Garmany and Pereira Understanding Contemporary Brazil 4 February 2018

**Chapter 10 – Soccer in Brazil**

**Introduction**

The first goal went in during the 11th minute of the match. The Germans took a corner, swinging the ball into an unmarked Thomas Müeller, who side-footed it past Brazil’s goalkeeper Júlio César. Twelve minutes later, Miraslav Klose scored another goal for Germany. And then a catastrophe occurred. In six frantic, almost unbelievable minutes, Germany scored three more goals against Brazil while the fans in the stadium and the nation watching on television were stunned into an anguished silence. Brazilians’ dream of winning the World Cup at home, 64 years after losing the final in Rio in 1950, was over. It was the 8th of July, 2014, and the semi-final played in the Mineirão stadium in Belo Horizonte ended 7-1 (Barbassa 2015: 277-279). This was Brazil’s worst defeat ever in a World Cup finals, dubbed the *Mineiraço* by the press.

Understanding the devastation of the *Mineiraço* to many Brazilians is impossible without an appreciation of the importance of football (*futebol* in Portuguese), or soccer, to Brazilian national identity. Soccer has deep roots in the country and dominates the sporting landscape, with millions playing the game and following their club and national team. Wearing the yellow shirt of the national team is an instantly recognizable sign of “Brazilianness”. Brazil is associated by outsiders with soccer due to the strong reputation of some of its most famous clubs, players and its national side, the *Seleção*. The Brazilian national team is the only one in the world to qualify for all twenty of the World Cup finals held since the first in 1930, and the first (and at present the only) to win the tournament five times, the last being in 2002 (Batty and Murray 2014: 12).

This chapter analyses how soccer became such an integral part of the Brazilian way of life, tracing the origins of the game in the late 19th century, through the state-sponsored attempts to use soccer as an instrument of national prestige in the mid-20th century, and into the globalized soccer landscape of the early 21st century. It explores a number of questions, including why do Brazilians have such passion for soccer, not only for their clubs, but for the national team? Why has the Brazilian national team’s record at the World Cup been so successful? How have soccer and politics been intertwined in Brazil? And how has globalization changed the nature of soccer?

Our reasons for focusing solely on soccer in this chapter – and men’s soccer at that – are threefold. First, there are of course other sports and leisure activities that are important to Brazilians, but soccer is king. Sports like volleyball, Formula 1 motor racing, basketball, surfing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and handball are also popular, but all of them finish a distant second to soccer. There is also capoeira, a martial art that combines music and dance and traces its origins to Brazilian slave culture. Capoeira has grown popular in Brazil as well as globally in recent years, and so significant is it today that we address it in Chapter 5 as we consider questions of race in Brazil. As such, rather than try to address all of these activities in one chapter, here we focus our analysis on one sport (i.e., soccer) in order to explain why it is so crucial for making sense of contemporary Brazil.

Our second reason for considering soccer and soccer alone – and by that, specifically, we mean men’s soccer and not men’s *and* women’s soccer – highlights an even more significant issue: problems of gender inequality in Brazil. According to the United Nations Human Development Index, Brazil’s Gender Inequality Index (GII) was rated at .414 in 2015, meaning that inequality faced by women and girls in Brazil is more than twice what it is in the United States (GII = .203), and between four to *ten* *times* more than in several European countries (e.g., the GII in the United Kingdom ranks .131, and in the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Switzerland, below .050). That women’s soccer today in Brazil receives only a fraction of the attention that men’s soccer does reflects broader and more troubling trends regarding the lack of opportunities and resources for women and girls (see Fig. 10.1). When it comes to soccer – and for that matter a host of other pursuits – women and girls have rarely been encouraged to play and/or provided opportunities. That is starting to change, but the change has been slow. For these reasons, when it is said that soccer is hugely significant to Brazilians, implicit here is the understanding that “*futebol*” (i.e., soccer) almost always means men’s soccer. Any discussion of Brazilian soccer should therefore raise questions of gender inequality, including the ways women’s labor is undervalued and unrecognized in Brazil and beyond.[[1]](#endnote-1)

And finally, our third reason for focusing on soccer at the expense of other sports relates to one of our primary goals in this book: namely, to provide insight to key social, political, cultural, and economic issues in contemporary Brazil. Soccer provides an important and unique entry point to these topics, and by analyzing one sport rather than several, we are better able to hone our critical focus. The aim is not only to help explain Brazil’s abiding obsession with soccer, but to help explain *why* this obsession is also important for making sense of other issues and debates in Brazil.

(Figure 10.1 about here.)

**The Origins of Futebol**

Everyday speech in Brazil is full of expressions that come from soccer. If you want to concede something to another person, you *dá bola*, or give the ball to them. If you make a mistake, you *pisou na bola* (stepped on the ball). If you come close to achieving your aim but did not quite make it, you *bateu na trave*, or hit the post. A situation that is polarized is a *Fla-Flu*, the game between the two rival soccer clubs in Rio, Flamengo and Fluminense. Doing something great is to *marcar um golaço*, or score a great goal. Language in Brazil reveals the extraordinary importance of soccer in the popular imagination.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The game has British origins (Norridge 2009: 187-189). Charles Miller (1874-1953), a Scottish-Brazilian, is seen as the founder of the game in Brazil. He was born in São Paulo to John Miller, a Scottish railway engineer and a Brazilian mother of English descent, Carlota Fox. In 1884 at the age of nine he was sent to Banister Court School (a private boarding school) in Southampton, England, where he learned to play cricket and soccer. When Miller came back to Brazil in 1894, he brought two soccer balls and a set of the Hampshire Football Association rules with him. He helped set up the São Paulo Athletic Club and the Liga Paulista, the first soccer league in Brazil. São Paulo Athletic Club won three championships, in 1902, 1903, and 1904, with Miller as their striker (Duarte 2014: 8-9; Fontes and Buarque de Hollanda 2014: 115; Guterman 2009:14-16).

