

## **When Was The First Real World Cup?**

Presented to the Conference on  
Globalization and Sport in Historical Context  
University of California, San Diego  
March 2005

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Of course we know when it was - 1930 in Montevideo, Uruguay. But this was a tournament with only 13 participants which barely represented the then known football world let alone the geographical one. It was an event barely noticed in Asia or Africa and ignored even in Great Britain which had invented modern football but refused to take part in what seemed an affair in a far away country of which they knew nothing run by an organisation which the British football associations had recently left. In what follows I want to explore how the idea of an international football championship developed into the global mega event of the twentieth century which is the FIFA World Cup. And I must also try to answer the question in the title of this essay.

One of the foundation ambitions of the International Federation of Football Associations - FIFA - when it was set up in 1904 was to organise an international championship. Article 9 of the first statutes laid down that the International Federation was the only organisation with the right to organise an international competition. Delegates representing eight European countries at the second congress in June 1905 drew up a plan for sixteen national teams to play each other in four groups of four with the four countries of the United Kingdom in one group, Spain, France, Belgium and Holland in a second and Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Hungary in a third. They only found three, to play in group four, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. This 'Coupe Intenationale' as they called it, was scheduled for the following summer during the Berne congress. But such ideas outstripped the young FIFA's economic, governmental and organisational powers. <sup>1</sup>(FIFA archives, Minutes of Second Congress, Paris 1905).

Even the International Olympic Committee (IOC) couldn't organise a football tournament. In 1908, when London took on the Olympic Games after Rome had

pulled out it was the English Football Association who organised and won a competition which had only six entries and they included two teams for France 'A' and 'B'. <sup>2</sup>(Neither of whom did much for the tournament, both losing to Denmark 17-1 and 9-0 respectively. See AH Fabian and Geoffrey Green, Association Football Vol.4 (1960) pp. 447-53) Entrants to the football tournament at the Stockholm Games in 1912 had to be FIFA members but again there were only eleven entries, all from Europe. England won again. It was during this competition in the match against Finland, that one of the English players deliberately missed a penalty because the team thought the decision of the referees too harsh. There was also a consolation competition for teams eliminated in the first two rounds in which Hungary and Austria reached the final. It was a very rough game of which the official report noted that the Hungarians played the whole of the match as if they were in ecstasy. I think it was in ecstasy..

The war of 1914-18 did not put an end to the playing of football but it did inhibit international matches between European national associations. FIFA did not meet in congress again until 1923. But it continued to run the Olympic Football tournaments after the war in 1920, 1924 and 1928 although in the first two of these Austria, Germany and Hungary were excluded as losers of the war. Playing standards were clearly rising in what was by then a sort of world football championship. Egypt was the first non-European country to enter in 1920, followed by the USA, Mexico and Uruguay in 1924. Uruguay made a big impression winning in 1924 and 1928 when they beat local rivals Argentina in the final. It was the way they did it which astonished commentators with the emphasis more on ball control and accurate passing rather than the strength and stamina of the British. (It was less well known that Uruguay brought new ideas of special training and were accompanied by a doctor and a physical trainer). The popularity of football was growing and this was reflected by the enthusiasm of the crowds at the tournaments in Paris and Amsterdam. In Paris, one third of the total income came from the football tournament while the revenue produced by the footballers in Amsterdam was twice as much as the next most popular sport, athletics and over 250,000 people watched the eighteen matches. Amsterdam saw the return of Germany and large numbers of their supporters travelled across the border to watch the matches, an early example of international sporting tourism

Olympic football was a success but it did not include all players. Missing were the professionals from Austria, Great Britain and Hungary and also British and Danish amateurs whose associations refused to accept the IOC's definition of amateurism. They could agree on payment of hotel and travel expenses but not payment to players for time lost from their work. This smacked, to them, of concealed professionalism or shamateurism. It was at this moment that FIFA decided to return to its earlier idea of an international championship which would make them independent of the Olympic tournament and perhaps even overcome quarrels about amateurism. Affiliated associations were circulated and a commission was set up. At the Helsinki congress in 1927 President Jules Rimet declared that the Executive Committee would propose an international competition to begin in 1930.

