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World Cup Watching

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Abstract

This essay describes Jack's experience dealing with World Cup fever in Bath, England, during the 2010 World Cup. It's Jack's outsider's perspective on the impact of world cup competition while he taught in the Advanced Studies in England Program.

Keywords

World Cup, England, sports, sports fan, soccer

Disciplines

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World Cup Watching

By: Jack Ryan

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"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I'm very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that."

... Bill Shankly (1913-1981)

--Scottish footballer, Liverpool manager

From our second floor flat in Bath, England, my family and I watched half-naked young men, most marked with elaborate tattoos signifying support for God, Queen, and Country, jump off North Parade Bridge into the River Avon. Many cried "Rubbish!" on the way down. Germany had just eliminated England from the 2010 World Cup finals competition 4-1, England's most lopsided finals round defeat since losing to Uruguay in 1954. It was a terrible display, an embarrassment. The jumpers emerged en masse from the Pavilion, a community leisure center used for various events, including ballroom dancing. Although the loss was not completely unexpected, the dispirited fans must have viewed the river as a refreshing alternative to what had become a miserable afternoon.

The Pavilion crowd, accustomed to national team failures, was generally well behaved. In 2006, havoc had ensued inside the Pavilion after Portugal knocked England out of tournament play. A television screen had to be replaced, glasses were smashed, and the bar was damaged. The Pavilion staff took proactive steps for the 2010 World Cup: chairs and tables were bolted and fans drank from plastic cups. On the national level, British officials revoked the visas of known football hooligans, an insurance measure against rowdy behavior in South Africa, host country for the 2010 World Cup.

The bridge crowd did not behave badly. Nothing was broken, and all the jumpers made it back to shore. Two police officers, a burly male and a petite female, dressed in Day-Glo green vests and caps with black and white checkerboard bands, arrived and gently managed the situation, coaxing the crowd back toward shirtless civility. After dark, small groups of drunken men returned to take the plunge, trying to wash away one more national defeat, or, in some cases, the reproduction of Saint George's Cross they had smudged on their chests earlier in the day, when all things seemed possible, even an England victory.

Passion for sport on a national level is not what I am used to, especially when it comes to soccer, as we call the game. I am used to fans rooting for Philadelphia,

Boston, San Francisco, or New York, not teams that represent the United States. Like most Americans, I did not even know most of our World Cup team players.

England's fans knew every player's life history, career statistics, and wasted potential. Even though they were used to defeat, the River Avon jumpers chose to register their disgust as Englishmen, a collective response to what they saw as a national disgrace. And they knew whom to blame, from goalkeepers to strikers to the imported coach.

From reading American sports pages, I knew Landon Donovan played Major League soccer in Los Angeles with David Beckham, the underwear model. Not connected to Ivy League culture, I knew nothing about Bob Bradley, the U.S. coach. I have friends invested in the world game, but they keep to themselves, spending too much time on the web or early mornings in New York bars with vague Premier League affiliations. My interests lie in the dynamic action between pitcher and hitter. Men in shorts haphazardly chasing an oddly shaped ball do not hold the same appeal for me.

In fact, what I know about European football, which cannot be confused with our professional tackle football, wouldn't cover the surface of a Carr's wheaten biscuit. My share of soccer knowledge started with *Fever Pitch*, Nick Hornby's first book, followed by *Football Factory*, Nick Love's filmic examination of hooliganism. I have read George Orwell's short, bitter assessment of the game titled "The Sporting Spirit." In 2004, during a Bolton Wanderers/Portsmouth match at Bolton's Reebok Stadium, I witnessed El-Hadji Diouf spit in Arjan De Zeeuw's face, an act that caused the home crowd to boo and ridicule one of their own. And I have attended countless children's soccer matches, which mostly involved my wondering what game I had been assigned to distribute the mid-game snack of orange slices and rice-crispy bars. A New York State native, I still don't understand why the National Soccer Hall of Fame is located in Oneonta and not in, say, Poughkeepsie. Even with my minor collection of soccer experiences, the "beautiful game," it seemed to me, was for other people: people who feel more comfortable working with their feet rather than their hands, people who accept games that end in ties, and people who enjoy bad acting. However, I understood that for the rest of the world, soccer, especially World Cup competition, dominates sports culture.

