¡Animales!
Civility, Modernity, and Constructions of Identity in Argentine Soccer, 1955-1970

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

By

Rwany Sibaja
Master of Arts
University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2005

Director: Matthew Karush, Associate Professor
Department of History and Art History

Summer Semester 2013
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
Copyright 2013 Rwany Sibaja
All Rights Reserved
DEDICATION

For Lisa, Isabella, and Roman
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation, ¡Animales! Civility, Modernity, and Constructions of Identity in Argentine Soccer, 1955-1970, could not be possible without the guidance and support of faculty and colleagues. I would like to thank a wonderful dissertation committee. Matt Karush, Joan Bristol, and John Nauright provided constructive feedback that immeasurably helped shape my thoughts and words. To them, a debt of gratitude is a meager offering in light of all the support they offered. I would like to specifically thank Matt for being a wonderful advisor. Each meeting and conversation with him reminded me that choosing George Mason University (GMU) was the absolute best decision. More than that, he trusted my instincts and encouraged me throughout the years.

Faculty in the Department of History and Art History also provided valuable support in the development of this work. The faculty at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media pushed me in bold, new directions through stimulating discussions about digital humanities and the production of historical scholarship. In particular, Kelly Schrum was always available to suggest new ideas and provide constructive feedback and support. I also want to thank fellow doctoral students at GMU, as well as numerous sports scholars across the U.S., for engaging conversations that enriched this project. A generous support from the Provost’s Office at George Mason University allowed me to focus on writing and complete this work on a timely basis.

I would be remiss without recognizing the kindness of colleagues and institutions in Buenos Aires. A sincere appreciation goes to the librarians at the Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos, Asociación de Fútbol Argentino (AFA), and Museo Evita for their assistance and their kindness towards a foreign scholar. I am especially indebted to the generosity of fellow fútbol academics in Argentina. Julio Frydenberg welcomed me to the Centro de Estudios de Deportes at the Universidad de San Martín. Conversations with Mariano Grutchesky pushed me to reconsider assumptions, typically accompanied by tasty asados at his home. Daniel Sazbón and Lía Ferrero offered sound advice at critical junctures, and Rodrigo Daskal selflessly opened his home and entire collection of valuable (and rare) research materials.

A final acknowledgement goes to friends and family. This dissertation is a testament to the sacrifice and unending faith that my parents have always provided—gracias mami y papi. Above all, I thank my Father, my wife Lisa, and two wonderful children for their patience, unending love, and needed laughter. They pushed me forward when I felt unable, or unwilling, to press ahead, and they inspired me to do my best each day.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Football Becomes Fútbol, 1912-1945</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Football Arrives in Argentina, 1884-1912</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalizing Football</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing National and Masculine Identity in the Sports Pages</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity, Growth, and Professionalization of Fútbol, 1920s-1945</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perón: “El Primer Hincha”</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fútbol, Traditionalism, and Peronist Discourse</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fútbol as a Progressive Cultural Activity</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fútbol and Film in the Peronist State</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics and the Limits of Peronist Intervention in Fútbol</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proscribing Peronism in Fútbol</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Las gallinas de huevos dorados”: Rights of Socios and Social Justice as a Moral Issue</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death, Murder, and State Repression in the Stadium</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dante Panzeri and the Moral Crusade at El Gráfico</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano and 1958 World Cup: A Game of Two</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halves</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Age of Modernism and Scientism in Fútbol, 1958-1966</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Half</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition in Sports Journalism: El Gráfico in the 1960s</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chantocracia”</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of the Celebrity Coach</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Toto” Lorenzo and the 1962 World Cup in Chile ........................................ 194
Second Half .................................................................................................. 203
The Crisis Deepens .................................................................................. 203
“Fútbol Espectáculo” ............................................................................. 214
“Caudillos” and Changing Notions of Masculinity ................................ 233
“Killing It”: Independiente and the Intercontinental Cup of 1963-1964 .... 246
Conclusion ................................................................................................. 253

5. Nationalism, the Military State, and Fútbol, 1966-1968 ..................... 255
The “Moral Champions” ......................................................................... 259
Racing, World Champions: The 1967 Intercontinental Cup ................ 279
War and Fútbol ......................................................................................... 288
The Rise of Estudiantes de La Plata ......................................................... 292
Conclusion ................................................................................................. 300

Intervention at AFA: The Reforms of Valentín Suárez ....................... 307
The Limits of “Hombre” in Fútbol .......................................................... 314
“Fútbol Espectáculo” Comes to an End ................................................ 328
Argentina’s Absence from Mexico 1970 .............................................. 334
The Fall of Estudiantes de La Plata ........................................................ 339
Conclusion ................................................................................................. 355

Epilogue ..................................................................................................... 357
“Golden Age” coaches and Nostalgia .................................................... 359
Menottismo and Bilardismo .................................................................... 361

Appendices ............................................................................................... 371
References ................................................................................................. 375
Archives .................................................................................................... 375
Films / Footage Consulted ....................................................................... 375
Selected Bibliography ............................................................................. 376
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1 - Monthly Salaries for Laborers, Ticket Prices for Public Entertainment, and Approximate Attendance Figures During the First Peronist Term, 1946-1951</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: “Como nos conocen en Europa”</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: Image of Domingo Tarasconi</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3: Cartoon in <em>La Cancha</em> August 9, 1930</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: ARG v URU- Cartoon in <em>La Cancha</em> August 2, 1930</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5: ARG v URU- Cartoon in <em>La Cancha</em> August 9, 1930</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: “Los del Cerro celebran su ‘victoria’…”</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: Club Membership in 1929</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8: Club Membership for the “Big Five”: 1931-1942</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9: General Juan Domingo Perón “Primer Deportista Argentino”</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10: General Juan Perón (6 honorary titles)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11: Propulsores del Deporte</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12: Perón Greets Ángel Labruna</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13: Boxer José Maria Gatica and Perón</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14: Perón Conducts the Ceremonial Tip-off at Girl’s Basketball Game</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15: Perón Honors Racecar Driver Juan Manuel Fangio</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16: Polo National Team Captain Enrique Alberdi Receives Trophy</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17: Cartoon: <em>Caras y Caretas</em>, August 1952</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18: English Players in Buenos Aires Pose with a Newspaper</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19: Perón With the Head of the English Football Association</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20: English Football Officials Lay Wreath for Eva Perón at the CGT</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 21: Advertisement in <em>Mundo Deportivo</em>, May 26, 1949</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 22: Cover to <em>Ahora</em> October 7, 1948</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23: 1949 Advertisement for the Inaugural “Evita” Youth Fútbol Tournament</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 24: Eva Perón Greets Participants at the Opening Ceremony of the “Campeonato de Fútbol Infantil ‘Evita’”</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 25: “La señora Eva María Duarte de Perón da un puntapié inicial del partido del campeonato argentino de fútbol infantil ‘Evita’,” February 21, 1951</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 26: “Inauguración del campeonato infantil Evita en River Plate 1953”</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 27: School Textbook: Eva Perón</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 28: School Textbook: “Fútbol” and “Campeonato Infantil”</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 29: Total Tickets Sold, 1943-1958</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 30: Average Attendance, 1943-1958</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 31: Cartoon: “Va mal en la tabla,” <em>Campeón</em>, November 16, 1955</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 32: Image of Deceased Mario Linker</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This dissertation argues that fútbol, or soccer, was a privileged venue in Argentina for negotiating social anxieties between 1955 and 1970, which in turn produced changing notions of national and masculine identity. Fút bol discourse also reflected middle-class preoccupations with success, civility, and modernity. As a result, this project engages with three distinct bodies of literature: works on middle class societies in Latin America, writings on masculinity and national identity in sports, and cultural studies of mid-twentieth century Argentina. Drawing on the wealth of scholarship on class and popular culture, this dissertation places the prevailing fútbol discourses in Argentina within a broader study of class anxieties in the 1950s and 1960s. These decades saw a shift in Argentina toward technocratic ideas that rejected traditionalism and populist governance, and sought to modernize Argentina. The goal was to fulfill the potential of an industrialized Argentina, and place the nation among the developed socities of the world.
In fútbol, this meant de-emphasizing traditional styles of play—heavy on individual talent and creativity—in favor of modern tactical systems, discipline, and greater physical conditioning. Many of the actors central to this dissertation—players, journalists, coaches, physical trainers, and sport officials—looked toward Europe for proven tactical systems and training methods. The result was a decade of “fútbol moderno” that produced a hard-hitting physical style of play. The goal was to out-muscle, out-run, and outlast opponents. The success of Argentine teams in the mid-1960s validated “fútbol moderno” in the eyes of these reformers. Yet, the solutions presented by the advocates of “modern” tactics and training methods were not universally accepted. Critics questioned if the singular pursuit of success came at the expense of the nation’s reputation in the world. By 1969, Argentine athletes gained notoriety as “dirty” players who practiced “anti-fútbol,” and, as English coach Alf Ramsey famously put it, behaved like “animals.” Argentina’s standing on the world stage was at stake. As a litany of disorders took place on and off the field in the late 1960s, serious doubts emerged about the modernity and civility of the Argentine people, especially among the middle-class actors central to this study. The result was a polarization among fútbol aficionados. Whereas purists linked masculinity and “Argentineanness” to the creole traditions of the past, others defined them according to the tenets of modern fútbol that favored strength and winning above all else. This dissertation exposes how these polarized views of Argentine fútbol, which still exist today, emanate from the debates of the 1950s and 1960s.
Introduction

Argentina lost to England, the host nation, in the quarterfinals of the 1966 World Cup of soccer by a score of 0-1. After the contentious match ended, English coach Alf Ramsey ran onto the field and prevented his players from performing the customary exchange of jerseys with their South American opponents. When reporters asked him about his team’s victory, Ramsey concluded, “We have, still, to produce our best football. It will come against the right type of opposition, the team who come[s] out to play football, not act as animals.”¹

The "animal" comment created a stir in Argentina. It transformed a sub-par performance by the national team into a moment of patriotic indignation. Fueled by a sense of injustice, Argentines concluded than an English, or European, “fix” prevented Argentina’s victory and ensured that England would win the World Cup in front of its fans. Thousands in Buenos Aires greeted the “moral champions” upon their return. The parade route concluded at the presidential house, where the new installed military regime greeted players and coaches and honored them as national heroes. Considering that Argentina only advanced to the quarterfinals, and lost, why did so many people celebrate the national team upon its return? Why did the outcome of the game and Ramsey’s “animal” comment produce such a visceral reaction in Argentina?

¹ La Prensa, July 25, 1966, 13.
Ramsey’s remark was not exceptional in its tone nor in its disparagement of a rival team. Metaphors of war and references to violence were common in sports. Many times, participants reacted in harsh tones after a heated match and accused opponents of playing dirty. Moreover, this was not the first time an accusation of savagery surfaced in a match between both teams. After Argentina lost to England in the 1962 World Cup, English reporters labeled the Argentines as “savage bulls.”

This dissertation examines how dynamics within Argentine soccer, or fútbol, reflected the anxieties, concerns, and issues at the forefront of public conversations between 1955 and 1970. At the same time, it also looks at how dynamics outside of the sport influenced the discourse of professional fútbol. Therefore, this dissertation explores how particular actors associated with fútbol shaped, and were shaped by, events in the 1950s and 1960s. By understanding who were the key figures of fútbol discourse, and what issues and events concerned them the most, we begin to unpack the potency in Ramsey’s “animals” comment.

The “animals” label reinforced a long-held perception in Argentina that Europeans disregarded South America as a continent of “savages,” or unrefined people. It was a sentiment shared by the Argentine elite at the turn of the century. These wealthy landowners, politicians, and industrialists benefited from their trade relations with European entrepreneurs in Argentina, most of whom were British railroad and shipping industrialists. The elite class in Argentina embraced progressive ideas and cultural practices from Western Europe and distrusted plebeian society. Their hope—articulated

---

2 “¿Qué dirán ahora los críticos británicos?,” Campeón, June 6, 1962, 3.
by Liberal intellectuals like Domingo Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi—was that by introducing “civilizing” tools, including organized sports, the barbarism of the Argentine masses would eventually give way to a modern society modeled after Paris or London.³

By the 1950s and 1960s, theories of modernization endured, but now as a central feature of middle-class discourse. Many public figures, artists, intellectuals, professionals, and fledgling entrepreneurs took umbrage at the suggestion that they belonged to a nation of savages. They believed that by adopting practices of modern societies, such as organized sports, and succeeding on the international level, Argentina showed that it belonged among other civilized and progressive nations. An international tournament like the World Cup thus provided the ideal stage for Argentines to demonstrate the quality and progress of their society. Consequently, people in Argentina understood Ramsey’s “animals” comment as something more than a remark made in the heat of the moment; they felt it was a public shaming designed to discredit Argentine civility and modernity on the world stage.

Concerns about modernity were not unique to the Argentine middle class. After World War II, politicians and cultural producers in developed countries placed their bets on the middle class to deliver their nations from backwardness. Although British historian Simon Gunn sees the modernity-backwardness framework as a rhetorical trope, which often simplifies the middle class as a “weak, imagined, or divided” witness to

historical events, he nonetheless acknowledges the enduring centrality of “modernity” in any conversation about this middle sector of society. In fact, Gunn concedes that “the ideas of modernity and middle class are so mutually implicated that it is almost impossible to disentangle them.” It is not surprising, then, that the key actors, or public figures, who were concerned over the progress and modernity of Argentine fútbol—players, coaches, sports writers, and professional trainers—belonged to the middle class by in the 1950s and 1960s. But rather than producing a homogenous and static articulation of identity, they expressed complex notions of masculinity and “Argentineanness” that fluctuated over time.

Ramsey’s “animals” comment also crystallized which issues were central to these middle-class actors. Namely, their concerns revolved around a perceived loss of decency, civility, modernity, and morality in society. They were also cognizant of how the outside world viewed Argentina. Whereas debates over the decline of fútbol and society were mostly introspective before 1966, trying to assess the faults of the Argentine approach to the game, the focus of these debates turned outward in 1966 in lieu of Ramsey’s remark. For many, the “animals” accusation was offensive and unjustified. They believed that it was, in fact, the English who cheated and ensured that Argentina would lose. Far from

---


5 Gunn, “Between Modernity and Backwardness: The Case of the English Middle Class,” 70.
acting in a civilized manner, English players, coaches, and officials demonstrated a lack of ethical behavior in their zeal to win the World Cup at home. It was a characterization that inverted old notions of European civility and Argentine barbarism as a response to a perceived injustice on the playing field. This inversion allowed Argentines to simultaneously claim a moral high ground.

Ramsey’s words reignited tensions between Argentina and Great Britain. Since the early nineteenth century, British merchants established trade networks in Buenos Aires and absorbed the Rio de la Plata region under its economic empire. The Liberal elite welcomed these British entrepreneurs, but others expressed an anti-imperialist sentiment towards Great Britain. Populist leaders, like Juan Perón in the 1940s and 1950s, employed nationalist rhetoric in trade disputes over beef exports and the British-controlled Malvinas (Falkland) islands off the southern tip of South America. Other politicians and public figures simply distrusted the intentions of foreign capitalists and an Argentine “oligarchy” that favored trade with Great Britain.

The 1966 World Cup proved to be a turning point for Argentine fútbol. The anti-British sentiment produced by the events after the quarterfinal match drew upon old antagonisms towards England and the recent history of populist forms of nationalism that vilified imperial interests in Argentina. More than simply stirring up national pride,

---

8 In September of 1966, a group of nearly two-dozen young Peronists hijacked an airplane of Aerolíneas Argentinas and flew to the Malvinas islands. The purpose of the so-called “Operación Condor” was to
media coverage revealed a popular anger towards any suggestion that Argentine society was less civilized than Europe. Anti-British sentiment became an affirmation of modernity, articulated by middle-class actors who spent most of the 1960s searching for a level of progress that would place Argentine teams alongside the best in the world.

This dissertation shows that fútbol was a privileged venue in Argentina for working through social anxieties between 1955 and 1970. It examines how fútbol reflected middle-class preoccupations with success, civility, and modernity. The concerns expressed by professional players, team officials, sports writers, and physical trainers, dealt specifically with the failures of Argentine fútbol and society. These actors did not directly shape political events. Yet, studies over the last few decades have shown that sports allow people to map out their identities and experiences, often by sustaining exclusionary forms of identity influenced by nostalgia, in order to make sense of a changing world.\footnote{Eduardo Archetti, “Estilo y virtudes masculinas en ‘El Gráfico': La creación del imaginario del fútbol argentino,” Desarrollo Económico 35, no. 139 (December 1995): 419–441; John Nauright, “Sustaining Masculine Hegemony: Rugby and the Nostalgia of Masculinity,” in Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity, ed. John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler (Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1996), 227–244; Carlos Sandoval García, Fuera de Juego: Fútbol, identidades nacionales y masculinidades en Costa Rica (San José: Editorial UCR, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, 2006), chap. 2.}

We should therefore read the concerns of fútbol actors over the moral decay of society, the loss of ethics on the playing field, or the corruption common among fútbol and government officials, as a case of a middle class talking to itself. For example, Ramsey’s “animals” comment is critical to this study because it shows how the foreign gaze was central to the anxieties of the middle class in the 1950s and 1960s.

protest the British presence on the islands. The men hoisted the flag of Argentina for thirty-six hours before an embarrassed military government arrested them. Government officials were frustrated because they were on the verge of securing a deal with British authorities. Yet, the news of Operación Condor ignited nationalist sentiment in Argentina. See: J. C. J. Metford, “Falklands or Malvinas? The Background to the Dispute,” International Affairs 44, no. 3 (July 1, 1968): 463–465.
Because it affects nearly every aspect of life in the country, fútbol should be included in a study of the cultural history of Argentina during the twentieth century. Yet, fútbol has received little attention from scholars. The reasons for this omission are not always clear. To be sure, some of the earliest scholars who studied fútbol, such as anthropologist Eduardo Archetti, worked with colleagues who dismissed sports as a trivial object of study. The academic field today is more open, perhaps realizing that sports like “football” occupy an important position in the construction of collective identity around the world.

In most countries around the world and in Latin America, soccer is the most popular sport. The Argentine case, however, is exceptional. Aside from Brazil, no country in the region is as closely associated with the sport as Argentina. Here, fútbol serves as a fulcrum between public and private spheres, between conceptualizations of what is “traditional” and what is “modern,” and between notions of civility and barbarism. Because fútbol’s immense popularity has not waned since it was introduced in the late-nineteenth century, it is a cultural practice ideally suited for revealing the habits and sentiments of the masses. By the 1910s, young men across Buenos Aires established hundreds of club associations, which they founded for the explicit purpose of fielding a “football” team. These clubs provided opportunities for recreational leisure activities and, in the case of “football,” a chance for male camaraderie through physical activity.

The complexity and fluidity of identity formation in Argentine fútbol poses challenges to investigators. Although a good amount of scholarship treats groups like fans and players as monolithic entities, these groups were hardly homogeneous. They all
articulated disparate philosophies and ideas about how to best play the game, or what they expected from a particular match. The differences, however, raise interesting questions. How, for example, does fútbol become a venue for the construction and re-imagining of a collective identity—be it national or masculine—when its participants differ on what constitutes as an Argentine style of play? Do terms like “bravery” and “toughness” mean one thing on the field and another in the stands, or on television? Moreover, who defined notions like “bravery” in fútbol discourse and how widely were those definitions accepted? In an attempt to answer these questions, this study draws on several areas of scholarship, including writings on the middle class, studies of fútbol and popular culture in Argentina, and works that address masculinity in sports.

Despite the cross-class appeal of fútbol in Argentina, this study focuses on middle-class participation in the sport. Journalists, players, coaches, trainers, and officials functioned, in some ways, as mediators between the fans who sat in the stadiums and the top-level politicians and fútbol officials that controlled the management and business of the sport. Although outside the context of twentieth-century popular culture, recent scholarship on the role of “go-betweens” in colonial Latin America has shown the usefulness of studying historical actors who were able to transverse two disparate worlds. By studying those who navigated between spheres, and thus lived in a peripheral state of “in-betweeness,” scholars have offered a new approach that deviates

---

from a top-down approach to history, as well as the history “from below” that emerged in
the mid-twentieth century.

This approach has been used to similar effect by labor historians studying modern
Argentine history. Roy Hora, for example, argues how the “new rich” in Argentina were
able to force their way into the upper classes in the 1930s while maintaining a
“bourgeois” mindset, thereby positioning themselves between the oligarchy and the
middle class. Daniel James and Juan Carlos Torre also show how labor unions, far from
being submissive to the Peronist state of the 1940s and 1950s, mediated between workers
and the government and carved their own social and political space.11

This project holds that certain groups functioned as intermediaries in Argentine
fútbol as well. Their position had less to do with their social status as middle-class
Argentines, although that was clearly a concern for many. Instead, this study shows how
fútbol actors adhered to a set of values and expectations that were decidedly bourgeois in
scope. Here, I borrow from J.A. Mangan and Mike Huggins, both of whom argue that
sports has historically functioned as a “powerful cultural bond, moral metaphor, and
political symbol” for the middle class—first in Great Britain, and later throughout its
sphere of influence, including Argentina.12

---

York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Roy Hora, *The Landowners of the Argentine Pampas: A

12 Mike Huggins, ‘Second Class Citizens? English Middle-Class Culture and Sport 1850–1910: A
Reconsideration’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 17, 2 (March 2000), 1 In J. A. Mangan,
“The Early Evolution of Modern Sport in Latin America: A Mainly English Middle-Class Inspiration?,”
Indeed, the very concept of organized sports gained traction in the eighteenth-century as an instrument of self-definition by members of the English middle class, most of whom aspired to carve out their own position in society.\textsuperscript{13} The equipment and space required to play football, or cricket, for example, limited the participation of the masses at first. Sports like football, however, soon spread to the working class because the requirements to play were not as numerous, or expensive, as other sports. The increased presence of plebeian society alienated many spectators and participants from high society who were averse to what they saw as the crude behavior of the masses. Nevertheless, the bourgeois ethos reflected in the rules of the sport remained in place. These guidelines aligned with middle-class ideas about civility, morals, masculinity, and the nation.\textsuperscript{14}

Fútbol earned a massive following in Argentina in the first decades of the twentieth century, moving outside the exclusive private clubs of major cities and onto the streets. As fútbol became more popular, middle-class individuals established club associations and sports magazines. To paraphrase historian Franca Iacovetta, these individuals became “gate keepers” of national culture at a time of rapid urbanization and massive immigration.\textsuperscript{15} They saw themselves as educated and progressive, and ascribed to fútbol an assimilating and unifying role in society. These early journalists and club officials established a hegemonic discourse that emphasized the rules, ethical norms, and “fair play” established by the British community in Argentina.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[14]{Ibid., 83–94, 154–157.}
\end{footnotes}
By the time fútbol became professional in 1931, fútbol officials became less concerned with the civic functions of their clubs. Instead, they focused their attention on maximizing profits, building massive infrastructure projects, and expanding the size of club membership. They met on a regular basis at the headquarters of the sport’s governing body, the Asociación del Fútbol Argentino (AFA), often deliberating in closed-door meetings. Each official held an equal vote, which meant that forming alliances and negotiating with other club officials consumed their attention more than providing improved services for club members. Over time, a sense of detachment led fans, journalists, and players to portray fútbol officials as part of the elite class.

Journalists filled the void left behind by club officials and articulated the passion of the fans, defending the amateur spirit of the early years. They constructed myths around fútbol and national identity, published match reports, generated a specific vernacular for fútbol, and defined specific forms of masculinity. Coaches, technical specialists, and players also shaped fútbol discourse through their comments to the press. Their observations did not always align with the views of sports writers; but all of these actors engaged in public debates over fútbol that helped establish an alternate form of modernity rooted in criollo (creole) traditions.

Debates over a national style of play, or the value of importing “modern” tactics, would only intensify during the late 1950s and the 1960s. This was the era of the middle class in Argentina. It was also one of the lowest points in Argentine fútbol based on the national team’s performance in international play, the quality of play on the field, and the social disorders at stadiums. This confluence makes the anxieties expressed by fútbol
actors between 1955 and 1970 especially useful. Their concerns over modernity, success, and morality offer greater knowledge of a period often neglected by Argentine historians.

In general, the middle class in Latin America remains an understudied topic, although recently that has begun to change.\textsuperscript{16} It should be noted that the term “\textit{clase media}” rarely appeared in texts before the 1950s—even if some scholars suggested at the time that nearly half of the population belonged to this social class.\textsuperscript{17} Up until then, the most common form of categorizing social classes was a binary opposition between “\textit{la gente decente}” (decent, or cultured people) and the plebeian masses, with the occasional use of the term French term “bourgeois” only beginning to appear in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{18} In the world of fútbol, the typical binary distinction before the 1950s was between the “\textit{muchedumbre}” (crowds) and the supposed oligarchy that ran the sport. Cartoonists depicted fútbol officials as erudite figures in top hats and smoking cigars.\textsuperscript{19}

Only in the 1950s did sports journalists begin to refine their social classifications. For example, they juxtaposed the majority of well-behaved spectators with the few who resorted to violence and exhibited a lack of culture. Sports writers also separated


\textsuperscript{18} Adamovsky, \textit{Historia de la clase media argentina}, 20–23.

\textsuperscript{19} For a few examples, see: “Los dirigentes de nuestro fútbol tienen culpa de que hayamos perdido el cam.p.mundial,” \textit{La Cancha}, August 2, 1930; Cover page, \textit{Campeón}, November 9, 1948, 1; Cover page, \textit{Campeón}, November 16, 1948, 1. The portrayal of fútbol officials as members of the oligarchy during the 1948 players’ strike resonated in \textit{Campeón}, which catered to mostly working-class readers.
professional players, between those who were well groomed and played in a responsible manner from others who were unkempt and played dirty. All of this was a response to a growing climate of violence on and off the field that grew worse in the 1950s. Sports journalists continued to criticize fútbol officials; previous references to an “oligarchy” morphed into negative generalizations that club directors were corrupt individuals. New social distinctions, therefore, accentuated a moral code that re-established order in daily life during a time of rapid political change. By criticizing the behavior of the masses, as well as the excesses of powerful officials, journalists articulated a middle space where they acted as arbiters of decency and of modernity.

This notion of an imagined social class, generated by a shared consciousness and interpretation of daily life, has led other historians to ask when did Argentines began to see themselves as “middle class.” While recent scholarship touches upon the impact of race, immigration, and politics, these works minimize the impact of cultural producers in defining the “middle class.” Likewise, the wealth of scholarship surrounding popular

---


This study also follows historian E.P. Thompson’s view of “class” as the product of a historical relationship and as a set of common experiences. As Thompson best put it, “…class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences, feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.” See: Edward P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 9. I also agree with Mike Savage that one should analyze the interrelationships and interdependencies at play by exploring who had agency, and which mechanisms they used to create differentiation; see: Michael Savage, “Class Analysis and Social Research,” in Social Change and the Middle Classes, ed. Tim Butler and Michael Savage (Bristol, PA: UCL Press, 1995), 25. Pierre Bourdieu also highlights the importance of difference in studying the construction of class. He argues that to deny the existence of differences, or the means of social differentiation, is folly; see: Pierre Bourdieu, Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12.
culture in Latin America, and its centrality to the formation of national identity, pays little attention to the “in-betweeness” of middle-class consumers and producers of culture.

One promise of this study is that it provides a cultural history from the “middle.” One need only look to the recent works on Mexican rock music, modernist art trends, Brazilian radio, or Argentine cinema, to name a few, to see that artists concerned themselves with the quality of their work vis-à-vis European and North American cultural products. Alternate forms of modernity emerged that drew upon local, or criollo, traditions, but that also maintained a certain degree of quality indicative of a modern sensibility.21 This does not mean that cultural producers were exclusively middle class; on the contrary, musicians, actors, visual artists, and athletes came from a variety of backgrounds. This is why this dissertation, to paraphrase Dror Wahrman, de-emphasizes “class,” per se, and instead focuses on those who saw themselves as in the “middle” of society.22 It is in the middle space, between the state, or powerful business interests, and consumer society, that producers of mass culture built their hegemonic discourse.

Far from homogeneous, cultural intermediaries like sports journalists and coaches held differing opinions about “modernity” and “success.” British historian Michael


22 Wahrman articulates a similar position on the importance of the “middle,” rather than “class”; see: Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14.
Savage points to two types of cultural views about the middle class. One version is that its members are respectable, traditional, and conformist; they are primarily concerned with defending the status quo and value the importance of maintaining order in society. Another view is that middle class citizens are cultural standard bearers, avant-garde, radical, and innovators.  

In the 1950s and 1960s, fútbol discourse points to a high degree of tension between these models. Older generations of journalists, coaches, and players rejected the emphasis of so-called “modernizers” on European-based tactical systems and training methods widely seen as modern and effective. Instead, they defended traditional styles of play that worked well in the past and that they still viewed as modern, albeit different from European football. The period between 1955 and 1970 saw an oscillation between these conservative and reformist philosophies. Binary oppositions quickly emerged to describe the two competing approaches to playing styles, tactics, and training methods: traditional vs. modern, Argentine vs. European, natural vs. scientific, and criollo vs. foreign. These debates are at the heart of this dissertation because they offer a glimpse of the disparate values middle-class fútbol actors held. In turn, competing notions of “Argentinaanness” in fútbol reflected a larger questioning of the country’s future, and its place among developed nations. Likewise, changing notions of masculine identity in fútbol were a part of a larger conversation over the perceived loss of civility, morality, and modernity in Argentina after 1955. As one Latin American scholar argues class

---

formation of identity is fluid; classes are not “made” once and left alone but rather “they are permanently in the process of being remade.”

This dissertation also draws on a growing body of sports scholarship. In relation to other cultural products like music, dance, or film, academic work on fútbol in Latin America has remained surprisingly thin. In Argentina, historians have largely ceded the topic to journalists, most of whom produce triumphant narratives of their favorite club teams that fail to contextualize key events. This often leaves the connections between fútbol, politics, economics, class, and gender muddled, or even absent altogether.

The scholarship on Argentine fútbol that has emerged over the last several decades is largely the work of sociologists and anthropologists. Since the 1980s, scholars have addressed a variety of topics, starting with anthropologist Eduardo Archetti’s pioneering and influential work on gender and national identity. Drawing on fellow anthropologist Néstor García Canclini’s theory of hybridization, Archetti describes how journalists propagated a specific notion of Argentine identity in fútbol that had

24 Parker, The Idea of the Middle Class, 214.
elements seemingly at odds with each other. He attributes this to the dilemma faced by Argentine fútbol enthusiasts in trying to assert modernity through corporal activities like sport. By emulating the British model of football, for example, Argentines claimed modernity and progressive change. Yet, they also transgressed British norms and appeal to elements rooted in tradition, such as the toughness required to survive in the outlying areas of the city known as arrabales.26

More recently, historians like Peter Alegi and Robert Edelman have shown that football generated multiple and competing forms of masculine and national identity in South Africa and the Soviet Union, respectively. In South Africa, Alegi attributes competing forms of identity to the colonial legacy of the country. Subjugated black South Africans used football to create their own interpretations of masculinity and ethnic identity in contrast to the British ideals first introduced in the early 1900s.27 A similar case of subaltern agency emerges in the Soviet Union. Here, Edelman captures how football provided urban citizens, manual workers, and people indifferent to the Communist state a space to express masculinity in ways that were different from the government’s emphasis on Olympic-type sports. In addition, the changing political dynamics of successive Soviet governments affected football clubs like Spartak Moscow that were able to portray themselves as a team of the people, not the state.28

Alegi and Edelman’s work show how players, coaches, and fans constructed alternate forms of identity from the hegemonic norm. While recent works on Argentine fútbol also reveal the influence of racial discourse on early constructions of identity, as well as anti-government attitudes among players and coaches during the late 1970s, these topics rarely played a role in fútoba discussions between 1955 and 1970.