Soccer in this period was an elite sport, played in private clubs where members played other sports such as rowing and tennis. The boots (cleats) and balls were imported, making them expensive. These elite origins can be seen in the original crests of some of today’s biggest clubs. Flamengo, for example (said to be the most popular in the country) has in its original crest of 1895 a pair of crossed oars and an anchor. Sport Club Recife, founded in 1905, has a rowing oar and tennis racquet in its crest. Corinthians, the São Paulo club with the biggest organized fan group in the country, was named after the English club the Corinthian Casuals, which toured Brazil in 1909, and has an anchor and oars in its original crest.

However, soccer soon became, as it did in Britain, a working-class game (Norridge 2009: 190). As in Britain, the growth of soccer was tied up with industrialization and urbanization, and eventually became a professional sport for the mass public rather than an amateur sport for elites in exclusive clubs. Balls and soccer boots began to be produced in Brazil, making them cheaper. Starting in 1931 live commentaries of soccer games were transmitted on the radio. Television coverage of games began in the 1950s. Teams were sponsored by factories, whose managers often saw soccer as a cheap way to keep workers fit and happy. Many people played in empty lots (in Brazil called *futebol de várzea*, floodplain football), or in *peladas*, improvised games on the beach, on cement, on asphalt, or whatever surface that was available. (One of the notable things about Brazil today is the number of improvised soccer pitches that can be seen all over the country.) Children often learned to play barefoot, using whatever materials they could find for a ball. As adults, if they were selected for a factory team, the company would provide them with a uniform and boots.

Immigrant groups set up clubs that reflected their origins. Portuguese immigrants established Vasco da Gama in Rio in 1898 (Goldblatt 2014: 18), and Italians created Palmeiras in São Paulo in 1914. (Palmeiras was originally Palestra Italia, but this name was changed in 1942 when the government banned the use of any symbols associated with the Axis Powers.) Italians also founded Palestra Italia in Belo Horizonte, and that became Cruzeiro in 1942. German immigrants helped to found Grêmio in Porto Alegre in 1903.

Bangu Athletic Club, founded in 1904 in Rio by the British directors of a textile company, was credited with being the first to admit working-class players, some of whom were non-white (Goldblatt 2014: 18-19). Some clubs discriminated against black players but many clubs started to accept them. Club de Regatas Vasco da Gama of Rio de Janeiro is today remembered as a pioneer in this respect (see Fig. 10.2). Elsewhere, in Porto Alegre, Sport Club Internacional accepted black players in the 1920s, while its rival Grêmio at first did not. Class as well as racial divisions often separated the teams. In many cities rival clubs still have historical associations with either elites or more popular followings; clubs with elite origins include Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, Cruzeiro in Belo Horizonte, São Paulo in São Paulo, and Grêmio in Porto Alegre, while more popular clubs include Botafogo and Vasco da Gama in Rio, Atletico in Belo Horizonte, Corinthians in São Paulo, and Sport Club Internacional in Porto Alegre.

(Figure 10.2 about here.)

In the 1930s and ‘40s soccer was played across class and racial lines and the state promoted the sport as an outlet for popular passion and a source of national self-esteem. (The fact that it is called *futebol* in Brazil is testament to the elasticity of Brazilian Portuguese. Brazilians regularly import words from other languages, especially English.) The Vargas regime of 1930-45 used soccer, as it used samba and Carnival, “as a tool for promoting national identity and integration” (Giulianotti 2014: xiv). Brazil had become, in the words of the journalist and playwright Nelson Rodrigues, “the country in soccer boots” (*a pátria em chuteiras*) (Rodrigues 1994).

**The Seleção**

The Brazilian national team, which competed in its first game in 1914 against the visiting Exeter City Football Club (Duarte 2014: 1), competed in the 1930, 1934, and 1938 World Cups. It finished third in the latter tournament, held in France. Brazil was knocked out by Italy in the semi-final and beat Sweden 4-2 for third place. Gilka Machado, a Brazilian poet, wrote in a poem of the 1938 team, “The soul of Brazil/Lays down a kiss/On your heroic feet” (quoted in Bellos 2002: 41).

After World War II Brazil gained the right to host the 1950 World Cup, which was the first World Cup tournament since 1938. The government built the enormous Maracanã stadium, finishing it just in time for the tournament. (Maracanã is still a shrine for soccer fans the world over; see Foer 2004: 128-130 as well as Fig. 10.3). Brazil played Uruguay in the final, and under the rules of the competition at that time, all they had to do was tie to win the cup for the first time, on home soil. The referee for the match was the Englishman George Reader (Duarte 2014: 30). 173,850 people entered the stadium with a ticket that had been paid for – a world record for a sporting event at that time. Journalists, officials and guests pushed the total crowd close to 200,000 (Bellos 2002: 49). Many Brazilians were extremely confident about the match. The first edition of the Rio newspaper *O Mundo* printed a picture of the Brazilian team with the caption “These are the world champions” (Bellos 2002: 49). But in the 79th minute the Uruguayan player Ghiggia scored what turned out to be the winning goal. He said later, “Only three people have, with just one motion, silenced the Maracanã: Frank Sinatra, Pope John Paul II, and me” (quoted in Bellos 2002: 52). The game finished 2-1 to Uruguay and became known in Brazil as the *Maracanaço*.