Before leaving our home in Pennsylvania for Bath, I was subjected to ESPN's relentless trumpeting the 2010 FIFA World Cup, including a promo for the England/United States game. Every time I saw the ad, I reminded myself that evening I would be in Coverack, a small fishing village in Cornwall, where I planned a brisk walk on the National Trust Coastal Trail. I would be in no mood for a football match. The Paris Hotel, Coverack's only pub, is crowded on a regular Saturday night. I had no desire to participate in an integrity test of pub's walls during the England/United

States match. Beyond that, ESPN's ad was too nationalistic, leaving the impression that two teams, not thirty-two, were in the World Cup tournament.

My family and I departed for Bath in early June, just before the beginning of the summer term for the Advanced Studies in England program. I was scheduled to teach for five weeks, concentrating on Thatcherism and British film with sixteen students from American colleges and universities. In my carry-on bag, I had the June 7, 2010, issue of *The New Yorker*, which contained an article by Hampton Sides titled "National Defense: Can the United States goalkeeper produce another Miracle on Grass?" Tim Howard, the starting goalkeeper, was new to me. The fact that he functions at a high level with Tourette's syndrome intrigued me. Paul Gardner, an Englishman and a soccer commentator quoted in the article, pushed things: "The English tend to be snotty about other soccer cultures, especially the United States. They think they're supposed to be top dogs at this, and will not accept that there could be something interesting coming out of the United States" (59). The English, according to my reading, still retained a little bit of King George III--at least when it came to football against the United States. On the pitch, England hadn't won anything significant at the World Cup level since 1966, when they defeated West Germany at Wembley Stadium, London, a home turf victory marked by a questionable call. During the extra period, England's Geoff Hurst took a shot from close range that hit the crossbar and bounced down on the line. The Swiss referee asked the Russian linesman if the whole ball crossed the line; through gestures--they lacked a common language--he indicated a goal. England would go on to victory by a 4-2 score. The third goal remains controversial. Perhaps, watching the England/United States football match wouldn't be such a bad thing. However, I would have to pretend I understood offside penalties.

The same *New Yorker* issue also featured "Letter From London," and "Party Games: Why did the British election turn out the way it did?" by John Lanchester, a British journalist and novelist. His essay examines the last British election by making a distinction between complaining and moaning: "The British are powerfully embarrassed by complaining, and experience an almost physical recoil from people who do it in public. They do love to moan, though" (26). Moaning, according to Lanchester, provides the British with a "psychic comfort blanket, a way of venting resentment without taking responsibility for effecting change" (26). The essays were physically separated by a report on Julian Assange. The implied editorial commentary would have been too obvious if the two articles were back-to-back. Could a collection of obscure United States soccer players make England moan?

When our group arrived at Bristol International Airport, dragging luggage while looking for the coach assigned to take us to Bath, no one we met was complaining or moaning. Just the opposite; there was intense excitement in the air. Even some

customs officials wanted to know what we thought about the upcoming England/U.S. match. We traveled back roads into Bath. Most of the automobiles we saw sported small window flags, either the Union Jack or the Red Cross of Saint George. Like the Baltimore Ravens fan who lives across the street from me, these English fans meant business, and the tiny flags flying from plastic window anchors announced their allegiance to nation and, perhaps, Wayne Rooney.

World Cup fever was also conspicuous in Bath, a small cosmopolitan city where fans had decorated businesses and homes with international flags--Italy, Argentina, France, Mexico, and Spain. We arrived in Bath the Sunday before the World Cup matches began and were astonished at the staggering amount of print dedicated to the tournament. The papers featured glossy foldouts designed to keep track of the winners and losers from the bracket round to the championship. I pinned The Guardian foldout to our dining room wall next to a window overlooking North Parade Bridge. We weren't supposed to attach anything to the walls, but this adornment never drew a remark from our landlord. In fact, everyone accepted it, especially because I dutifully recorded the score of every game. When I first placed it on the wall, though, it meant nothing to me. Famous contemporary footballers framed the scoring grid. I recognized Wayne Rooney because I had read uncomplimentary things about him and his girlfriend in 2004 when I lived in England for five months. He was new to Manchester United then--a natural footballer who looked like he spent time in pubs after a full day on the docks--and fans adored him. In sport, though, true romance seldom lasts, and Rooney had not met expectations since 2004; he existed under the spotlight of unrelenting scrutiny and unrealistic expectations.