Because the principal actors in this dissertation are the sports writers, coaches, players, trainers, and officials who were concerned with the quality and modernity of Argentine fútbol, the focus will primarily rest on international matches. Similarly, the large majority of club teams, players, and media outlets all resided in the capital of Argentina: Buenos Aires. Although provincial players and teams played a role in the history of fútoba’s development, their influence on international play was minimal, at least until the mid-1960s. To the chagrin of many fans in the interior of the country, porteños (the people of Buenos Aires) constructed the hegemonic discourse in fútbol. Even today, this metropole-peripheral divide continues to privilege Buenos Aires as the center of most discussions about Argentine fútbol.

For those looking for an examination of daily life in Buenos Aires through the histories of various local club associations and fútbol teams, historian Julio Frydenberg

---

29 In the case of Argentine fútbol, subaltern agency is less apparent. For this reason, this project shies away from a Marxist view of class struggle in or through fútbol that is more applicable in Chile, where Brenda Elsey’s examination of amateur teams provides deep insight to the struggles of working-class politics. Her work is a valuable contribution to the field of sports studies as well because the Chilean case involved competing notions of masculine and national identity along racial discourse, namely competing versions of mestizaje (racial mixing). See: Brenda Elsey, Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in 20th-Century Chile (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 18–37.

provides an excellent series of works. He examines how social practices associated with fútbol shaped urban life, masculine identities, and cultural values of the popular sector. Still, Frydenberg’s work mainly focuses on the popular sectors of society. This is a conscientious decision on his part, one that reflects the nature of civic associations and the early press in the 1910s and 1920s—the focus of his studies. He argues that during fútbol’s gestational period in Argentina, class differences were not readily apparent among working and middle-class fans that sat together in overcrowded stadiums. On the other hand, by examining the culture of fútbol several decades later, this dissertation cannot ignore the obvious middle-class ideals at the core of hegemonic fútbol discourse. To do so would be to subscribe to what had become an outdated notion of fútbol as an activity of a monolithic popular sector.

Because one of the objectives of this study is to map how identities changed over time, it became necessary to look at how scholars addressed identity in various forms. On constructions of national identity, this project begins with the works of Archetti and sociologist Pablo Alabarces and then expands to areas outside of fútbol. Archetti and Alabarces show that journalists associated a distinct set of criollo traits to Argentine fútbol meant to separate it from British “football,” such as guile, ball control (“dribbling”), individual expression, and toughness. The iconography they point to,
which was largely established by the writers of sports magazines like *El Gráfico*, drew upon gauchesque, rural, and peripheral settings in Buenos Aires like the arrabales.\(^{32}\) The goal of these sports writers was to draw a contrast with the British “other.” Scholarship on Peronism points to a similar process. At times, Perón emphasized the rural criollo as a source of national authenticity. As Mariano Ben Plotkin and other point out, the goal was to link an authentic Argentina to the Peronist state.\(^{33}\)

Other scholars, however, point to examples where Perón drew from modern art forms, like cinema and music, to articulate his brand of populist nationalism.\(^{34}\) Scholarship across Latin America reveals similar cases where popular culture furthered a particular form of nationalism tied to the state.\(^{35}\) In Chapter 2, we will see that Perón used international sports tournaments to further an image of a modern and progressive Argentina full of healthy citizens who competed at the highest levels. What the Peronist case shows is that national identity in sports was amorphous as Archetti points out, able to shift from criollo to modern as circumstances dictated. Archetti, however, presents a rather static view of national and masculine identity. Both he and Alabarces look to the writings of sports journalists in the 1930s and 1940s to describe an Argentine style of play that seemingly has not changed over time. This dissertation shows that by the late


\(^{34}\) Clara Kriger, *Cine y peronismo: El estado en escena* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2009); Karush, *Culture of Class*.

1950s, a turn towards European football took hold in Argentina. Fútbol criollo became a symbol of backwardness and failure to many fans, players, coaches, and officials. By the late 1960s, the pendulum swung back again; Argentines embraced fútbol criollo as the key to success because it mirrored new tactical systems from Europe like “total football.”

Furthermore, my research shows that when it came to sportsmanship, ethics, and ideal characteristics of manliness, England, or more broadly Europe, was not the “other”; instead, British ideas of “fair play” remained the standard of ethical behavior on the field for most middle-class Argentines. Argentines who played in Italy and Spain attributed their growth as players to the emphasis European teams placed on respect, discipline, and a strong work ethic among European teams. By contrast, they believed that Argentine fútbol encouraged laziness, irresponsibility, and a disregard for rules and authority.

Nowhere is this discourse on civility and manliness more apparent than in discussions of fan and player violence. In Latin America, hooligan studies from the Leicester school in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the revisionist works of the 1990s, influenced anthropologists like José Garriga Zucal and Verónica Moreira, who explored the causes for similar violent behavior among groups popularly referred to in Argentina as the “barras bravas.” Their findings show that despite the popular perception that the
violent rituals among these groups are irrational acts, they are actually tools in the
construction of a complex collective identity. The bodies of these participants become
sites for contesting power, affirming solidarity, and defining masculinity.

The question, then, is how did spontaneous acts of fan violence in the 1920s and
1930s become organized rituals by the late 1960s? This question shaped the early stages
of this project but proved difficult to address head-on with the nature of sources available
for these decades. Nevertheless, this study does examine the changing nature of violence
in fútbol as articulated by journalists, fans, players, coaches, and officials. It shows that
violent acts took on new meanings when teams imported tactics from Europe. These new
approaches emphasized greater physicality and endurance, thereby altering notions of
masculinity by favoring aggression, tolerance to pain, and toughness. Again, how the
various actors in fútbol perceived this shift toward the European model varied greatly, but
I suggest that the parallel growth of player and fan violence is not coincidental—
especially when televised matches began in the late 1960s and provided the so-called
“barras bravas” a national audience for the spectacle they produced.

My primary interest, however, is to unpack the lexicon associated with
masculinity and understand how terms like “aguante” (tolerance), “hombría”
(manliness), and “matarlo” (to kill it), among others, reflect the changes in fútbol and
society as a whole. Other works show that fluctuating discourses of masculinity in
football are not unique to Argentina. Beyond Edelman and Alegi’s analyses of
masculinity in the Soviet Union and South Africa, works by Roger Magazine and Patrick
McDevitt also show how fans and players differed greatly in the values they emphasized
in football and other sports. In Mexico, and across the British Empire and Commonwealth, competing notions of masculinity were products of the ongoing tensions within society among citizens of different classes, ethnicities, and regions, as well as between citizens and the state.37

In the Argentine case, *El Gráfico* constructed an entire myth around fútbol that emphasized the predominantly male culture of the bars, cafés, and the streets of the capital city. They also identified the *pibes* (young boys) and *potreros* (empty urban space) of the outlying barrios as the spiritual representatives fútbol criollo. By contrast, rural fútbol players depicted in film and print media possessed less-than-ideal traits; they were uncultured and their skills were unrefined. Yet, by the 1950s and 1960s, as waves of migrants flocked to Buenos Aires looking for work, this urban-rural divide became less noticeable. The countryside eventually became the embodiment of the humility that many Argentines felt was lacking in professional fútbol.

The focus on masculine identity places female athletes and spectators in a peripheral role. Where it makes sense, this study will explore how women were active in their clubs and at the stadiums. Still, fútbol culture was decidedly hyper-masculine—especially by the 1940s—and women primarily served in supportive roles, either as mothers of the young children who played fútbol on the streets, the girlfriend of the young player, or the wife who tolerates her husband’s passion for the sport. How men reacted to the presence of women at stadiums brought to light notions of honor and

---

civility. Men were expected to protect female spectators from violence, or they demonstrated a lack of civility and morals when they behaved inappropriately towards them. As a result, women played a passive role in fútbol culture, although they played more important roles in the many fútbol films of this period.

By drawing on a rich variety of scholarship on class formation and identity, masculinity in sports, and popular culture, this project casts a wide net to better assess the understudied decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Fútbol serves as a gateway towards a better understanding of how Argentines of the middle class articulated their concerns, anxieties and hopes. Whether fans viewed fútbol as a form of escapism or a microcosm of daily life, it undoubtedly functioned both as a producer and a recipient of change.

I wrestled quite a bit with the issue of terminology. This is a study of soccer in Argentina, but the term “soccer” has no meaning in South America. The term “football” raises further problems. Widely used in the English-speaking world, football is clearly associated with Great Britain. For a project that examines how national identity was constructed, and later re-imagined, in juxtaposition to the English brand of football, using the term “football” would dilute the contrast that has become central to the imagining of a distinct Argentine style of play. For these reasons, I use the Spanish term “fútbol” to describe the sport as played and imagined by Argentines. When discussing overall trends in international football, I will revert to “football” because it is the term used by the world’s governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). As a scholar from the United States, I will abstain from British terms and idioms that are
irrelevant to the topic at hand. I will give preference to terms like “playing field” (not “pitch”), “cleats” (not “boots”), and scores that end in “zero” (not “nil”).

The research for this study draws on a variety of sources located in the United States and Argentina. The excellent research facilities and support at the United States Library of Congress were invaluable in accessing over a dozen newspapers with relative ease. I supplemented my research on fútbol journalism in newspapers with an in-depth study of sports magazines like *El Gráfico, Campeón, La Cancha, Mundo Deportivo*, and *Goles*, among others. The library at the Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos in Buenos Aires contains a vast and well-kept collection of sports magazines, spanning the 1920s to the present. Various research libraries in Buenos Aires also provided a wealth of popular magazines, primary sources, and hard-to-find secondary literature, which helped contextualize the history of fútbol to the larger events shaping Argentina over three decades. The Archivo General de la Nación, for example, provided access to audio-visual material, government documents, footage of matches and stadium projects, images, citizen petitions for sports facilities, government ordinances for sports tournaments and physical education programs, and data on ticket prices and salaries for various auxiliary jobs in fútbol—all of which are largely absent from previous fútbol scholarship. The Biblioteca Nacional and the Museo Evita also provided a wealth of popular magazines, Peronist literature and textbooks, images, and publications from fans of various club associations. For pictures and records related to clubs and the national team, the library at the Asociación de Fútbol Argentino (AFA) offered an abundance of material.
The personal collection of several scholars and journalists who I came to know during the research process also helped fill some necessary holes. In the cases where sources, such as match footage and feature films, were unavailable, I purchased them online or at various specialty stores in Buenos Aires. Interviews with a few people who recalled the culture of fútbol of the 1950s and 1960s provided needed context, although more oral histories would have benefited this project. Interpreting this heterogeneous collection of source material required both forethought and constructive advice from other sports scholars and cultural historians. A careful analysis of text, and the meanings attached to recurring terms, was not easy. In some cases, the opinions of the actors central to this story were helpful. They articulated a certain “philosophy” about fútbol that crystallizes the debates of the 1950s and 1960s. Lastly, music lyrics and films provided a different view of fútbol’s impact on society as a whole.

The first chapter describes the explosive growth of association football in Argentina during the early twentieth century. Locals appropriated the sport from British merchants and sailors and subsumed it, within a larger process of constructing national and masculine identity, thereby making “fútbol” their own. In adopting the sport, Argentines also affirmed their own modernity, civility, and cosmopolitanism as participants in a transnational cultural phenomenon. They adhered to British norms that reflected a bourgeois sensibility about “fair play,” ethical behavior, and sportsmanship. Although the playing style and training methods of British football served as the “other,” British ethics remained the model for civilized society according to many journalists. Chapters 2 assesses the impact of the Peronist era on fútbol. During his decade in power,
Juan Perón appealed to workers through a populist form of nationalism. He simultaneously appealed to traditionalism and modernity in his use of sports to glorify the “New Argentina.” Perón also placed sports at the center of his program for “social justice,” extending to the working class access to sports as spectators and participants. But despite his overtures to fútbol players and various club associations, his influence over fútbol remained small in comparison to what he achieved in other sports. Chapter 2 shows how professional fútbol remained essentially autonomous during this era.

When military forces staged a coup in 1955 that deposed Perón, they acted on the basis of restoring order and morality to the country. The years of the so-called “National Liberation” (1955-1958)—the focus of Chapter 3—revealed deep anxieties and class tensions in the country. Anti-Peronists, who were largely middle class, accused the former regime of corruption and excess and spearheaded an age of proscription that banned any reference to Peronism. During these three years, sports journalists also decried the various crises in fútbol, which had begun before 1950, but were now gaining steam: dwindling attendance, player indiscipline, poor management of clubs, and a lack of planning for the national team. Argentina’s “disastrous” performance at the 1958 World Cup punctured a narrative of fútbol superiority that had begun in the late 1920s and persisted through the 1950s. The anger that awaited the national team upon its return to Argentina revealed the growing discord produced by the various “crises” of this time.

Chapter 4 looks at the post-Sweden landscape. This was the age of the celebrity coach, who in many cases embraced new training methods, tactics, and “scientific” approaches from Europe. The aim was to produce faster and stronger players. It was a
rejection of the so-called traditional values of Argentine fútbol in favor of “modern” concepts, which served foreign teams well in international competitions. Technical experts and trainers became part of the coaching staffs and ushered in an age of technocrats in fútbol. This was also the era of “fútbol espectáculo,” when presidents of major clubs ran for elections based on their promises to sign big-name foreign players and build major projects. With massive investments came high expectations. Modern approaches to the athletic and business side of fútbol, however, did not translate into a better product on the field. Nevertheless, a string of minor achievements allowed Argentines to redefine “success” in 1964.

Chapter 5 examines the impact of these successes and traces the re-imagination of national and masculine identity, with a renewed anti-British sentiment generated by a series of high-profile matches between 1966 and 1968. Argentines became further preoccupied with their international standing when military leaders, for the third time in a decade, overthrew a democratically elected government—with no signs of improving a stagnant economy or uniting a divided society. Chapter 6 examines the end of the experiment with “modern” fútbol. By emphasizing victories above all else, critics complained that teams like Racing and Estudiantes jeopardized the reputation of the country through their overly physical—even dirty—style of play. Whereas the debate over morality in fútbol in the mid 1950s questioned the excesses and values of fútbol criollo, in the late 1960s the debate shifted as to whether Argentines had lost their identity in the process of becoming “modern.” A series of reversals, and embarrassing incidents on and off the field, reignited a desire to return to the traditional criollo style of play.
In May of 1928, two select Argentine teams comprised of players from Buenos Aires and the provinces defeated Scottish side Motherwell, one of the premier teams in Europe, by a combined score of 3-1. The visitors were on a lengthy exhibition tour of South America, which was customary in the 1920s for successful European teams like Motherwell. The tours proved lucrative in large part because they generated high interest among locals, who were anxious to see their players compete against the premier practitioners of football in the world. Promoters billed these games as contests between “masters” and “students” of the game.

Ahead of the first match, Motherwell coach John “Sailor” Hunter told Argentine reporters that the goals for his team were to hold the Scottish banner up high, as well as to demonstrate to the locals “how to play football.” But after two consecutive Argentine victories over Motherwell, the sports publication La Cancha declared that “yesterday’s students” had become “tomorrow’s teachers.” It used these achievements to disparage Europeans for what it perceived as their low regard for South American culture: “In Europe they ignore us quite a bit. Too much…The ignorance in Europe about the level of

---


2 “Los alumnos de ayer, son los maestros de mañana,” *La Cancha*, June 9, 1928, 2.
progress that we have achieved in South America extends to all levels of society.”

*La Cancha* also criticized Argentines who continued to ignore the quality “of our foot-ball” and who remained convinced of the superiority of European footballers. The paper contrasted the willingness of Motherwell players to abandon their professionalism, and to play brute strength, against the “clean” technical quality exhibited by local players who calmly dribbled past their opponents. For the writers at *La Cancha*, character was most important in defining manliness than mere brutality. In this regard, the Argentines had taught the Scots a lesson. By representing their country in the best manner, *La Cancha* argued that Argentine players demonstrated the evolution of the nation’s “foot-ball.”

This chapter traces the construction of national and masculine identity in Argentine fútbol during its formative years. Following the lead of scholars like Eduardo Archetti and Julio Frydenberg, it shows how in the 1920s journalists constructed a specific discourse to describe a national style of play in opposition to British football. In turn, such contrasts exposed the often-paradoxical discussions that assessed the relationship between Argentina and Great Britain. On the one hand, the long history of the British in Argentina often yielded nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments; on the other hand, Western Europe remained a barometer of progress and modernity for many educated Argentines. As a result, the hegemonic discourse that emerged by the late 1920s

---

3 Ibid., 2.
4 “¿Hemos ido a Europa a enseñar fútbol?,” *La Cancha*, June 16, 1928, 13.
5 Donald Mrozek finds that the balance between vigor and and brutality often proves difficult, especially when athletics and military life blend together, as was the case of U.S. and British soldiers in World War I; see: Donald J. Mrozek, “The Habit of Victory: The American Military and the Cult of Manliness,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 234.
echoed a larger trend towards myth making that simultaneously celebrated the criollo elements of the country while at the same time it claimed modernity and cosmopolitanism on par with Western Europe.

The goal of this brief chapter, then, is twofold. First, it presents the incongruities found within constructions of national identity associated with Argentine fútbol. Scholars have largely accepted Archetti’s proposal that British football served as the “other” by which sports journalists at El Gráfico—the most influential sports magazine in the country—articulated an Argentine style of play.6 For writers, like Borocotó and Chantecler, British players exhibited teamwork and a methodical approach emphasized at private schools and country clubs. Argentine players, on the other hand, were artists whose creativity and guile derived from countless hours of playing fútbol on the streets.

Yet, as La Cancha’s coverage of the Motherwell matches shows us, the behavior exhibited by Argentine players was often as important to sports writers as a national style of play. Because Victorian and Edwardian notions of “fair play” defined proper conduct for both Argentine and British athletes, the “other” was not foreign in ethical terms but rather the role model.7 “Otherness,” then, had more to do with a lack of civility that these journalists saw among the masses. Therefore, any discussion about national identity must accept both the Argentine perceptions of the “otherness” in the British style of play, and the embrace of its ethos vis-à-vis what journalists saw as the barbarous masses.

While I do not dispute Archetti’s analysis of the construction of national identity

---

through fútbol, he fails to address how it changed over time. In fact, scholars have said little about Argentine fútbol beyond its formative stages. This dissertation breaks new ground by tracing how masculine and national identity evolved over the years—addressing notions of civility, modernity, morality, virility and ethical behavior, among others. In this chapter, I will use various international matches between 1904 and 1930 to show how such concepts were central to the construction of Argentine national identity in the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, I argue that journalists, coaches, officials, and (to a lesser extent) players defined these concepts almost exclusively along class lines. They articulated masculinity and “Argentineanness” with bourgeois notions of civility and modernity.

British Football Arrives in Argentina, 1884-1912

At the end of the nineteenth century, Argentina emerged from decades of internal strife to pursue a path of modernity and industrial growth. Key to this transformation was the need for large quantities of workers. Between 1857 and 1930, massive waves of immigrants—mostly from Spain and Italy—provided Argentina with a needed injection of labor. Liberals like Domingo Sarmiento believed that an infusion of European immigrants could transform a nation historically defined by its more “barbarian”

---

8 For a comprehensive overview of Spanish immigration, see: Jose C. Moya, Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 46-56. Moya lists 7.5 million arrivals between 1850 and 1930, of which nearly 4 million remained in the country. Of the over 56 million migrants that left Europe, more than 20 percent settled in the River Plate region of Argentina, Uruguay, and southern Brazil—second only to North America. Argentina alone accounted for 11 percent of all European immigrants. Just between 1880 and 1890, over 1 million immigrants arrived in a country whose population was approximately 2 million.
elements—the unrestrained *gauchos* and *caudillo* strongmen of the countryside—into a modern and well-educated society on par with Western Europe.  

Alongside millions of Southern and Eastern Europeans, close to 40,000 British émigrés settled in Buenos Aires and other major cities. English and Irish industrialists helped construct railroad lines that would facilitate the commercial trade that earlier British settlers had established in the region decades before. Railways allowed Argentina to begin exporting large quantities of wheat and beef products overseas, primarily to Great Britain. As a result, a small community of British entrepreneurs settled along railway lines and port cities. They established civic institutions, as well as schools and country clubs designed to preserve their traditions in a new land. For liberals like Sarmiento, as well as the Argentine elite, which looked towards Western Europe as model of civility and progress, the presence of English, Scot, and Irish communities in Argentina was a positive development for the country.

Among the influential practices British immigrants introduced to Argentina was organized sport. During the second half of the nineteenth century, governing bodies in

---


10 As early as the seventeenth century, people from Great Britain traveled to “Buenos Ayres” for a variety of reasons, some staying only for a brief time, others resided permanently. After independence, British merchants flooded the Rio de la Plata region with textile products; see: Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129–133.


Great Britain (as well as the United States) formalized the rules and regulations for over a dozen sports. Instructors, who were largely military and middle-class civilians, used athletics to instill discipline among workers and soldiers, citing their “ennobling effect.” Sport thus provided a space for idealized notions of masculinity and nation in Britain and across her empire. As J.A. Mangan and other historians have shown, organized athletics defined a particular cult of manliness, or “muscular Christianity,” that was typical of the late Victorian era. With a missionary zeal, instructors preached bourgeois values of sportsmanship, athleticism, and “fair play” as a way of contrasting civilized Britons to German “automatons” and uncivilized colonial peoples.

Rather than offering a unifying environment, as games promoters hoped, British sports tended to reinforce differences along class and ethnic lines. When the working class adopted a particular activity like football, members of the middle class turned to other games that had a certain economic threshold for participation in order to protect

---


15 Mangan, The Games Ethic and Imperialism, 37 and 55–56. Mangan notes that the initial use of “fair play” was meant to draw contrasts between British soldiers who practiced sports and the “barbarians” they came into contact, as well as the “bully” of “German Kultur.”
what they perceived as their social standing. In Great Britain and across her colonies, the costs associated with club membership regulated who could participate. The playing equipment and space required for sports like cricket, golf, or polo, for example, defined which activities were exclusive and which were popular. Nevertheless, many athletic events quickly became popular across the globe as a form of public entertainment. They spawned a commodity culture driven by middle-class entrepreneurs selling sports equipment to eager enthusiasts.

Like their counterparts in other parts of the British sphere, the first Argentines to embrace sports were the liberals and the elite, who viewed athletic games as civilizing activities that promoted a healthy lifestyle. The first football practiced in Argentina likely began inside British country clubs and on the docks of the River Plate starting in the 1860s. In formal settings, British instructors focused on the observance and

---

reinforcement of proper conduct. Although the British community in Argentina was largely insular in regards to its social activities, some children of the Argentine elite were able to attend these private schools and club associations. Those who were unable to join such clubs and schools formed their own versions. As clubs and schools publicly competed in the first formal matches of football, demonstrating good sportsmanship was essential. For the early advocates of sport in Argentina, public displays of civility were key to eventually lessening the barbarism of the masses. Just as they promoted science and medicine as civilizing tools, liberal thinkers hoped that organized athletic contests would correct what they saw as the deficiencies of the masses. Sport seemed like an ideal tool for reinforcing social order because it stressed discipline and honorable conduct.

Before they turned to sports, men of the upper classes resorted to public duels to defend their honor at the turn-of-the-century. Participants did not see these public duels as a sign of barbarity. Rather, public confrontations helped upper-class men make sense of what they perceived as a disorderly society by injecting into it a set of norms. Duels affirmed the status of combatants as “gentlemen.” Clubs in urban areas of Argentina became sites for activities like fencing, thereby shifting duels from public to private spaces. The elitism of these duels, however, limited their influence over constructions of identity. Instead, Gayol argues that popular sports like football and boxing eventually replaced fencing in the first decades of the twentieth century as representations of

---


21 Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 5–8 and 260.

endurance, honor, and virility. Sport inserted competition and spectacle into the paradigm of honor and shame. As sports like fútbol grew in popularity, the values championed by the “gente decente” (decent folk) made their way to plebeian society. 23

Liberal thinkers, politicians, landed elite, and successful entrepreneurs promoted sport as a unifying leisure practice. 24 Governed by a set of formal and informal rules, athletics and education went hand-in-hand. These practices required teaching—regardless if lessons took place in a school, a private club, or out on the docks. Writing on the use of sport to teach concepts of manhood in the British Empire, Patrick McDevitt reminds us that despite the obvious relationship, “sport and masculinity are not inherently connected and the meanings attached to constructions of athletic masculinity are not self-evident.” 25

It is not surprising, then, that the first systematic teaching of “football” occurred at British private schools in Argentina. In 1884, Scotsman Alexander Watson Hutton, a teacher at the exclusive Buenos Aires English High School, used football to educate his students about the value of a good moral character and the need for discipline. 26 Watson Hutton emphasized “fair play,” as well as an orthodox, precise, and scientific version of football: standard field dimensions, organized tournaments, written rules, a limited number of players, and refereeing were all necessary to play in a “proper” manner. 27

---

23 Ibid., 235–236.
24 Not everyone was convinced that sport was a positive contribution to society. Frydenberg points to documents from the 1900s that show how public education leaders in the National Institute of Physical Education worried that children would practice in school physical activities that generated violence and enmity outside of school; see: Frydenberg, Historia social del fútbol, 27.
25 McDevitt, May the Best Man Win, 2.
26 Frydenberg, Historia social del fútbol, 26; Mason, Passion of the People?, 1–3. It should be noted that prior to Watson Hutton’s teams at the Buenos Aires English High School, “cricketers” and sailors informally played football to pass time as early as the 1860s.
27 Frydenberg, Historia social del fútbol, 26 and 31-33.
European sports first became fashionable among affluent *porteños* (people of Buenos Aires). According to Frydenberg, a bourgeois climate of “*esnobismo*” (snobbery) led to the creation of new club associations. Affluent porteños emulated the latest trends from Paris and London as a sign of their own cosmopolitanism. They formed their own exclusive clubs and established athletic teams modeled on those of the British.

Football soon spread beyond the exclusive clubs and private schools of the capital. Its popularity was largely based on its simplicity: football could be played in diverse settings, had few rules, and required minimal equipment. As football spread to the working class, it developed along railway lines and in the vacamay lots of outlying barrios and tenements. The result was that impromptu playing fields emerged for the urban masses. Many of these early amateur practitioners were workers, artisans, and shopkeepers. Newly arrived immigrants also used football as a way to assimilate into their new home. In Buenos Aires, the pervasiveness of a masculine “café” culture allowed creole and immigrant workers to mingle over drinks and play football later.

---

30 Duke and Crolley, “Fútbol, Politicians and the People: Populism and Politics in Argentina,” 94. Buenos Aires was not the only hotbed of early football in Argentina; cities along the railway lines, such as La Plata and Rosario, were also home to some of the earliest football clubs. Duke and Crolley cite the founding of Rosario Central (1889) and Quilmes (1887) as but two examples of football clubs that emerged along these British-controlled railway lines. Other clubs were more direct in their connection to the railway industry, with names such as Ferrocarril Oeste (1904) and Ferrocarril Midland (1914).
31 Frydenberg, *Historia social del fútbol*, 29. *Conventillos* (tenements) and cafés offered the ideal social settings for creoles and immigrants to intermingle, a mixture that according to Frydenberg also included the development of tango, theatre forms like the *sainete*, and linguistic forms such as *lunfardo*. 

38
Nationalizing football

The earliest sports articles in the Argentine press targeted readers of high social standing. In 1914, *El Hogar* covered yachting, rowing, equestrian, and airplane events in the parks of Palermo, just outside the urban center of Buenos Aires. According to an article, attendees wore the latest fashion and were excited to see local and foreign sportsmen like American boxer Jack Johnson. Football teams from Britain also began to visit Buenos Aires after 1904. Promoters billed the exhibition matches against Southampton or Nottingham Forest as opportunities to see proper football. These games drew heavy interest among football enthusiasts that numbered in the tens of thousands, and who wanted to see the quality of British “footballers” against local teams.

The fan base present at these exhibition matches reflected the sport’s explosive growth at the turn-of-the-century. Buenos Aires alone boasted over 300 amateur teams by 1910, which turned the capital into a vibrant scene for “fúbal”—a term that eventually became “fútbol.” In order to field a worthy squad against the European visitors, players from the best local teams—Alumni, Belgrano, Quilmes Atlético Club, and Rosario—formed an “all-star” Argentine team. Although fans cheered their local sportsmen, most, if not all, of the players representing Argentina came from British club associations.

The exclusivity of these clubs angered Argentines who were unable to play for a team like Alumni. Instead, they formed their own club associations in order to play fútbol. The names of these “clubes atléticos”—River Plate (1901), Boca Juniors (1905),

---

32 “Todos los sports; Crónica gráfica de los sports,” *El Hogar*, December 25, 1914.
34 For a list of rosters for the Argentine all-star teams, see: Escobar Bavio, *El football en el Rio de la Plata*. 
Argentinos Juniors (1904), and Asociación Atlética Manchester (1907)—reflected the influence of English language and culture in the country. Some clubs embraced an identity of defiance against the British community. The best-known story involved Argentino de Quilmes. Several local enthusiasts grew frustrated by Quilmes Atlético Club’s policy against admitting criollo players and decided to form their own club. Founded in 1899, Argentino de Quilmes adopted the colors of the Argentine flag for player uniforms. They also drank mate (a South American tea) during the customary “tea time” on game day, which earned the club the nickname “Los Mates.” A 1914 tango song, “Argentinos de Quilmes,” honored the patriotism of these founding players.

Perceptions about the British community shifted over time as fútbol became increasingly popular throughout the country. The earliest Argentine club associations copied the British models, and locals flocked to see games involving European teams. Yet, by the 1910s, the emulation of European football shifted to nationalist sentiment by emphasizing the quality of criollo players and teams. This process was not unique to Argentina. In South Africa and Chile, locals also formed their own teams in reaction to the isolationist attitudes of the British community.

35 Frydenberg, *Historia social del fútbol*, 51–54. Many of these clubs are no longer in existence, particularly those that simply took the name of noteworthy English clubs, such as Everton FC, Sheffield, Bristol, and Fulham. Frydenberg also notes that many club founders chose specific days tied to Argentine history, such as Independence Day, as the foundation for their associations.


37 Alegi, *Laduma!*, 15–20; Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen*, 22–24. Much like Argentina, visiting British teams in South Africa attracted widespread attention but soon Indian and Black South Africans formed their own leagues, largely due to the exclusivity of white football leagues. In Chile, however, Elsey reveals how clubs in Valparaiso embraced a European identity to a greater extent than in Santiago.
overwhelming growth of clubs inevitably led to the criollization of fútbol. With over 480 clubs in Buenos Aires alone by 1911, the surnames on the “all-star” Argentine squads changed dramatically by 1916.\(^{38}\) Rosters once filled by players like Brown, Forrester and Buchanan, now reflected the realities produced by massive immigration from Mediterranean Europe, with names like Matozzi, Leonardi, Reyes, Ferro, and Perinetti.\(^{39}\)

A turning point towards the criollization of fútbol occurred in 1912 when English team Swindon Town traveled to Buenos Aires to play in a series of matches. Unlike previous exhibition games between English and Argentine squads, Swindon Town players demonstrated a degree of physicality and rough play that shocked Argentine fans and journalists in attendance.\(^{40}\) Swindon Town’s performance brought into question the legitimacy of the British approach to football; their performance ran counter to the ideas of “fair play” and sportsmanship Argentines associated with British society.