(Figure 10.3 about here.)

Losing this game was devastating for many Brazilians because they had invested so much of their hope and self-esteem in being champions (Goldblatt 2014: 94; Reid 2014: 282). The journalist Fernando Duarte calls the aftermath of the *Maracanaço*, “one of the longest post-mortems in the history of sport” (Duarte 2014: 34). The white uniform used by the team in the 1950 final was discarded, never to be used again (Barbassa 2015: 255); Brazil subsequently adopted the now-familiar kit of yellow shirt with green trim, blue shorts, and white socks. Nelson Rodrigues wrote, “Everywhere has its irremediable national catastrophe, something like a Hiroshima. Our catastrophe, our Hiroshima, was the defeat by Uruguay in 1950” (quoted in Bellos 2002: 43). (The Uruguayan players on the other hand, including captain Obdulio Varela, are still heroes in Uruguay. That is the last time they won the World Cup.) Roberta da Matta, a Brazilian anthropologist, wrote that the 1950 World Cup final “is perhaps the greatest tragedy in contemporary Brazilian history. Because it happened collectively and brought a united vision of the loss of a historic opportunity. Because it happened at the beginning of a decade in which Brazil was looking to assert itself as a nation with a great future. The result was a tireless search for explications of, and blame for, the shameful defeat” (quoted in Bellos 2002: 45).[[3]](#endnote-3)

Many narratives of the 1950 disaster note that blame for the defeat came to rest on three players. These were the goalkeeper Barbosa, who had let in a relatively weak shot from Ghiggia; the defender Bigode, who had supposedly not reacted to a slap from the Uruguayan captain Varela; and the midfielder Juvenal, who was seen as having not done enough to defend against the Uruguayan attackers. All three of these players were black (Duarte 2014: 34). Today, this scapegoating is seen by most commentators as a shameful reminder of racism, at a time when many other factors and individuals could have been singled out as responsible for the historic loss.

Brazil competed in the 1954 World Cup finals in Switzerland but were beaten by the Hungarians in the quarter finals. A few years later they had another opportunity for redemption. On 21 April 1957 Brazil beat Peru 1-0 in the Maracanã to qualify for the World Cup finals in Sweden. According to Nelson Rodrigues (1993: 51-52; 60-61), Rio-based sports journalists were not impressed with the team. Peru were considered a weak side and Brazil won narrowly on a free kick by Didi (Waldyr Pereira). The journalists instead admired the Hungarians, the Russians, the Czechs, and the English, thinking European soccer was the best soccer in the world. Some Brazilians also thought that “the Brazilian players were always guided by their instincts rather than reason, and their behavior was marked by immaturity and nervous instability as opposed to maturity and self-control” (Leite Lopes 2014: 115).

In Sweden Brazil played well. They drew 0-0 with England in the group stage and beat Wales 1-0 in the quarter final. They beat France 5-2 in the semi-final and Sweden 5-2 in the final. Didi was the midfielder who drove their team. Their most unusual, unpredictable player was Mané Garrincha (Manuel Francisco dos Santos), a right winger with a prodigious ability to dribble around opponents (Rodrigues 1993: 53).[[4]](#endnote-4) His legs were crooked and he delighted in surprising defenders. The coaches considered him psychologically unfit to play for the team when, in a friendly in Italy before the World Cup, he waited for a defender to run back into the goalmouth before dribbling around him and scoring. Only reluctantly did they put him in the team. Garrincha captured the love and admiration of many fans and he seemed to express the joy of the amateur player, the young man who played for fun in a casual game or for his factory team. The final also saw action from the 17-year old Pelé (Edson Arantes do Nascimento). He scored two goals, including one in which he received the ball on his chest, kicked it over the head of the advancing defender, and volleyed it with his right foot past the goalkeeper into the net (Foer 2004: 122). (What he did to the defender the Brazilians call a *chapeu*, or hat). Mario Zagallo, who was later to coach Brazil, also scored in the final (Guterman 2009: 128-130).

The 1958 World Cup was the coming of age of Brazil as a soccer nation. Their play delighted the world and news of the team’s victory, which reached Brazilians by radio, was received with tremendous enthusiasm (Goldblatt 2014: 100). Nelson Rodrigues declared that because of the team’s success in 1958, Brazilians could finally overcome what he called their “stray dog” complex (*complexo de vira-lata*; see Rodrigues 1993: 51-52; 60-61).

What made the Brazilians special in the sport was a topic of debate, often revealing notions of racial essentialism common at the time (and even still today). For example, in the 1930s, the Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre argued it was due to a combination of cultural and racial factors. “The Brazilians play [soccer] as if it were a dance. This is probably the result of the influence of those Brazilians who have African blood or are predominantly African in their culture, for such Brazilians tend to reduce everything to dance, work and play alike” (quoted in Bellos 2002: 27). Freyre also described Brazilian soccer as a reflection of a folkloric Brazilian character, the mixed-race artful dodger or *malandro*. He wrote in 1938, “Our style of playing soccer contrasts with the Europeans because of a combination of qualities of surprise, malice, astuteness and agility, and at the same time brilliance and individual spontaneity…Our passes…our dummies, our flourishes with the ball, the touch of dance and subversiveness that marks the Brazilian style…seem to show psychologists and sociologists in a very interesting way the roguery and flamboyance of the mulatto that today is in every true affirmation of what is Brazilian” (quoted in Bellos 2002: 36). The writer Mario Filho, the brother of Nelson Rodrigues, popularized Freyre’s ideas in a book first published in 1947, O Negro no Futebol Brasileiro (The Black in Brazilian Football; see Goldblatt 2014: 85).