Which brings us back to Montevideo, Uruguay in July 1930. Why Uruguay? It was partly chosen in recognition of those two Olympic gold medals. But it has to be said that it was also a financial question. FIFA was not a wealthy organisation in 1930. Its income came from a small levy on the gate receipts at all international matches together with the subscriptions of member nations of which there were 47. <sup>4</sup>(Fifa Handbook 1930). The Uruguayan Government was prepared to take the financial risk. They were proud of the achievements of their football team and seized the opportunity to link them with the centenary celebrations of Uruguay's independence from Spain. Not only did they offer to build a new stadium; they also agreed to pay the travelling and hotel expenses of the competing teams. These were considerable for the Europeans as it took about two weeks to sail from Europe to the River Plate and a stay of a shade over two weeks would be followed by another fortnight at sea. In some ways this first FIFA international tournament was not a success. Most European football associations refused to embark on such a trip so close to the start of their own football seasons. Only France, Belgium, Rumania and Yugoslavia actually went. The absence of Spain and the British was especially disappointing for the hosts. Mexico and the United States also competed joining Uruguay and six other South American counties. It was hardly a proper representation of the world of football. Relatively little attention was paid to it in the world's press outside the competing nations. In the English Athletic News for example the first World Cup Final received only two lines. The Rumania-Peru match on 14 July was apparently watched by about

300 people, the smallest attendance at a match in the World Cup Finals.<sup>5</sup> (See Jack Rollin, *The Guinness Record of the World Cup 1930-1994*) (1994 ed.) p.185 In Uruguay people still claim to have won four World Cups; the 1924 and 1928 Olympics and the World Championship of 1930 and 1950!) Yet in many ways what is now called the First World Cup was a success. Large crowds filled the new Centenario Stadium especially when Uruguay and Argentina played and the exciting final between these two neighbours compensated for two very one-sided semi-finals. And it made FIFA some money!

The second World Cup held in Italy in 1934 also attracted many foreign visits. Mussolini used the event to display the progress and modernisation of his nation. Yet that the World Cup is not very important to him is shown by the fact that the winning Italian team received the Coppa del Duce, a trophy offered by Mussolini himself that was much bigger and heavier than the small and somewhat modest World Cup itself.

The actual staging of a football world championship consolidated FIFA's view of itself as an organisation with ambitions to develop away from its European and South American heartlands. In 1929 it had changed its logo from a single hemisphere with Europe in the foreground to a double hemisphere which not only included the Americas for the first time but clearly had the globe in view. It still had not quite made up its mind about what to call its world championship. At a meeting of the Executive Committee in Barcelona in 1929 it was the 'International Championship'. At a general committee meeting just before the tournament in Uruguay it was 'The Worlds' Cup Competition and the Technical Regulations Committee called it the Coupe du Monde but placed the phrase in inverted commas. In March 1931 the Executive discussed the rights of FIFA to organise 'Un Championnet du monde'.<sup>6</sup>(FIFA Archives EC Minutes March 1929 and 1931, Exec-Com Minutes 5 June 1930). It is instructive to see how the tournament was presented on the official poster of the organising committees down the decades. Perhaps the gradual emergence of the title, World Cup owes something to the search of advertisers for a memorable brand and to the emergence of English as a global language in the last twenty years of the twentieth century.

The World Cup apart, international football before 1939-45 was heavily localised, the most frequently played matches being between Argentina and Uruguay, France and Belgium, Sweden and Denmark, Austria and Hungary and England v Scotland. From the 1950's national teams began to use modern air travel to play much further afield. Argentina visited France and England and was the first overseas team to play at Wembley in a match to celebrate the Festival of Britain in May 1951. Yugoslavia visited Indonesia and Japan. Some of these trips were cultural contributions to the so-called third way. But they were also yet another sign that international football was becoming a truly global game and FIFA a real world organisation. Even in 1955 the only state in the Western hemisphere not affiliated to FIFA was Trujillo's Dominican Republic.

There was a slow but steady increase in the number of national associations entering for the World Cup, most of them outside the Europe-South American core whose maximum numbers just over 30 and 10 respectively were reached soon after 1950. Moreover it remained popular making money for organisers and participants alike. As Ivo Shriker the FIFA Secretary said to President Rimet after the final of 1950 in the huge Maracana Stadium in Rio, 'we are going to be rich'. There was some tinkering with the structure of the tournament, some of it somewhat bizarre, but by 1958 many European commentators thought the balance between the four biggest political and regional sectors perfect. In Sweden in 1958, the Americas, Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Great Britain each supplied four finalists which were distributed evenly through four mini leagues. But if this sounded like complacency it was about to be challenged.

FIFA acquired 38 new members between 1954 and 1963, most of them newly independent countries the products of the decolonisation of former western empires in Africa and Asia. These years also saw the emergence of the continental federations. The South American members of FIFA had set up theirs in 1916 and used it to organise a South American Championship one year later. Europe, Asia and Africa established similar bodies, the first two in 1954 the latter in 1957. <sup>7</sup>(Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the South Pacific split off from Asia to form Oceania in 1966). The Federations provided a regular opportunity to discuss issues common to their members and to exert some pressure at FIFA congresses as well as to develop

football in their regions. And one of their most pressing grievances was that they wanted more designated places in the World Cup Finals. For the 1966 World Cup Finals to be held in England, Africa and Asia between them had only a single designated place. Few Asian national associations entered but sixteen African countries did and then withdrew in an organised protest against what they saw as an unfair competition which called itself the World Cup but which only allocated one place for two of its most populous continents, in both of which the enthusiasm for football was growing.<sup>8</sup> (North Korea and Australia did not withdraw and played off over two matches in Cambodia to decide who would go to England. The North Koreans won and famously knocked out Italy in the finals. After 1970 no country would boycott the World Cup.