The following year, Racing Club de Avellaneda became the first champions of the Argentine league with a roster entirely comprised of criollos.\(^{41}\) The emergence of Racing offered an alternate example of modernity, athletic skill, and success to the British model. Racing’s triumph also signaled the end of an era of British-run clubs in the national league. Watson Hutton disbanded Alumni—the most successful team of British origin—

---


\(^{39}\) Escobar Bavio, El football en el Rio de la Plata, 20 and 146-147. The inclusion of Spaniards and Italians into constructions of a criollo identity in fútbol was largely a result of the sheer volume of immigrants from Southern Europe. However, the insular nature of the British community was also a factor; most of the British expatriate community returned to Europe after collecting enough capital in South America.

\(^{40}\) Frydenberg, Historia social del fútbol, 41.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 113. Racing was also the first championship club with no ties to elite or British club associations.
after its last championship in 1912, but the flourishing of independent leagues and
popular participation already signaled the demise of the old structure dominated by elite
and British clubs. This created a space for an alternate approach to fútbol less concerned
with the ethos of British “fair play.” Instead, winning replaced “fair play” as the key
component of honor.

As the sport became popular across Buenos Aires and other urban centers, players
focused on winning at any cost. This left journalists and league officials as the guardians
of “fair play,” rules, and proper conduct.42 Yet, not everyone in Argentina was enamored
with the “cracks,” or star players, of the streets and potreros. Conservative newspapers
like La Nación critiqued players who preferred to dribble and perform “pirouettes” for
the crowds than to play efficiently and pass the ball.43 La Nación’s contrast between
“cracks” and players from reputable clubs like Alumni demonstrates a mistrust of plebian
society. The well-educated porteños that read La Nación advocated a more progressive
vision for the country that they deemed as essential for Argentina to achieve modernity
and become a civilized nation.

Constructing National and Masculine Identity in the Sports Pages

In just a few decades, fútbol became a lucrative business for civic associations
that were able to attract hundreds, or even thousands, to join as socios (members). By

42 Ibid., 115–117.
43 La Nación, January 27, 1913 as cited in Roberto Di Giano, Fútbol y discriminación social (Buenos Aires: Leviatán, 2007), 16–17. La Nación’s founder, Bartolomé Mitre, was a liberal in the mold of Sarmiento and former President of Argentina. In nineteenth-century Argentina, liberals like Mitre and Sarmiento favored relations with Europe and governance by educated men like themselves. Mitre founded La Nación in 1870.
1925, the five most successful clubs—Racing, Independiente de Avellaneda, Club Atlético Boca Juniors, Club Atlético River Plate, and Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro—registered between 1,800 and 3,500 socios each. Several newspapers and magazines from Buenos Aires capitalized on the popularity of fútbol and increased their sales by dedicating space to the results of weekly matches. The tabloid Crítica was among the first papers to publish play-by-play coverage of games, sometimes hours after they concluded. It was also the first paper to send one of its writers on an international assignment to cover fútbol, in this case the 1922 Campeonato Sudamericano (South American Championships) held in Brazil.

Several scholars rightly point to Crítica’s coverage of Boca Juniors’ European tour in 1925 as a key moment in Argentine sports journalism. Because it was the first Argentine team to travel to Europe, the paper’s writers portrayed Boca Juniors as ambassadors for the nation. The paper declared that “these Argentine sportsmen will

44 Planillas de afiliación 1927 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1927).
45 The Uruguayan publisher Natalio Botana founded Crítica in 1913. Similar to figures of American yellow journalism, like William Randolph Hearst, Botana revolutionized the Argentine press with articles that extended beyond politics and current events. Besides a sports section, Crítica covered film, radio, and cultural events in order to appeal to working and middle-class readers; see: Carlos Ulanovsky, Paren las rotativas: diarios, revistas y periodistas (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2005), 37–41.
48 El Gráfico also shared in the nationalist sentiment, although it placed an equal emphasis on Boca Juniors’ tour as an achievement for all of South America when it wrote, “...it is in football where the greatest triumph resides for the South Americans. We have carried with us to Europe a new school of football. We have been acclaimed as masters, not simply as players trying to win a match. Frankly, this is how European newspapers declare it.” See: “El pueblo deportista dispensó un entusiasta recibimiento a los footballers del Boca Juniors,” El Gráfico, July 18, 1925, n.p. http://www.elgrafico.com.ar/coberturas-historicas/1925-la-gira-europea-de-boca-detalle.php.
carry the banner of the nation on high...they will travel across the nations of the Old World in a noble campaign of sports identity. They will demonstrate their might and integrity. The entire Argentine sports world, without distinction of flag or partisanship, follows them awaiting the news of their first victory.”

As historian Sylvia Saítta points out, Crítica became the chief advocate for Boca Juniors and encouraged all citizens—regardless of which club they favored—to head to the port and wish the team well on their journey. But Frydenberg also asks a valid question: Which form of nationalism did Crítica champion? The inclusive cosmopolitan-liberal model, or the more exclusive conservative version that emphasized Argentina’s Spanish and colonial roots? I am convinced by Frydenberg’s conclusion that Crítica was ambiguous on purpose when it came to nationalism, wanting to appeal to the widest audience possible to sell copies. Nevertheless, regardless of which model was at play, Crítica envisioned fútbol players as representatives of the nation. It depicted fútbol as a modernizing and homogenizing force for social good, possessing myths and images steeped in national symbolism.

Like Crítica, the sports publication La Cancha envisioned a national identity through fútbol that was both cosmopolitan and populist. Both of these publications

50 “Debe despedirse dignamente a Boca Juniors” Crítica, February 4, 1925 as cited in Saítta, “Fútbol y prensa en los años veinte: Natalio Botana, presidente de la Asociación Argentina de Football (febrero-agosto de 1926).” Saítta shows that the interest in fútbol coverage also possessed less-than-altruistic reasons for the magazine’s editor, Natalio Botana, who set his eyes on the presidency of the Argentine Football Association.
52 La Nación’s coverage focused on the impact for the club’s fans in La Boca neighborhood; see: “Fue calurosa la acogida dispensada por los aficionados al team de Boca Juniors,” La Nación, July 13, 1925.
appealed to the readers of the barrios of Buenos Aires.⁵⁴ They spoke to readers in a
language that was easily relatable but that also reflected the varied interests of porteños.

Crítica, for example, published opinions from Europeans about Boca Juniors’
performances. According to Spanish reports, Argentine players either lacked heart or
were full of courage; they played a disciplined passing game (as opposed to the excessive
dribbling of a Spanish rival) or displayed an artistic prowess. Crítica, however, argued
that the one consistent trait Europeans praised was the gentleman-like professionalism of
the Argentine “footballers.”⁵⁵ The paper concluded that Boca Juniors’ Europe tour
became a chance for players to show the culture and civility of the Argentine people.

La Cancha also spoke about the maturation of Argentine society in 1928, when
two sports events captured the attention of its readers: the visit of Scottish team
Motherwell to Buenos Aires and the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam. Describing the
national fútbol team’s performance at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam, the paper
focused on the “modesty” of the Argentine players, who did not resort to the “roughness”
that characterized the European style of play. Instead, Argentina played a “clean” and
“elegant” game. “Our ‘pícaro’ (crafty) boys,” the paper exclaimed, employed short
passes and the occasional long pass when “they wanted to take the enemy by surprise.”⁵⁶

The tone of this article was also tongue-in-cheek; La Cancha employed false
modesty to question the assumed superiority of the Europeans as the “masters” of the

⁵⁴ Adrián Gorelik, La grilla y el parque: Espacio público y cultura urbana en Buenos Aires, 1887-1936
(Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1998), 299-312.
⁵⁵ Crítica, June 12, 1925, 14; Frydenberg, “Boca Juniors en Europa: El diario Crítica y el primer
nacionalismo deportivo argentino,” 115-118.
⁵⁶ “¿Hemos ido a Europa a enseñar fútbol?,” La Cancha, June 16, 1928, 13.
sport. With both Argentina and Uruguay playing for the gold medal in Amsterdam, and
Motherwell losing their games to teams in Buenos Aires, the paper sardonically
wondered if the criollo players had not traveled all the way to Europe to teach the locals
how to play fútbol. In other words, had the student surpassed the teacher? Success on
the athletic field allowed Argentines to imagine themselves as equals to the Europeans
when it came to modernity, progress, and civility.

What bothered many Argentines was the suggestion by Europeans visitors that
they lacked the culture and sophistication modern societies in Europe. When Motherwell
coach John Hunter listed among the goals for his team to demonstrate to the Argentines
how to play football, La Cancha published an illustration that poked fun at foreign
perceptions of Argentina. “Cómo nos conocen en Europa” (figure 1) imagines how
people in Scotland must view Argentine society. Full of backward stereotypes, the image
depicts players either as gauchos on horseback, naked Indians, or mulattos sipping yerba
mate. A barefoot child storms the field, while an Argentine referee warns players that he
will strike them with a club if they complain too much. In the stands, a buck-toothed
woman talks to a friend about the “Yonis” (or Johnnys—a reference to the Scottish
players). The other woman has babies strapped to her back. The cartoon uses satire to
make the broader claim that Argentina is, in fact, a modern and civilized nation on par
with European states.

57 This false modesty is clear in the paper’s claim, on the even of the championship game against Uruguay,
that “tomorrow the Argentines will be world champions.” See: “Los argentinos serán mañana los
campeones del mundo,” La Cancha, June 9, 1928, 8-9. (Argentina lost to gold medal game to Uruguay)
La Cancha’s coverage of the Motherwell visit and the 1928 Olympics exhibited a form of nationalism that mixed xenophobia with populism, using class divisions to tie the Argentine elite to the Europeans they mimicked. In one article, the paper questioned why fútbol fans in Argentina would continue to fear British teams when they saw for themselves the quality of their own players. La Cancha deemed this way of thinking “unforgivable.” It felt that current players like Manuel Seoane and Humberto Recanatini were technically superior to the stars of yesterday, such as the Anglo-Argentine Brown
brothers or the German-Argentine Rithner brothers.\footnote{“Los alumnos de ayer, son los maestros de mañana,” La Cancha, June 9, 1928, 2.} By selecting non-Latin names, La Cancha hoped to purge the colonized mentality among Argentines by showing that criollo players were as good as their European counterparts.

At the same time, La Cancha claimed a level of Argentine modernity on par with Europe but different in character. It employed working-class imagery aimed at the “muchachada” (young men) that attended matches every weekend. The paper’s coverage drew on familiar, easily identifiable images of urban life in Buenos Aires: children playing with a ball worth twenty “guitas” (a slang term for money), games played on empty lots, players dribbling past each other and avoiding automobiles, fans yelling at the stadium, and players dressed in the light blue and white jerseys of the national team.\footnote{“Muchachada del football, ¡salud!,” La Cancha, June 9, 1928, 3.}

Journalists also celebrated players as true criollos.\footnote{Unlike other areas of Latin America, people of indigenous or African descent did not figure into the national imagination. Constructions of national identity around mestizaje in Argentina were therefore less biological in nature compared to the rest of South America. Instead, mestizaje referred to the process where new immigrants assimilated into an existing Argentine culture shaped by centuries of Spanish colonial rule. Criollos thus represented the mixture of diverse peoples into a singular national identity.} During the 1928 Olympics, La Cancha published an image of a member of the national team, Domingo Tarasconi, posing with a gourd and metal straw and ready to sip mate, the preferred beverage of Argentines (figure 2).\footnote{La Cancha, June 23, 1928, 13.} The point of the image was to show how Argentine players maintained their customs and traditions wherever they traveled. Sometimes the populist appeal reflected class resentment. After Argentina lost the 1930 World Cup final to Uruguay, its closest rival, La Cancha blamed Argentine fútbol officials for being more preoccupied with hobnobbing in Montevideo than with selecting the best players for the
national team. The cartoon illustration depicts these officials as social elites, an oligarchy of fútbol at odds with humility of players (figure 3). By contrast, La Cancha praised the Argentine hinchada (fanbase) that traveled to Montevideo as heroic “martyrs” and who withstood the threats from Uruguayan fans that “wanted to eat them alive.”

Playing against European competition offered sports writers an opportunity to shape nationalist discourse against the “otherness” of the opposition. What happened, however, when Argentina’s rivals were just across the Rio de La Plata and were similar in many ways? In the case of the 1928 Olympics and the 1930 World Cup, the Argentine press contrasted the civility of its players with the savagery of their neighbors across the

---

63 “Los dirigentes de nuestro fútbol tienen much culpa de que hayamos perdido el cam. Mundial,” La Cancha, August 2, 1930, 3 and 10.
64 Alberto Arena, “Como se gana un campeonato del mundo,” La Cancha, August 2, 1930, 9.
Rio de la Plata. The championship match of the 1930 World Cup, hosted in Montevideo, came two years after Argentina lost to Uruguay in the Olympic gold medal match. La Cancha accused Uruguayan players of resorting to “patadas” (dirty kicks) and other tricks during the World Cup final in order to secure a victory in front of its own fans. The paper also depicted Argentina’s neighbors as backstabbers or animals (figures 4-5). Only as brutes, the paper claimed, could Uruguayans defeat a superior Argentine squad.65

Figure 4 (left)- Even in their semblance, the Uruguayan player’s appearance—poor teeth and unkempt hair—contrasts with the more refined Argentine player. La Cancha, August 2, 1930, 5. Illustrated by Domingo Villafañe. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

Figure 5 (right)- The caption reads: “With vicious kicks, brutally, as if it were a fight to the death, the Uruguayans took from us the World Championship, and yet they remain proud!...” La Cancha, August 9, 1930, 5. Illustrated by Domingo Villafañe. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

65 Hugo Marini, “¡Nuestros hermanos los uruguayos!,” La Cancha, August 2, 1930, 5; Hugo Marini, “¡Invencibles en trampa, suerte, y prepotencia!,“ La Cancha, August 9, 1930, 5 and 18.

66 This allowed La Cancha (as well as El Gráfico) to welcome the national team back home as the “moral” or “true” champions of the world. See: “Nos ganaron, pero no son mejores,” La Cancha, June 16, 1930, 2-3; “Dominando durante los dos tiempos los argentinos fueron vencidos,” La Cancha, June 16, 1930, 8-9; “Un triunfal recibimiento se tributó a los jugadores olímpicos argentinos,” La Cancha, July 21, 1928, 8-9.
La Cancha portrayed Uruguayan “savagery” in racialized terms as well. Its writers bemoaned their prolonged stay in a land of “quemados” (burnt-skinned people). They yearned to be back home in a land free of obscene “negros” that were prone to yelling insults.67 A cartoon in the paper portrays the Uruguayan national team as black savages celebrating in a circle drum formation (figure 6). This direct connection between civility and race appealed to notions of Argentina, or porteño society, as a white society that had been circulating for many decades. From this perspective, Argentine journalists described acts of violence on the field, or obscenity in the stands, as the hallmarks of colored people who were by their definition not Argentine. As we shall see in the next chapter, racialized discourses about public behavior also applied to Argentines who fell outside of the imagination of a white nation, such as the poor migrants from the interior that settled in Buenos Aires in the late 1930s.

---

67 “Los del cerro celebran su ‘victoria’,” La Cancha, August 9, 1930, 12. Also see: La Cancha, August 2, 1930.
Media coverage of fútbol in the late 1920s shows that populism and tradition existed side-by-side with cosmopolitanism and modernity in the making of the nation. For Néstor García Canclini, this hybridity was a hallmark of many Latin American societies in the early twentieth century, especially Argentina. According to him, Argentines have debated whether cultural policies should opt for the “civilization of the metropolises,” or an embrace of the “national-popular” for over a century.\(^6^8\) \textit{Crítica} and \textit{La Cancha} demonstrated that both models presented by García Canclini were a part of sport’s coverage and served as the basis for constructions of national identity in fútbol.

García Canclini’s model of hybridization influenced Archetti’s analysis of another sports publication, \textit{El Gráfico}, which was more explicit than \textit{Crítica} and \textit{La Cancha} in delineating an Argentine style of play along nationalist lines. Archetti credits two journalists, Borocotó (Ricardo Lorenzo Rodríguez, who was Uruguayan by birth) and Chantecler (Alfredo Enrique Rossi), with establishing the foundation of “fútbol criollo.” They attributed the “dribbling” of Argentine players to the creativity required from playing fútbol on the streets and potreros of Buenos Aires as opposed to the strict educational setting of British private schools and club associations.\(^6^9\) According to Archetti, these journalists drew upon two seemingly contradictory traditions in Argentina and throughout Latin America: \textit{mestizaje} (ethnic, or racial mixing) and \textit{criollización}


\(^{69}\) Archetti, \textit{Masculinities}, 66–68; Archetti, \textit{El potrero, la pista y el ring}, 12–14, 42. For Archetti, it was natural for sports journalists to draw on other forms of popular culture, such as tango, in constructing a criollo style of play. For example, deft cutbacks on the ball, known as \textit{gambetas}, helped players avoid tackles in fútbol; journalists described such cutbacks in terms similar to sudden breaks in movement in tango dancing. “Cracks” like José Manuel Moreno even credited their ability to \textit{gambetear} (skillfully dribble) to evenings of tango dancing in the nightclubs of Buenos Aires.
(creolization). The former evoked a folkloric past shaped by Spanish and indigenous cultures (the iconic literary gaucho Martín Fierro is one example). The latter alluded to what liberal elites perceived as a white, progressive, and European tradition that dated back to the colonial and Republican eras.70

The value of Archetti’s work is that it helps us understand the construction of a criollo style of play. It was a characterization of Argentine fútbol that drew from national traditions and eschewed British influences, but still claimed modernity by virtue of success on the playing field.71 Borocotó and Chantecler thus credited the Iberian traditions of the country that predated the British arrival, such as the “viveza criolla” (creole cunning) of the people, for the skill and artistry of the criollo player. Borocotó grounded the traits of fútbol criollo in the nation’s colonial Spanish heritage, thus excluding the British but allowing for Latin immigrants.72 Chantecler, on the other hand, subscribed to what Archetti sees as a “melting-pot” theory in fútbol. It allowed for any immigrant group—even the British—to become criollo by virtue of assimilating those traits quintessentially Argentine, such as “viveza.”73 Watson Hutton thus became criollo the longer he stayed in Buenos Aires and helped spread football among locals.

70 Archetti, Masculinities, 28. It is also worth noting the paradox of associating an urban style of play with the free-spirited rural gaucho, as discussed in Alabarces, Fútbol y patria, 47–48.
71 Archetti, “Estilo y virtudes masculinas en ‘El Gráfico’: La creación del imaginario del fútbol argentino.”
72 Saítta and Karush show how Crítica—whose readership by the 1920s included many children of immigrants—referenced dark-haired “morochos” within discourses of fútbol criollo. These morochos could be indigenous people of the provinces, as well as Italians. Moreover, becoming a passionate fan and attending a fútbol match were acts of patriotism according to Crítica; see: Karush, “National Identity in the Sports Pages: Football and the Mass Media in 1920s Buenos Aires,” 17, 20–21; Saítta, “Fútbol y prensa en los años veinte: Natalio Botana, presidente de la Asociación Argentina de Football (febrero-agosto de 1926).”
The Popularity, Growth, and Professionalization of Fútbol, 1920s-1945

In the late 1920s Argentine writer Roberto Arlt described the scene at a fútbol match between Argentina and Uruguay, the first he ever attended: “A rotten orange smashed a crazed fan on the head. Forty thousand handkerchiefs whirled around in the air, and [Nolo] Ferreyra, with his magnificent kick, made the first goal. Not even a bunch of machine gunners could have made more noise than those eighty thousand hands that were applauding the Argentine success.”⁷⁴ Arlt’s characterization of a day at the stadium captured the vibrancy of daily life in Buenos Aires and the passion of its people for fútbol. His description of the match employed tropes used by sports writers of the time: the massive crowds, fans throwing objects at targets of their frustration, metaphors of war to describe a game, the adoration of the “crack” player (Ferreyra), and displays of patriotism in the stands. When Arlt addressed acts of mischief by young fans, or instances of public urination aimed at rival fans, he did so with a wink and a nod to the carnivalesque atmosphere. Furthermore, he depicted an almost exclusive masculine environment where aggression and passion went hand-in-hand.

Arlt’s account took place amid transformative changes that unsettled the class structure in Buenos Aires. Like the United States, Argentina enjoyed a boom period in the 1920s that ultimately ended with an economic depression. Arlt’s writing captured

---

what the economic downturn meant for average porteños: those seeking employment and struggling to survive in the capital city. The 1930s became known *década infame* (infamous decade) as citizens accused the conservative governments of Agustín Justo, and later Ramón Castillo, of corruption, electoral fraud, and favoring British economic interests tilted towards the Argentine elite. But this was also a time of significant public works projects, such as new highways, improvements to an already impressive railway system, and improved urban planning in Buenos Aires that widened avenues and expanded public spaces. This Keynesian approach to state intervention in the economy created jobs. Rural citizens affected by the depression flocked to major cities in the late 1930s, mostly to Buenos Aires seeking work. For the most part, these transplants settled on the outskirts of the city, in shantytowns popularly known as the *villas miserias*.

The “invasion” of the countryside generated a class-based discourse in Argentina. Middle sectors of porteño society blamed the influx of rural migrants for what they perceived as an era of decay. They labeled these new arrivals as “grasas” (grease-haired), “negros” (blacks), and “brutos” (brutes), and resented their occupation of public spaces in downtown Buenos Aires on the weekends. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the

---


77 Garguin, “‘Los Argentinos Descendemos de Los Barcos’: The Racial Articulation of Middle-Class Identity in Argentina, 1920-1960,” 357–358; Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina*, 276–283. Nationalists (some of whom held fascist sympathies) looked for whom to blame for the recession. They blamed the open-door policy for immigrants and rejected the policies of the liberal government in
increased presence of plebeian society in the patrician sections of the city created tensions that would inevitably boil over.\textsuperscript{78}

The mass arrival of migrants over the course of a decade changed the makeup of Buenos Aires. By the 1940s, people born in the provinces numbered forty-four percent of the population in the capital city, up from twenty-four percent in 1936.\textsuperscript{79} This produced anxiety, as well as a longing for the past among middle sectors of porteño society. A series of reflections on the “ser nacional” (what it meant to be Argentine) characterized much of the literature of the 1930s. Far from uniform, intellectuals and writers articulated disparate notions of national identity.\textsuperscript{80} For sports writers, fútbol provided opportunities for cultural assimilation for new immigrants through fandom and participation.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{78} Racialized discourse, however, appeared with more frequency later. Natalia Milanesio’s study of the term “cabecitas negras” (black-haired people) shows that racialized stereotypes of rural migrants grew stronger after 1945, when Peronism became the political movement of the working class. \textit{See:} Milanesio, “Peronists and Cabecitas: Stereotypes and Anxieties at the Peak of Social Change,” 56–62.


\textsuperscript{80} El Gráfico’s Chantecler, subscribed to the melting-pot model that imagined Argentina as a nation capable of absorbing immigrants from all nations. For Chantecler, and his colleagues at \textit{El Gráfico}, football players—regardless of their origin—represented Argentina’s criollo culture by virtue of a playing style born in the potreros. \textit{See:} Archetti, \textit{El potrero, la pista y el ring}, 20–23.
Like Arlt, the writers at *El Gráfico* in the 1930s paid tribute to everyday life in Buenos Aires by extolling the pibes (young kids) and hinchada enamored with fútbol.\textsuperscript{82} Many of these pibes were part of the rural migration to the city that increased in the latter half of the decade. The effects of migration, and the growth of outlying barrios, inspired Borocotó to write a series for *El Gráfico* in the 1940s entitled “Del diario de Comeuñas.”\textsuperscript{83} It chronicled the adventures of a group of pibes that formed their own fútbol team called Sacachispas. The children in Borocotó’s series come from diverse backgrounds and live on the margins of the city. But unlike their parents, many of whom cling to the traditions of their homeland, these pibes express their Argentineanness through a love of fútbol.

Despite *El Gráfico*’s admiration for the passion of the hinchadas that helped fútbol stadiums sell tens of thousands of tickets each week, the magazine was often critical of the masses at the stadium. In particular, its writers repudiated acts of incivility at fútbol matches—a criticism by sports journalism mostly absent in the 1920s and which largely appears with the arrival of migrants in the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{84} Although, as Frydenberg reminds us, violence in Argentine fútbol has a long history, rivalries became more intense in the 1930s and 1940s. “Hinchas” (fans) developed strong identifications with the barrio and the local stadium.\textsuperscript{85} For writers like Arlt, the lack of civility among hinchas (throwing oranges and bottles onto the field, public urination, abusive language) was a colorful

\textsuperscript{83} “Del diario de Comeuñas” ran from January 10, 1947 to April 22, 1949 in the pages of *El Gráfico*.
\textsuperscript{84} Frydenberg, *Historia social del fútbol*, 238–242 and 255–258.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 157–159.
anecdote of everyday life. For *El Gráfico*, however, the lack of decorum at the stadium was an aspect of Argentine society that fell outside of the national character. By minimizing the effects of rapid demographic changes in the 1930s, scholars have undersold the impact of rural migration in shaping the ethical discourse found in the sports pages. As *El Gráfico* evolved into a pedagogical publication by the late 1940s, references to Sarmiento’s two Argentinas—one civilized and the other barbarian—appeared whenever fan disorders occurred. *El Gráfico* thus articulated the concerns of its predominantly middle-class readers to the shifting social structure of Buenos Aires.

As public voices debated civility, barbarity, and the “*ser nacional*” in fútbol, stadiums became a focal point for identity. Unlike the various public spaces constructed by the federal government in the 1930s, ordinary citizens financed and helped construct fútbol stadiums, which became a primary site for neighborhood identity. As fútbol exploded in popularity during the 1930s, some clubs transcended their neighborhoods to become national entities. Teams like Boca Juniors, River Plate, San Lorenzo, Independiente, and Racing—the so-called “big five” clubs—built stadiums with seating capacities to accommodate their massive following. In 1929, the number of socios at these clubs ranged between 6,000 and 15,000, while mid-level clubs like Ferrocarril Oeste and Vélez Sarsfield only counted between 1,000 to 2,000 socios (*figure 7*). Over the next twelve years, membership doubled, or even tripled. At River Plate, membership
rose from 15,686 in 1930 to 32,700 by 1936. Boca Juniors nearly doubled its quota in one year, from 17,500 socios in 1939 to 29,601 in 1940 (*figure 8*).\(^87\)

Club loyalty proved critical to the shaping of masculine identity. Stadiums became hyper-masculine spaces for neighbors to meet, or at times venues for sanctioned conflict among the *muchachadas futboleras*.\(^88\) Socios participated in club elections and other votes that required majority approval. On weekends, they volunteered at the stadium to help with repairs or they helped organize family events. This level of commitment to clubs gave socios a stake and sense of ownership.\(^89\) Many fans believed that they had the right to protest what they saw as acts of injustice because they were the “owners” of their clubs. Whether it was a referee who made a dubious call, police officers who used excessive force, or club officials that squeezed as many fans as possible into a stadium, fans expressed their discontent, often in violent terms.

---

\(^87\) *Planillas de afiliación 1927* (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1927); *Registro de institutos afiliados 1940-44* (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1944).

\(^88\) Christopher Thomas Gaffney, *Temples of the Earthbound Gods: Stadiums in the Cultural Landscapes of Rio De Janeiro and Buenos Aires* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 4 and 149; Frydenberg, “Los hinchas y las ‘barras bravas’.” Frydenberg notes how references to aggressive fans in the press of the 1920s and 1930s included terms like *la muchachada futbolera*, *barras* (or *barra bravas*), and *la hinchadas*. He notes that the term “barras bravas” appeared in *Crítica* as early as the 1920s and did not carry the same meaning as it does today to describe organized, gang-style, hooligan groups. Violence back then was sporadic and unorganized.

\(^89\) Jurgen Habermas suggests that a gap exists in the public sphere between the “proletarian” masses that claim ownership over spaces they populate, and those who actually control the means of production; *see:* Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 196. Pierre Bourdieu, however, gives weight to the symbolic capital social agents recognize, and give value to, by virtue of the divisions that favor one group over another. In the case of club associations in Argentina, socios could differentiate themselves from other fútbol fans through their membership status—a marker of devotion and loyalty to the team; *see:* Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 47 and 102.
Figure 7- Club membership in 1929 for Boca Juniors (BOCA), River Plate (CARP), San Lorenzo (CASLA), Ferrocarril Oeste (FERRO), Independiente (INDEP), Racing, Tigre, and Vélez Sarsfield (VELEZ). Registro de institutos afiliadas 1940-44 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1944). Data courtesy of Mariano Gruschetsky.

Figure 8- Club membership sharply increased for Boca Juniors (BOCA), Independiente (INDEP), and Racing and allowed these clubs to match the levels enjoyed by River Plate (CARP) and San Lorenzo (CASLA). However, only San Lorenzo saw a moderate or sustained growth (from top to bottom, in the year 1930, are: CARP, CASLA, BOCA, RACING, and INDEP). Registro de institutos afiliadas 1940-44 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1944). Data courtesy of Mariano Gruschetsky.

This contrast between the victimized fans and the powerful interests who controlled fútbol is most visible in the films of the 1930s. Movies reflected the popular
view of an Argentine society divided into two groups—the “people” and the “oligarchy.”[^90] Along with fútbol stadiums, cinema houses were one of the main destinations for the public on the weekends and offered affordable entertainment[^91] Two films from the 1930s encapsulate the popular appeal of fútbol and the various discourses about identity associated with the sport. *Los tres berretines* (Alton, 1933) and *El cañonero de Giles* (Romero, 1937) each offered viewers identifiable slices of daily life: the local bar, tango music, the pibes playing in the potreros, the immigrant parent and his criollo children, among others. Both films also featured notable fútbol players in key roles: Estudiantes player Miguel Ángel Lauri and River Plate’s Bernabé Ferreyra—the player highlighted by Arlt at the outset of this chapter. Because sports magazines like *El Gráfico* promoted fútbol as a spectacle defined by the star actors on stage, which made the transition from the fútbol field to the silver screen a natural move for Lauri and Ferreyra. Filmmakers also understood the hero worship associated with fútbol “cracks.”

More than simple entertainment, these films articulated specific notions of masculine and national identity tied to fútbol. The protagonists of *Los tres berretines* are the children of a Spanish immigrant, Manuel Sequeiro, who owns a small tool store.


[^91]: Karush, *Culture of Class*, 82–83. Karush notes that domestic film productions held less appeal for the Argentine elite than films from the United States; however, local films were popular in middle and working-class neighborhoods. Using data from various sources, Karush shows that by 1936 there were over 1,400 cinema houses in Argentina. Because ticket price were affordable, Argentines flocked to see the latest Hollywood productions. He attributes the growth of cinema, especially after 1933, to the advent of sound films. These films allowed the Argentine cinema industry to compete with Hollywood by offering movies that were modern, yet still offered viewers familiar images and sounds of daily life.
Rather than embrace the three berretines (passions) of Argentine culture—fútbol, cinema, and tango music—Manuel is a curmudgeon who scolds his sons Lorenzo and Eusebio for pursuing trivial pastimes like fútbol and tango music. His wife and daughter’s obsession with going to the cinema also irritates him. Only Eduardo, his third son, pursues a “noble profession” by studying architecture. Eduardo embodies the creed of many immigrants, that an honest education provided a pathway to social ascendancy.