There is another, more prosaic explanation of Brazil’s success in soccer and victory in 1958 that does not depend on essentialist notions of culture and race. This perspective focuses on the state’s promotion of soccer and careful investment in and planning for the national team’s competitions. The 1958 delegation was the most professional group that went from Brazil to a World Cup up to that time. Its key figure was João Havelange, who in early 1958 had become head of the Brazilian Confederation of Sports (*Confederação Brasileira de Desportos*, or CBD, which in 1979 became the CBF, the *Confederação Brasileiro de Futebol*, or Brazilian Football Confederation).[[5]](#endnote-5) Havelange would be there for more than sixteen years, and was able to use his leadership of the CBD to jump to the presidency of FIFA (the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*), world soccer’s governing body in 1974, and stay there until 1998.

Havelange appointed the São Paulo businessman Paulo Machado de Carvalho as head of the Brazilian delegation to the 1958 World Cup. Machado de Carvalho was an owner of radio and TV stations who carefully prepared for the Cup. For the first time the delegation included a psychologist, a nutritionist and a dentist. Twenty-five location scouts were sent to Sweden to find a base for the squad (Goldblatt 2014: 99). Havelange also appointed the coach, Vicente Feola, who selected the players in consultation with Machado de Carvalho, the doctor Hilton Gosling and the psychologist João Cavalhares. As the journalist David Goldblatt (2007: 359) notes, “the Brazilians devoted scientific, psychological and economic resources to the development of domestic and international football and to winning, especially the World Cup.”

The period from 1958 to 1970 was perhaps a golden age for Brazilian soccer. Brazil won three of the four World Cup finals in that span of thirteen years, in 1958, in 1962 in Chile and in 1970 in Mexico. In keeping with the rules, they retained the Jules Rimet Trophy, the original World Cup trophy, after winning it for the third time in 1970. (The Cup was stolen from the CBF in 1983 and never recovered.) In this period all the players in the national team played for Brazilian clubs such as Santos, Corinthians, São Paulo, Palmeiras, Botafogo, Flamengo, Fluminense, Grêmio, Cruzeiro, and Atlético Mineiro. They were known and loved by Brazilian fans, and relatively unknown (with the exception of Pelé) and exotic to fans outside of Brazil.

The 1970 team may have been the best ever for Brazil. Brazil won the final 4-1 in the Azteca stadium in Mexico City with some mesmerizing play and memorable goals, especially the last goal by the captain Carlos Alberto. A long period of Brazilian possession was finished off by Jairzinho running towards the middle of the pitch from the left, passing to Pelé who stood just outside the penalty area and who then teed up his captain by laying the ball off to his right. Carlos Alberto, running up the right side of the pitch, met the pass perfectly with his right foot, hitting a low, hard shot past the Italian goalkeeper into the left corner of the goal. This was soccer that in its artistry, fluency and mastery met the dreams of many fans all over the world.

1970 was the first World Cup final that Brazilians were able to watch on television. The way the team played was admired by many observers. The style was called by some football-art, or *o jogo bonito*, the beautiful game, and it reflected the high technical ability of the Brazilian players, who played on all kinds of surfaces, as well as their tendency to rely on technique and finesse rather than mere physical force. At this time, the generally larger and more physically robust northern Europeans played on muddy fields and put the ball in the air more than their South American counterparts. The Brazilian style of play was more distinctive from the European than it is in the 21st century, in part because they game was not as globalized then as it is now. For many Brazilian fans at that time, European soccer was boring and predictable, more about tactics and physicality than grace and finesse. But their own team expressed their ability to improvise and make the game more of a dance. In the journalist Franklin Foer’s words, “where the European style was prose, the Brazilian was poetry” (Foer 2004: 120).

The British sports journalist Hugh McIlvanney wrote of the 1970 World Cup final:

Those last minutes contained a distillation of their football, its beauty and elan and undiluted joy. Other teams thrill us and make us respect them. The Brazilians, at their finest give us pleasure so natural and deep as to be a vivid physical experience…the qualities that make football the most graceful and electric and moving of team sports were being laid before us. Brazil are proud of their own unique abilities but it was not hard to believe that they were anxious to say something about the game as well as themselves. You cannot be the best in the world at a game without loving it and all of us who sat, flushed with excitement, in the stands of the Azteca sensed that we were seeing some kind of tribute (quoted in Goldblatt 2007: 359).

The British historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote, “who, having seen the Brazilian national football team in its heyday, can deny its claim to the status of art?” (quoted in Fontes and Buarque de Hollanda 2014: 2). Reflecting on this period, the anthropologist Roberto da Matta wrote about the link between Brazilian national identity and soccer: “In futebol there is art, dignity, genius, bad luck, Gods and Demons, freedom and fate, flags, hymns, and tears, and above all the discovery that although Brazil is bad at a lot of things, it is good with the ball. It is a football champion which is very important. After all, it is better to be a champion in samba, carnival and football than in war and the sale of rockets” (quoted in Goldblatt 2007: 357).