On the eve of the England/United States match, we traveled to Cornwall, the southwestern portion of England. There is a sizable movement in Cornwall calling for greater self-rule. Many Cornwallians want the same political and administrative status as Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. During the World Cup, however, Cornish nationalists rooted fiercely for England.

The coach carrying students, tutors, and Advanced Studies in England staff echoed with easy banter about the match the next day in Rustenburg, South Africa. Jonathan Hope, dean of the program, and Lindsay Orchard, ASE's social and cultural coordinator, each purchased two large Union Jack flags at a motorway service stop. They waved the flags relentlessly as the coach moved toward Tintagel Castle, a medieval ruin often described as King Arthur's birthplace. Wayne, our coach driver, was anxious about getting to Coverack, our evening's destination. For him, Tintagel lacked the same appeal as the Uruguay/France match that night. A driver for the Bath Rugby team, Wayne was passionate about sport, especially football enhanced by a pub and fresh cider. While we clambered around Tintagel, he impatiently mapped his route to Coverack.

That night, inside Coverack's Paris Hotel, outfitted with two flat screen televisions for World Cup viewing, Wayne, Jonathan, and Lindsay worked to bring me up to speed on football rules while we watched Uruguay and France play to a zero to zero tie--or, as the purists prefer, a nil-nil draw.

The next morning, the ASE group hiked the Lizard, England's southern tip and a place of uncommon physical beauty, then motored to St. Ives for an afternoon of museum hopping, surfing, swimming, and shopping. The streets of St. Ives, once an active fishing village and now a tourist destination popularized by the artists Bernard Leach, Ben Nicholson, and Barbara Hepworth are too small to accommodate coaches. Large vehicles must park in a lot above the picturesque town. Wayne demanded that everyone return to the coach in time for a 4:30 Greenwich Mean Time departure. The match started at 8:30. Being late was not an option.

Unlike the night before, the Paris Hotel was jammed with English football fans. Jonathan and Lindsay had smeared white makeup on their faces, and, using their noses as center points, had drawn one red line from ear to ear and another from hairline to chin; they wore their Union Jack flags like capes and sat at the center of the Paris's small pub room. By the time my family and I arrived, it was impossible to see the television screen. The place was mobbed. Almost everyone was standing and singing "God Save the Queen." When their turn came, the American students spontaneously stood and sang the "Star Spangled Banner" with gusto. Most of the Cornwallians were nonplussed, not aware that Americans had occupied a quarter of the small pub. Nationalism, however, did not diminish good fun, at least at the beginning of the match. We sat near a window with an exceptional view of Coverack Cove, ate pasties, watched the sea, and judged the game by examining the barmen's faces. Trail hikers continued to file into the pub, somehow finding a few inches of floor space. My son, Gabriel, edged his way into the crowd and vanished. Four minutes in, the crowd erupted. Steven Gerrard, England's Captain, scored on Tim Howard. The Cornwall supporters raised their pints, ignoring their own nationalistic desires--England was ahead.

Because standing patrons obscured both television screens, I started watching and listening to the patrons in order to interpret the first half of the game. Their collective moans, groans, shouts, and curses, coupled with apoplectic gestures, were all I needed. When Clint Dempsey scored at thirty-eight minutes, the American students leaped from their seats, cheered, and exchanged high-fives. The mood in the room darkened. In 1950, the United States defeated England 1-0 in a World Cup group match in Brazil. At that time, the English were reputed to be the "Kings of Football"; the two countries had not played a World Cup match for fifty years. While the match we were watching was also at the group stage, defeat would mean unimaginable embarrassment for England. What I couldn't see on the television was Robert Green's

blunder. England's goaltender failed to smother Dempsey's weak shot-on-goal; he attempted to scoop the ball, which bumped his thumb, and wobbled into the net. If England expects that every man will do his duty, as Admiral Nelson suggested, then Green failed to answer the call.

At the half, the American students expressed hope, voicing support for their team while puzzling over the difference between Orchard Cider and Lizard Bitter. The Cornish fans registered disgust, unwilling to give in to a bunch of pikers. Some patrons exited the Paris after the first half, either to continue their walks, or because they feared the worst, allowing me to view most of the second half from a distance. Howard blocked shots with stunning regularity. Donovan cut through the defense. But England played well, too, with Green smothering shots and Rooney attacking the American defenders, using every part of his high school lineman's body to get close to Howard. Everyone in the room was focused on the game. In the end, the match ended 1-1, a draw. Real soccer fans accept ties, and, for the most part, it kept the mood inside the Paris festive. For me, the tie notwithstanding, the excitement of this match was unexpected, and the prospect of watching more World Cup events now seemed inviting.