For the Sequeiro family, salvation comes from fútbol. Lorenzo’s success on the fútbol field allows him to fund Eusebio’s tango compositions, which by the end of the film turn him into a known composer. Lorenzo is also able to use his status as a “crack” player to secure a job for Eduardo designing his club’s new stadium. Even the women abandon the cinema houses and Hollywood films they adore for a chance to see Lorenzo play at the stadium. Despite his criticisms of Lorenzo’s career, Manuel secretly follows his games. He eventually succumbs to temptation, leaves his store, and climbs a pole at the packed stadium to catch a glimpse of his “crack” son. As a result, the fortunes of the Sequeiro family turn as they fully embrace the passions of Argentine society. The Sequeiros also achieve a middle-class status by the end of the film that offers respectability and public visibility.

Lorenzo’s athletic prowess also serves as an ideal form of masculinity. Unlike his father, who toils for long hours in his shop, or Eduardo, who has little to show for his education, Lorenzo becomes the subject of public adoration. The women in the film are also crucial to the construction of masculine identity. Eduardo, for example, becomes depressed after losing his job because he can no longer meet his girlfriend’s high standard
of living. The Sequeiro women also abandon their household chores due to their obsession with Hollywood films. Accompanied by an effeminate male friend, Manuel’s wife and daughter find escapism in the downtown cinema houses. For his daughter, a chance to see the latest film production is a chance to leave the “slavery” of the kitchen. By the end of the film, the women eventually return home and dutifully support the successes of the Sequeiro men. Even the stuttering Eusebio (played to great comedic effect by Luis Sandrini) earns the admiration of women at his tango performance.

The comedy *El cañonero de Giles* employs a similar adoration of the male athlete. In this film, Lorenzo is a star player from the provincial town of Giles. His powerful shooting technique catches the attention of professional scouts. Although he desires to stay in town, friends and family push him to accept a move to a big club in the city (Buenos Aires). Lost in this new world, Lorenzo is a fish out of water and begins to lose confidence. Rival teams send a seductress to pry him away from fútbol and into a world of alcohol, sex, and parties. Although Lorenzo’s girlfriend discovers his infidelity, she arrives with her father and rescues him from the vixen (who labels this country bumpkin girl a “cow”). Lorenzo ultimately finds salvation in his devoted girlfriend (although her father is ashamed to find Lorenzo dressed in the latest men’s fashion, which he deems as “effeminate”). She takes on a motherly role that is typical in other fútbol films. She never gives up Lorenzo. Her love allows him to re-discover a more noble form of masculinity.

---

93 For an extended discussion of *Los tres berretines*, see: Alabarces, *Fútbol y patria*, chap. 3; Karush, *Culture of Class*, chap. 1.
Both films contrast the ethics of rural or barrio life with the corrupting influence of urban Buenos Aires. In _El cañonero de Giles_, the scouts who arrive from the city dismissively label the rural people of Giles as “animales.” The film employs a populist portrayal of these “sophisticated” porteños as arrogant and unethical. In a discourse that fútbol purists would understand, Lorenzo seems perplexed by the regulated training methods of his new team in Buenos Aires. The film depicts such training as foreign and outside of Argentine traditions. It is also in Buenos Aires where Lorenzo falls prey to partying, alcohol, and an affair with a woman who revealed to be no more than a high-class escort employed by corrupt club officials. Thus, rural Argentina serves as the embodiment of the nation, while Buenos Aires is a modern Babylon.

This rural/urban dichotomy echoes the opposition between barrio and downtown in _Los tres berretines_ when the Sequiero women leave their household chores and head to the city center to catch the latest Hollywood film. _Los tres berretines_ and _El cañonero de Giles_ thus denigrated urban life in favor of the values found in the countryside or outlying barrios of the city. Where these films differ is on the subject of labor. In _El cañonero de Giles_, hard work, sacrifice, and loyalty are all preferable to the simple pursuit of fame and wealth. Lorenzo of Giles represents the everyman, who easily loses his way with the temptations that the big city offers; the only redeeming characters in the

---

95 The image of fútbol officials as “fat cats,” who enriched themselves from fútbol, already existed as a powerful representation of “us” (the people, or fans) and “them” (the oligarchy) in explaining why Argentina lost the 1930 World Cup final against Uruguay, see: “Los dirigentes de nuestro fútbol tienen culpa de que hayamos perdido el camp. mundial,” _La Cancha_, August 2, 1930, 3 and 10.
film are the rural inhabitants of Giles. Conversely, in *Los tres berretines*, fútbol and tango offer a quick path to fame and fortune as opposed to the professional aspirations of Eduardo. Despite where each film situates the moral compass of the nation, it is clear that a particular set of values is key to the success of the characters in the films: faithfulness, humility, a love of family, and honest work. The social ascendancy offered by fútbol, spoke to the aspirations of many Argentines but especially to middle-class audiences.

**Conclusion**

More than offering a corrective to Archetti’s analysis, the goal here is to expand upon his influential analysis of a construction of national identity in *El Gráfico* in relation to the “otherness” of British football. When sports writers like Chantecler and Borocotó absorbed, or eliminated, vestiges of British culture from fútbol criollo they were holding up a mirror and assessing Argentina’s progress in comparison to Europe. Even if Argentines appropriated a sport like fútbol and make it their own, the measure of their success was how they performed against European competition. Their writings, however, only focused on identity through the “viveza criolla” and picardía of Argentine players.

By only focusing on *El Gráfico*, Archetti misses a second component that I argue is just as important: the civility of the criollo player. Sports writers at *Crítica* and *La Cancha* used the victories over European opponents as a sign of Argentina’s modernity, and they pointed to the professional attitudes of Argentine players as a marker of civility.

---

96 Winning is nonetheless important to the fútbol fans of Giles as well. When Lorenzo leaves for the big city, neighbors comment that if he fails to succeed in Buenos Aires, he should not bother to set foot back in his hometown. Another man comments: “A war can be lost, but a fútbol match? Never.”

97 A more extensive analysis of Argentine fútbol and the British “other” can be found in Alabarces, *Fútbol y patria*, chap. 1–3.
In this regard, the visits of foreign teams like Motherwell were indeed crucial for understanding the role fútbol played in articulating an idea of national identity.\textsuperscript{98} Matches against European teams reveal a preoccupation with Argentina’s status as a modern nation that was typical of a middle-class consciousness or concern over social progress. When Argentine teams defeated a European squad like Motherwell in 1928, winning mattered as a measure of success; but when criollo players demonstrated superior talent and conduct, then comparisons placed Argentina on par, or above, European civilization.

This chapter has shown that articulations of identity in the media were contradictory and eclectic. Journalists appealed to the modest origins of Argentine fútbol using populist language and imagery, but they also claimed a level of equality with Western Europeans when it came to the sportsmanship and performance of Argentine athletes. This ethical component to discourses over morality dated back to when Swindon Town played in Argentina in 1912 and shocked locals with their overly physical play. When the national team lost two significant championship games to neighboring Uruguay in 1928 and 1930, Argentine journalists redefined what they meant by success by citing the good sportsmanship of their teams versus the barbarity of their neighbors. Yet, we also see in the Uruguayan case where the perception among Argentines of their whiteness as a European nation in South America, served to diminish Uruguay’s accomplishments in racialized terms that posited their neighbors as “negros” or “quemados.” As a result, journalists in Buenos Aires became adept at juggling contradictory notions of national identity in the service of establishing fútbol criollo.

\textsuperscript{98} Frydenberg, \textit{Historia social del fútbol}, 244.
2. Fútbol in the “New Argentina,” 1946-1955

The English national football team traveled to Buenos Aires in May of 1953 to play in two highly anticipated matches. The official game-day brochure included a message from President Juan Perón citing sports as the ideal vehicle for cementing friendships between nations.¹ AFA also hosted ceremonial dinners for English football officials and arranged for the visitors to stay at the exclusive Hindu Club. Shortly before the kick-off to the first match, Perón greeted the English squad at the Monumental stadium. In a similar gesture of diplomacy, the visiting delegation paid its respects to the recently deceased first lady, Eva Perón.

Despite such platitudes, these encounters were serious matters for AFA, the national team, and the Peronist state. England rested its key players for the first match. Argentina, on the other hand, sent its best players to the field. Perón nervously watched the game unfold as Argentina won 3-0.² The local media praised the quality of the Argentine players, who “demonstrated a marked superiority in playing style and tactics” over their foreign competitors.³ Even after the second match ended prematurely due to

¹ Asociación del Fútbol Argentino partidos con The Football Association, May 1953, 2.
² Mundo Deportivo published images of the President reacting to the match against England like any other hincha: biting his fingernails, yelling at the referee, and embracing the triumphant Argentine captain after the match. A re-publication of these images appears in “Perón: Presidente del fútbol argentino,” Mundo Deportivo, June 9, 1955, 64.
³ “Los deportes en 1953,” Esto Es, December 30, 1953, 31-33. The magazine also labeled the national team as “magnificent” for its victory against Spain in July of 1953.
heavy rain, papers described it as a moral victory for Argentines and another example of the supremacy of fútbol criollo.

This chapter examines the nationalist discourse surrounding fútbol, and sports in general, during the Peronist decade (1946-1955). It argues that the Peronist state alternately appealed to traditionalist nationalism and modernizing cosmopolitanism in its glorification of the “New Argentina.” One moment the state employed a discourse bordering on jingoism and the next moment officials were preoccupied with modernity and international prestige. Less than contradictory, the Peronist state’s view of athletics fluctuated based on the whims and vision of its leader.

Perón envisioned sport as integral to his vision of justicialismo (social justice) because it involved all of Argentina’s citizens in a healthier and more productive lifestyle. He argued that a commitment to physical activity would result in stronger citizens. Workers should also enjoy greater access to sporting events during their time of leisure, as a reward for their contributions to building the New Argentina. This meant including those groups traditionally excluded from organized sports, namely the poor, women, and children.

In order to showcase Argentina’s progress under his administration, Perón also pursued the hosting rights to the Olympic Games and the World Cup. He hoped that such events would bring the world to Argentina and help unite citizens in a common patriotic fervor. The Peronist state used sports to project an image of Argentina as a modern, just, and developed nation whose success came from the strength of its people and not from the interests of the elite or foreign capitalists.
This chapter begins with an overview of Peronist discourse and his notion of social justice as it applies to the masses. It primarily focuses on fútbol in the Peronist decade; but Perón’s interests revolved around athletics in general. An enthusiast of multiple sports, he found a natural connection with athletes from basketball, automobile racing, and boxing, to name a few. As a result, this chapter addresses fútbol but also provides some space for other sports. The decision to include other activities in this chapter is based on the state’s own image as a patron of sports; no state before, or since, supported athletes to the same degree as the Peronist regime. Nevertheless, the focus in this section remains on the culture around fútbol, in particular with the flurry of fútbol films of the late 1940s and 1950s. These movies echoed discursive elements of Peronism—even if Argentine cinema was largely apolitical in nature during this time. The chapter also addresses the criticisms towards Peronist intervention in sports from anti-Peronists, as well as the limits the government faced in dealing with civic associations and professional fútbol.

**Perón: El Primer Hincha**

On October 17, 1945, a large crowd gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in support of Colonel Juan Perón. Just two years prior, a group of young army officers known as the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (GOU) overthrew the constitutional government of Ramón Castillo. Perón’s political skills allowed him to quickly rise through the ranks of the GOU. As the secretariat of labor, he developed a close relationship with leaders of the
labor movement and initiated reforms supported by the working class. In addition, Perón gained national visibility in the relief efforts after the 1944 earthquake in San Juan.

By 1945, Perón had earned a significant degree of popularity among the working class. This development troubled GOU leaders, many of whom held their own political ambitions. For their part, groups on the political left accused GOU leaders and Perón of harboring fascist sympathies. The Unión Democrática—a political alliance between the Radical Party, communists, socialists, and progressives—coalesced in opposition to Perón and the GOU. The emergence of leftist opposition to Perón encouraged military officers wary of the charismatic leader to arrest him on October 8th. Their victory was short-lived. Nine days later, a rally by thousands of Peronist supporters—most of whom were industrial workers—demanded and secured his release.

The October 17th demonstration altered the political landscape of Argentina. Perón capitalized on his broad support among workers, who in turn showed their political strength at the Plaza de Mayo. He ran for President the following year on a populist platform heavy on nationalism and suspicious of foreign influences like communism. Perón also criticized the Argentine oligarchy and supported the rights of workers. By doing so, he usurped the rhetoric of the political left. Socialists and communists resented Perón’s attacks on them but their larger concern was his ability to make inroads among laborers. Other opponents feared that his election as president would further move Argentina towards a totalitarian state.5

---

5 Ibid., 97–98.
Perón’s election in 1946 awakened a historically marginal segment of society. His platform of justicialismo resonated among workers and labor unions across the country and with the growing migrant population in Buenos Aires. Before Perón and the GOU emerged on the national stage, wealth disparity had grown exponentially under the series of conservative governments. Coupled with lingering effects of the economic depression of the early 1930s, working class Argentines found Perón’s notion of justicialismo appealing. He portrayed his cause as a struggle against an oligarchy and foreign interests that enriched themselves at the expense of the Argentine worker.

Peronist rhetoric about social equality and justicialismo created a rift among the popular sectors of society. Over the years, Perón criticized those who were obsessed with materialism. Despite his initial appeal to the middle class, Perón eventually emphasized the morality and humility of the “descamisados” (shirtless) as the authentic representation of the nation. He envisioned a unified Argentina that would integrate the masses into society through shared sacrifice by all citizens. He also believed that the

---

7 Xenphobia was a powerful tool for Perón. When U.S. Ambassador Spruille Braden directly meddled into Argentine politics by insinuating that Perón was a Fascist sympathizer, and then threw his support behind candidates for the Unión Democrática, Perón deftly used Braden’s involvement to his own advantage. He turned the election into a referendum on patriotism, asking voters whether they would side with him against Ambassador Braden and the oligarchy, or whether voters would be complacent with the nation’s wealth inequality and policies that favored foreign capitalists. “Braden o Perón: Edición dedicada exclusivamente a la histórica elección del año 46 que derrotó a la oligarquía,” *Así*, February 25, 1946, 1. Also see: Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 95–99.
plebeian sectors of society should enjoy the same access to public entertainment as the wealthy and the benefits of the “New Argentina.”

Historians in recent years have argued that Perón’s discourse polarized Argentines. For the first time, some began to imagine themselves as “middle class” mostly in their opposition to Peronism. Ezequiel Adamovsky, for example, finds that references to a “middle class” were few and far between before 1945; this identity had little relevance for small business owners, professionals, and commercial employees, who imagined themselves as part of “the people.” For Adamovsky and others, a self-conscious middle-class identity emerges only with the rise of anti-Peronism, when members of the middle class resented Perón’s elevation of those below them.

Yet, Peronist rhetoric was full of contradictions. On the one hand, Perón promoted athletics as a unifying force and the key to social equality. He called on a shared sacrifice by citizens to elevate the nation as a sports capital. On the other hand, Peronist rhetoric also mirrored the hegemonic discourse in sports journalism that priviledged athletes from humble origins in contrast to the “fat cat” club directors that ran professional fútbol. Recent cultural studies of Peronism show that Perón deftly appropriated mass culture as a way of appealing to the working class. So, rather than inventing polarizing images between the honorable poor and the greedy elite, Perón drew

---

9 Alabarces, *Fútbol y patria*, 71.
upon existing narratives familiar to many Argentines. The end result, however, was a middle-class fan base omitted from Perón’s vision for sports. Some fans and journalists soon began to resent the attention lavished on fans who they saw as lacking decorum and a sense of ethical behavior at matches.

Despite these contradictions, the state nevertheless envisioned sport as a unifying instrument for the nation. Athletics became a central component for the Peronist state’s goal of developing a healthy and “virtuous” nation. In a letter to Mundo Deportivo—the Peronist state’s answer to El Gráfico—Perón acknowledged the educational function sport offered to the public and its attraction as a “spectacle.” But he also believed that the true value of sport resided in its ability to attract widespread participation. Rather than have ten athletes performing for three hundred thousand spectators, Perón stated that “the ideal would be that three-hundred thousand play and ten watch.”

All of this is to say that sport was a natural fit for Peronism’s traditionalist brand of nationalism. Athletics possessed discursive elements of the “nation” that were not only populist but also in line with liberal ideas about propriety and success. Major tournaments like the Olympics, or the World Cup, provided Argentines the opportunity to rally behind

---


14 Rein, “‘El Primer Deportista’: The Political Use and Abuse of Sport in Peronist Argentina,” 64. Rein’s analysis of the Peronist sports magazine Mundo Deportivo shows that professional experts and sports journalists contributed to Peronist propaganda, such as the weekly feature “Sports Medicine” written by Doctor Eduardo Saunders; see: Eduardo Saunders, “Los deportes más adaptados a la modalidad femenina,” Mundo Deportivo, April 23, 1953, 50.

the colors of their flag. Yet, as we saw in 1928, international competition generated expressions of xenophobia that Argentines leveled against rivals like Uruguay or Great Britain. These tournaments offered Argentines opportunities to celebrate individual achievements or the sportsmanship of the nation’s teams. In addition, athletes competed in uniforms adorned with the national colors. Spectators also listened to the national anthem before a match and during ceremonies. Even before the rise of Peronism, publications like *El Gráfico* characterized sports as unifying force for the nation, thereby subscribing to the concept of Argentina as a “melting-pot.”

In addition to aligning with Peronist discourse, sport also allowed state officials in charge of propaganda to project the president as an athlete, a fan, and a patron for athletes. For historians Raanan Rein and Mariano Ben Plotkin, state patronage of sport was part of the personalismo (cult of personality) associated with Perón. Images of the “primer deportista” (first sportsman) regularly appeared in popular magazines, as well as in official letters and memorandums from government offices like the Eva Perón Foundation (*figures* 9-10). AFA, as well as clubs like River Plate and Boca Juniors

---


17 Sport was by no means the sole form of popular entertainment usurped by Perón for political ends. For a look at how the Perón government embraced folklore music and beauty pageants, see Oscar Chamosa, “Criollo and Peronist: The Argentine Folklore Movement During the First Peronism, 1943-1955” and Mirta Zaida Lobato, María Damilakou, and Lizel Tornay “Working Class Beauty Queens under Peronism” in Matthew B. Karush and Oscar Chamosa, eds., *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). For a comprehensive look at cinema under Perón, see: Kriger, *Cine y peronismo*. A more general look at Peronist appropriation of popular culture is found in Plotkin, *Mañana Es San Perón*.


also bestowed honorary titles for Perón, such as “presidente del fútbol argentino” (president of Argentine fútbol) or “primer hincha” (first fan).\textsuperscript{20}

Figure 9 (left)- “General Juan Perón Primer Deportista Argentino,” Mundo Deportivo, April 22, 1954, cover. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

Figure 10 (center)- This image contains no less than six different titles for Perón: “Excmo. Señor Presidente de la Nación, General Juan Perón, El Primer Deportista Argentino, Libertador de la República” (“Most Excellent Mister President of the Nation, General Juan Perón, the First Argentine Sportsman, Liberator of the Republic”) Mundo Deportivo, August 14, 1952, 1. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Museo Evita.

Figure 11 (right)- Eva and Juan Perón featured in a Boca Juniors fan magazine, Jugador Nº12, as “Propellers of Sport.” “Propulsores del deporte,” Jugador Nº12, April 16, 1952, 6-7. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional.

Beyond furthering his image as a patron of sports, Perón’s material and moral support for athletes stemmed from a personal passion for athletic competition. Photographs of the “primer hincha” participating in multiple sporting activities frequently appeared in the press. Across Peronist publications, articles showed Perón participating in marksmanship, billiards, boxing, Alpine skiing, fencing, and even riding a motorcycle. Automobile racing was a particular passion for the president. In various images, he posed with champion driver Juan Manuel Fangio, and in one picture he stood next to a racecar.

\textsuperscript{20} Mundo Deportivo, June 9, 1955, 6; “Nuestra Adhesión,” River, April 22, 1954; “Propulsores del deporte,” Jugador Nº12, April 16, 1952, 6-7. “El primer deportista” was the most common description in Peronist channels; see: Mundo Deportivo, August 14, 1952, 1 (with the added title “Libertador de la República”); Mundo Deportivo, December 25, 1952, 4-5; Mundo Deportivo, April 22, 1954, 1.
named “Justicialista”\textsuperscript{21} A savvy politician, Perón took advantage of the immense popularity athletes enjoyed in Argentina to pose with icons from multiple sports, including boxer José María Gatica, River Plate star Ángel Labruna, and polo captain Enrique Alberdi among others (\textit{figures 12-13, 15-16}).\textsuperscript{22} He also attended events that celebrated the Perón’s contribution to athletics and the opening of venues financed by the state, such as River Plate’s opening of a complex built for young athletes (\textit{figure 14}).

\textbf{Figure 12 (left)-} Perón greets Angel Labruna. \textit{River}, April 14, 1955, 1. Courtesy of the personal collection of Rodrigo Daskal.

\textbf{Figure 13 (center)-} Boxer José María Gatica and Perón. \textit{Mundo Deportivo}, April 30, 1953. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

\textbf{Figure 14 (right)-} Perón conducts the ceremonial tip-off to a girls’ basketball game at the facilities for Club Atlético River Plate. \textit{River}, December 23, 1954, 1. Courtesy of the personal collection of Rodrigo Daskal.


Fútbol, Traditionalism, and Peronist Discourse

Perón was the first major politician to understand the potential of sports as a vehicle for social change. With the exception of Agustín Justo, who regularly attended fútbol matches, and facilitated loans for the construction of Argentina’s two iconic stadiums, La Bombonera and the Monumental, few presidents associated themselves with sports in any significant way.²³ Perón, on the other hand, believed that every Argentine should have the ability to participate in athletic competition and attend matches. During his decade in power, sports and social justice intertwined in an effort to include the popular class—especially workers and children—in the construction of the New

Argentina.²⁴ To this end, the Peronist state handpicked presidents of AFA and intervened at other governing bodies for sports. It also tasked various ministries with improving the health of its citizenry. Inspired by her book *La razón de mi vida*, the Labor Ministry organized the Eva Perón National Tournament for Workers in honor of the president’s wife.²⁵ Working-class men and women participated in various athletic events, such as basketball, marksmanship, swimming, track and field, and tennis.²⁶

Perón also wanted citizens to have a stake in sports-related reform initiatives. The state asked citizens to submit petitions to the Ministry for Technical Matters. Some requests were specific to a neighborhood or a club association, while others were broader in nature, including one suggestion that the government build Olympic-quality venues in each province in order to unite Argentina through sports.²⁷ Among the requests was one from Club Atlético Unión Güemes (Salta), which requested the government’s assistance with a land transfer that would allow the club to construct facilities for fencing and boxing, as well as seating stands for its fútbol venue.²⁸ Club Sport Colón also requested

---

²⁵ Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión de la Nación, *Revista de trabajo y prevision: educación física y cultura popular*, Ministerio de Asuntos Técnicos (February 1953), 135-137. Beyond sports, the Labor Ministry also developed cultural activities and christened art galleries in the name of Eva Perón
²⁶ Ibid., 137-138. Some events, however, were exclusively male, such as rugby, fútbol, and boxing.
²⁸ Letter to President Perón from the Club Atlético Unión Güemes, December, 1951. It is no coincidence that the club listed these sports in the requests. Perón was an amateur fencer and boxer as a young military cadet, and he had recently aided various clubs with fútbol-specific projects. To sweeten the appeal, the club’s letter hailed the President as a leader who “listens, suffers, and fights for his people, with all the strength of his soul and with all the passion of his masculine and criollo heart.”
federal assistance to obtain land for a sports complex and a swimming pool. The club argued that both projects were for the common good and the “development of sports.”

No project garnered more attention than the construction of Racing’s new stadium—a key venue for Argentina’s staging of the first Pan-American Games. In September of 1951, the club opened the impressive 100,000-seat “Presidente Juan Domingo Perón” Stadium. His finance minister, Ramón Cereijo, as well as Eva Perón’s close friend, Carlos Aloé, were among the club’s socios. Both men successfully lobbied for state funds necessary to complete the ambitious project. Federal and city governments provided a subsidy for three million pesos. This allowed Racing to start construction on the final phase of a project in development for many years. Accompanied by club officials, Perón inspected the new facility two days before the opening match.

In return, Racing praised Juan and Eva Perón for their “unconditional support” to the club, to sports, and to the nation in the months leading to the inauguration of the new facility. In a massive one hundred-page publication, the fan magazine Racing: Una auténtica voz racinguista thanked Perón, Aloé, and Cereijo. The publication also paid tribute to the Argentine athlete, who possessed a “coraje criollo” (criollo bravery). It wrote: “Just like in other sectors of international relations, the Argentine Republic

---

29 Letter to President Perón from the Sociedad Civil de Sports Club Colón, February 9, 1952.
occupies an indisputable position in sports. The protectors of the [national] colors obtained many legitimate triumphs over the years in the most diverse international fields and, above all, exhibited ethics and gentleman-like behavior...[they] give credit to the quality of Argentine sports.”

Even today, Racing supporters identify themselves with Peronism—a relationship that did not exist before the opening of the stadium in 1950.

The state made every effort to link its vision of social justice to sports. Aloé, who also served as editor of Mundo Deportivo, wrote that the “rich have their ‘weekends,’ their excursions or their sports, according to their means.” By contrast, he observed that “the masses, the people, the worker or the employee, do not possess such means.” Nevertheless, Aloé believed that workers likewise deserved to rest and to enjoy a moment of respite, in particular one that was within reach for all workers: fútbol.

Mundo Deportivo repeated the state’s view that sports and labor were the twin pillars of society. The magazine let its readers know that Perón would make work and athletic activities available to all citizens. Work and fútbol were, in its words, “the passion of our people”—Argentines who were “pure,” “descamisados,” “modest,” “humble,” “happy with a ball and a potrero,” and “proud of their race, fellow citizens, and leader.”

The success enjoyed by Mundo Deportivo demonstrated the Peronist state’s ability to usurp the hegemonic discourse established by El Gráfico in order to blend its own political lexicon with the idyllic imagery of pibes, potreros, and working-class sports.

34 Racing also earned the nickname “Sportivo Cereijo” for the many benefits received under the Perón government thanks to the Finance Minister.
enthusiasts, with elements of class warfare thrown in for good measure. This mixture produced a particular strain of nationalism, one that associated fútbol with a past reimagined by Peronism as an eternal struggle against oligarchic and foreign interests.

According to Aloé, no moral trait was more important for an Argentine athlete than his love for “la patria” (the nation).³⁷ Before the national team left for Europe to play England in 1951, Mundo Deportivo highlighted the words from Watson Hutton, who in 1933 hoped that criollo fútbol players would one day show the masters of the game in the British Isles how much Argentines had progressed.³⁸

**Fútbol as a Progressive Cultural Activity**

In the same way the Peronist state drew on traditionalist forms of nationalism to generate associations with fútbol, it also used athletics as an example of its progressive ideals. Argentina hosted several international tournaments and matches between 1950 and 1953. These competitions allowed Perón to showcase the modernity of the “New Argentina.” In various publications, state officials trumpeted the country’s status as a premier sports nation. Argentina was fairly well prepared to host major athletic spectacles during this time. Social legislation passed in 1949 provided workers with annual bonuses, paid vacations, retirement funds, and other financial benefits.³⁹ Combined with the massive migration patterns that only accelerated in the 1940s, a large urban population had the means and proximity to go to the cinemas, fútbol matches, the theatre, and boxing

---

matches. Although prices for these events doubled, or tripled, under Perón’s first term, the average salary for workers across Argentina saw a commensurate increase (table 1).

### Monthly Salaries for laborers, ticket prices for public entertainment, and approximate attendance figures during the first term for Perón, 1946-1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>$204</td>
<td>$187</td>
<td>$3,206,799 ($1.38)</td>
<td>$313,356 ($1.93)</td>
<td>$1,519,469 ($3.77)</td>
<td>$40,628,454 ($1.10)</td>
<td>$3,975,924 ($2.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>$287</td>
<td>$264</td>
<td>$2,074,899 ($1.56)</td>
<td>$509,004 ($2.71)</td>
<td>$1,664,859 ($3.89)</td>
<td>$41,692,518 ($1.39)</td>
<td>$3,849,293 ($3.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>$395</td>
<td>$361</td>
<td>$1,915,728 ($2.13)</td>
<td>$396,173 ($3.71)</td>
<td>$2,117,555 ($4.09)</td>
<td>$46,880,670 ($1.64)</td>
<td>$3,664,331 ($4.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>$515</td>
<td>$490</td>
<td>$2,104,190 ($2.53)</td>
<td>$369,689 ($4.82)</td>
<td>$2,153,703 ($5.86)</td>
<td>$53,803,861 ($2.02)</td>
<td>$4,358,010 ($5.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>$628</td>
<td>$594</td>
<td>$1,860,580 ($3.79)</td>
<td>$477,537 ($6.70)</td>
<td>$2,147,626 ($6.15)</td>
<td>$52,273,440 ($2.50)</td>
<td>$4,113,672 ($8.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>$670 (Jan-June)</td>
<td>$658 (Jan-June)</td>
<td>$1,905,799 ($4.07)</td>
<td>$564,457 ($11.42)</td>
<td>$2,422,687 ($6.70)</td>
<td>$55,157,305 ($2.56)</td>
<td>$4,117,091 ($9.28)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

40 After 1930, when global markets panicked and a military coup ushered a new age of Conservative rule, Argentina severely restricted immigration into the country. The rise of communist and syndicalist groups led the Argentine elite to blame the country’s ills on immigrants. Yet, a prosperous period before the Depression created a vibrant bourgeois consumer society centered in Buenos Aires. As the economy revitalized by the late 1930s, massive waves of people arrived from the provinces into Buenos Aires. Immigrants, on the other hand, remained mostly shut out of the country. Whereas 641,910 people entered Argentina in 1949, only 242,874 arrived in 1953. The net gain of immigrants drastically declined, from 157,195 to 29,551 over the same five-year period. See: “Boletín diario secreto: movimiento migratorio,” Ministerio de Asuntos Técnicos, N° 987, February 18, 1954, 1-2 and N° 156, September 25, 1950, 1-3.

41 In addition, in 1950 citizens would have paid the following prices for food and drinks: bread ($0.05/ kg.), beef ($0.12/ kg.), milk ($0.10/ liter), eggs ($1.53/ dozen), rice ($0.16/ kg.), coffee ($5.86/ kg.), yerba mate ($0.11/ kg.), wine ($0.16/ liter), pasta ($0.24/ kg.), and flour ($0.20/ kg.). See: “Índice del costo del nivel de la familia del peón industrial en la capital federal,” Dirección Nacional de Servicios Técnicos del Estado—Ministerio de Asuntos Técnicos, N°163, October 5, 1950, 1-8.
After an initial economic boom in the post-war era, the economy began to show signs of decline by 1950. Undeterred, the government organized tournaments across the country for citizens of all ages, male and female. It spared no expense in staging the inaugural 1950 FIBA (Fédération Internationale de Basketball) World Basketball Championships and the 1951 Pan-American Games. Both events would demonstrate Argentina’s level of progress and modernity as a fully developed nation. As part of its preparation to host the 1951 Pan-American Games, new sports structures like the 17 de Octubre racetrack in Buenos Aires (a direct reference to the events at the Plaza de Mayo that brought Peronism to power) opened to great fanfare.\footnote{\textit{“Eva Perón: llama viva de un pueblo de deportistas,”} Mundo Deportivo, December 25, 1952, 6-7. Mariano Ben Plotkin argued that by exalting the \textit{national} character of this day of celebration—as well as Worker’s Day on May 1\textsuperscript{st}—the government implicitly identified nationality itself with Peronism. See Plotkin, \textit{Mañana Es San Perón}, 78. The President often performed the opening tip-off at basketball matches, for another example see: \textit{Síntesis del deporte argentino} (Buenos Aires: Servicio Internacional Publicaciones Argentinas, 1952).} Of course, the centerpiece of Argentina’s hosting of the 1951 Pan American Games was the new “Presidente Perón” stadium, which hosted fútbol and track and field events.