For some, though, Brazil’s 1970 World Cup victory was tainted by the attempts of the government, a dictatorship headed by General Emílio Garastazzu Médici, to exploit soccer success for its own benefit. Such practices had a long tradition in Brazil. President Getúlio Vargas told the national team before they traveled to Switzerland for the 1954 World Cup finals “not to forget that abroad you will represent the ability, the force and the resistance of a people (*raça*). If you win, Brazil will be victorious. If you lose, it will be Brazil that will lose” (quoted in Guterman 2009: 106). President Juscelino Kubitschek invited the national team to the presidential palace and drank champagne out of the Jules Rimet trophy in 1958, and President João Goulart associated himself with the victorious 1962 team in the same way.

The Médici government, however, brought the political control and exploitation of the national team to a new level in 1970. The head of the Brazilian delegation to Mexico was Army Brigadier Major Jeronimo Bastos. Bastos’ chief of security was Army Major Roberto Camara Lima Ipiranga dos Guaranys. Even the physical trainer was an Army Captain, Claudio Coutinho (Guterman 2009: 183). In addition to the militarization of the delegation, the President of the then-CBD João Havelange conferred with the head of the intelligence agency the SNI (Serviço Nacional de Inteligência) General Carlos Alberto da Fontoura, the head of the military cabinet General João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo, and the President’s Chief of Staff João Leitão de Abreu about the preparations and progress of the national team (Guterman 2009: 171).

President Médici and his advisors were directly involved in the preparations for the World Cup, because they regarded it as an issue of the utmost importance. When CBD President João Havelange fired the team’s coach, João Saldanha, in March of 1970, replacing him with Mario Zagallo, many people, including the player Jairzinho, believed that this was done at the bequest of the government. Saldanha had been a member of the Communist Party, and was said to be uncomfortable with his role of coach of the national team under a dictatorship (Guterman 2009: 169). Once the World Cup games began, President Médici, who had played for Grêmio de Bagé in Rio Grande de Sul in his youth, listened to them avidly on the radio, telegramming or telephoning his congratulations to the team afterwards (Guterman 2009: 175-176).

The Médici government tried to portray the 1970 World Cup victory as validation of its project for the country. The President told the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper the day before the final between Italy and Brazil that it would be 4-1 for Brazil, and the newspaper ran the story under the headline, “In the presidential palace, the hypothesis of a defeat is not accepted” (Guterman 2009: 178). When the team returned to Brazil, Médici was photographed raising the Jules Rimet trophy alongside the players, and issued a press release that said:

I identify in the success of our national team the victory of unity and the convergence of forces, the victory of intelligence and bravery, confidence and humility, persistence and serenity, technical capacity, physical preparation and moral consistency. But it is necessary to say, above all, that our players won because they knew how to be a harmonious team in which, as well as individual talent, they affirmed a collective will. In this moment of victory, I bring to the people my tribute, identifying myself with the happiness and emotion of the streets, to celebrate, in our incomparable national football team, the affirmation of the Brazilian man (quoted in Guterman 2009: 183-184).[[6]](#endnote-6)

In this way the Médici government, which was engaging in fierce repression of dissidents and opponents, tried to show that the military dictatorship was popular. The government tried to use the World Cup victory to win votes for its political party ARENA (the *Aliança Renovadora Nacional*, or National Renovatory Alliance) in the Congressional elections of October 1970.

After the 1970 World Cup the government pressured the CBD to reorganize the national league in the country. Before this time, competitions had been largely state-wide or at most regional. In 1971 the CBD created a national league that is now known as the *Campeonato Brasileiro* or Brazilian Championship (Guterman 2009: 180). The basic format of Brazilian club competition has remained the same since this time, even though the specific organizational details have changed. Part of the season is taken up by the state championships, while the other part is the national league (with four divisions, A, B, C and D) and a national cup competition (*Copa do Brasil*). Clubs from the states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, and especially São Paulo dominate the national competition.[[7]](#endnote-7)

In 1974 and 1978 the national team experienced frustration and eclipse in world soccer, as the Dutch revolutionized tactics, and the Germans and Argentines won World Cup trophies on home soil in 1974 and 1978 respectively. But in 1982 Brazil presented another world-class team to the world, in a side that included gifted players such as Socrates, Falcão, Eder, Zico, and Júnior. The team lost 3-2 to Italy in a pulsating quarter-final match in the Sarrià stadium in Barcelona. The Brazilian press dubbed the defeat “the Sarrià Tragedy” (Duarte 2014: 131). This team is still remembered fondly in Brazil, perhaps more fondly than later teams that won the competition (Duarte 2014: 130). Its captain Socrates became a national figure in the early 1980s when he, alongside some of his teammates in the Corinthians team, publicly campaigned for a return to direct elections for the presidency of the country and for democracy within the club in a movement dubbed Corinthians Democracy (Downie 2017: 196-206; Duarte 2014: 110-111 – see also Fig. 10.4).

(Fig. 10.4 about here.)