Sunday's papers revealed a different attitude, however; the draw with the Americans had caused extreme discomfort among many English fans. The amplified moaning confirmed Lanchester's definition. With stunning speed, the British press rejected Green as the goaltender for his single mistake, and pushed him into disgrace. Most newspapers used a common headline "Hands of Clod" to describe Green's error, expressing a nation's collective moan by invoking Diego Maradona's mysterious 1986 World Cup goal against England. A robust newspaper culture makes hiding impossible, especially if you are a highly paid professional. Green's image blanketed every newspaper. He was finished. From *The Financial Times*, the high-end broad sheet, to the compact *Independent*, to the *Daily Star*, the low-end tabloid, commentary on Green's performance was brutal--he became England's Bill Buckner. Green, to his credit, did not respond; in fact, he displayed a degree of civility that confounded many of Rupert Murdoch's employees.

Most goalkeepers don't manage themselves with such grace. Although he's a fictional creation, Josef Bloch, the goalie in Wim Wenders's *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, adapted from a Peter Handke novel, represents an extreme reaction to failure in goal. Bloch fails to prevent a penalty kick, and he is suspended from the game. Full of anger, he commits a murder. His life goes on, but he cannot dismiss the psychological tension all goalies must face. Wenders opens his film with a long shot that isolates Bloch at the far end of the soccer pitch. He's alone. Game action is removed from his space. According to many sportswriters, goalkeepers are supposed

to be eccentric, solitary, and insular. Green, however, was said to be rather normal, especially when measured against his professional cohort.

Simon Hattenstone, a features writer for *The Guardian*, rose to Green's defense. "I happen to like Green," Hattenstone declared. "His error was uncharacteristic, and he retrieved the ball from the back of the net with a kind of reserved humility, a response he has been able to perfect during a couple of seasons at Upton Park" (9). Even while defending Green, Hattenstone couldn't resist taking a swipe at his goaltending work for West Ham United. Hattenstone's article, "Who Would be a Goalkeeper: The Misfits," describes a goalkeeper's existence, and Green appears with some impressive company. Albert Camus wrote *The Stranger* after playing goalie for the Algiers University. Hattenstone paraphrases Camus' famous link between football and existentialism: "All that I know about morality and obligation I owe to football" (8). Vladimir Nabokov tended goal, as did Pope John Paul II, and Che Guevara. Noted for other accomplishments and long dead, Camus, Nabokov, John Paul, and Che can face their blunders. Green had one bad moment, but on the world stage, one error is one too many for a goalkeeper.

British sportswriters credited the Yanks, suggesting that the draw was really a U.S. victory because England was the dominant team, at least on paper. Newly confident, American soccer fans became emboldened, at least those I was with in Bath. Suddenly, the World Cup became part of daily conversation, and watching matches between distant countries the norm. Television connected every fan, and everyone knew when his or her favorite team was scheduled for tournament play. Pubs overflowed; fans claimed choice seats hours before matches began. The British television presentation was vastly different than any American media product. Commentators did not dominate the game, willing instead to let play unfold without melodramatic pronouncements or shrieking celebration. Game action was not interrupted by advertisements. Newspapers featured abundant daily coverage. Nothing was off limits. Writers recognized players as rich entertainers and magnified every fact about them, both on and off the field--no matter how innocuous or salacious.

Watching the games became a guilty pleasure with benefits: no commentators telling you what you just saw, no silly sideline trollops with enhanced body parts shaking pom-poms, no Jumbotrons, and no commercials. The setup was simple: two national anthems followed by the game, a wonderfully efficient and effective design. Still, soccer, even at the highest level, features irritating issues for the casual viewer. Too many players love to act. Faking injuries to stay ahead, a ridiculous part of football culture, is commonplace. Players kill time, catch their breath, or just slow the entire game down. FIFA calls it simulation. Flopping is a better description. Unlike most American sports, comebacks, especially late in the game, are practically impossible because of these bizarre player antics. Late game heroics, for the most part, didn't

happen during the World Cup. Worse, star players were sent off for phantom fouls, calls never evidenced in the television replays. Weak officiating diminished many games. At times, officiating was a staggering display of incompetence and arrogance.