The larger goal was to secure the hosting rights to the Olympic Games and the World Cup. For state officials and sports aficionados, hosting either event would place Argentina alongside developed countries like Great Britain, the United States, France, and Italy. Moreover, staging a World Cup would allow Argentina to join Brazil and Uruguay as South American host nations. To this end, government publications like
*Verdad* portrayed Buenos Aires as the “Sporting Athens of South America,” thanks to the “generous support of the Peronist government.”

Domestic and international tournaments also helped the Peronist state portray itself as an advocate for social justice. The state invited the masses to participate in events that served the greater good of the nation. Citing the collectivist and positive spirit of his policies, Peronist propaganda emphasized the state’s efforts in making athletics available to all citizens. To the chagrin of many middle-class porteños, attending sports events as a “right” under the banner of social justice really meant the invasion of working-class spectators in sports venues that, unlike fútbol stadiums, were traditionally part of middle class society. During the 1951 Pan-American Games, for example, Perón grew concerned about the cost of ticket prices and the visuals of empty seats at sports venues. Touting the right of the nation's "most humble" citizens to attend athletic events, the government distributed free tickets to the *popular* section of venues that hosted events with little following, such as cycling. In reality, the Sub-Secretary of Information wanted to avoid the narrative and visuals of empty stadiums. It quickly circulated a brochure entitled *Buenos Aires, Capital del Justicialismo* in honor of Perón’s commitment to providing free tickets to those who were less-privileged. This brochure serves as a good example of how the Peronist state often worries about foreign perceptions of Argentina.

---

45 *Campeón*, February 28, 1951, 1-3.
Soon after the Pan-American Games came to a close in 1951, a new wave of excitement surrounded the national fútbol team’s trip to the British Isles that same year. Outside of continental tournaments, the national team had not played in Europe since the 1930s. As a result, excitement and curiosity grew as Argentine players left for Europe. The press billed the match against England as another test between students and teachers—similar to how the press in the 1910s and 1920s characterized games against teams like Swindon Town and Motherwell. Sports publications emphasized the historical connections between both nations, describing the national team’s voyage as “(Alexander) Watson’s spiritual children” leaving for England.\(^46\)

By all accounts, Argentina performed well against England at Wembley stadium. After Argentina’s 1-2 loss, and its 1-0 victory over Ireland, the reaction in Buenos Aires was mixed. *Mundo Deportivo* described the loss to England as a demonstration that Argentine fútbol matched the level of English football.\(^47\) *El Gráfico* emphasized the technical quality of fútbol criollo but also praised the sportsmanship of the Argentine player.\(^48\) Not surprisingly, sports tabloids were more sensationalists in tone. *Campeón*, for example, billed the game as a battle that would likely see the English cheat in order to win.\(^49\) *La Cancha* accepted Argentina’s defeat in what it labeled as the “match of the


\(^{47}\) Marc Gaudichau, “Quedaron mano a mano el fútbol argentino y el británico,” *Mundo Deportivo*, May 17, 1951, 4-9.


\(^{49}\) “El match del siglo,” *Campeón*, May 9, 1951, 1 (and various other articles on pages 2-7). A list of matches between Argentine and British club teams appears in “Los equipos británicos en la Argentina,” *Campeón*, May 9, 1951, 8.
century”; however, it concluded that the classical English approach was “stale” compared to the criollo style.50 Papers had little to say about the victory over Ireland beyond acknowledging the superiority of the Argentine player over his Irish counterpart.

Upon the team’s arrival in Buenos Aires, a celebratory atmosphere awaited players and coaches. Papers labeled the returning players as conquering heroes.51 This encouraged AFA to schedule international matches at home. By staging a series of exhibition matches in Buenos Aires, the hope was that these encounters would impress FIFA officials as they considered possible sites of the 1962 World Cup, scheduled to take place in South America. The English FA arranged to play two matches in Buenos Aires in May of 1953. The Spanish fútbol association also agreed to host a match in December in 1952 and to send its national team to Buenos Aires in July of the following year. For Perón, these matches provided extra opportunities to highlight the successes of his government. Fútbol also offered the Peronist state an opportunity to host an English delegation at a time of ongoing trade and land disputes with the British government.

Although AFA rolled out the red carpet for the arrival of the English team, anti-British sentiment remained a part of public discourse. In a cartoon in Caras y Caretas, the illustrator depicts the reversal of fortune in beef exports between 1913 and 1953.

Whereas in the past Argentina’s best beef products went to British capitalists, now in

1953 Argentina held the upper hand. The cartoon uses the British icon John Bull as the symbol of capitalist exploitation. A new character emerges that represents the people, Juan Pueblo (who looks like Perón and shares the same initials—figure 17). Thus, under Perón the people enjoy their own harvest.

**Figure 17**—“De fuera vendrá quien lo tuyo se comerá (1913); De fuera vendrá quien lo que te sobre se llevará (1952),” *Caras y Caretas*, August 1952, 54-55.Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Museo Evita.

In the cartoon, the year is 1913 and John Bull tells “Paisano”—the poor Argentine rural worker—that he “should be proud of your country; it produces very cheap and delicious meat.” Paisano responds that those “advantages” are leaving Argentines bone dry. In the second image, the roles are reversed. Paisano is nowhere to be found; instead, “Juan Pueblo”—a man who looks like Perón and shares the same initials—is feasting at the table. Pueblo tells John Bull that “we are very proud of our country; it produces very cheap and delicious meat. Bull, on the other hand, humbly asks his “dear friend” Pueblo that when he finishes eating well, if he would be so kind to sell him what is left over.

Despite the overt criticism of British policies, government and AFA officials welcomed the English football delegation with full honors. Visiting players practiced at the spacious Hindú Club in the provincial town of Don Torcuato.\(^52\) AFA released an

---

\(^{52}\) An image of the English practice session, as well as other images of special activities hosted by AFA, can be found in the photographic collection “Visita ‘The Football Association’ Mayo 1953” located in the Biblioteca de la Asociación del Fútbol Argentino.
official game-day brochure that included a list of all of the national team’s previous matches, as well as a message of goodwill from Perón. The English delegation met with key Peronist allies, such as the Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT), the largest labor syndicate in the country. Members also laid a wreath at a memorial for Evita at the CGT headquarters. On the day of the match, Perón sat in a special viewing stand at the Monumental Stadium alongside English fútbol official Sir Stanley Rous (who would become FIFA president). Perón greeted each member of the English national team in a show of goodwill that allowed him to serve as the master of ceremonies (figures 18-20).

Figure 18 (top left)- English players in Buenos Aires pose with a newspaper that exclaims: “Welcome Maestros.” Courtesy of the Biblioteca de la Asociación del Fútbol Argentino.
Figure 19 (bottom left)- Perón, flanked by the head of the English Football Association and AFA President Valentín Suárez, greets English players before the first match held at River Plate’s stadium (“Del match Argentina v. Inglaterra 14-5-53.” Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación.
Figure 20 (right)- English football officials lay wreath for Eva Perón at the CGT (Consejo General de Trabajadores) headquarters, a symbolic gesture towards the powerful labor union tied to Peronism. Courtesy of the Biblioteca de la Asociación del Fútbol Argentino.

53 Asociación del Fútbol Argentino partidos con The Football Association, May 1953, 2.
The publication of these images achieved the objective at hand: to demonstrate Perón’s passion for fútbol and for the national team. Photographs also furthered the populist image of the president as just another hincha. More important, these international exhibitions were a chance to impress English officials with influence at FIFA. As the vote for the 1962 World Cup approached, AFA ramped up its efforts to secure the hosting rights. It published an attractive booklet entitled *El fútbol argentino* for visiting FIFA delegates touring the country and inspecting fútbol facilities. Published in Spanish, English, French, and German, the book highlighted Argentina’s cosmopolitanism, its modern fútbol stadiums, an efficient transportation system, a rich legacy of fútbol clubs, and the country’s natural beauty. Included were various images of Perón at the 1953 match against England as a sign of the state’s commitment to hosting the tournament.  

---

*Figure 21*- Advertisement in *Mundo Deportivo*, May 26, 1949 that highlights the role of the Peronist state in supporting athletics, as evidenced male and female “champions” in various sports. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

---

54 *El fútbol argentino* (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1955?).
Perón also promoted athletic initiatives for women and children as examples of the progressive social policies that placed Argentina on par with other modern and developed nations (figure 21). A key feature of the Peronist state’s second five-year plan, or quinquenal, was to promote physical education for girls and boys. Specific references to the “Evita” youth fútbol tournaments tied the popularity of the sport to the state’s vision for the nation’s youth.

The state’s physical education initiatives were in line with liberal-progressive views from the early twentieth century about sports and medicine. Before 1946, access to first-rate athletic facilities and playing equipment eluded Argentina’s poorest citizens. As a result, working-class children rarely played tennis, rugby, polo, or fencing. These sports were the privilege of upper and middle sectors of society because they required space, land, and in some cases membership into affluent private clubs. Instead, children in poor neighborhoods flocked to fútbol because it only required enough space in the potreros to kick a ball through markers that served as goals. Hoping to use the sport’s popularity to promote health initiatives, the ministry of education, along with AFA, sponsored a secondary school fútbol tournament in the early 1940s. In 1945, 418 teams participated in 69 matches during the month of July. Over six thousand children between the ages of 12 and 14 took part in matches between schools.55

The secondary school tournaments of the early 1940s encouraged the Peronist government to capitalize on their popularity and develop its own youth tournaments. The inaugural *Campeonato Infantil de Fútbol Doña María Eva Duarte de Perón* attracted tens of thousands of young boys across the country in December of 1948. The tournament allowed the state to register boys for health exams and provide free screenings—a service traditionally out of reach for the poorest families. The state released official announcements for the tournament and expected prominent government officials to attend as honorary dignitaries. State-controlled publications and radio stations ran advertisements for the tournament during the end of the school year and the summer months. Images of children smiling, waving, sporting leather fútbol balls and wearing crisp uniforms conveyed a healthy and positive experience for prospective boys and their parents (*figures 22-23*).

---

56 Rodríguez, “El deporte como política de estado (periodo 1945-1955).”
57 Rein, “‘El Primer Deportista’: The Political Use and Abuse of Sport in Peronist Argentina,” 64.
58 “Nuevos concursos de juegos infantiles Evita realizará el próximo domingo la intendencia,” *Intendencia Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, Informativo Nº 590, July 28, 1955. For petitions requesting the presence of government officials, such as Dr. Raúl Mende (who was instrumental in developing the state’s health initiatives based on *justicialismo*), see Fundación Eva Perón, Letter and Expediente Nº 3777, Informe Nº 4329, August 14-December 23, 1953. Buenos Aires Mayor Bernardo Gago also conducted a tour of various neighborhoods in Buenos Aires to witness various youth matches, see “Efectuó el intendiente una visita a los concursos de juegos infantiles,” *Intendencia Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, Informativo Nº 584, July 24, 1955.
59 *Ahora*, October 7, 1948, 1.
Figure 22 (top left)- Cover to Ahora (October 7, 1948) celebrates the world’s first youth soccer tournament. Courtesy of the Biblioteca de Museo Evita.

Figure 23 (top right)- 1949 advertisement for the inaugural “Evita” youth fútbol tournament. Courtesy of the Biblioteca de Museo Evita.

Figure 24 (center)- Eva Perón greets participants at the opening ceremony of the “Campeonato de Fútbol Infantil ‘Evita’” at River Plate’s stadium, February 5, 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación.

Figure 25 (bottom left)- “La señora Eva María Duarte de Perón da un puntapié inicial del partido del campeonato argentino de fútbol infantil ‘Evita’,” February 21, 1951 (Eva Duarte de Perón performs the ceremonial kick-off for the youth tournaments of 1951). Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación.

Figure 26 (bottom right)- “Inauguración del campeonato infantil Evita en River Plate 1953,” February 3, 1953. Perón is wearing a black armband in memory of his recently deceased wife as he performs the ceremonial kick-off for the youth tournaments of 1953. Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación.
Although their presence at professional fútbol matches was not a regular affair, Juan and Eva Perón made every effort to perform the ceremonial kickoff at the opening and closing matches of athletic events for children (figures 24-26). The popularity of the annual “Evita” youth tournament soon led to a new competition for teenagers that began in 1952: *El Torneo Juvenil “Juan Perón.”* This event allowed the president to capitalize on the popularity of his recently deceased wife to carve his own space in youth athletics.

The state’s outreach to women and children using fútbol and other sports was certainly progressive for its time. It reinforced a strong nationalist discourse present in school textbooks. Early-reader books glorified the president and first lady and were seeped in nationalist rhetoric. Perón, for example, appears as the “conductor” of the nation, or the “forger” of the New Argentina. Textbooks also celebrated key events in the Peronist movement. They included passages about “our” Malvinas, stolen by the English but “always Argentine.” References to the “Evita” youth fútbol tournaments became more frequent after her death in 1952, when Eva began appearing in the first pages of books—a space usually reserved for the figure of the mother (figures 27-28). These textbooks asked children to honor their parents and the sacrifices made by senior

---


citizens.\textsuperscript{62} Eva’s book, \textit{La razón de mi vida}, also became compulsory reading for students. In short, textbooks linked public education to the goals of the quinquenal.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure27}
\caption{Figure 27 (left)- Traditionally the mother is the first figure to appear in reading textbooks. Eva either took that spot, or shared it with the mother, in textbooks from the 1950. Ángela Gutiérrez Bueno, \textit{Privilegiados} (Buenos Aires: Editorial Kapelusz, 1953), 2-3. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Museo Evita.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure28}
\caption{Figure 28 (right)- “Fútbol” and “Campeonato Infantil” are two entries from a 1955 publication aimed at young readers, encouraging families to enroll their young boys in the Evita Youth Fútbol tournaments. Lía Casas de Branchini, \textit{Hadas buenas} (Buenos Aires: Editorial Luis Lasserre, 1955), 38-39. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Museo Evita.}
\end{figure}

Fútbol and Film in the Peronist State

The imagery found in advertisements for the Evita youth tournaments built upon hit movies of the time, such as \textit{Pelota de trapo} (Torres Rios, 1948), which Borocotó wrote based on his series “Del diario de Comeuñas.” In the film, a group of young boys in an outlying barrio of Buenos Aires forms the Sacachispas club. For much of the first half of the film, the main point of discussion among them is their dream of owning a

\textsuperscript{62} The best scholarship on Peronist use of textbooks is found in Rein, \textit{Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946-1962}, chap. 3.; Plotkin, \textit{Mañana Es San Perón}, chap. 5–6.
leather ball and becoming the next “crack” player. The image of a young child holding aloft a leather ball in an advertisement for the Evita youth tournaments borrows a scene from Pelota de trapo, when the children, who each day play with a ball made of rags (hence the title of the film), marvel at a leather soccer ball displayed in a store window.

Pelota de trapo is one of several fútbol films in the Peronist era that reinforced the mythic narratives established by El Gráfico in the 1930s and 1940s. Pablo Alabarces argues that the series of fútbol films that began with Pelota de trapo created a new, populist mythology for the foundation of the nation. Comeuñas is more than a simple boy and leader of the neighborhood Sacachispas club. He is a pibe: the child who represents the most humble and genuine aspects of the nation. The soul of the nation thus lies squarely in the barrios and among the criollo children who play in the potreros, according to Alabarces. A similar association between “Argentineanness” and the poor barrios of the city is found in Con los mismos colores (Torres Rios, 1949). In both films, young boys find salvation in fútbol because their talent is the door to a more secure financial future for themselves, and especially their mothers. Accentuating the association with a popular sport like fútbol and social ascendency is the appearance of several notable players in the film, such as Mario Boyé, Alfredo Di Stéfano, and Norberto Méndez.

Other films focused on a different aspect of myth making and fútbol. The 1950 film Escuela de campeones (Pappier, 1950) highlights the contributions of Scotsman

---

63 Leopoldo Torres Ríos, Pelota de trapo, DVD, Drama, 1948.
64 Alabarces, Fútbol y patria, 73–74. The pibe ultimately comes to represent the nation in a visual manner as the mascot of the 1978 World Cup held in Argentina. The design used for this World Cup is that of a young gaucho, thus imbuing the pibe with a folkloric sensibility. With fussy hair, and a devious smile, he remains an adorable niño travieso (a rambunctious kid) that any parent could relate to.
65 Carlos Torres Ríos, Con los mismos colores, 1949.
Alexander Watson Hutton to the nation by taking a fair share of liberties with his actual story. In the film, Watson Hutton embraces an Argentine identity once he sets foot in Buenos Aires. By professing his love for Argentina, as well as teaching the children of his adopted homeland, he becomes criollo. British school officials turn their back on Watson Hutton after a boy dies in a football match, but local Argentines plead with the Scottish educator to teach them this new sport. By the end of the film, his team, the famous Alumni Athletic Club, is no longer the last English team in Argentine fútbol history; Alumni is now an “example of Argentine sports” and the first criollo team.66

*Escuela de campeones* does not ignore the British roots of Argentine fútbol; instead, the film seeks to appropriate Watson Hutton and include him in the birth of fútbol criollo. To drive the point home, the man in the film who provides the Scottish educator with the necessary support to begin teaching football is the Liberal thinker, educator, and president Domingo Sarmiento. By portraying Watson Hutton as a hero of the nation for his contribution of teaching football, and intertwining Scottish and Argentine cultures, *Escuela de campeones* also contributes to the whitening of national identity. When he first arrives from Scotland, Watson Hutton first encounters members of society who are not quintessentially Argentine, and all portrayed in caricatures: black female servants prone to anger and hitting children, simpleton and buffoonish gauchos, exceedingly disciplinarian police officers, and stuffy English aristocrats wary of this new arrival from Scotland.67 These characters provide a contrast with the more educated

---

67 Ibid.
leaders of society, like Sarmiento, who will eventually encourage Watson Hutton in his goal of educating the next generation of Argentines through sports. Towards the end of the film, local leaders come to fully trust in Watson Hutton, who tells his students: “Usted lleva dos cosas en la cabeza: el sombrero y la picardía criolla” (“You carry two things on your head: a hat and the crillo craftiness”). Watson Hutton thus comes to understand the Argentine people and shows them the key to their success on the playing field: their criollo identity. He is a Moses-like figure who carries the sport only so far, before a new generation of players will come to use their “picardía criolla” to take Argentina to the promised land of athletic success.

Education also plays a significant role in the mythology surrounding fútbol and nation in the film El cura Lorenzo (Vatteone, 1954). Here, the protagonist who teaches the young pibes of the barrio is a cura, or priest: Lorenzo Massa. For Lorenzo, the young pibes from the nearby conventillos (housing settlement) in the neighborhood of Almagro embody the spirit of the nation. In his zeal to save the souls of the children, Lorenzo endures taunts, mistrust, and even an assault from local ruffians. Undeterred, he uses fútbol to teach children about the values that will serve them and (implicitly) the nation well into the future. The thugs, on the other hand, represent the undesirable traits of society. They allow their vices—drinking, dancing, gambling, fighting, and cursing—to control their lives. By the end of the film, Lorenzo becomes a hero. Even the leader of the street thugs comes to protect the priest. Single mothers thank him for his patience with their children (who he constantly labels as “innocent” in God’s eye). When the parents of
a rival fútbol team, comprised of elite children, refuse to let their children play against the boys from Almagro, Lorenzo steps in and defends the honor of his adopted barrio.68

Peronist-era fútbol films were different from those of the 1930s, such as Los tres berretines and El cañonero de Giles. While all of these films revealed class differences, films produced during the Peronist era were pedagogical in tone. Whereas earlier films treated fútbol as a national passion and popular form of entertainment, fútbol films of the late 1940s and early 1950s dealt with serious topics that allowed writers and directors to highlight the virtues central to national identity.69

Perhaps the most heavy-handed film of this era is El hijo del crack (Torre Nilsson and Torres Rios, 1953), which reunites the creative team behind Pelota de trapo. The main character in this film, Héctor “Balazo” López, breaks the mold of past protagonists whose talent on the fútbol field allowed them to live better lives. “Balazo” is a man down on his luck. His wife abandoned him and their young son years ago and his finances are almost depleted. As a result, “Balazo” has lost his passion for fútbol. His dire situation makes him consider desperate measures, including bribes from men who want him to miss open shots and throw a game for gambling purposes.

Desperate, “Balazo” turns to his estranged wife, María, who belongs to the upper crust of society. He leaves their son Mario to live with her because of the opportunities María’s family can provide the young boy. It is a difficult situation for father and son. Mario idolizes his father and misses playing on the streets of his old neighborhood.

68 Augusto César Vatteone, El cura Lorenzo, DVD, Drama, Biography, 1954.
69 Outside of fútbol films, Clara Kriger also sees Peronist films as apolitical and concerned with reinforcing certain values in line with the state’s ideas of social justice; see: Kriger, Cine y peronismo, 250–251.
“Balazo” is also upset at María’s continued disinterest in being a mother, preferring to live the socialite life. Thus, the film enforces the conservative gender views of the Peronist state that a woman’s true service to the nation resides as a homemaker. The film also paints an unflattering picture of the elite as self-absorbed, which aligns with Peronism’s anti-oligarchy discourse.

*El hijo del crack* emphasizes the values of family, duty, and honor. “Balazo” eventually reconciles with Maria. His sacrifices also provide him with one final shot at resurrecting his career. Unbeknownst to many, however, “Balazo” is seriously ill. With his wife and his son in the stands, he offers the ultimate sacrifice for his true passions in life: his family and fútbol. In an act of bravery, “Balazo” dies shortly after scoring in a championship game, thereby reconciling him with the hinchas who once turned on him.70

Peronist-era fútbol movies were not uniform, however. Historian Clara Kriger concedes that many films of the 1940s and 1950s supported Perón’s ideas of social justice. On the other hand, she also shows how Argentine cinema lacked a “precise and established aesthetic norm” that was typical across all forms of art. Although the Peronist state’s involvement in cinema was palpable according to Kriger, intervention in the film industry was more about sterilizing content than outright controlling the vision of film directors. The government offered financial and moral support to filmmakers in exchange for their tolerance toward state supervision of films, which Kriger believes is hardly a case of the film industry serving at the behest of state propaganda officials.71

---

71 Kriger, *Cine y peronismo*, 17–19.
Fútbol films bear out Kriger’s conclusion. Productions like *Pelota de trapo* and *El cura Lorenzo* echoed discursive elements of Peronism, but these films did not possess political overtones. Moreover, members of the elite, such as María’s family in *El hijo del crack*, or Watson Hutton in *Escuela de campeones*, find redemption when they help the less fortunate. In the latter case, foreigners also become honorable as they fully integrate with criollo society.

One film made little pretense about educating its audience. Like previous films that celebrated the popular appeal of fútbol, *El hincha* (Romero, 1951) is an homage to the hinchada and to daily life in Buenos Aires. Written by tango lyricist Enrique Santos Discépolo, the film equates fútbol with romance, love, pain, and even religiosity in melodramatic terms easily found in tango music. *El hincha* is the quintessential film about fútbol in the early 1950s. Fans throw projectiles from the stands, fights breakout between rivals, authority figures are depicted as either immoral or corrupted by money, fútbol is often compared to war (and love), women are relegated to supportive roles, and loyalty to a club is the greatest example of a man’s devotion—second to his love for his mother.

Unlike most films of this genre, *El hincha* is the product of an artist who was, in fact, openly Peronist. This is a populist film where the working class barrio and local club team are important central characters. Outsiders, especially affluent club directors, are depicted as morally vacuous and only concerned with greed. These rich interlopers

---

73 Ernesto Ziperstein’s *Tango y fútbol* contains a comprehensive collection of tango songs written about fútbol. While most tango lyrics praised the skills of a star player, or a particular team, over a dozen songs used poetry and metaphors to equate fútbol with love.
represent all that is wrong with fútbol, whereas Ñato, the central protagonist, represents the everyman. He sees sport as a vehicle for deep expressions of love, as well as for anger at social injustice. Played by Discépolo with an overboard lust for fútbol, Ñato never abandons his friends, his neighborhood, his family, and above all the true love his life: Victoria Fóbal Club (much to the chagrin of his long-suffering fiancée).

The fútbol films of the Peronist era reflect the dual discourse of the state. On the one hand, they reinforce the values central to Peronist definitions of national identity. The working class characters are the heroes of these films. Protagonists all show loyalty, dedication to family, and selflessness that the oligarchy lacks. The heart of the nation does not lie in the center of the city; in El hincha, Buenos Aires is a site for decadence and corruption. Rather, the soul of the nation resides in the outlying barrios of the city and other remote areas. Much like Borocotó’s writings in El Gráfico, pibes and potreros represent what is best about Argentina. Pelota de trapo drives this point home by contrasting the criollismo of the children in contrast to their immigrant parents’ inability, or disinterest, in becoming Argentine. The subtle subtext, of course, is that by playing fútbol these children have become Argentine. Even Watson Hutton becomes criollo by teaching children the sport of football and by emphasizing to them their “natural picardía” as a key to success.

On the other hand, these films appeal to a certain level of modernity and cosmopolitanism as well. Most of these films are well-produced and include the participation of authentic “crack” players in cameo roles in order to provide these movies authenticity. The centrality of education in El cura Lorenzo and Escuela de campeones
also portrays sport as a civilizing tool, a concept that had yet to disappear from fútbol discourse. Europe also falls outside of any criticisms these films might have had. Watson Hutton is a hero to the nation. Players like Ñato, or “Balazo”’s estranged wife Maria, leave for Europe seeking better opportunities for themselves. Their decision to leave implies that their situation is worse if they remain in Argentina. As a result, fútbol films in the Peronist era embody the often-contradictory elements of Peronist discourse, even if these movies were never meant to be political.

**Criticism and the Limits of Peronist Intervention in Fútbol**

The state’s desire to forge strong relationships with fútbol, athletes, and the international sports community gave critics of the regime opportunities to voice their concerns. One criticism was that the staging of the 1951 Pan-American Games mirrored Fascist Italy’s hosting of the 1934 World Cup and the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany. In addition, anti-Peronists pointed to the state’s organization of youth tournaments as examples of indoctrination. Similarly, the visuals on display at the annual “Fiesta de la Educación Física,” which celebrated the state’s physical education programs in public schools, reminded critics of the staging techniques seen in Fascist youth ceremonies. Furthermore, the cult of personality around Perón rankled opponents. As the regime created thousands of new schools, provided a greater access to education to Argentina’s poor, and organized tournaments for children, those who began to see themselves as

75 For images of this festival, see “Fiesta de la juventud,” *El Gráfico*, November 24, 1950, 37.
middle-class grew increasingly unhappy with a Peronist state bent on disrupting the social hierarchy and brainwashing children.

Criticisms also dealt with the increasing authoritarianism of the regime in the cultural arena. The Peronist state wielded intervention—particularly in the second quinquenandal—as an effective instrument towards realizing its goal of greater social justice. State control of athletic organizations, such as its appointment of AFA presidents, bothered many fans due to the autonomy that these governing bodies had always enjoyed.

A more direct intervention occurred with the state’s bid to host the 1954 Olympic Games and the 1962 World Cup. The government restructured varying sport entities in order to streamline athletic initiatives. The most noteworthy case involved the merger between the CAD (Confederación Argentina Deportiva, or Argentine Sports Confederation) and the COA (Comité Olímpico Argentino, or Argentine Olympic Committee) into CADCOA. Soon after the merger took place in 1947, CADCOA helped secure the 1950 FIBA World Basketball Championships and the 1951 Pan-American Games. Argentina’s resounding success in both of these tournaments—even

---

76 The Peronist state was by no means the first to intervene in Olympic affairs. In 1908, President José Figueroa Alcorta provided explicit instructions on forming an Argentina Olympic team. He directed the Sociedad Sportiva Argentina, a private sports club with roots in equestrian sports, to organize a national squad of athletes to compete in the 1908 London Olympic Games. While Sportiva failed to organize a full Olympic squad in 1908 and 1912, the Argentine upper class and government officials increasingly attached importance to sport as a symbol of modernity and cosmopolitanism. See César Torres, “Tribulations and Achievements: The Early History of Olympism in Argentina,” in Sport in Latin American Society:Past and Present, ed. J. A. Mangan and Lamartine Pereira da Costa (Portland, OR: F. Cass, 2002), 67–69, 72.

77 Rein, “‘El Primer Deportista’: The Political Use and Abuse of Sport in Peronist Argentina,” 56. CADCOA also organized national tournaments, such as the Campeonato Deportivo de la República, an Olympics of sorts that would attract athletes across all of Argentina. See Departamento de Prensa, “Campeonato deportivo de la república,” Confederación Argentina de Deportes-Comité Olímpico Argentino, July 27, 1955.

78 Rodríguez, “El deporte como política de estado (periodo 1945-1955).”
topping the medal chart at the Pan-American Games—strengthened its case to as a viable venue for larger tournaments. Unfortunately for Argentina, the Olympic committee held its vote for the 1956 Summer Games in 1949 and was not able to assess Argentina’s ability to host the FIBA Championship and Pan-American Games. Buenos Aires lost the hosting rights for the 1956 Olympics to Melbourne by one vote in the final round.79

The second quinquenal was also explicit in how the government would intervene in athletics.80 Following the model of CADCOA, the state would organize sports at the national level. Teams would receive economic support through credit and subsidies, athletes would receive medical assistance, and the Ministry of Education would assemble a body of medical and instructional experts for every sport.81 If the second quinquenal tasked the federal government with providing guidelines for athletic initiatives, the actual execution of these plans was largely left to local and provincial government. For example, the Juan Domingo Perón sports specialization school in Buenos Aires conducted technical training for coaches—mostly for fútbol—and graduated 140 participants in 1955. At the ceremony, Cultural Affairs Secretary Agustín Obregón stated that the diplomas not only reflected the goals of the second quinquenal, but they were also essential “for the general good and culture of the people.”82

The most serious accusations were that state funds went towards pet projects for Peronist officials. The most vivid example was the construction of Racing’s “Presidente

82 Intendencia Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires “Recibieron sus diplomas los nuevos técnicos deportivos”, Informativo 578 (July 22, 1955).
Juan Domingo Perón” Stadium. The structure earned Racing the nickname “Sportivo Cereijo” in reference to the government official who pulled the strings that facilitated the stadium’s construction.\footnote{Duke and Crolley, “Fútbol, Politicians and the People: Populism and Politics in Argentina,” 104; Rein, “‘El Primer Deportista’: The Political Use and Abuse of Sport in Peronist Argentina,” 58. The other accusation was that Cereijo helped minimize the exodus of Racing players during the 1948 strike—leading to three consecutive league titles.} Still, many athletes and club officials came under criticism for their close association with the state and the perks they received from Peronist officials.

The Peronist state faced occasional limits to its ability to influence sports, especially fútbol. In April of 1948, professional fútbol players—perhaps inspired by the state’s support of labor unions—demanded a greater portion of earnings from ticket sales. They not only wanted to earn their fair share of what had become a lucrative business, but they also desired the rights and benefits other workers enjoyed. Club directors initially refused their players’ demands. Instead, these officials suggested a salary cap to prevent any star athlete from jeopardizing the finances of non-profit club associations. The intransigent position of club officials prompted players to call for a labor stoppage that would put an end to the 1948 season.

