

'The Other Final'

Interview with Johan Kramer

2 June 2004 | Amsterdam-based advertising agency KesselsKramer organized a match between [Bhutan](#) and [Montserrat](#), the two lowest-ranked teams in FIFA at the time, to coincide with the World Cup final on 30 June 2002. A documentary film, directed by KesselsKramer's [Johan Kramer](#), debuted the next year and has been making the rounds of numerous film festivals. *The Other Final* recently screened at the [San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival](#) and, at some point, will be released on DVD. The film, along with *The Forbidden Team*, is discussed in the [spring 2004 issue](#) (no. 11) of *Global Game*. Johan Kramer's responses were e-mailed from Amsterdam.

GG: The bouncing white soccer ball jauntily ties scenes in *The Other Final* together and provides a sort of peaceful, consoling presence as it rests by the side of those being interviewed. To your knowledge, does this white spheroid—the unadorned football—have any broader significance within Buddhism?

JK: The white ball is not only a sign of purity, but [it is] also a magnet that brings completely different people together. As far as I know, there's no broader significance within Buddhism, although everything that is done with full compassion, like playing with a white ball, is encouraged, as long as it doesn't take the mind off the chosen path. | [back to top](#)

GG: Adherents of other world religions might be surprised to see a sport being integrated so seamlessly within the Bhutanese Buddhists' prayer life as depicted in your film. Are there aspects of football that lend themselves to a Buddhist worldview?

JK: Football can turn enemies into friends. It's a language that everyone can speak. Playing together with passion is the most important "Buddhist" aspect of football, not the winning or losing. In a way the result is completely irrelevant. The people of Bhutan were actually a bit ashamed that they won 4–0. They had rather drawn! | [back to top](#)

GG: To continue in this religious vein, the ritualistic elements of football come through clearly in the film: the pregame procession of athletes with young children (in national costume), the exchange of trinkets, gathering for team photographs, and so on. Is it partially this ritualistic sameness that makes football a force for bridging cultural differences?

JK: Well, in the end, it's just the game itself. It's so simple. Everyone can kick against a ball. It's a language that doesn't have too many difficult words. Everyone can play, [w]herever you live. Although some of the rituals are slightly different, they feel much the same and appeal to everyone. | [back to top](#)

GG: Bhutan in the film seems like a place without boundaries. Dogs roam onto the football pitch, and I recall seeing very few fences or segmentation (other than natural topography) that keep people from interacting. Was this the filmmakers' experience of Bhutan during their visit?

JK: Bhutan is a country that is in the middle of its development and the infrastructure is expanding. In a country where everyone learns to share, gates and fences are very unpopular. Apart from that, there's a big problem with dogs in the main capital [Thimphu]. They are everywhere and barking the whole night. Once in a while, the government gathers lots of dogs and brings them to the mountains. But they keep coming back. . . . | [back to top](#)

GG: It seems, from the film, that Montserrat accepted the match fairly readily. Was this true in actual fact? since for Montserrat especially, it seemed like a courageous trip to take, given their strained resources and fragility as a side. Did they need any special convincing to make the journey, or was the lure of cross-cultural exchange enough for them?

JK: It was not an easy decision. The government took it after a few weeks of thinking. Their main reason was the fact that they were desperate for other publicity than the negative news about their exploding volcanoes on [the] island. | [back to top](#)

GG: What was most painful to cut from *The Other Final*, when final editing decisions had to be made?

JK: To be honest, I can't remember. It's now 1½ years later and I only think about the overwhelming reactions we've received all over the planet. That's so much more than we ever expected. It's fantastic to see that a positive film about football can do so well. | [back to top](#)

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