After a 24-year hiatus, the Brazilian national team won the World Cup again in 1994, in the United States. This team had little of the artistry and flair of the 1970 team, and the period has been baptized as the “Dunga era” by some observers, in recognition of the importance of the captain of the 1994 team, the defender Carlos Caetano Bledorn Verri, whose nickname is Dunga (Duarte 2014: 130). Coached by a conservative and defense-minded tactician, Carlos Alberto Parreira, the 1994 team specialized in mopping up opposition attacks, stifling opponents in midfield, and snatching a 1-0 victory with a late goal. (This was the score of its winning round of 16 match against the United States and its semi-final against Sweden.) Brazil won the final of the 1994 World Cup against Italy after a scoreless stalemate was decided on penalties. At this point Brazilian soccer had changed markedly. Only half of the squad of 22 players in the national team played in Brazil, and most of the best players, such as Mauro Silva, Bebeto, Romário, Dunga, and the goalkeeper Taffarel were playing in Europe. In 2002 Brazil repeated this feat with its fifth World Cup victory. This squad looked similar to the 1994 group, in that many of its best players including the captain Cafu, Roberto Carlos, the striker and top goalscorer Ronaldo, Rivaldo, and Ronaldinho Gaucho were playing in Europe.

Cafu, the captain of the 2002 team, did something during the post-match celebrations that highlighted the inequalities that are part of the modern game in Brazil. He wrote on his shirt, “100% Jardim Irene”, in honor of the neighborhood in São Paulo where he grew up. Jardim Irene is a poor and violent neighborhood in the eastern part of the city, and Cafu had said in an interview that many of his childhood friends had been killed in gun violence. Cafu’s tribute to his old home revealed the odds against upward mobility for the poor in Brazil, and the gratitude of a particularly gifted player for his escape from poverty. At Cafu’s side for much of the celebration was Ricardo Teixeira, the son-in-law of João Havelange and President of the CBF, someone who had married into a wealthy Swiss-Brazilian family and who epitomized the privilege and power of the *cartolas* (literally top hats) or bosses who run Brazilian soccer.

In contemporary Brazil, there are polemics around the wearing of the yellow shirt of the *Seleção*. Because some people who protested in favor of the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) in 2015 and 2016 wore the shirt, it has become something of a political symbol. For some supporters of President Rousseff and the Workers’ Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* or PT), the wearing of the shirt is associated with conservatives who try to use patriotism against the PT. For others, the shirt is still a supra-political symbol of national identity (Sebba 2018).

It is also remarkable that in a country traditionally seen as soccer mad, the Confederations Cup, the FIFA mini-tournament held a year before the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil, was the object of nation-wide protests in June-July 2013. In protests that were diffuse, pluralistic, and difficult to interpret, the largely young protestors objected to the government’s lavish expenditure on the World Cup despite serious shortcomings in the public health and education systems, as well as public transportation and security.[[8]](#endnote-8) These concerns were well-placed, as Brazil spent $11.6 billion on the World Cup, more than Germany and South Africa put together, the hosts of the 2006 and 2010 finals respectively (Barbassa 2015: 280). Furthermore, many stadiums, such as those built in Brasília, Manaus, and Recife, were destined to become under-used white elephants, either because of their location or the lack of a team with a large enough following. The protestors demanded “FIFA-standard” hospitals and schools, and decried the corruption associated with the building of the infrastructure for the World Cup.

Once the World Cup began in June 2014, however, many Brazilians still wanted the national team to win, despite the serious questions that had been raised about the wisdom of holding the tournament in the country (Barbassa 2015: 270). This accounts for the trauma of the 7-1 defeat to Germany in the semi-final with which this chapter began. It remains an open question of how the Brazilian national soccer team will be seen in the future, and whether Brazilians will continue to put aside their differences to support their team in future international competitions.

**The Modern Game**

Brazilian soccer has changed with the globalization of the country. Many clubs specialize in nurturing young players and then selling them off for a profit to European clubs. They are exporting raw material, not refining the finished product. For example, it was estimated in the early 2000s that roughly 5,000 Brazilian soccer players had contracts with clubs outside of Brazil (Foer 2004: 131). This is also reflected in the national team. Among the Brazilian squad of 23 for the 2014 World Cup, only four players played for Brazilian clubs. The rest were *estrangeiros* or foreigners, some of whom had never played in Brazil as adults.[[9]](#endnote-9)

The top five European leagues (in England and Wales, Spain, Italy, Germany and France) rake off most of the profits from global soccer (including television rights, ticket sales, and merchandising), while the Brazilian league remains outside this gilded arena. Brazil’s clubs are, with some exceptions, badly managed and often corrupt (Barbassa 2015: 279; Foer 2004: 120). Wrote Juca Kfouri, a Brazilian soccer journalist, “In Brazil, there is still the ideology of `rouba mas faz’ – it’s OK to steal if you get things done. In football this is stretched to the most far-reaching consequences. Everything is forgotten in the light of victory. I have always said that God put the best players here and the worst bosses to compensate” (quoted in Goldblatt 2007: 794).

The former player Romário, who was elected to the Senate in 2014, established a Congressional committee to investigate corruption in the game. This committee issued two reports in 2015, one by the majority of committee members, and a minority report signed by Senator Romário (PSB – Rio de Janeiro) and Senators Randolfe Rodrigues (REDE – Amapá) and Paulo Bauer (PSDB – Santa Catarina). While the majority report attempted to protect the directors of the clubs from accountability, the minority report alleged that corruption in FIFA had links with corruption in the CBF, and involved millions of dollars in bribes. The report, which contained more than 1,000 pages, was sent to Brazil’s Prosecutor General, Federal Police, Ministry of Justice, and FIFA. It alleged that the CBF housed a mafia that used Brazil’s principal sporting patrimony for its own benefit (Romário 2017: 238-239). The report recommended the indictment of CBF officials Marco Polo Del Nero, José Maria Marin, Ricardo Teixeira, and six other officials, as well as structural changes to the management of soccer in Brazil (Romário 2017: 231; 216-230). José Maria Marin, a former CBF President, was convicted of corruption and in prison in New York in 2018 and his successor Marco Polo Del has been unwilling to travel abroad since 2015 because of the risk of his being arrested (Sebba 2018: 15).[[10]](#endnote-10)