This was not the first time that players went on strike. In 1931, fútbol players also demanded a fixed salary and recognition as professional employees of their clubs.\footnote{Martínez and Frydenberg, “De la huelga nace el fútbol profesional (Interview with Julio Frydenberg).”} The 1931 work stoppage produced its desired effect. Rather than threatening the health of clubs, the professionalization of fútbol protected the earnings of player and led to a decade of explosive growth in club memberships and ticket sales. Now, in 1948, players hoped that a similar action would ensure financial security, namely through a minimum
wage guarantee. Because the government of Juan Perón earned its political support from labor unions, and the president was a self-avowed sports enthusiast, players believed that the government would support these popular athletes.

The 1948 players strike left the Peronist state exposed to the difficulties of balancing its rhetoric of social justice with the benefits of establishing close relationships with club officials. On the one hand, it would have been easy for Perón to side with popular players against “fat cat” club directors. Many of these officials, however, were Peronist sympathizers, or at the very least appreciative of the state’s support for athletics. Left without a clear option, the Peronist state took a laissez-faire approach towards a strike that threatened the financial health of the nation’s most popular sport. The standoff was temporarily resolved when cabinet minister, and AFA President, Oscar Nicolini—a close confident of the first lady Eva Perón—intervened. Nicolini extracted concessions from both sides; players would end their strike and club officials would commit to improving financial compensation for players.85

Players felt cheated as the 1948 season reached its conclusion. Club directors—as they had done for many years—were slow in implementing the salary reforms agreed upon in the April accord. Players around the league reacted by silently protesting on the fútbol field. On the final Sunday in October, they sat in silent protest during the first minute of matches. Their actions earned the support of fans in attendance, who were not likely to side with club officials.86 A week later, players officially went on strike.

86 “El público ya empezó a silbar,” Campeón, November 2, 1948, 5.
The damage to professional fútbol was severe on several levels. First, the strike produced the first prolonged suspension of the league, which lasted until April of the following year. Second, when club officials eventually met the demands of their employees, their acquiescence did not halt the migration of players to other leagues.87 “Cracks” like Alfredo Di Stéfano, Adolfo Perdenera, and Néstor Rossi left Argentina and signed lucrative contracts in Colombia and, for some, later in Europe. Fifty-seven Argentine players in all joined an exodus that brought to an end what some have called the “golden age” of Argentine fútbol.

Third, the prolonged strike revealed an inability by the Peronist state to successfully intervene in professional fútbol—even when the government handpicked the presidents of AFA. The Peronist government was unable to dictate matters to players who were wildly popular, nor to club officials who controlled club associations with tens of thousands of members. These club directors were more concerned with their personal standing and the future of their clubs than they were with acquiescing to demands from the state that ran contrary to their own interests. Although some club officials, like River Plate’s Antonio Liberti and Racing’s Carlos Pailot, sought close ties to the state, most club officials retained the non-political nature of these non-profit civic associations.

**Conclusion**

Although Argentina failed to secure the Olympics and the World Cup, the Peronist state’s policies towards athletics and physical education were largely successful.

---

State-initiatives expanded participation across social classes, Argentine athletes excelled on the international stage, and sports ultimately helped Perón’s image among the masses. Perón used his political capital and popular support to enhance an existing love affair between Argentines and spectator sports. He enjoyed posing with famous athletes, and Peronist news outlets like Mundo Deportivo reminded readers that the president was also a sportsman. As a former boxer, basketball player, and fencer, it was in sports other than fútbol that Perón seemed most at ease and willing to attend events. Even when Racing opened the new “Juan Perón” Stadium in 1950, Perón was not in attendance, deciding instead to visit a few days earlier. Perhaps distancing himself from the disastrous fútbol players’ strike of 1948-1949, Perón found secondary sports a more favorable terrain—especially with the power that club presidents yielded in professional fútbol. But it was his support for amateur athletics among women and children that became the greatest legacy of the Peronist age in sports.

Political events in late 1955 ultimately doomed Argentina’s chances to host the 1962 World Cup. Perón became embroiled in a dispute with the Catholic Church. Rumors swirled of political oppression by the Peronist state towards dissidents and critics of the government. After an initial attempt to oust Perón in June of 1955, a military coup finally removed the President from power in September. Perón fled into exile in Paraguay, then Panama, before settling in Spain. He would not return to Argentina until

---

88 Rein, “‘El Primer Deportista’: The Political Use and Abuse of Sport in Peronist Argentina,” 73. Also see: Rodríguez, “El deporte como política de estado (periodo 1945-1955).”
1973. The Revolución Libertadora (the Liberating Revolution) vowed to restore order and stability to the country, stem the tide of inflation that had affected the country for years, and recognize the vital role of the Church. After a brief period of moderate reform, anti-Peronist military leaders hardened their approach and proscribed Peronism. In light of the recent turmoil, FIFA committee members questioned Argentina’s ability to host the World Cup. The tense and uncertain political climate of Argentina offered no assurances of a peaceful spectacle. The new military government and AFA nonetheless pressed forward with Argentina’s World Cup bid, hosting an exhibition match against Italy in June of 1956—the same month FIFA would award the 1962 tournament. The effort was to no avail; Argentina lost the hosting rights to Chile by securing only a quarter of the votes.90


“The disaster in Sweden!” This was the public’s reaction in Argentina to the national team’s poor performance at the 1958 World Cup, punctuated by an embarrassing 1-6 loss to a previously unheralded Czechoslovakian team. For sports writer Osvaldo Ardizzone this exclamation demonstrated the dramatic sense by which Argentines live their lives. Reflecting on that tournament seventeen years later, Ardizzone saw the national team’s performance as a turning point. Before Sweden, fans boasted that Argentina would run circles around its European opponents. Like a Greek tragedy, however, the national team arrived at Ezeiza airport and faced a hostile crowd after losing to Czechoslovakia by five goals—the worst loss in Argentina’s history.¹ Some in the crowd expressed their embarrassment by spitting, throwing coins, hurling insults, or mocking the delegation. For Ardizzone, 1958 began a pattern that would repeat every four years. Each time a World Cup tournament approached, fans hoped and dreamed of winning a championship.² And after each ignominious early exit, the public renewed its

¹ A full list of scores for the national team, up to and beyond the 1958 World Cup, can be found in: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, Cien años con el fútbol (São Paolo: Manrique Zago Ediciones, 1991), 230–235.
² Except for 1970, when Argentina did not even qualify for the World Cup tournament in Mexico—a fact that Ardizzone wants to forget in his article.
“mourning” for the quality of its fútbol. He concluded that such was the drama of the Argentine people.3

More than a singular moment of failure for the national team, this chapter argues that the public reaction at Ezeiza airport was the culmination of a series of problems that raised concerns about the direction of the country. Sports journalists attributed the multiple “crises” in fútbol to the loss of morals and ethical behavior in the sport and society in general.

These perceptions reflected a widespread anxiety over the tense political climate in the post-Peronist era. After removing Perón from power in September of 1955, the leaders of the Revolución Libertadora initially promised that there would be “neither victors nor losers.” Yet, after hard-line military officers consolidated their power in November of 1955, the provisional government shifted to an aggressive agenda primarily focused on eliminating any vestiges of the Peronist regime. Intellectuals, artists, and conservatives—typically from the well-educated and professional middle class—supported this policy for disparate reasons, including Perón’s favoritism for the working class, the corruption and excesses of state officials, Peronism’s supposed betrayal of democratic systems, and state control over cultural production.4 In short, the aim was to scrub Peronism from society.

---

4 One of the key publications produced by anti-Peronist intellectuals was Imago Mundi. It described Peronism as “a state of collective madness” after its fall in 1955; its writers considered the movement as a “extraneous, perverse, and passing phenomenon”; see: Oscar Terán, Nuestros años sesentas: La formación de la nueva izquierda intelectual en la Argentina, 1956-1966 (Buenos Aires: Puntosur Editores, 1991), 39.
Other sectors of the middle class, however, sided with workers and their demands for social justice. They believed that it was a moral obligation of the state and its people to address social inequality.\(^5\) If Perón proved to be a flawed leader, some anti-Peronists nonetheless believed that his idea of a just society, where every Argentine reaps the benefits of production, remained a noble goal. They pointed to the tense political climate, which had unfortunately turned repressive, punctuated by the military state’s execution of six officers who attempted a resurrection in June of 1956. Some critics of the regime found hope for democratic reform in the candidacy of Arturo Frondizi, a leader of the Radical Party whose conciliatory tone appealed to workers and some conservative sectors of society. Unfortunately for Frondizi, he soon discovered that it was difficult to overcome the Peronist-Anti-Peronist divide.\(^6\)

In the same way as citizens asked “What now?” after the 1955 coup, many wondered about the direction of fútbol in this age of transition. The decline in attendance, the growing debt incurred by clubs, the drop in scoring averages, the growing influence of European tactics and training, and the escalating disorders at stadiums all generated heated debates. As the years passed, it proved easier for club officials to disassociate themselves from Peronism—thus avoiding a prolonged state intervention—than to seriously address the mounting concerns of fans. This negligence bothered journalists and fans, many of who believed that the money involved in professional fútbol bred

---


corruption. Worse, fútbol officials seemed to take spectators for granted by raising prices without providing a safe environment at stadiums.

Peronists and anti-Peronists alike were among the many club officials, fans, and journalists. They learned how to navigate the political climate in an age of proscription. Even when the Revolución Libertadora intervened in professional fútbol, and prosecuted Peronist officials tied to the sport, the military government decided not to investigate the majority of club associations. While it is not a stretch to argue that political and social events affected fútbol discourse, the sport’s appeal across political and social lines demonstrated how fútbol clubs extricated themselves from one political movement, maintained autonomy from another, and stood on their own as uniquely powerful cultural institutions in Argentina.

In the end, the “disaster” in Sweden was the tipping point of a series of crises that percolated over many years. The national team’s abysmal performance left fans feeling marginalized and disillusioned with the state of affairs in fútbol and society. For some, these problems pointed to a general moral decline. This chapter examines how various actors imagined and felt these crises during the late 1950s. With each spectator death, stadium collapse, or clash between fans and police officers, a debate emerged as to whether these incidents were unique to fútbol or indicative of larger problems in society.

As a site of enormous collective vulnerability, disorders at fútbol stadiums should have been a paramount concern for government and club officials. But the frequency of violent episodes called into question the values supposedly central to fútbol culture and the nation. Fans began to see the state—particularly police officers—as perpetrators of
violence. Coupled with criticisms towards the behavior of players and club directors, this had the effect of de-legitimizing traditional institutions. This is why the reaction of the crowd at Ezeiza is informative. The disgust fans felt towards the national team stemmed from Argentina’s poor performance; however, this chapter also argues that they were directing their ire towards club officials, coaches, and the police officers tasked with keeping the crowd at bay. The real crisis, then, had to do with the internal dynamics that perpetuated the status quo for some, and endangered traditional values others held dear.

**Proscribing Peronism in Fútbol**

After assuming the presidency on September 23, 1955, General Eduardo Lonardi offered a positive and conciliatory vision for the country. Speaking to the large crowd gathered at the Plaza de Mayo, he pledged to protect the rights of citizens. Lonardi argued that the “legitimate” conquests of the working class would be protected and even improved upon under the new government.\(^7\) As a show of good faith, he established talks with labor leaders from the powerful CGT. His pacifist stance was in line with the views of some anti-Peronists, like sociologist Gino Germani, who believed that the worst excesses of the deposed regime lay with its deposed leader, not necessarily with the masses.\(^8\) Lonardi agreed with Germani that no government could pretend to establish a

---


\(^8\) Anti-Peronists were far from a homogeneous group. Lonardi belonged to a segment that valued the political clout of the working class and who simply sought to remove Perón from power. This group of anti-Peronists advocated for social justice; middle class professionals appreciated the new job opportunities offered in an expanded state apparatus and did not see need for structural changes. Other anti-Peronists despised the cult of personality around Perón but wished to continue his hard line against communism. As Daniel James points out, the existence of a pro-Peronist press after September 16 revealed a fear among anti-Peronists that organized labor could veer towards communism if it came under
legitimate rule by ignoring the masses. Working-class citizens, in particular, were anxious about a possible political retribution for their support of Perón. Lonardi understood his government would be more effective by not targeting workers. Instead, he promised a return to an age of morality and decency. His government promoted an educational system free of politics, advocated for the freedom of the press, and defended the universal rights of citizens. The Lonardi government also reversed Perón’s anti-clerical legislation, re-instated the rights of religious schools, and renewed federal observance of faith-based holidays.

Although Lonardi presented conciliatory gestures, the primary focus of the Revolución Libertadora was to prosecute accomplices to the “immoral” dictatorship of Perón. The first move was to ban Perón’s Justicialist Party. A second step was to depoliticize various social institutions by taking a hard stance against former Peronist officials. Government officials, for example, investigated cases of corruption that included two men loosely associated with fútbol: Carlos Aloé and Ramón Cereijo. Particularly newsworthy was Aloé’s arrest in early November. As the former editor of Mundo Deportivo, mayor of Buenos Aires, and the key organizer of the Evita youth tournaments, Aloé’s deposition attracted a large crowd, one that jeered him as he left.
under police protection. For his part, Cereijo—the famous socio of Racing who helped facilitate the construction of the club’s new stadium—answered questions from an inquiry panel over propaganda methods he employed as Minister of Theatre, Radio, and Cinema. In all, police detained hundreds of Peronist officials, some of whom faced charges of torture.\(^{12}\)

Despite these strong measures, the most uncompromising group of anti-Peronists believed that Lonardi’s approach did not go far enough to restore the social order. Popularly referred to as gorilas, they abhorred Peronism’s appeal to the vacuous “chusma” (rabble) of society. Their attitude towards the working class was a continuation of the anti-“grasa” sentiment of the 1930s, but now infused with racial overtones against the “cabecitas negras” that formed the base of Peronism.\(^{13}\) These gorilas supported hard-liners within the military like General Pedro Aramburu and Admiral Isaac Rojas, who served as Vice-President under Lonardi. They wanted decisive action that would remove all vestiges of Peronism from society.\(^{14}\) When hard-liners signaled their intent to remove Lonardi by force, he submitted his resignation on November 13. Aramburu took over the

---

\(^{12}\) “Aloé prestó declaración otra vez y fue detenido,” *Democracia*, November 2, 1955, 2.

\(^{13}\) For recent work on the racial component to anti-Peronism, see: Milanesio, “Peronists and Cabecitas: Stereotypes and Anxieties at the Peak of Social Change”; Garguin, “‘Los Argentinos Descendemos de Los Barcos’: The Racial Articulation of Middle-Class Identity in Argentina, 1920-1960.”

\(^{14}\) Military officials like Rojas and Aramburu represented those who desired to remove all remnants of Peronism from society. In their view, the whole structure and nature of the Peronist movement was immoral, authoritarian, and corrupt. Some intellectuals simply saw the last decade as nothing more than a “nightmare” that indicated a general sickness in society. Literary figure Jorge Luis Borges, for example, described Peronism as a “locura colectiva” (“collective madness”). Others, however, understood the Peronist phenomenon as an exploitation of society’s base instincts that proved disturbingly effective. Liberal ant-Peronist intellectuals, for their part, saw Peronism as something similar to Fascism or Nazism. See: Novaro, *Historia de la Argentina, 1955-2010*, 14; Sarlo, *La batalla de las ideas*, 7:27–28.
presidency with Rojas continuing to serve as Vice-President.\textsuperscript{15}

Once in power, the Aramburu government promptly outlawed any reference to Perón, or Peronism, by name.\textsuperscript{16} Among the several allusions used by journalists were to label Perón as the “deposed head of state,” and to refer to his government as the “former dictatorship.” Sports publications and club associations followed suit with the government’s intent to depoliticize professional fútbol. They avoided direct mention Peronism and largely ignored the political events of September. San Lorenzo, for example, noted that it lost significant revenue when “national events of public knowledge” cancelled its most important match of the season (against bitter rival Vélez Sarsfield).\textsuperscript{17} The sports tabloid \textit{Campeón} referred to the “events of public notoriety” in passing when it argued for the need to resume the fútbol season and return to normalcy.\textsuperscript{18} \textit{El Gráfico} and \textit{Mundo Deportivo} made no mention of the military coup. While the latter’s omission was the product of state intervention at Peronist news outlets, the former’s silence reflected its desire to maintain a politically-neutral stance that worked well under Perón and would appease the new regime.

The provisional government’s reach into professional fútbol proved more complicated. Under Lonardi’s brief presidency, the government appointed Arturo Bullrich as interventor of AFA—the first direct state intervention of fútbol’s governing

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Novaro, \textit{Historia de la Argentina, 1955-2010}, 14. Officially signed into law by Aramburu on March 5\textsuperscript{th} of 1956, Decree 4161 proscribed Peronism throughout the country.
\textsuperscript{17} “Memoria,” \textit{Memorias y balance 1955} (Buenos Aires: Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro, 1956), 9.
\textsuperscript{18} “Hay que adoptar medidas practices para que el campeonato de fútbol pueda terminar en época propicia,” \textit{Campeón}, September 28, 1955, 1.
\end{flushright}
body. Although the government’s selection of Bullrich simply continued the tradition of handpicking the AFA president begun under Perón, he was tasked with one singular objective: to purge Peronist influences in professional fútbol. Over the years, AFA had carefully guarded its image as an apolitical entity responsible for governing the sport, but this did not mean that clubs were blind to the advantages of supporting the Peronist state.

Club officials complied with Bullrich and the government of the Revolución Libertadora and purged any political references in an effort to avoid intervention. Large institutions like River Plate and San Lorenzo did not find it difficult to retain their autonomy. They had a long history that did not tie them specifically to the Peronist regime. More important, an expansive membership afforded these large clubs some level of protection; politicians learned over the years the benefits of harnessing the support of the major clubs when possible, and to not alienate their members. Indeed, River’s writers were relieved to hear that intervention would only affect AFA. They believed that it was a correct decision and that it upheld the rights of socios. Moreover, River argued that “liberation” and intervention only served as a pretext for unnamed people with their own hidden agendas to levy nefarious accusations against a club as popular and successful as River Plate.

Smaller civic associations enjoyed less protection. The records of Club Atlético Sarmiento, for example, shed some light on how this small club avoided intervention.

21 “No serán intervenidos los clubes,” River, October 14, 1955.
Closely tied to Perón, Sarmiento christened its new stadium Estadio Eva Perón in 1951. Each year, the club touted its contributions to the second quinquenal. After her death in 1952, Sarmiento honored Evita as the “spiritual leader of the nation” whose death was a “step towards immortality.” In its 1954 Memoria y balance, the club also paid tribute to the late Juan Duarte (brother of Eva), who once served as president of the institution. A year later, all references to Perón in the Memoria y balance were gone. The club changed the name of its stadium to Estadio Sarmiento. Likely fearing a government audit, Sarmiento stressed its commitment to the fans and socios by ensuring that its finances and records were all in order.

If intervention succeeded in de-politicizing professional fútbol, it was unable to solve some of the ethical issues that concerned fans and journalists. One of the first areas Bullrich addressed was the lack of safety and order at fútbol stadiums. Although fan violence was a recurring problem, it seemed to worsen during the 1950s. The interventor honored police officers for providing greater security during fútbol matches, but little evidence exists that conditions actually improved. In fact, a series of incidents in 1955 suggests otherwise. Between November and December, police officers launched gas canisters and water hoses against unruly fans in the city of La Plata, and in the porteño neighborhoods of Parque Patricios. Police officers responded to a series of problems, including fan riots, players attacking fans, and attempts by the crowd to tear down

---

fences.\textsuperscript{25} These types of incidents were not limited to the first division. In a weekly column entitled “Son cosas de la ‘B’,” \textit{El Gráfico} regularly chastised lower-division fans who acted like “criminals” and “ruined the spectacle for honest, hard-working fans.”\textsuperscript{26}

Another recurring problem was the quality of match officiating. Similar to incidents of fan violence, hostile behavior towards referees had long been a feature of fútbol games in Argentina. Controversial decisions often provoked fans to throw projectiles at referees, or even to rush onto the field to attack them. A critical match between Independiente and River Plate at the end of the 1955 season did more than incite fans to throw rocks and bottles. A series of questionable decisions by the referee raised allegations of match fixing, which seemingly subsided when AFA began hiring English match officials in 1947. After the English referee, “Mr. Thurman,” expelled one of River Plate’s key players, partisan supporters threw projectiles at him. Their actions ensured a round of gas canisters from police officers.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, by 1955, even foreign referees like “Mr. Thurman” were not immune to the hostility from fans, or worse, charges of


\textsuperscript{26}In the lower divisions, spectators attacked a referee in match between Union de Santa Fé and Almagro (\textit{El Gráfico}, September 2, 1955, 43) and threw projectiles in the suburban town of Temperley (\textit{El Gráfico}, November 25, 1955, 65). Journalist Alejandro Fabbri also lists three major incidents during the second half of the 1955 season in the first division—aligned to the political turmoil of the country—which garnered national attention and led \textit{Clarín} to profile the problems associated with fútbol violence; \textit{see:} Ibid., 156–157; \textit{El Gráfico}, December 2, 1955, 65. \textit{El Gráfico} suggested that this problem was transnational by republishing excerpts from Peruvian newspapers on disorders in that nation’s local leagues.

\textsuperscript{27}Félix Fráscara, “¡Oh, Mr. Thurman!,” \textit{El Gráfico}, November 4, 1955, 3-7.
When English referees left after the 1957 season, one of the last remnants of the Peronist age came to an end. Their departure, however, did little to quell speculations of match fixing.

The more difficult problem facing Bullrich to address was the perception that fútbol officials lacked ethics. Bullrich himself came under fire by *El Gráfico* for offering amnesty to athletes and sports officials guilty of improper conduct during the Peronist decade. In his last act as interventor, he pardoned those who were at fault for accepting bribes, attacking match officials, and provoking confrontations on the field. Bullrich pardoned them as an act of good will towards club directors who wanted their employees reinstated. For *El Gráfico*, amnesty rewarded improper behavior. What’s more, this type of political interference by the provisional government was no different than the excessive reach of the Peronist regime, according to the magazine. What was the point, it asked, if the results of intervention left the status quo in place after Argentina’s so-called “liberation”?²⁹

The election of Colombo as President of AFA in 1956 offered critics hope that the ethical problems in Argentine fútbol would finally receive attention. But a few years later another general amnesty for athletes—this time for those directly associated with Peronism—raised more questions about the influence of politics in professional fútbol. Colombo and AFA concurred with the newly elected Frondizi government that the only

crime committed by these athletes was to accept gifts and an official recognition from the government.\textsuperscript{30} Aware of the potential backlash, especially among anti-Peronist gorilas, senators stressed to fútbol officials their obligation to honor the measure passed by Congress.\textsuperscript{31} This second amnesty shows that separating politics from fútbol was not easy. It also reveals that fútbol officials were political creatures capable of adjusting their policies and priorities according to the concerns of the government in power.

\textit{“Las gallinas de huevos dorados”: Rights of Fans and Social Justice as a Moral Issue}

When fans and journalists alluded to the excesses of team officials, they were questioning decisions they believed were contrary to the charter of clubs as non-profit civic associations. By the mid-1950s, the perception of fútbol officials as oligarchs grew stronger. One of the main problems for socios was that club officials were prone to handing out outrageous bonuses for star players even when they failed to meet the club’s objectives for the season.\textsuperscript{32} By failing to hold players accountable, socios believed that officials acted irresponsibly and were inattentive to the needs of the member who elected them to office.

Socios also wanted to see the club’s finances managed efficiently. \textit{Democracia}, a formerly Peronist daily newspaper, now under state intervention, nevertheless maintained


\textsuperscript{32} Although written as an open, anonymous letter to the editor, the weekly column “Carta abierta de un hincha” was most likely the work of the writers at \textit{Así}. The column regularly accused fútbol officials of mismanagement bordering on corruption. Two examples include: August 14, 1957 and February 12, 1958.
its populist tone and blamed fútbol officials of corruption. The paper characterized fútbol as a business run by a “maffia [sic]” of club directors unconcerned with leaving their institutions in debt. Democracia accused these “pirates” of generating all sorts of new revenue through raffle tickets, but then ignoring projects that socios cared for: swimming pools, improvements to the libraries, and needed repairs for social activity rooms.

According to the paper, when it came time to show club members the financial balance for the year, millions of pesos in new revenue “mysteriously” balanced out to zero.33

Mundo Deportivo best conveyed the feeling of neglect among fans when it argued that fútbol officials treated spectators as if they were “las gallinas de los huevos dorados” (“the chicken of the golden eggs”)—always ready to pay more for match tickets, even if they complained.34 It was a disregard best exemplified by the lack of basic services at stadiums. As El Gráfico observed, club officials took for granted the sense of “heroism” among fans to aguantar (endure) the lack of sufficient bathrooms, the poor quality of seats, the broken toilets, or the claustrophobic conditions produced by selling a number of tickets that exceeded the seating capacity of stadiums. The magazine argued that such

33 “¡El fútbol se viene abajo!,” Democracia, November 2, 1955, 8. That Democracia disparaged fútbol officials, while absolving the socios, is not surprising. Since it began in 1946 as a tabloid paper, Democracia was one of the key supporters of the Peronist movement and the working class. Now, under state intervention, the government purged the paper’s Peronist staff members and replaced them with new writers. However, Democracia retained its populist tone. Thus, we should see its criticism of club officials tied to Peronism, like Boca Juniors’ Alberto Armando, not only as a natural extension of the paper’s populist tone, but also but also in line with the government’s pressure on officials like Armando to resign. See: Ulanovsky, Paren las rotativas, 160–161.

34 “La gallina de los huevos de oro,” Mundo Deportivo, April 7, 1958, 6.
poor conditions showed how vast sums of money did not go towards fans, and thus exposed the lack of ethics among club officials.\(^3\)\(^5\)

By expressing their rights as socios, fans appealed to the concept of social justice, which proved resilient during the era of proscription. Even opponents of Perón appealed to this egalitarian idea. They blamed the exiled leader for betraying his stated principles with half-hearted measures that only benefited his allies.\(^3\)\(^6\) This allowed politicians, such as Radical leader Arturo Frondizi, to reappropriate the idea of justicialismo by grounding it in a pre-Peronist past. Radicals in the 1910s and 1920s had characterized the struggle for equality as an issue of “the people” versus the “oligarchy” under Yrigoyen. Yet, Radicals failed to offer workers a political platform that would allow them to claim their rights, which Peronism ultimately provided.

When Aramburu began his aggressive push against labor unions, Frondizi filled the void left behind by Perón and appealed to workers under the tenants of radicalism. In his 1955 book *La lucha anti-imperialista*, Frondizi spelled out what economic justice meant in the struggle against imperialism. Any valid economic system, he argued, should allow people to achieve their creative potential as an ethical goal. Argentina’s material wealth, he argued, was to serve its moral wealth; the goods of the nation should be at the

---

\(^3\)\(^5\) Ampelio Libeali, “Se acabaron las cifras millonarias,” *El Gráfico*, April 19, 1957, 21. After attending fútbol matches in Lima (Perú) for the 1957 Copa Sudamericana, one of its new writers, Ampelio Libeali, marveled at the fútbol facilities in Lima. Whereas stadiums in Europe and other parts of Latin America, like Lima, were often no different in quality than cinema houses, or theatres, in Argentina, club officials largely ignored improvements to facilities.

service of all of its citizens. Frondizi thus framed social justice as a moral obligation from the state to its citizens.

The framework used by Frondizi to describe the duties of the state to the people resonated with fútbol fans as well. Social justice was a form of social consciousness that resonated with those who paid monthly club membership dues. Just as public officials faced scrutiny over supposed acts of corruption, socios felt it was their right to hold their officers accountable. Letters to sports publications presented this concern over the rights of club members as a moral issue. For example, one River Plate socio complained about the rising cost of tickets. High prices were making it difficult for him to continue to pay his membership dues. The increase in ticket prices was most noticeable between 1956 and 1958 when clubs sold nearly one million fewer tickets, from 3,223,150 to 2,335,182 (figures 29-30). To recoup the loss in revenue, AFA raised ticket prices from 4.6 pesos in 1956 to 7 pesos a year later—a 66 percent increase. By 1958, prices ranged from 8 to 12 pesos for crucial matches. For fans who paid their membership dues, in order to obtain benefits like reduced ticket price for home games, the increase of their monthly rates revealed a disconnect between club officers and socios. When some officials

38 Figures drawn from the *Memorias y balance* of AFA for the years 1954 to 1960.
suggested that members should no longer enjoy reduced rates and instead pay the same rate as a visiting spectator, the resentment among fans grew worse.41

Figure 29- This chart shows the total number of tickets sold per season in the first division. From 1941 through 1958, 240 games took place each season. However, AFA arranged the schedules between 1949 and 1951; the total number of matches in the 1949 and 1950 seasons totaled 306, while in 1951 AFA 264 games took place. Data collected from Memorias y balance for the years 1941-1958.

Figure 30- The discrepancy between this graph and Figure 1 is due to the increase in matches played in 1949 and 1950 (306 total versus 240 matches average). Data collected from Memorias y balance for the years 1941-1958.

41 See: “Carta abierta de un hincha” in Así or “Libro de quejas” in River. A few examples used include Así (February 12, 1958) and River (June 19, 1958 and June 27, 1957). Also see: Nicolás Vulovic, “El socio debe exigir respeto para sus derechos,” Qué, June 4, 1957, 27. Beyond the rising cost of tickets, other fans disapproved of mid-week matches designed to generate more revenue. As one socio put it, hard-working fans could not afford to leave their jobs to attend evening matches.
Beyond discussions of economic fairness, the rights of socios extended to questions of equal access. Although women and children did go to the stadium on game day, they did so in small numbers. Stadiums were hyper-masculine venues where men perceived women as lacking sufficient knowledge about the game; women, therefore, were not “true hinchas.” The gender disparity reveals an environment that had become increasingly homogeneous. To help boost attendance, clubs provided special sections of the stadium for female fans. In an age of middle-class consumerism, appealing to the whole family—not just the fervent young men of the hinchada—made sense as a way to improve the club’s finances. This meant that socios expected their clubs to offer a variety of activities for each member of the family (dances, skills courses, carnivals, and athletic events). Because the Revolución Libertadora halted the Peronist state’s financing of sports programs for women and children, families depended on clubs to offer female and youth athletics. Family-oriented sports programs offered clubs the opportunity to claim a more modern concept of honor and justice by respecting all of its members.