As is the case with most sports, fans made World Cup watching unique, demonstrating their allegiance with frenzied pride. Bath residents displayed their support in pubs, from buildings, and in the street. Flags of victorious teams dangled from apartments buildings, businesses declared allegiances with drink and food specials, and early morning talk at the Bog Island News Stand was always about a particular football team. However, everyone in England--and perhaps the world--was elated by the catastrophic collapse of the French team. Les Bleus arrived in South Africa determined to erase the memory of Thierry Henry's "Hand of Frog" double handball, which cost Ireland a World Cup opportunity and pushed the French into the tournament. But the French team had other issues, and the creative British press spotlighted each indiscretion. Franck Ribery, France's star player, could not escape from allegations that he had sex with an underage prostitute, which was mentioned in every article about the French team. Like most of the World Cup teams, Les Bleus stayed in a five-star hotel and had luxury training facilities, but French sportswriters called the facilities indecent during a period of economic recession. Of course, if the team had been behaving, their accommodations would not have been an issue. Their offpitch antics, including excessive drinking, poor training, and ignoring coaching suggestions, drew public scorn even before the team left France for South Africa. The British press simply added to the French chorus, but they took great pleasure in pointing out French mishaps. Les Bleus completely unraveled at halftime during their match against Mexico, which they lost 2-0. Striker Nicolas Anelka lost control and told Raymond Domenech, France's manager, to "go fuck yourself, you son of a whore" (Willsher 16). When South Africa defeated France, sending Les Bleus home, England fans erupted with joy. French President Nicolas Sarkozy called for an investigation of "la crise." In response, according to Simon Hoggart, a French journalist blamed "a culture of greed and egoism imported from the Premier League" as one explanation the French had for their early return home from South Africa (16). In other words, French professionals learned to behave badly while playing in England. The French exit added significance to the preliminary competition for many football fans. Despising the French and celebrating the disgrace of Les Bleus created a common bond among many fans, a way to increase the joy of what had otherwise been a ho-hum preliminary competition.

Neither England nor the United States played particularly well in the group stage, and they both limped into the knockout round. On 23 June, each team played for the opportunity to advance to the final sixteen. England played Slovenia; the U.S. played Algeria. The games ended with identical scores, 1:0. England had struggled against

Algeria in its previous game, and the players and Fabio Capella, the imported manager, were under constant attack in the press. John Terry, a former England team captain, told beat writers that the mood in the team's camp was bleak. Capella would not allow beer, wives, or girlfriends in camp, preferring to treat his players like boxers rather than football lads. Camp, of course, was a five-star hotel, but it was not home. Before the Slovenia match, Capella experienced a change of heart, and he allowed his players beer--a little--to calm pre-game jitters. It worked. England beat Slovenia, but none of the players credited alcohol for the victory. Only Capella mentioned beer during the post-game interviews, perhaps a discreet way to take credit for the victory.

The Americans, who expected to advance from the group stage, faced an Algerian team that couldn't match the U.S. talent, but bad luck, bad finishing, and bad officiating kept the game close until Landon Donovan scored a stoppage-time goal, propelling the Americans into the round of sixteen. Donovan's goal saved team U.S.A. and, perhaps, coach Bob Bradley's job. The goal was the highlight of the entire tournament for the Americans. Donovan called it a "Hollywood moment," as he wept for a global television audience. He seemed to reach out for his ex-wife, and then anyone else he had ever met while basking in his short-lived worldwide celebrity.

The British press didn't think much of the U.S. performance against Algeria--not Donovan's, not the team's. British reporters and columnists had soured on the Americans, seeing them as underachievers, not Cinderella darlings. Yet the Americans attracted celebrities. Bill Clinton and Mick Jagger watched U.S./Algeria together, two old dogs having a fine time watching a tense match. In Bath, the crowd at Lambretta's Pub enjoyed seeing Bill and Mick, speculating on bits of dialogue for the two weathered celebrities. Paul Wilson, covering the match for *The Guardian*, crafted a memorable lead: "Bill Clinton was at this game, probably reflecting for 92 minutes that he scored more often than this lot." He had a point. Scoring is difficult in soccer, making viewing hard on those who don't follow the game. Typically, goals are not spectacular, usually occurring after long frustrating periods of players running back and forth on a green field without ever achieving much, often not even footing the ball. Consequently, crowd noise and player antics draw attention, just as the television camera found Bill and Mick when game play grew dull.