These developments ushered in a period of uncertainty in the governance of FIFA. The world governing body of football had a democratic structure. The power lay in the congress which could overturn decisions of the executive committee and where each member had one vote, like the United Nations. But as has often been pointed out, unlike the UN, FIFA has no security council on which the big powers have the veto. In the late 1960's and early 1970's some of the big powers of football began to question whether it was right that they were worth no more than the vote of the smallest and newest member. There were suggestions that the constitution of FIFA should be changed to give more weight to the European and South American members.<sup>9</sup> (An attempt to achieve it had failed in 1961). This provided a lively context to the FIFA Presidential Election of 1974 when a 58 year old Brazilian businessman, Joao Havelange, stood against the 79 year old English Knight, Sir Stanley Rous. This is not the place to explore the details of what was an important moment in the recent history of world football. Suffice it to say that Havelange campaigned vigorously and modernisation programme that included promising more world cup final places to the national associations of Africa and Asia.<sup>10</sup> (The most important details of this were the sponsorship deals with Coca Cola and Adidas that would produce the resources to enable the smaller and poorer countries and the bigger and richer ones, of Africa and Asia to develop their football. See P. Lanfranchi et.al. 100 years of Football; (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 2004 Ch.11). He recognised that entries for the World Cup from the national associations of Africa and Asia had risen dramatically after 1970, when their combined total was 18 to 40 in 1974, 44 in 1978

and 46 in 1982. By this time Havelange's promise to increase both the number of places available to the African and Asian countries at the World Cup Finals and the total number of teams at those finals had been met. The traditional number of sixteen final places was increased to 24 for the 1982 Finals with two each for Africa, Asia/Oceania and the North and Central American group, 13 for Europe 3 for South America plus the hosts (Spain) and the holders (Argentina). Was this now a competition more clearly representative not only of the membership of the worlds largest sports governing body but also of the fact that football was the global game?

Obviously the media had an important part to play in the globalisation of the World Cup. Football and the media had had a fruitful symbiotic relationship from the start of the modern game. Newspapers were interested in football and football was keen to promote itself through the press. Many of the officers of clubs, county and national associations had not only been players in their youth but also journalists. FIFA had recognised the usefulness of letting the press into meetings of congress. 277 press and radio reporters were accredited to the World Cup Finals of 1934. <sup>11</sup>(The Berlin Olympics hosted 1200 journalists in 1936. Multinational sportswear companies have also been important here. Adidas have used the World Cup as huge promotional campaigns for their products since about 1980 and Nike were later to do the same. The 1998 World Cup Final between France and Brazil was also a match between Adidas and Nike who respectively sponsored the teams). Most people who noticed the early World Cup at all almost certainly did so through the press or the radio. Television would give a new dimension to the experience of seeing it while not being there.

In 1954 and 1958 Europe had black and white TV pictures from most of the matches in Switzerland and Sweden. In 1962 the technology could not run to show live transmissions outside South America but the invention of satellite transmission changed all that. In 1965 the Early Bird satellite allowed the Clay-Liston fight to be beamed from the United States to Western Europe. The World Cup final of 1966 was watched by an estimated 400,000,000 people, the largest audience for a television broadcast up to that time. But this was only the beginning. It is television which enables almost every person in the world to experience the World Cup if they want to Khyentse Norbu made a feature film about it in which he showed how young novice

monks, Tibetans in exile in a monastery in India in 1998, could, with determination, initiative and luck, see France play Brazil at the same time as everyone else!!<sup>11</sup>(The film was called The Cup. For more on the subject of the media see P.Lanfranchi et.al. op cit. Ch 13).