43 The most heterogeneous clubs were smaller, or newer, institutions like Club Atlético Brown. These clubs were better able to shape their offerings without worrying about a long history of exclusivity. Half of Brown’s members were women and children in 1958; *see: Memoria y balance 1958* (Buenos Aires: Club Atlético Brown, 1958).
Despite the efforts by clubs to attract families to fútbol matches, the continuing lack of attention to the poor quality of facilities, the negligence of club officials, and the deteriorating quality of play, drove many Argentines away from the stadium. The inability to draw new spectators was partly the product of changing consumption patterns. In the late 1950s, Buenos Aires saw a rise of middle class consumerism that reshaped notions of public and private spaces, gender relations, and even concepts of morality.\footnote{Podalsky, Specular City, 52, 65–70.}

Argentine families—especially of the middle class—used their purchasing power to find alternate forms of leisure during an age of rising consumerism. New commercial centers provided shopping experiences for families.\footnote{Félix Luna, “El desarrollismo, un proyecto nacional: Prólogo,” in El pensamiento del desarrollismo, ed. Ricardo De Titto (Buenos Aires: Editorial El Ateneo, 2010), 21.} As was the case in the United States and Western Europe, the Argentine middle class sought innovative luxuries, such as domestic appliances and the latest automobiles. Between 1951 and 1957, consumers purchased over 80,000 television sets largely manufactured overseas.\footnote{“Televisión, industria electronica para nuestra defensa,” Qué, April 2, 1957, 9.} These new purchasing patterns produced some divisions among middle-class Argentines. While some identified their social standing through their material possessions, others critiqued their neighbors’ obsession with foreign and luxury goods. For social critics like Arturo Jauretche, the obsession with materialism indicated the moral decay in society.\footnote{Some critics ridiculed the obsession by certain sectors of the middle class with the latest imported goods from the United States and Europe. Most famously, social critic and intellectual Arturo Jauretche...}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{129}{y balance general 1957-1958 (Buenos Aires: Club Atlético Boca Juniors, 1958), 9-10, 48. Clubs also offered skills courses specifically designed for women and children.}
\footnotetext{46}{As Brenda Elsey shows, Chilean clubs of the 1950s also supported female athletics as a sign of modernity and social progress; see: Elsey, Citizens and Sportsmen, 191.}
\footnotetext{47}{Podalsky, Specular City, 52, 65–70.}
\footnotetext{49}{“Televisión, industria electronica para nuestra defensa,” Qué, April 2, 1957, 9.}
\footnotetext{50}{Some critics ridiculed the obsession by certain sectors of the middle class with the latest imported goods from the United States and Europe. Most famously, social critic and intellectual Arturo Jauretche...}
\end{footnotes}
Regardless of their views, Argentine middle-class families began to watch television at home and travel on vacation in greater numbers after 1955.

Although alternate leisure activities suggest one reason why attendance at fútbol stadiums began to decline, other consumer patterns were at play. Partly due to the rising cost of ticket prices, fans increasingly followed matches on transistor radios. The growing affordability of these devices helped those who were unable or refused to go to the stadium. Instead, they followed their favorite teams via radio broadcasts. Televi
ded fútbol matches, on the other hand, were not a factor in the decline of attendance. Even though the first televised match aired in 1951, AFA did not grant television contracts until the late 1960s. Government policies also limited television programming. A mere five stations had the necessary paperwork by 1958 to air programming, and only one met the necessary obligations to do so on a regular basis.51

The rising cost of tickets did more than keep fans away. Steep prices provoked among clubs and led smaller institutions to appeal to economic fairness. These small clubs objected to a motion, passed in 1957, which stipulated a set of conditions for teams that wished to play in the first division. Among the provisions, clubs should possess a

---


51 “Confusion Makes T.V. Worse Confounded,” Buenos Aires Herald, October 21, 1958, 8. Newspapers like La Nación and Buenos Aires Herald cited the unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles involved in starting a television station in 1958. Qué also made a case in 1957 that Argentine legislation worked against the national production of television sets and that foreign models flooded the Argentine market. These policies prevented the Argentine electric goods industry from developing a vibrant television market: television sets, broadcast stations, and local programming. Between 1951 and 1957, the magazine noted that eighty percent of the 80,000 television sets in the country were manufactured overseas.
stadium seating capacity over 40,000 and a minimum club membership of 10,000 socios. They argued that AFA’s aim was to establish an elite league for the “big five” clubs and that few other institutions that met these figures.

For a “B” division team like Club Atlético Sarmiento, the “arms race” in spending of the late 1950s had disastrous consequences. In 1957, the club spent 349,224 pesos on its fútbol team—largely paid for by club dues that generated 319,000 pesos. The following year, fútbol expenses nearly tripled to 982,351 pesos, but revenue from club dues only increased to 446,720 pesos. All of this led many clubs to wonder if ascending to a higher division after a successful season was actually in their best interest. By articulating a doctrine of fairness, meant to curtail the power of major clubs like Boca Juniors and River Plate, small clubs like Sarmiento represented the anger that many socios felt towards those in charge of professional fútbol.

**Death, Murder, and State Repression in the Stadiums**

The growing problem of violence and lewd behavior among “some hinchas” not only led families to reconsider going to the stadium, but it also raised questions about the

---


53 Gimnasia y Esgrima, a team from La Plata, is a good example. In 1958, its club membership totaled 41,889. But this number is a bit misleading, as only 15,686 members were considered active. The question, then, becomes which number AFA uses for its minimum requirement. See: “Socios,” *Memorias y balance 1958* (La Plata: Club Atlético Gimnasia y Esgrima, 1958).

54 Club Atlético Sarmiento, *Memoria y balance: 1957-1962*. By 1961, the club spent 3,464,512 pesos on fútbol. Such a drastic increase affected all of its members. Socios now contributed 1,742,700 pesos in annual dues, which suggests a significant rise in annual dues between 1957 and 1961.
lack of civility in the world of fútbol. The most serious crisis of the mid-1950s dealt with the safety of fans at the stadium. As Frydenberg reminds us, violence at fútbol matches dates back to as early as 1907, when the public whistled, yelled, and threw rocks onto the field at rival players or referees. Police officers resorted to repressive measures to control the crowds, which only made matters worse. Fences soon appeared, designed to separate fans from the actors on the field. However, this did not stop fans from chanting phrases like “matalo, pechalo, hacele un foul” (“kill him, hit him with your chest, foul him”). According to Frydenberg, the fútbol environment in Argentina was always a universe symbolically governed by rivalry and enmity. As a result, fans were intolerant of defeat. They resorted to acts of violence in order to correct what they perceived as an act of injustice, or to defend their honor amid a humiliating defeat.

A match between Boca Juniors and River Plate in December of 1955 displayed the ubiquitousness of fan violence in fútbol described by Frydenberg. Boca Juniors had just defeated River Plate after many years of failure. It was not a significant loss for River Plate, which had already secured its fifth championship in ten years. Losing to its fiercest rival, however, did not stop River from needling Boca Juniors fans on their victory. Using a bit of humor to offer a backhanded compliment to rival fans, River wrote that Boca

---


56 Frydenberg, Historia social del fútbol, 71–74.

57 Ibid., 79-86.
Juniors celebrated the only way they knew how: armed with bottles and crude chants. It was congratulatory note meant to portray Boca fans as uneducated and prone to violence—even in celebration.

The use of humor in River was more than a dismissive comment towards Boca Juniors supporters. It suggests that violence and vulgarity were common features of the stands. In a cartoon entitled “Va mal en la tabla” (“It’s going poorly in the stands”—figure 31), Campeón’s illustrator, Villafañe, satirized fan disorders inside the stadium. He depicts three men in an unflattering manner: dressed in cheap clothes, unshaven, and wearing ragged hats. Two of the ruffians carry a third on a stretcher. One man asks the other where they should take the injured fan: to the medics or to the morgue?

![Figure 31 - Villafañe, “Va mal en la tabla,” Campeón, November 16, 1955, 7. “Va mal en la tabla” is a play on words. Normally, it is a reference to a team’s position in the league standings, or table. But “tabla” is also a reference to the “tablón”—the seating area of the stadium that consisted of wooden planks, or boards (called “tablas.”). Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.](image)

---

Despite the ubiquitousness of violence at the fútbol stadium, it remained a serious concern in the press. Images of police officers launching gas canisters against unruly fans either exposed the barbarity of “other” fans or were acts of state repression against innocent spectators. Partisan magazines sometimes went so far as to suggest violence as an appropriate reaction to an act of injustice. When a referee expelled River Plate’s two star players, Néstor Rossi and Ángel Labruna, River felt that fans had every right to travel to stadiums with “sangre ardiente” (“boiling blood”) due to the conspiracy against the club. Still, for mainstream sports magazines, the escalating violence was symptomatic of deeper issues in society that needed immediate and serious attention. In July of 1955, riots broke out between River Plate and Estudiantes fans in La Plata, followed by more clashes over the following weeks. Police responded with force using water hoses and gas canisters just weeks after a coup attempt against Perón by military forces.

In November of 1955, a series of matches once again entailed police officers using force to subdue fans that were fighting in the stands; but this time, the results led to the death of a spectator. In a match between Lanús and Huracán, one of the visiting Huracán players scored the winning goal. He then ran into the stands to punch a Lanús fan that had been verbally disparaging him throughout the match. When local fans tried to tear down the wire fence and storm the field, police officers intervened by launching gas canisters in the crowd. When the smoke cleared, a spectator, Pascual Tuozzo, lay

---

60 For a partisan take, see: “¡El fútbol o la guerra?,” River, December 1, 1955.
61 “Sangre ardiente” literally translates to “steaming blood.” The phrase is similar to English phrases such as “boiling mad,” or “seeing red.” In the case of Rossi and Labruna’s suspensions, it is unclear what injustice River is alluding to since Rossi punched an opponent and Labruna verbally assaulted a referee.
62 “Incidentes que juzgará el Tribunal de Penas,” La Nación, November 14, 1955, 6.
dead presumably of a heart attack. Tuozzo, a socio of Lanús, was sitting among Huracán supporters when he passed away. This raised suspicions that his death was the result of an assault from rival fans during the mayhem caused by the police.

Stadium violence fully erupted as a moral crisis in Argentine fútbol in 1958. After a match between River Plate and host Vélez Sársfield, local fans threw bottles at the visiting goalkeeper, Amadeo Carrizo. This prompted River Plate fans to return the favor at Vélez goalkeeper Roqué Marrapodi, who suffered a laceration on his forearm. The referee cancelled the match, which provoked anger among some fans who began throwing rocks onto the field. Just as fans were beginning to calm down, and leave, police officers launched gas canisters into the crowd. One missile fatally struck a fifteen-year-old boy named Mario Linker. Seeing the bloodied corpse, fans asked police officers to stop (figure 32 A-B). Reporters from various news outlets observed how one photographer approached the head of police and rebuked him, only to receive a punch to

---

63 “El autor del gol del triunfo reaccionó frente a un hincha,” Campeón, November 16, 1955, 6; “Un muerto y dos heridos en Lanús,” Clarín, November 14, 1955; “Suspendiéndose el cotejo jugado en La Plata por un gran desorden,” La Nación, November 14, 1955, 6. Also see: Fabbri, Historias negras del fútbol argentino, 156–158.


64 According to witnesses who spoke to La Razón, the use of gas canisters by the police was the result of fans cutting the water hoses in the stadium. The police were unable to subdue the crowds until reinforcements arrived. See: “Los luctuosos sucesos de Liniers en los que un menor perdió la vida, deben ser investigados,” La Razón, October 20, 1958, 13. The paper also noted that Linker was a fan of Boca Juniors and had planned to attend its match. However, Linker overslept and instead went to Liniers by invitation from a friend.
the head. Witnesses also noticed that an officer drew his gun and approached the fallen photographer, but other policemen eventually convinced him to draw down.

Confrontations between fans and police spilled onto the streets for hours afterwards.65

The coverage of Linker’s death not only had the effect of de-legitimizing state authority but it also raised questions about the civility of Argentine citizens. Police officials were quick to denounce the judgment against them in the press, noting that the cause of death had yet to be determined. The chief of police defended the actions of his officers. He deflected the blame by reminding reporters that the violence began with unruly fans inside the stadium and continued outside on the streets. He defended the use of force as a necessary measure to stop the destruction of local businesses and the attacks on police officers.66 But when medics concluded that Linker’s death was consistent with

---

65 “Lo que sucedió el domingo en Liniers es el reflejo de la descomposición del fútbol,” Campeón, October 22, 1958, 1 and 3; “Espectáculo deplorable en Vélez,” La Nación, October 20, 1958, 12.

66 “El grave hecho de V. Sársfield,” La Nación, October 21, 1958, 12.
a traumatic blow to his head caused by an object the size of a gas canister, police officials stopped talking to the press.67

Unlike previous deaths related to fútbol, Linker’s death garnered extensive news coverage.68 Articles focused on the loss suffered by a mother (on Mother’s Day), the actions of an out-of-control and inefficient police force, and yet another “black chapter” in the history of fútbol.69 Journalists lamented how these incidents were becoming more frequent and were a sad indication of a general malaise in society. For Campeón, it was not enough to blame a few “criminals” in the stadium. Instead, a better understanding of the conditions that triggered such violence was necessary. The paper accused players of forgetting their responsibilities as professionals, club officials for ignoring the safety of fans, fans for constantly blaming referees, and the Disciplinary Tribunal at AFA for its inability to restore order to fútbol.70 There was also a sense that the state was exceeding permissible limits of social control. Linker’s death seemed arbitrary and unnecessary. More important, it exposed tensions between state authorities and working-class

67 “Pudo prevenirse el luctuoso suceso,” La Razón, October 21, 1958, 6.
68 El Gráfico was the exception. Always quick to point out the corrupt vices of the sport, the magazine gave scant attention to this tragedy—perplexing considering its pedagogical tone. This void could most likely be due to the initial uncertainty to the cause of Linker’s death, that the head of police appointed by Frondizi (Ezequiel Niceto Vega) was a naval officer, or the eventual role of police officers—guardians of order—in exacerbating tensions at the stadium and killing Linker. The magazine avoided entanglements with the Peronist state, as well as during the Revolución Libertadora. It was likely exercising the same restraint under the new Frondizi administration in 1958.
70 “Lamentable epílogo de lo que debió ser una fiesta deportiva: Un muerto y muchos heridos,” Campeón, October 22, 1958, 2.
communities, where many people felt that their rights as citizens meant little to those who served in government.71

Fútbol officials lost a measure of moral and social legitimacy with the general public after Linker’s death. Vélez Sarsfield quickly defended its socios and stadium policies. The club blamed the incident on unidentified “bandas” (gangs) and “maladapted” spectators who claimed to be fans.”72 AFA, in damage control mode, convened a special session to honor the victim and provide monetary support for his family.73 Despite its public charity to the Linker family, AFA merely proposed further investigations on stadium security. Congressional figures, however, wanted answers from the police, AFA, and the executive branch. Nothing, it seemed, was being done to curb stadium disorders. One congressman accused police officers of acting like “assassins” and threatening journalists.74 The general consensus in 1958 was that the police presence at stadiums did little to protect citizens and actually exacerbated the problem of violence.

71 Eduardo Archetti and Amilcar G. Romero, “Death and Violence in Argentinean Football,” in Football, Violence, and Social Identity, ed. Richard Giulianiotti, Bonney, Norman, and Mike Hepworth (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55. It was not just working-class communities that expressed a distrust of state authorities. The same day that Linker died, university students and police clashed in La Plata. Students had marched on the provincial legislature, protesting educational reform measures when police agents arrived in cars and launched gas canisters at students hoping to disperse the crowd. When the smoke cleared, dozens of students lay injured in confrontations. Reports stated that police began to beat students, including those who were fleeing. See: La Razón, October 21, 1958, 10.
72 “El suceso en Vélez; Renuncias y cotejos,” La Nación, October 21, 1958, 14.
73 “Sesión extraordinaria del consejo directivo realizada el 20 de octubre 1958,” Boletín N° 418, Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, October 20, 1958. A moment of silence was held in Linker’s honor at the following AFA meeting; see: “Homenaje,” Boletín N° 421, Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, October 22, 1958. AFA also punished River Plate for the actions of its fans by closing the Monumental Stadium for four matches (a penalty ultimately reduced after protests from club officials); see: “Incidentes en los estadios,” Boletín N° 416, Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, October 15, 1958.
“Lo de Vélez” raised serious concerns about the values central to fútbol and society at large. Fans who attended to Linker as he died, as well as the journalists who covered the incident, wondered how fellow citizens and police officers resorted to such disregard for human life, all in the pursuit of some aggrieved sense of injustice. These “guerrilleros futbolísticos” (war-like fans of fútbol), as Panzeri described them, indiscriminately threw stones, bottles, and gas canisters. Worse, fans and police officers were oblivious to the possible consequences of their actions.\footnote{Dante Panzeri, “El salvajismo suplantó al fútbol,” El Gráfico, October 24, 1955, 54-57; “Lo que sucedió el domingo en Liniers, es el reflejo de la descomposición en el fútbol,” Campeón, October 22, 1958, 1 and 3.}

Linker’s death also prompted questions about the social structure present at public venues. The weekly experience of attending fútbol matches reinforced specific social norms. These rules were important to many people, but particularly to a middle class that imagined social order as part of the national character. The expectation was that spectators understood the hierarchy at play at the stadium. In addition, a set of rules was necessary to govern the game and the actions of players. Police officers and stadium employees also expected fans to abide by a sense of order, which permitted players to perform. In turn, fans anticipated that state and club officials would provide adequate safety measures. This structure and set of habits reinforced a sense of civility.\footnote{Here, I borrow the concepts of fields and habitus from Pierre Bourdieu to situate the hierarchies and understood customs at play in fútbol stadiums. See: Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Bourdieu, Practical Reason, 41. Sebastián Carassai further extends the notion of state-directed terrorism by attributing the initial Perón state (1946-1955) and the National Liberation (1955-1958) as influences upon future governments after 1966: the military rule of the National Revolution (1966-1973), the second Peronist state (1973-1976) and the military junta that conducted the “dirty war” that claimed tens of thousands of lives (1976-1982). Carassai, “The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Violence, Political Culture, and Memory (1969-1982),” 262–264.}
What happens, then, when the hierarchy lies upended? The failure to observe the norms at fútbol matches bothered many fans, players, and journalists. They were particularly troubled by the failure of police officers to maintain public safety in the Linker case. The relentless launching of gas canisters was excessive and it caused the type of harm to public safety that police officers were supposed to prevent. Furthermore, their actions went against the ordered logic of fútbol stadiums. The rowdy fans that spent parts of the match throwing projectiles at players were already gone before Linker suffered the fatal blow. The scene at the Vélez Sarsfield stadium amounted to what theorist Pierre Bourdieu describes as a lack of “practical sense” by fans and police, both of whom acted beyond what was appropriate.77 Fan violence created the space for state terrorism against a child, which in turn raised doubts among spectators about the civility of Argentine society as a whole.78

**Dante Panzeri and the Moral Crusade at El Gráfico**

As sports writers searched for answers to the violence at stadiums, they positioned players as models of both success and failure. The ideal Argentine player—morally upright and professional—was a product of the sports journalism of the 1920s and 1930s. During those early years of professional fútbol, constructions of national identity in fútbol reflected the hope for a better future during an age of social, economic, and

---

78 Garriga Zucal, *Haciendo amigos a las piñas*, 14 and 18.
political changes (the 1930 coup, economic depression, and later migration from the interior). These journalists of the 1930s still shaped fútbol coverage two decades later.

Amid a new period of transformative changes, the ideal criollo player represented to journalists a link to a more orderly and simple past. In his study of Costa Rica’s own “golden age” of fútbol, Carlos Sandoval García notices similar patterns emerging within Latin American sports journalism of the 1950s. Sports writers looked towards the past with rose-colored glasses. For sports journalists, nostalgia was a reaction to changes that troubled them, namely the mass commercialization of fútbol and the rise of new media. But as Sandoval García puts it, the idyllic view of a so-called “golden age” is but one version of the past.\textsuperscript{79} In Argentina, it is doubtful that many players, or coaches, shared the same level of concern over morality that Chantecler or Borocotó articulated. Moreover, sports writers were largely silent when players displayed behavior on and off the field that fell outside of their vision of the criollo player.

An era of pedagogical sports journalism was largely responsible for the nostalgic view that persisted into the 1950s, and which some would argue exists until this day. Magazines like \textit{El Gráfico} educated their audiences on the finer points of the game. It was a form of narrativity that historian and literary critic Hayden White describes as “the impulse to moralize reality,” with the aim of constructing or presenting an ideal society.\textsuperscript{80} For writers at \textit{El Gráfico} (and \textit{Mundo Deportivo} until its demise in 1958), players were model citizens; when fans displayed positive support for their teams, they demonstrated


\textsuperscript{80} Hayden V. White, \textit{The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 14 and 157.
the nation’s civility and passion. The magazine’s large circulation meant that it exerted a great influence over how people understood fútbol and its history.\textsuperscript{81}

By the mid 1950s, \textit{El Gráfico} remained a pedagogical publication. However, its tone shifted in response to the crises it believed were affecting fútbol. Foreign coaches and journalists ridiculed how Argentine players rolled around the field feigning injury in order to kill time. Borocotó criticized these actions on the field. He was uneasy about the image Argentine teams projected to the world. One reader believed the behavior of players led to accusations from foreigners that Argentines were “llorones” (cry babies) who did not know how to lose.\textsuperscript{82} Borocotó believed that playing outside the laws of the game ruined the moral character of the game and encouraged a physical style of play fueled by retribution.\textsuperscript{83} This is why he no longer labeled what he saw on Sundays as fútbol; instead, he described it as “fóbal”—a popular term used to describe a less appealing, unorganized way of playing, similar to pick-up games played on the streets.\textsuperscript{84}

Other journalists agreed with Borocotó that players known for their \textit{juego brusco} (tough play) ignored their moral obligations as professional athletes. These writers argued that overt physicality was a sign of intemperance and an inability to contain opponents that are more skilled. As a result, creative and intelligent “cracks” needed protection from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{81} \textit{El Gráfico}, published by Atlántida, continued to sell well with over 200,000 copies per week in the late 1940s; \textit{see:} Mason, \textit{Passion of the People?}, 117.
\item \textsuperscript{82} “Hemos leído,” \textit{El Gráfico}, March 23, 1956, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Players realized that when they committed a foul, they could slowly form a defensive wall for the direct kick awarded to the other team. In addition, defenders could better grab jerseys on direct kicks, or other set pieces, as opposed to during a normal run of play. Borocotó also directed his ire at coaches and trainers who encouraged their players to exaggerate injuries, just so that they could rush onto the field to tend to a player who was clearly fine, thus killing more time. All of these actions for him were the rules of “criollismo” that were ruining the game.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Borocotó, “Vicios del fútbol,” \textit{El Gráfico}, June 17, 1955, 48-49.
\end{itemize}
“gangsters” and “assassins” like José Varacka, who earned a reputation for injuring opponents with his style of play. By 1956, the number of unfortunate incidents troubled sports writers and many fans. That year, AFA recorded 21 penalties for physical confrontations with referees, 124 for verbally abusing match officials (as well as 150 for dissension), 250 for attacking rival players, 15 outright expulsions, and 89 for suspensions due to accumulating 4 warnings—2,224 total warnings for players. In addition, AFA levied 100 fines for various clubs and closed stadiums over half a dozen times as penalties for insufficient spectator safety.

Perhaps the most vocal critic of Argentine fútbol during the late 1950s was Dante Panzeri, chief writer for El Gráfico. Panzeri emerged as a new, critical voice in sports in the late 1940s. Unlike Borocotó, who focused on how players behaved on the field, Panzeri’s concerns dealt with the deeper and more insidious ills afflicting fútbol. On that particularly violent weekend in December of 1955, when San Lorenzo fans attacked River Plate players, the English referee, and rival fans, Panzeri questioned the civility of Argentine society as a whole. According to him, fan violence was the product of thousands of factors, all of which instilled in the hinchada the conviction that they could seek justice on their own, outside the rules and norms of civilized society. The spectator

---

87 “Sanciones impuestas a jugadores,” Memorias y balance 1956 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1957), 46. It is worth noting that the following year, the numbers decreased dramatically. There is no reason provided as to why player violence plummeted, but it is likely that these figures under-reported as a way of demonstrating the military government’s effectiveness in restoring social order. See: “Penas a clubs y jugadores,” Memorias y balance 1957 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1958), 69-71.
who behaved correctly was not an hincha. Panzeri argued that the term was more appropriate for the “delenguado”, or “foul-tongued,” aggressor who used rocks, bottles, and barbed words to try to intimidate referees. Moreover, the hincha was just as likely to remove his shirt in the stands, as he was to act in an uncouth manner in front of woman. Worse, these types of fans only aimed to please their fellow members of the “patota.” That clubs and players dedicated their victories to “these hinchas” only fed their irrational passion, according to Panzeri.88

His enduring popularity to this day stems from the image Panzeri cultivated over the years as a sports writer who pulled no punches, and who did not spare his fellow journalists either. In one article, he questioned the merits of portraying patotas (gangs) as victims or martyrs for their ability to endure adverse conditions. It was a staple of sports journalism that Panzeri felt was irresponsible because it encouraged the wrong type of fan behavior.89 He blamed journalists for agitating the hinchada through their hypercritical assessments of referees.

Panzeri also took aim at the irresponsibility demonstrated by players and fútbol officials who failed to uphold ethical behavior. He questioned why fútbol directors neglected to educate club members on the proper behavior they should exhibit at stadiums. Panzeri argued that these “hinchas ofﬁcials” were less interested in the well being of spectators; instead, they ran a village of corruption focused solely on generating

89 Dante Panzeri, “No; el hincha no tiene razón,” El Gráfico, August 8, 1958, 55. It is also difficult to ignore Panzeri’s characterization of “hinchas” as un-shirted and irrational fans, swayed by passion and base instincts rather than sound logic and proper behavior. His a way of describing the worst spectators was similar to how anti-Peronists described Perón’s followers.
money. Sparing no one, he blamed players for accepting the dangerous notion that referees lacked reason and were inherently corrupt. Police authorities were not safe from Panzeri’s crusade either. He believed that they failed to address the root causes of fan disorders and reacted to any disturbance in the stands with water hoses and gas canisters. These measures, he argued, increased the “barbarie” at stadiums.

Panzeri’s approach to journalism was a product of a time when other publications, like the political news magazines Leoplan, Qué and Contorno also sought to educate readers through vigorous debates and by presenting complex topics on the issues of the day. Panzeri believed his duty was to explain the intricacies of fútbol that the average reader did not grasp. Therefore, he wanted to do more than simply explain tactics and training methods; he wanted to tackle the vices of professional fútbol that fans, players, and officials did not see for themselves. And one of the concerns that extended beyond fútbol was the lack of public safety.

Panzeri’s broadsides came down to a single question: Why was unethical behavior excused in professional fútbol when in any other setting participants faced arrest? Although links between fan violence and the general rise in bombings, kidnappings, and rumored use of torture under Perón and Aramburu were certainly

---

91 Dante Panzeri, “¡Qué vergüenza!,” El Gráfico, December 2, 1955, 10-13. Panzeri himself, perhaps resigned by the persistent violence at stadiums and the lack of concern by police authorities, suggested three years later that the only way to deter “salvajismo” might be outside of the law. “‘Barbarie’ cannot substitute civility where no one wants to replace it. Methods exist to end it [fan disorder] before ‘barbarie’ puts an end to civility; see: “¿Hasta cuándo?,” El Gráfico, December 11, 1958, 11.
92 Sarlo, La batalla de las ideas, 7:34–36; Ulanovsky, Paren las rotativas, 100, 158–159.
plausible, Panzeri steered clear of greater implications beyond fútbol.\(^{93}\) If he ever alluded to outside influences affecting fútbol, he did so only vaguely. His approach—moralizing, polemic, and assured—stemmed from his own sense of integrity.

Panzeri’s writings reflected a general distrust of the masses that was common among sectors of the middle class. He believed that those who did not possess, or did not care to possess, a practical sense were the ones who created the ongoing incidents at stadiums. For Panzeri, fútbol was a reflection of the civility and ethics of its citizens. Therefore, when hinchas yelled obscenities, threw oranges, and wore disheveled clothing, this was not, in his opinion, the proper behavior of “true” fans. When other fans tolerated such behavior, then, in his opinion, the problem extended beyond the acts of a few irresponsible hinchas and reflected poorly on all of Argentine society.

Panzeri’s emphasis on respecting the rules and norms of the sport reflected a bourgeois mentality, one that made little effort to understand what drove fans to disorder beyond some sense of irrational behavior. Panzeri is careful to avoid generalizations based on class or club affiliation; but there is an unmistakable class element present in his writings. Throughout his career, Panzeri expressed a notion of modernity grounded in the traditions of *El Gráfico*: nationalist in its praise for the criollo elements of fútbol, but rooted in British traditions of “fair play.” An adherence to the rules of the game was essential for him in the same way that citizens should follow the laws that governed society. When players, fans, or police officers transgressed these rules, it was a display of

barbarism. Thus, Panzeri appealed to a clean break from the immediate past of the Peronist masses, by harkening back to a time when society was more orderly. The anxieties expressed by Panzeri thus mirrored those by social conservatives, most of whom backed the government of the Revolución Libertadora.

Panzeri’s tone was influential but not hegemonic. Not all narratives in sports journalism presented his bleak picture of professional fútbol. Light-hearted articles contained images of joyous children and women at stadiums. These pieces presented the fútbol stadium as a wholesome venue for the entire family. Other images captured the passion of fans that were willing to climb any part of the stadium to see the action on the field. Mundo Deportivo was also less critical than El Gráfico. Under Panzeri’s editorial direction, El Gráfico had a tendency to speak down to its readers. Mundo Deportivo used terms like “garra” (“grit”) and “guapeza” (slang for “courage”) to denote strength and valor. Whereas El Gráfico reserved these terms for violent behavior on and off the field, Mundo Deportivo portrayed “garra” and “guapeza” as positive terms. As a result, discursive elements in fútbol proved malleable. They were ideal for literary flourishes that either disparaged or praised elements within the culture of fútbol.