Brazilian clubs generally seem content to compete in a league with few international followers, and specialize as suppliers of some of the best players in the world to other clubs. The two most expensive transfers (as of early 2018) have involved Brazilian players. Neymar, a player who began his career in Brazil with Santos, was transferred from Barcelona to Paris St. Germain in 2007 for $273 million dollars. And his countryman Philippe Coutinho, a former youth player at Vasco da Gama in Rio de Janeiro, was transferred in 2018 from Liverpool to Barcelona for $202 million dollars.[[11]](#endnote-11) However, when Deloitte’s published its list of the thirty richest soccer clubs in the world (the Money League), not a single Brazilian club made the list.[[12]](#endnote-12)

The World Cup in 2014, staged in Brazil and held in twelve different capital cities around the country, showed how much the modern game had changed in Brazil. Ticket prices were high (Barbassa 2015: 257) and the crowds were largely affluent and white, reflecting changes in club soccer as well. According to the geographer Christopher Gaffney, ticket prices for games in Brazil are some of “the most expensive in the world relative to the minimum wage” (Gaffney in Fontes and Buarque de Hollanda 2014: 200). From 2007 to 2012, average attendance at Brazilian Serie A (first division) games decreased by 15.8%, while during the same period ticket prices rose by an average of 88 percent (Gaffney 2014: 200). Fans in Brazil have become accustomed to watching games on the *O Globo* television network and seeing half-empty stadiums behind the players on the pitch (see also Foer 2004: 130).

If *futebol* was created and sustained by *o povo*, the Brazilian people, it has to some extent been neoliberalized, repackaged and reformed to fit the lifestyles and preferences of the middle and upper classes. In the words of sociologist Richard Giulianotti, the “commercialization and sanitization of football stadiums...has clearly had a negative effect on the social and cultural foundations of the game” (Giulianotti 2014: xvii). How to respond to this development is contested. For some, the game should be returned to its working-class roots, made cheaper and more accessible, and therefore – at least potentially – more popular. For others, such a solution is both undesirable and impossible. Soccer around the world has moved in a neoliberal direction, with more luxurious stadiums, more expensive tickets, bigger deals with television networks, and an expanding worldwide audience. In such a competitive environment, it is incumbent upon the CBF and the clubs to continue to modernize the game in order to capture a greater share of the global industry’s profits. The only thing that people from these two perspectives agree on is that corruption is not good for the game. An example of the corruption that has been uncovered came after the 2014 World Cup when Sergio Cabral, the former Governor of Rio de Janeiro state, was convicted of taking bribes from the construction company responsible for the renovation of the Maracanã stadium.[[13]](#endnote-13) Even the jewel in the crown of Brazilian soccer was not free from the taint of corruption.

**Conclusion**

The news anchor William Bonner tells a story that reflects the abiding passion for soccer in Brazil. After the presidential election of 2002, Bonner was scheduled to interview Luíz Inácio “Lula” da Silva in the studios of Jornal Nacional, the news program of TV Globo, Brazil’s largest television network. He planned to ask Lula, a fan of the São Paulo team Corinthians, which was the biggest thrill for him, his election to the presidency or the goal by Basilio, a goal in 1977 that won Corinthians their first Sao Paulo state championship in 23 years. His editors talked Bonner out of starting the interview in this way, feeling that it was inappropriate. But after the interview in the elevator with Bonner Lula, unprompted, said about the election, “Look, aside from the goal by Basilio, I think I’ve never had an emotion like that in my life!” (Bonner 2009: 209-211).

In some ways soccer represents both the best and the worst of Brazil. It reflects the joie de vivre, the creativity, the improvisation and athleticism of the people. It is a tremendous force for sociability, solidarity and togetherness, and for mutual celebration. But soccer also represents the ills of Brazilian society, including corruption in the management of clubs and the National Football Confederation and the predatory selling of players to clubs abroad. It is not surprising that soccer, the world’s most globalized game, reflects problems with Brazil’s experience with globalization. And, once one understands the deep roots soccer has in Brazilian society and social life, it is easy to understand the trauma of the 7-1 defeat to Germany in the World Cup, a defeat that, according to the journalist Juliana Barbassa (2015: 280) “didn’t just lift the proverbial rug; it ripped it right off and exposed the gap between Brazil’s aspirations and its ability to achieve them, on the field and beyond”.

The story of soccer in Brazil is closely connected to elites and their political projects. Politicians saw the mass appeal of soccer and could not resist trying to exploit it for their own ends, whether that was a vision of national integration, national development, or an upcoming election. At the same time, soccer also mirrors the development of Brazilian democracy. It started as an elite sport in private clubs, and it became a sport for everyone, including the poor and the non-white. Through force of will, marginalized people made the game their own. For a lucky few players, soccer became a means of social mobility, while for millions of fans, it was an outlet for their joys and fears, and a means of identifying with fellow citizens and the nation. Despite disagreement and debates about which direction the national game should take in the future, almost everyone agrees that the management of soccer – like the management of the country – should become more transparent and accountable. Whether it will or not is an open question.