Crowds chant "Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole," no matter what countries are playing, which seems oddly misguided, unless the fans are Spanish. Enthusiasm, though, is never in short supply. Football fans arrive with their own special chants. Some sound lyrical, some crude, and some comic. Watching the 2010 World Cup on television prohibited clear understanding of the various chants. Mostly, the television soundtrack was filled with the insect drone of thousands of vuvuzelas. The first time my son and I heard the noise, we thought the television in our flat was dying. Soon we understood that the vuvuzelas were part of the show, even if the BBC tried to filter the noise. The

repetitive insect sound provided an ambient background for every game, a sonic reminder of where the games were being played, focusing the world on South Africa.

On the field, players' exuberance, especially when they scored, was so extreme that games stopped while players piled on top of each other or pulled up their shirts with homoerotic flare; the opposition, especially the goaltenders, would sulk with tragic weight, lost in a vast dark, as if they had discovered that they were sleeping with their mothers and had killed their fathers. The behavior was comic and absurd, especially with game commentators trying to shout over the vuvuzelas. Every other major sport has a built-in system of retribution: if players celebrate too much, something will happen sooner or later. Not soccer. Goals arrive infrequently, and therefore players overreact, and the behavior is accepted. After Landon Donovan scored his goal against Algeria, launching the United States into the sixteen-team competition, he delivered his tear-soaked autobiography for anyone with a microphone and a camera. Mick and Bill recognized the transformation, but they knew Donovan was a piker.

At the start of the second round, the United States faced Ghana. South African winter rains drenched the spectators bundled against the cold weather. Playing conditions were difficult, but the game was tense and exciting. Half a world away, in Toronto, Canada, violent G20 protests were just starting up. While the World Cup games were being played, however, economic news did not interrupt the matches. The U.S. team allowed a goal early on, common for them in World Cup tournament play. But they fought back with pulsating intensity, particularly Clint Dempsey. In extra-time, Asamoah Gyan, a striker for the Premier League's Sunderland club, took a long pass, controlled it with his chest, and then blasted the ball past Tim Howard, establishing a commanding 2-0 lead. But Dempsey never stopped playing, never stopped running, even while silly game delays drained dramatic tension from the final minutes of the contest, even after the game was officially finished. My lasting image of the U.S. team is the hardboiled Dempsey trying to take the ball from an Angolan player as a referee waves to announce the end of competition. Dempsey did not want the game to end, did not know when to stop.

For many in England, the observation shared by Marina Hyde of a crafty email transmission captured the symbolic reality of the second round: "This World Cup is exactly like the second world war. The French surrendered early, the U.S. turned up late, and we are left to deal with the bloody Germans." On 27 June, Toronto was in lockdown, traumatized by rock throwers and fire starters dressed in black clothes and colorful bandanas--anarchists with flair. American soccer fans were in recovery. As the game between England and Germany approached, the streets of Bath emptied. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to watch the match. My son and I walked the city seeking a real World Cup football experience. Large bouncers with Bluetooth device plugged ears stood guard at the doors of pubs and public houses, gathering places that

always had room for a few more on a normal day. Small pubs, like The Raven, a family-owned Free House, were empty. No television; no customers during the game. In London, 10 Downing Street, occupied now by Tory David Cameron, who was in Toronto, sported the Cross of St. George. At the G20, Cameron sat with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to watch the match. He did not look well before he took his seat. Then Germany demolished England; the game was never close. Cameron's pain spread across the nation. At one point, Frank Lampard, a Chelsea player with offpitch issues, scored, but the goal was disallowed, ending England's slight chance against the superior German team. Monday morning, the Union Jack fluttered above 10 Downing Street. It was obvious to all that England did not deserve to advance, and therefore the national despondence did not last long. British sporting enthusiasts turned their attention to Wimbledon, where Andy Murray, a Scotsman, and perhaps the best professional tennis player never to have won a major tournament, was doing well in the early rounds.