So we come to the moment of truth. When was the first real World Cup? In 1950, in Brazil, the teams travelled between match venues by plane for the first time. Before the tournament the Brazilian football authorities had thought that England and Scotland would be their most difficult opponents and the Brazilian team manager and a group of journalists flew from Rio to London and then travelled by train to Glasgow to watch England play Scotland. This and the Maracana made it special but not special enough. The finals of 1966 were held in England, the inventors of the modern game. As we have seen, a team from Asia, North Korea made an impact in the finals for the first time. The television audience was a record for any TV programme and the slow motion replay was introduced. Or perhaps it should be 1970 with colour television widely available for the first time and the football good guys, Brazil, defeating the football bad guys, Italy and convincing viewers, expert and non-expert alike, that nothing on a football field could be so sweet. And what about 1994, when the World Cup went to America? To FIFA it must have seemed as if the United States of America was football's last frontier. In virtually every country in the world football was either the number one sport or very close to it. Except one. The staging of the trophy had been awarded to the most populous and wealthiest country in the world in 1988 but there was some anxiety as to whether it would be a success. The World Cup of 1990 in Italy had been shown only cable television in the States. The final between Argentina and Germany only drew an audience of 570,000. Even on the eve of the 1994 tournament, when the New Republic published a 10 page supplement on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1994 entitled 'The Politics and Culture of Soccer' one of the articles had been threateningly titled 'Why soccer bores us'. The American organisers realised how important it was that those national teams who had qualified for the finals should play in cities where they could count on ethnic support. In previous World Cups the draw had been made and the groups of four then allocated to cities In the USA it was done the other way round: the composition of a group influenced where it would play its matches. So Germany played in Chicago, for example and Italy and Ireland in New York. And Southern California had two out of the nine venues so that advantage

could be taken of its vibrant Latino soccer scene. Three points instead were awarded for a win in an attempt to boost scoring. In the event the 1994 World Cup produced the highest average attendances at the matches, 68,604. It also saw the first World Cup Finals game to be staged indoors when the United States and Switzerland drew 1-1 in the Pontiac Silverdome in Detroit.

By 1994 FIFA had 178 members and over 130 of them entered the World Cup producing a scheduled 582 qualifying matches. This was a tournament that not only saw the USA involved for only the second time since 1950 but also contained Norway for the first time since 1938; the Republic of Ireland for only the second time and Cameroon for the third time, Morocco for the third time, South Korea for the fourth time and Greece, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia for the first time. But it could hardly be given the title of the first real World Cup.

The third women's world cup, was also held in the United States in 1999. The sixteen finalists represented most of the world's continents although there was no team from South East Asia and only Brazil from South America. 32 matches saw average attendances of 37,944 compared with only 4,316 at the previous World Cup in Sweden in 1995. Women's football was for more popular than the men's game in the USA where there were thousands of women players. Very large crowds watched team USA both in the stadium and on television. For the first time all the matches were refereed by women. Also for the first time two matches without goals, the final and the game for third place. USA 99 has strong claims to be the first real women's world cup. (Report FIFA Women's World Cup)

The World Cup of 2002 broke a good deal of new ground. It was the first to be held in the world's most populous continent, Asia. It was also the first to be co-hosted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Japan with 32 matches in each country. It was the first time China had appeared in the field. But perhaps the most notable aspect of the tournament was the street support broadcasts on television. This was especially true of South Korea where it has been estimated that almost half of the population of 47 million came out to support their national team on its journey to the

semi-finals, the first asian country to go so far. They watched on 2,021 giant screens set up in almost 1,900 different venues throughout the country. The finals were a huge televisual festival in both Japan and South Korea but especially in the latter, most spectacularly in the capital Seoul where countless thousands gathered around the Kwang Hwa Mun intersection in the city centre. Most were young, between ages of 10-30, including very many women, wearing the red shirts of the national team, painting their faces in the same colours and bringing picnics. Some of them even stayed behind and helped clean the streets after the matches were over. Nothing quite like it had been seen since the World Cup became a truly global event and certainly nothing on this scale. How far it was spontaneous, how far organised remains to be discovered. But clearly World Cup 2002 was not the first real world cup. (see Whang Soon –Hee Korea-Japan 2002; Bodies attracted to public viewing, unpublished paper 11 July 2003)

But I nominate 1982 in Spain as the first real World Cup in spite of its ludicrous structure. It was the first tournament to have twenty-four finalists. This produced a record entry of 108 from a FIFA membership of 147. Of those 108, 43 were from Europe and South America and 65 from the other four confederations. Algeria, Cameroon, El Salvador, Honduras, Kuwait and New Zealand reached the finals for the first time and although none progressed further, Algeria would have done without an act of shameless collusion between Austria and Germany. After that teams in final round qualifiers would all kick off at the same time. And it was in 1982 that a match in the finals was settled by a penalty shoot out for the first time. Finally it was at these finals that each person on earth tuned into live match transmissions at least twice which meant a television audience of ten billion for the first time. (P.Lanfranchi et al. (2004) p.254). There were two other changes which came with the 1980s. Political and diplomatic compromises the decide on the venues for future World Cups began in these years. Before 1982 nearly all players in national teams were playing in their own national leagues. 1982 pointed to a different future with half of the Cameroonese and Algerian players being professionals abroad. Before this World Cup national squads had rarely used their foreign mercenaries.

It seems to me that the first real world cup has to reflect the football world and the geographical world. In only one significant respect did the 1982 World Cup fail its publics: the best two teams did not reach the final. It was Germany v Italy : it should have been Brazil v France.