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1. Not to be overlooked here is the distressing state of gender inequality in the United States. While better off than Brazil, the US has one of the highest rates of gender inequality among highly developed countries worldwide according to the United Nations. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. English has its own sports metaphors, of course; see Norridge 2009: 195. But they tend to come from a multiplicity of sports rather than, as in Brazilian Portuguese, one sport. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. These overwrought statements are reminiscent of the words attributed to Bill Shankley (1913-1981), the legendary manager of the Liverpool Football Club, who is supposed to have said something along the lines of, “Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure you, it’s more serious than that”. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The nickname “garrincha”, or wren, was said to have been given to him by his sister Rosa. From Bellos 2002: 97. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The CBD split into several different units in 1979. This was partly a response to FIFA’s decision to require that its affiliated national bodies should only be for soccer, and not for other sports.

   At that point the CBF was created and became responsible for managing the game in Brazil (Downie 2017: xiii). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. These and other translations from the Portuguese are by the authors. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. In the fifteen-year period 2003 to 2017, São Paulo teams won the Série A (First Division) of the Brazilian Championship nine times, with the other champions coming from Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro. The São Paulo winners were Corinthians, Palmeiras, São Paulo, and Santos. Cruzeiro, a team from Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, won three championships; the Rio team Fluminense won twice; and the Rio team Flamengo won once. Note the complete absence of teams from the south, center-west, north and northeast in this list. In the Brazilian Cup, in the eight-year period between 2010 and 2017, the winners have come from Rio Grande do Sul (Grêmio in 2016), São Paulo (Palmeiras twice, and Santos), Rio (Flamengo and Vasco da Gama), and Minas Gerais (the Belo Horizonte teams Atlético Mineiro and Cruzeiro). Again, no teams from the center-west, north or northeast won the competition in this period, and there was only one winner from the south. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For insights into the protests, see Avritzer 2016: 65-82 and Alston, Melo, Mueller and Pereira 2016: 209-213. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. “Brazil Squad for the 2014 World Cup” in The Guardian, 5 June 2014, at <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2014/jun/05/brazil-squad-2014-world-cup> accessed on 3 February 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. For more information on José Maria Marin’s conviction, see “De Luxo ao Cárcere”, 27 December 2017 at Rádio Peão Brasil at <http://radiopeaobrasil.com.br/do-luxo-ao-lixo-ex-presidente-da-cbf-marin-esta-preso-em-penitenciaria-dos-eua/> accessed on 3 February 2018. For more on Marco Polo Del Nero, Marin’s successor as President of the CBF, see Martín Fernandez, “Após revelações nos EUA, investigação sobre Del Nero na FIFA avança” in O Globo, 14 December 2017, at <https://globoesporte.globo.com/blogs/bastidores-fc/noticia/apos-revelacoes-nos-eua-investigacao-sobre-del-nero-na-fifa-avanca.ghtml> accessed on 3 February 2018. Both Marin and Del Nero were investigated as part of the FIFAgate investigation led by the US Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See Collins Udeme, “Coutinho Makes 10 Most Expensive Transfers of All Time List” in FC Naija, 7 Janeiro 2018, <http://fcnaija.com/coutinho-makes-10-most-expensive-transfers-of-alltime-list> accessed on 4 February 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See Deloitte’s Football Money League at <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/sports-business-group/articles/deloitte-football-money-league.html> accessed on 31 January 2018. In 2018 fourteen of the 30 richest clubs were English, with Spanish clubs Real Madrid, Barcelona, and Atletico Madrid, the French club Paris Saint Germain, German clubs Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortumund, and FC Schalke 04 and Italian clubs Juventus, Internazionale and Napoli also listed. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. See Julia Affonso, Ricardo Brandt, Fausto Macedo and Luiz Vassallo, “Sérgio Cabral condenado a 14 anos e 2 meses por corrupção e lavagem” in O Estado de São Paulo, 13 June 2017, at <http://politica.estadao.com.br/blogs/fausto-macedo/sergio-cabral-condenado-a-14-anos-e-2-meses-por-corrupcao-e-lavagem/> accessed on 4 February 2018.

    Figure 10.1 – Despite having many skilled players, including Marta Vieira da Silva who is widely considered the best *ever* female soccer player (pictured here), Brazil’s female *Seleção* has never won the World Cup.

    Source – Wiki commons:

    <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marta_-_Brasil_e_Suécia_no_Maracanã_(29033096805).jpg>

    

    Figure 10.2: Club de Regatas Vasco da Gama of Rio de Janerio (more often called simply “Vasco”), pictured here in 1929, was one of the first Brazilian soccer clubs to accept black players. (The authors thank Fabio Luiz for bringing this to our attention.)

    Source – wiki commons:

    https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CR\_Vasco\_da\_Gama\_1929.jpg

    

    Figure 10:3 – the Maracanã national stadium in Rio de Janeiro, pictured here in 2009 as it was originally configured between 1950-2010. A major overhaul was undertaken beginning in 2010 in preparation for the 2014 World Cup.

    Source – Arthur Boppré (wiki commons): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maracanã\_Stadium\_in\_Rio\_de\_Janeiro.jpg

    

    Figure 10.4: Dr. Sócrates, one of Brazil’s all-time greats and famous for his social activism, participating here in the *Diretas Já* protests for direct presidential elections in 1984.

    Source – Jorge Henrique Singh (wiki commons): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Socrates\_(futebolista)\_participando\_do\_movimento\_pol%C3%ADtico\_Diretas\_Já.jpg

     [↑](#endnote-ref-13)