In his book *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Richard Holt observes that writing about "sport in modern Britain is a cultural and political as well as a social and economic enterprise" (3). Following the World Cup, especially while England remained in the competition, elevated the sport for me on multiple levels. Witnessing soccer as a vast cultural experience while inside a country that appreciates the game underscored the positive social impact athletic competition can have on a population. Living in Bath allowed an outsider like me to experience how complicated national allegiances can be, as well as the emotionally draining result of a national failure on the international stage. Major sports in the United States are packaged and sold as commercial products. Major League Baseball, the NHL, the NFL, and the NBA have to convince large audiences to watch their players perform. Soccer fans possess an appreciation for the game that begins at birth and ends at the grave. In *Fever Pitch*, Hornby captures this cultural common: "I fell in love with football as I was later to fall in love with women: suddenly, inexplicably, uncritically, giving no thought to the pain or disruption it would bring with it" (15). England fans cleaved to a genuine hope, however ridiculous, that their team would defeat Germany. The country wanted their lads to vanquish the swift, relentless Germans. Football for the English--and for fans around the world--has a relevance that I may never understand. Arthur Hopcraft, once a journalist for *The Guardian*, explains the power of English football in *The Football Man: People and Passions in Soccer*: "The point about football in Britain is that it is not just a sport people take to, like cricket or tennis. It is built into the urban psyche, as much a common experience to our children as are uncles and school. It is not a phenomenon: it is an everyday matter" (2). The English team faced boos and catcalls on their journey home; they were seen as overpaid, underperforming louts who diminished the entire country. National self-esteem took similar knocks in France, Italy, and around the world. Goodluck Jonathan, the president of Nigeria, was

so upset at the national team's flop that he threatened to ban the team from future competitions. Brazil and Argentina departed covered in recrimination. Diego Maradona lost his position as manager of Argentina because of his team's quarterfinal exit, humiliated by Germany 4-0. Entire countries assumed a George Steinbrenner approach when their teams failed in World Cup competition.

Uruguay, on the other hand, a country led by President Jose Mujica, a Tupamaros guerrilla who was once imprisoned in a well for two years, became the standard-bearer for North and South America once the tournament was reduced to four teams. European teams, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain, occupied the other three semi-final slots. It would be unthinkable for Americans to root for Uruguay, a country led by a man inspired by the Cuban revolution, but it made sense to Americans in Bath, even though the smart money was on Spain.

As we prepared to leave Bath, Uruguay lost to the Netherlands, and Germany fell to Spain. We would be back in Pennsylvania before the final match of the 2010 World Cup. British newspaper columnists discussed the proliferation of St. George's Cross flags during the World Cup. Progressive pundits debated the meaning of St. George's Cross while admitting that they, too, found themselves screaming their lungs out for England to remain in play, and when they did, the old red cross on the white background didn't matter. Liberalism, conservatism, and socialism fell away while the national team competed. Perhaps because of the vast size of our country and its staggering heterogeneity, this connection to a national team is something that we Americans cannot understand. Every four years, most of the world is captivated by World Cup competition--but not the United States. We are regional fans, rooting for a city, a town, or a school district. In *The World is a Ball: The Joy, Meaning, and Madness of Soccer*, John Doyle describes his experience covering and watching World Cup tournaments: "If the World Cup and the other continental tournaments resemble anything in the planet's past, it is the ancient Greek festival of Dionysus, a large and raucous religious feast in honor of the god Dionysus, and where core ceremonies were the staging of tragedies and comedies" (xiv). Back in Pennsylvania, I watched Netherlands play Spain at my home. I was alone, merely an American observer of a world-wide obsession.

The game was marked by scrappy play and penalties. The Dutch kicked, pulled, and tugged Spanish players in an attempt to disrupt their elegant team play. In extra-time, Spain scored. Elegance trumped force. Television cameras captured Nelson Mandela applauding the conclusion of this major South African sporting event. Vuvuzelas announced the end of things. For me, the Spanish win meant little. The streets outside were quiet, flags were not draped from my neighbors' homes, football lovers didn't exit bars in celebration. I was moored by familiar surroundings, and no one near me cared about the game. Watching and enjoying the World Cup in a city willing to

transform itself for four weeks, even though England's national team was not well regarded, in the end, made sense. At home, my connection to this all-consuming game was reduced to a commercial experience produced by ABC television and ESPN.

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