94 According to a recent biography, Panzeri was an anti-Peronist but not necessarily a supporter of the military government. But he also abstained from injecting politics in his writing, even if he felt that sport itself was political. See: Ezequiel Fernández Moores, “Contra viento y marea,” La Nación, May 15, 2013, Online edition, sec. Deportiva, http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1582044-contra-viento-y-marea. For the biography, see: Matías Bauso, Dirigentes, decencia y wines (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2013).
95 “¡Miren que caras!,” El Gráfico, November 4, 1955, 54-55.
96 Mundo Deportivo, May 20, 1954, 20; May 27, 1954, 14; “aguerrido”- May 16, 1954, 19; “guapeza”- August 18, 1955, 6. Fan magazines also used these terms in a more positive light. They referred to their loyal club supporters as “fabulous warriors” similar to the fútbol heroes of yesteryear; see: “¿El fútbol o la guerra?,” River, December 1, 1955.
The 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano and the 1958 World Cup: A Game of Two Halves

In 1955, El Gráfico celebrated the 25th year of professional fútbol in Argentina. It noted that the league’s popularity drew more interest from fans than the national team.97 Much of this was due to the hiatus in international football before, during, and after World War II. Beginning in 1951, Argentina began to fully reintegrate into the international football community, albeit in a limited fashion at first.98

The most significant development occurred when AFA officials committed to participating in the 1958 World Cup after a twenty-four year absence from the tournament. The problem facing head coach Guillermo Stábile was the lack of “crack” players after the 1948 players’ strike led many of them left to play outside the country. Stábile, who had been coach of the national team since the late 1930s, was not worried about Argentina’s ability to compete with European competition. He spent years playing in Italy and France and felt that he understood the European mentality. Although Stábile conceded that the Argentine player sometimes took excessive risks, to he also played a

97 “Bodas de plata con el profesionalismo,” El Gráfico, April 29, 1955, 4-5.
98 Although Argentina sent a successful Olympic delegation to the 1948 Summer Games held in London, it did not compete in football. It was after 1950 that Argentina’s national team participated in several international encounters with teams outside of South America. In Europe, it played matches against England and Ireland (1951), Spain and Portugal (1952), and Italy and Portugal (1954). In 1953, Argentina hosted encounters against England and Spain. The national team also competed in the 1951 and 1955 Pan-American Games, as well as the 1955 Campeonato Sudamericano. Suggestions that Perón did not want Argentina to participate in international football do not bear out and are only based on the country’s absence from the 1950 and 1954 World Cups. See: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, Cien años con el fútbol, 233.
more relaxed and attractive brand of fútbol than his European counterpart.\(^9\)

Perceptions about national identity in fútbol had changed over the years to encompass a more national character. Whereas previous national teams were essentially porteño, now each region of the country offered its own contribution to fútbol criollo. The “Rosarino” style of play (from the city of Rosario)—once derided in the press as heavy on combination passes but light on shooting—was now praised for its aesthetic flair.\(^10\) But the journalists at *El Gráfico* warned Stábile and AFA officials that if a new generation of “crack” players did emerge, it was important for them to resist non-Argentine influences. The magazine’s writers were among the first to warn about the creeping influence of European systems like the Italian *catenaccio* (known as “el cerrojo” in Spanish). According to *El Gráfico*, systems like the catenaccio emphasized compact defenses, which ran contrary to Argentine fútbol’s expressive nature and “macramé” passing combinations.\(^11\) Its writers felt that systems like catenaccio were “anti-fútbol” because they targeted the imaginative play that was central to Argentine identity in fútbol.\(^12\)

*El Gráfico*’s warning reveals a growing concern Argentine fútbol was becoming too mechanized. Although this criticism grew louder after 1958, coaches like Stábile nevertheless faced scrutiny for their supposed emphasis on tactics, as well as their

---

99 He recalled Europeans asking him several years back what they needed in order to imitate the skillful criollo player. His response? Another criollo player. See: Borocotó, “Charlas de fútbol a tres bandas,” *El Gráfico*, May 27, 1955, 32-34.
102 “Enemigos del fútbol: Ahora resulta que tener habilidad es un delito,” *River*, July 22, 1954. This point was raised on several instances, including a 1955 match between Independiente and Boca Juniors: Félix Frásca, “A no dejar jugar,” *El Gráfico*, June 3, 1955, 4-5.
tendency to over-coach. Players were losing their freedom to be expressive and their joy to play, according to its writers. The moral crisis depicted by *El Gráfico*, which supposedly de-humanized the criollo player is an example of what media theorist Marshall McLuhan describes as a contradiction in “professional” sports. Excessively structured games transformed players into mere specialists, dutifully completing one task on the field. “Everybody,” he observes, “senses an incongruity” when athletes lack the freedom to express themselves, sinking into “automation.” Although McLuhan’s observation dealt with sports like hockey in the age of mass media, it reflects the concerns outlined by many sports writers. For Borocotó, the problem was that Argentine fútbol had become stagnant, unappealing, and failed to evolve in the right way. Panzeri, however, was more direct. He rejected “scientific” tactics that were in his words “alien” to Argentine culture and produced listless matches. In a similar vein, *Qué* regarded the importation of European approaches as “repugnant” and an explanation for why fans were abandoning the stadiums.

Stábile dismissed the suggestions that Argentine fútbol was in decline. He argued

---

103 Borocotó, “El fútbol argentino y el seleccionado argentino,” *El Gráfico*, April 22, 1955, 14-15. He cited his own defense of the criollo style of play even after a defeat, as was the case after England’s victory over Argentina in 1951 at Wembley Stadium; *see* Archetti, *El potrero, la pista y el ring*, 29. His colleague at *El Gráfico* expressed a similar sentiment even after Argentina defeated Ecuador 4-0. According to Fráscara, achieving the feat while playing an unattractive brand of fútbol seemed like a hollow victory; Félix Fráscara, “Cuatro a cero y nos quejamos,” *El Gráfico*, March 18, 1955, 4–8.


that time would allow new stars to replace those who had left after the 1948 strike.

Overwhelmed by the increasing pressures and responsibilities of the job as head coach, Stábile asked AFA to hire professionals from diverse fields for his coaching staff. AFA accepted his request and appointed kinesiologist Adolfo Mogilevsky to oversee the health, diet, and training regimen for national team players. Although Stábile did not fully adopt foreign tactical systems, he was open to new ideas. He supported Mogilevsky’s emphasis on changing the diet and habits of players, most of whom were accustomed to generous portions of steak, late night dancing, alcohol, and cigarettes. Mogilevsky wanted to educate his players on the total commitment that was necessary to succeed in international football.

AFA’s reliance on veteran players on the national team also demonstrated the need to find new blood as Argentina prepared for the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano (South American Championship) and the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. AFA arranged a series of exhibition matches in 1956. “Friendly” encounters against Italy and Czechoslovakia, as well as minor tournaments like the Chevalier Boutell Cup and the Copa del Atlántico allowed coaches to assess young talent against high quality opponents. After Argentina’s undefeated performance at the Copa del Atlántico, journalists portrayed it as an example of Argentina’s continuing dominance against South American opponents. The stellar performance of the team generated high expectations for the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano held in Peru. The cover to River’s December 1955

issue foreshadowed the passing of the guard, depicting Labruna, the captain of River Plate, leading his team onto the field with young star Enrique Omar Sívori right behind him. Many hoped that a similar generational shift would occur in Peru (figures 33-34).

![Figure 33- Ángel Labruna and Enrique Omar Sívori. River, December, 1955. Courtesy of the Personal Collection of Rodrigo Daskal.
Figure 34- Coach Guillermo Stábile poses with younger members of his 1957 national team squad, including Corbatta (far left), Angelillo (second from left), and Sívori (far right). Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación.](image)

The national team’s performance at the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano remains one of the crowning achievements of Argentine fútbol, and at the time seemed like a breath of fresh air amid the multiple concerns about the declining quality of play. The mix of young talent, complimented by the team’s seasoned veterans, was key to the team’s success.111 Labeled as the “carasucias,” after the ruthless assassins from Michael Curtiz’ 1938 Hollywood film *Angels with Dirty Faces*, Sivori (age 21), Antonio Angelillo (age 19), and Humberto Maschio (age 24) became the sensation of the 1957 tournament,

---

widely remembered for their killer instincts in front of goal. The team’s offense primarily ran through the central halfback, Rossi, who provided balls to his prolific scorers. The team’s offensive prowess reminded journalists of the “cracks” of old with their creativity. By the third match, a decisive 4-0 victory over archrival Uruguay, Argentina had scored fifteen goals. A 3-0 victory over Brazil cemented the perception among fans cultivated over the years by sports writers: the Argentine player had the combination of skill and “garra” that others, like the Brazilians, lacked.

For journalists, the emergence of the “carasucias” promised to reverse the decline towards defensive, imported “anti-fútbol.” In fact, some journalists blamed the Brazilians’ loss on their adoption of European tactics, such as the defensive shell Brazil employed in order to restrict the creativity of Argentine players. Consequently, sports writers described Argentina’s victory over Brazil as a triumph over European tactics.

The success of the “carasucias” in 1957 garnered the attention of many European clubs. When Sivori, Angelillo, and Maschio (among others) left to play in Italy in 1957,
many believed that the national team’s chances of winning the World Cup were effectively over. Due to AFA’s policy of only selecting players from the domestic league for the national team (a practice common in international football at the time), the “carasucias” were ineligible to play for Argentina in Sweden. Even more troubling for Argentina’s chances in Sweden were initial reports from Europe that Sivori, Angelillo, and Maschio were failing to produce impressive performances in Italy. Still, AFA officials and journalists argued that Argentina could easily produce new talent to replace the young stars who left the country and there was no need to select players in Europe.

As the calendar turned to 1958, a peculiar mix of conviction and doubt surrounded the state of Argentine fútbol. For most of the decade, the total and average number of goals scored per season dropped to the lowest levels of the professional era. But as the 1958 season began, scoring rose and raised hope that fútbol was returning to some degree of normalcy. Sivori, Maschio, and Angelillo were also beginning to perform well in Europe. Yet, only Sanfilippo, the leading scorer of the 1958 season, remained in Argentina from the 1957 national team. This meant that AFA would once again draw from the same pool of veteran players who featured in the national team for much of the decade. Depending on veterans like Labruna and Rossi.

118 “¿Por qué los jugadores argentinos no rinden en Italia?,” Qué, October 29, 1957, 29.
did not seem like a recipe to win a major international tournament. Worse, critics questioned AFA’s haphazard preparations for the 1958 World Cup. Poor scheduling and the refusal of club officials to release players forced Stábile to field an incomplete squad during exhibition matches.122

![Total Goals 1931-1958](chart)

**Figure 35** - This chart shows the total number of goals scored per season in the first division from 1941 through 1958. Data collected from *Memorias y balance* for the years 1941–1958.

These exhibition matches raised serious concerns about the quality of play and behavior of players. *Mundo Deportivo* described a “sad spectacle” in its coverage of Argentina’s matches against Uruguay and Chilean club team Colo-Colo. In both encounters, referees expelled multiple Argentine players. It was the type of behavior that

---

122 “Ni tanto, ni tan poco,” *Mundo Deportivo*, March 24, 1958, 26; Carlos Fontanarrosa, “¿Ésto es empezar?,” *El Gráfico*, March 14, 1958, 26-28. The German national team coach observed Argentina play in these friendlies (unlike Stábile, who did not bother to go to Europe to see the Germans play) and concluded that his team had little to fear of Argentina; see: Archetti, *El potrero, la pista y el ring*, 30.
the magazine believed ran contrary to the essence of the Argentine player. At *El Gráfico*, Panzeri’s chief concern revolved around the identity of the team and how Argentines played fútbol. He argued that AFA should immediately settle on twenty-three players whose understanding of the game exemplified the fútbol practiced in Argentina. In his opinion, displaying the aesthetic criollo style was more important than wins, losses, or even a World Cup trophy.

By tying a particular mindset and style of play to national identity, Panzeri created an expectation where players were morally obligated to represented their nation in a corporal manner. This is not to say that many fans were in agreement with Panzeri. After hearing legendary stories about the players on the national team during the 1928 Olympics and 1930 World Cup—immortalized over the years in publications and tango songs like “Tarasca Solo”—this was the chance for a new generation to experience Argentina’s performance on a global stage. The various crises in Argentine fútbol, however, generated doubts among fans. Scoring had dropped for many years, attendance was on the decline, players were overpaid, and the best prospects were unable to play for Argentina because they played professionally in Europe. After lackluster performances by the national team in its “tune-up” matches, fans sounded an alarm loud enough that

---

123 Miguel Angel Merlo, “Tristeza puede ser el título,” *Mundo Deportivo*, May 5, 1958, 7-9; Dante Panzeri, “De fútbol sólo amigos,” *El Gráfico*, May 9, 1958, 30-32. *Mundo Deportivo*’s Horacio Besio concluded that being a “guapo” was not the same as being a professional fútbol player. The guapo hits hard, yells at referees and rivals, and insulting the spirit of the spectator. If Argentina were to win the World Cup with these guapos, or “criminals of sport”, it would be detrimental to the nation; see: Horacio Besio, “Crimen internacional,” *Mundo Deportivo*, May 12, 1958, 4.


125 Ziperstein, *Tango y fútbol*, 69. Written by Bernardo Germino and José de Grandis, “Tarasca Solo” paid tribute to Domingo Tarascone, who was Argentina’s star striker at the 1928 Olympics (see figure 2 in Chapter 1).
AFA added Labruna to the squad at the last minute—despite his nearly forty years of age. The first matches in Sweden did little to raise hope. Argentina lost 3-1 to defending World Cup champion West Germany, a team considered by many as the best in the world. Journalists drew on stereotypes to assess the matches in Sweden. They concluded that the supposed beauty of the Argentine game proved useless against the “methodical and efficient” German approach. Even after Argentina’s victory over Northern Ireland, journalists told their readers back home to accept this new reality.¹²⁶

Czechoslovakia was the third and possibly final opponent in Sweden. For Argentina, only victory ensured its passage to the next round. Players faced immense pressure to deliver. Fans in Buenos Aires remembered the quality of the Czechoslovakians, who narrowly lost to Argentina in a 1956 exhibition match. Like the Germans, Argentines described Czechoslovakia was a quintessentially European team: physical, strong, fast, and technical. For Borocotó, two matches in Sweden showed that Argentine players still “possessed too much potrero” in their style of play; it would be unwise for them to try to match the Czechoslovakians’ physicality.¹²⁷ Despite these words of caution, sports writers like Borocotó continued to compare the Argentine player, who was born to play fútbol, to Europeans, whose intense training regimen was necessary for them to play at a high level. As a result, the perpetuation of a discourse centered on the natural skills of the Argentine player reinforced delusions of grandeur ahead of a defining match against Czechoslovakia.

Few people in Argentina expected the final score line: Czechoslovakia 6, Argentina 1. Reporters in Sweden grasped for ways to explain this lopsided result. Borocotó attributed this “disaster” to the decaying morals of Argentine players, who lived off fútbol but not for fútbol. Again, drawing on stereotypes, he believed that Argentines lacked the will to work hard, unlike the Germans who trained incessantly.\textsuperscript{128} Other sports writers agreed. They labeled Argentine players as lazy, pampered, and unprofessional. Specifically, they believed that the short nights of the Northern European summer encouraged players to stay out late on the streets looking for Swedish women to seduce. They also ridiculed the demands of the team for Argentine beef and chicken (which never arrived) so as to avoid the peculiar Swedish diet. Most criticisms, however, dealt with cases of in-fighting among players and coaches, willful disregard for the instructions of the physical trainer, and a coaching staff that allowed players to take days off.\textsuperscript{129}

The post-match analysis demonstrated how unfathomable Argentina’s humiliating loss must have seemed to Argentines. A crowd of angry fans waited for hours at Ezeiza airport for the arrival of the national team. As players descended from the aircraft, they heard the insults from the crowd: “Get out of here!” “Drunkards!” “You shouldn’t play anymore!” Despite an intense screening process, and hundreds of police officers and

\textsuperscript{128} Borocotó, “No es cuestión de hombres,” \textit{El Gráfico}, June 20, 1958, 4-5; Borocotó, “Velocidad: Corriente moderna,” \textit{El Gráfico}, June 20, 1958, 6-8. (“Germans” at the time referred to players from both West Germany and Czechoslovakia.)

\textsuperscript{129} Various articles, \textit{Campeón}, June 25, 1968, 4-5. That the team was stationed at a Swedish hospital for the mentally ill seemed appropriate, according for the journalists at \textit{Campeón}. It should be noted that \textit{Mundo Deportivo}’s Horacio Besio disagreed about the accusations of poor discipline and players staying out all night. Unlike other reporters in Sweden, he (along with five others) stayed with the team, day and night, at their concentration facilities. According to Besio, players did not abuse their time off. Lurid accounts came from sensationalist journalists stationed kilometers away from the team’s facilities; see: Horacio Besio, “Suecia: Una verdad en 5 puntos,” \textit{Mundo Deportivo}, June 30, 1958, 8-9.
firemen ready to launch gas canisters and water hoses, angry fans began throwing rocks and coins as the players descended from the airplane (figure 36).\textsuperscript{130} The “6 to 1” left many fútbol fans disgusted and confused. The reaction at Ezeiza was a cathartic exercise in frustration best captured by a cartoon in \textit{Campeón} that understood this rage, but that reminded readers it was better to revive Argentine fútbol than to destroy it (figure 37).\textsuperscript{131}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure36.png}
\caption{The national team arrives Ezeiza airport. AFA President Raúl Colombo (bottom), Pedro Dellacha (middle), and Néstor Rossi (top) show mixed emotions. Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure37.png}
\caption{“Sacar leña del árbol” was a phrase that suggested that in the face of tragedy, it was time to tear things up and salvage what you can. But the artist suggests that now is not the time, but instead the tree should be revived. Nevertheless, a group of man hack at branches labeled “Colombo,” “Stábile,” “Corbatta,” “Carrizo,” and “Menendez.” \textit{Campeón}, June 25, 1958, 1. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.}
\end{figure}

In the same way that Argentines asked “What now?” after the 1955 coup, the question that dominated public discourse after Sweden had to do with the direction and identity of Argentine fútbol. Writers at \textit{El Gráfico} and \textit{Mundo Deportivo} absolved themselves from setting high expectations by reminding readers of the warning signs they


printed in their magazines. The strongest impulse that emerged was to shift gears and emulate the successful European approaches to training and tactics. Even *El Gráfico’s* Borocotó argued that Argentines should look no further than to the Brazilians, who eventually won the World Cup. Brazilian coaches, for example, imported balls made in Sweden that were lighter than those used in South America, in the event that they would be adopted for the tournament. Meanwhile, Argentine players feigned injury and publicly complained whenever physical training proved to be too excessive for their tastes.

Panzeri, however, showed that *El Gráfico* was capable of presenting alternate views. His solution to the “disaster” in Sweden was simple: change personnel, from players to officials. He warned that the desire by some to adopt foreign tactics was a knee-jerk reaction. Panzeri concluded that the disaster in Sweden was the product of a generation that did not take the sport seriously; Argentines deluded themselves into believing that their fútbol was inherently superior without working hard to perfect it.

**Conclusion**

Brazil’s triumph must have been a tough pill to swallow for Argentine fútbol fans as well. The notion that Brazilians served as models worth emulating, after decades of

---

132 “Antes de Suecia,” *El Gráfico*, June 27, 1958, 21; Horacio Besio, “Desastre con historia,” *Mundo Deportivo*, June 23, 1958, 4. The most common “warning” they expressed dealt with the poor preparation by the national team. AFA officials set the team up for failure by improvising at every turn. The match against Czechoslovakia thus proved to be Argentina’s waterloo. And it was stupid vanity according to *Mundo Deportivo*. It argued that world football had advanced, while Argentine fútbol remained stuck in the past. The solution was to improve training, become faster, and continue to participate in international football—isolationism hurt Argentina in the long run. See: Héctor Villita, “Ya fue dicho,” *Mundo Deportivo*, June 23, 1958, 28-32.


Argentines believing themselves to be superior in fútbol—often in racialized terms—was difficult to process. Nonetheless, some journalists understood Brazil’s victory as a product of a conscious decision to complement their own style with a European emphasis on speed, strength, and cultivating a professional work ethic. If Brazil did this, they argued, so could Argentina. Journalists who observed the national team in Europe largely agreed that Argentine players produced a visually appealing style of play, but never posed a serious threat to opponents.

More than ever, the foreign gaze affected how Argentines saw themselves through the lens of fútbol. Argentines were keenly aware of how Europeans assessed the quality of their players. Unfortunately, the “disaster” in Sweden left a bad impression. But there was also a feeling that Argentina was not far removed from success. The 1957 team that impressed observers in Peru offered hope that Argentina could still succeed with its criollo style of play. Moreover, the success of Argentine players, such as Alfredo Di Stéfano and the “carasucias,” also showed that the criollo player was able to adapt and to succeed in Europe. The result was that for the next several years, a fierce debate emerged in Argentina as to whether coaches and players should adhere to the traditional approaches of fútbol criollo, or embrace European tactics and training methods that proved successful in the age of “modern” football.

135 Archetti, Masculinities, 161 and 169. One of Archetti’s informants believes that the problem in Argentina has always been the propensity to expect its players to achieve victory. Chauvinism and “patrioterismo” are as much a part of the masculine ideal as those commonly cited by Archetti and others: “garra,” “aguante,” and ingenuity. This expectation to always win is a product of fútbol’s ability to level the playing field, so to speak, for men of all classes throughout the twentieth century. To share a passion for fútbol, or play on an amateur team, allowed any participant to converse about culture, modernity, social development, and foreign cultures through the language of fútbol.

Perhaps the lasting legacy of the “disaster” in Sweden was that it punctured the myth of superiority sports writers cultivated over several decades as they imagined national identity through fútbol criollo. The speed of European athletes, and their ability to run hard for the entire ninety minutes, surprised those who observed the matches in Sweden. It also raised questions about the merits of an Argentine style of play.

The “disaster” of 1958, and the subsequent reaction at Ezeiza airport, brought to a head a series of crises that affected the sport and society in general. Inside and outside of fútbol stadiums, the period between 1955 and 1958 brought radical changes to structures of governance, an increase in moments of public violence, high inflation and suppressed wages for workers, and raised questions about the moral fabric of society. Government and fútbol leaders seemed to take the masses for granted. Rather than restore ethics and order to society, the Revolución Libertadora exacerbated the divisions in society produced by Peronism. And instead of addressing the declining quality of play and excesses in professional fútbol, officials kept the status quo in place. For many fans and journalists, the “disaster” in Sweden was the product of years of failure, while the anger at Ezeiza airport was the expression of frustration for the social malaise of the late 1950s. Perhaps Campeón summed it up best when in 1965 it looked back at the glorious squad of the “carasucias” and labeled it the “last criollo” team, the end of an era.  

4. The Age of Modernism and Scientism in Fútbol, 1958-1966

“¿Fútbol ó pelotita?”¹ When Campeón posed this question in 1965, it signaled that the debates over modernity and the identity of Argentine fútbol remained unsettled seven years after the “disaster” in Sweden. According to the paper, spectators were fickle about the type of fútbol they wanted to see. They were quick to criticize the poor quality of play by Argentine players; yet when reputable teams from Brazil or Europe visited Argentina, fans equally disparaged the supposedly higher quality play of foreigners.² In a moment of introspection, Campeón argued that much of the blame belonged to journalists, who presented to their readers a tiring and incessant debate over the merits of traditional and modern fútbol. Instead, Campeón suggested that the real problem was the lack of collective spirit in the country. Until players let go of the individualist mentality of the “pelotita” (street game), and forged a shared sense of sacrifice, Argentina would never reach its potential in fútbol. Moreover, the nation’s teams would continue to perform unevenly in international tournaments.

This chapter argues that between 1958 and 1966 Argentine fútbol underwent a contested process of modernization. Technical experts and coaches addressed the root problems that stifled success on the field, but their efforts at modernizing fútbol produced

¹ “Ha llegado la hora de la opción fundamental: ¿Fútbol o pelotita?,” Campeón, December 8, 1965, 6.
² “¿Qué fútbol queremos los argentinos?,” Campeón, November 3, 1965, 5.
mixed and inconclusive results. Those who embraced new tactics and training methods from Europe were convinced that Argentine players were insufficiently prepared when it came to conditioning and tactical awareness. Advocates, including many coaches and physical trainers, believed that new diets, pre-season workouts, awareness of new tactical systems, and resistance training would all help Argentine teams reach their long-imagined potential. According to these proponents, the modern game favored scientific approaches because the pace was quicker and required athletes who were stronger and possessed stamina.

Critics—mostly journalists and older fans—questioned the value of implementing concepts they viewed as alien to the natural instincts of the Argentine player. They believed that “scientific” fútbol turned artistic players into mechanized pieces on a coach’s game board and stripped them of their innate abilities. Furthermore, “fútbol moderno” elevated a singular focus on winning—exitismo—over more noble pursuits like good sportsmanship. According to these critics, new approaches de-emphasized the visually pleasing style that had long defined fútbol in Argentina. They argued that this exitismo produced ugly fútbol, which did nothing to improve the quality of play; worse, the emphasis on physicality and conditioning led to games that turned violent and generated what critics saw as misguided notions of virility. Skeptical journalists traced a

straight line between aggressive play on the field and irrational acts of fan violence, both of which they saw as borne of an inability to process defeat.\(^4\)

Various actors in fútbol—journalists, players, coaches, spectators, and officials—are central to this study of frustrated modernization in Argentine fútbol. Their reactions to the dismal performance of the national team in Sweden, as well as the state of the professional leagues, shaped fútbol discourse after 1958. The anxieties they expressed about the changes taking place in fútbol reflected similar concerns by many Argentines about the larger social and political transformations affecting the country.

For critics of the Revolución Libertadora, three years of military government was a return to the *década infame* of the 1930s, a moment of state-sponsored violence and arbitrary repression.\(^5\) Free elections in 1958 brought hope to these critics. Arturo Frondizi won the presidency thanks to a tacit alliance with the exiled Perón, which helped deliver the working class vote.\(^6\) Naturally, this pact upset anti-Peronist military officials. Still, Frondizi’s emphasis on a conciliatory form of democracy, as well as his developmentalist economic plans, or *desarrollismo*, satisfied those who were seeking to move past the

---


Arturo Frondizi’s criticized the government’ proscription of Peronism and its detention of people on political grounds; see: “Nadie debe ser perseguido por sus ideas,” *Qué*, January 8, 1957, 16-17. Frondizi also understood that the economic winds were at his back. He questioned the economic policies of the military government at a time when inflation increased by at least thirty-five percent and the Argentine peso had lost about twenty-three percent of its value. Wages did not rise to meet the demands of higher costs, while the gap between poor and rich widened. See: “35% de aumento en el costo de vida,” *Qué*, January 29, 1957, 10-11; “El peso argentino se sigue devaluando,” *Qué*, January 15, 1957, 10-11; “Estadística 1956: El obrero argentino produce más pero come menos,” *Qué*, January 15, 1957, 18-19.

polarization of the post-Perón era. Frondizi offered a new path. It was a political vision that sought to empower citizens and to hold government officials accountable in the pursuit of a moral and peaceful society. This vision earned Frondizi the support of small entrepreneurs, middle-class professionals, and intellectuals like Raúl Scalibrini Ortiz, who echoed the need to develop the nation’s industry if Argentina was to modernize and progress. Specialists in various fields became central to the Frondizi state, offering research-based ideas to improving key economic sectors. Frondizi’s moderate appeal and bonafides as an intellectual appealed to many professionals and earned him the label “Perón of the middle class.” His presidency ushered in an age of consumerism, technocratic government, and international alliances.

Technical experts also gained an outsized influence in fútbol. Trainers like Adolfo Mogilevsky studied training sessions from Europe. The best teams, they argued, addressed the physical and psychological needs of their players, adopting a holistic

---


approach to training. By meeting the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of players, they held that a collective spirit conducive to intense training regimen would soon emerge.\(^{11}\)

This chapter is divided in two parts. The first half explores the immediate reactions to the “disaster” in Sweden and traces the decisive shift towards new concepts in fútbol. The voices in sports journalism that held onto traditional views about fútbol, namely the writers at *El Gráfico*, began to lose influence. AFA officials enacted serious reforms modeled after European football and hired coaches open to new concepts in international football. This shift at AFA, and at various clubs, gave rise to “technical-tactical” fútbol. Coaches and trainers justified their hiring by citing their knowledge of the latest tactics and training regimens. By the following World Cup, held in Chile in 1962, conditioning and tactical awareness had visibly progressed; but uneven match results left the overall merits of this new approach up in the air.

In the second half of this chapter, the attention turns towards the impact of fútbol moderno on the business practices at AFA and major club associations, on notions of masculinity, and how fútbol officials defined success. Charismatic figures in fútbol imposed their will on and off the field. The dominant form of masculinity in fútbol changed as well. Whereas the ideal traits of a player in the past included wit, artistry, technique, and individuality, the emphasis on tactics and discipline in “modern” fútbol favored other traits: strength, virility, athleticism, endurance, and adherence to tactics.

\(^{11}\) Damián Cané, “El hombre y el grupo,” *Mundo Deportivo*, July 21, 1958, 26-27. Another trainer, José Della Torre, suggested that isolationism harmed Argentines because they could not learn from others.
The emphasis on winning at all costs, however, produced unattractive fútbol to traditionalists. It also exacerbated violent confrontations on the field and in the stands. As a result, the long-running debate over civility and barbarism remained unsettled by 1965.

4: First Half

Transitions in Sports Journalism: El Gráfico in the 1960s

During the late 1950s, Argentina experienced a rise in middle-class consumerism not unlike other countries in Latin America, such as Mexico and Brazil. Families bought the latest clothes, televisions, electronic appliances, and automobiles—preferably imported from Western Europe or the United States.\(^{12}\) Similarly, European training methods and tactical systems began to appear in South America during this period, especially with the success of Brazil at the 1958 World Cup. Advocates, such as physical trainers, encouraged fútbol officials to emulate the various practices that helped players in Europe succeed on the international level: pre-season training, strict diet, education about lifestyle habits, resistance training and conditioning, and tactical awareness. If a general consensus emerged after the 1958 World Cup, it was that Argentine fútbol regressed because of an adherence to approaches that were proven to be outdated and out of sync with the modern game.

*El Gráfico* remained a vocal proponent of the traditional approaches that defined fútbol criollo. Yet, in the post-Sweden landscape the magazine’s unrelenting loyalty to

\(^{12}\) Karush, *Culture of Class*, 216–219. Karush nonetheless reminds us that the rise of mass cultural products pre-dated the post-Perón era, as evidenced by films like *Los tres berretines* that placed middle-class consumerism front and center.
traditional approaches, and its critique of imported ideas, required a more concise reasoning for fútbol fans in the wake of the debacle against Czechoslovakia. Over the next several years, El Gráfico outlined several problems with the adoption of European approaches. First, it constructed a binary opposition that labeled fútbol criollo as “natural” and European football as “scientific.” This juxtaposition emanated from the earliest writings in El Gráfico about “lo criollo” in Argentine fútbol from the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. During these early years, writers like Borocotó and Chantecler defined the Argentine player as a skilled artist that used trickery and “dribbling” to evade opponents and score, whereas the English player was disciplined, physically strong, and remained faithful to tactics.13

Several decades later, Panzeri and his colleagues argued that “scientific” fútbol threatened the spirit of the Argentine player.14 They argued that European players required training and excessive coaching because football was not central to their cultures. Argentine players, on the other hand, “felt” fútbol from their earliest playing days. For Panzeri and Lazzatti, the modern “technical-tactical” approach meant that players were unable to deviate from the game plan. They argued that tactical systems limited a player’s imagination, his liberty to create and improvise, and sapped him of his

---

13 Archetti, El potrero, la pista y el ring, 20.
14 Most of Panzeri’s criticisms dealt with the corruption and the lack of professionalism in professional fútbol—topics he later expanded upon in his 1974 book Burguesía y gangsterismo en el deporte. Panzeri saw these “vices” as an extension of the loss of identity produced by the greater emphasis on profits. For examples of Panzeri’s crusade against several other “vices” of fútbol in El Gráfico, see: “Si la intención es sanear...” August 1, 1958, 26-27 (player indiscipline); “Cambiar, pero cambiar la raíz,” January 8, 1959, 8-9 (players and fan behavior); “Se ganó: Falta jugar mayor,” April 9, 1959, 4-18 (winning as the ultimate goal); “Franqueza para el futuro o más lágrimas en el futuro,” December 2, 1959, 50-53 (improvisation at AFA); “El asunto podría ser técnico,” January 27, 1960, 52-55 (coaches’ selection of undisciplined players); “Primera victoria argentina: Mayor tranquilidad, optimismo todavía no,” June 7, 1961, 3-7 (lack of a “school,” or identity, of Argentine fútbol).
joy to play the game. In their opinion, the emphasis on “scientific” fútbol was too focused on preventing a goal rather than scoring, and consequently ran contrary to “lo nuestro.”¹⁵

The second problem *El Gráfico* presented to its readers was that foreign tactics and training robbed players of their ingenuity and made them more dependent on the instructions of their coaches. In other words, “modern” fútbol converted players into nothing more than cogs in a machine. It was a line of reasoning reminiscent of Gramscian critiques of the Fordist standardization of products. Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that an industrialized set of fixed norms and habits favored “exactitude and precision” and subjugated the “animality” (or natural instincts) in man.¹⁶ The result was mass production of standardized goods lacking craftsmanship. Similarly, Panzeri characterized “technical-tactical” approaches as a strict adherence to tactical formations that produced mindless play. He argued that athleticism and physical conditioning did not replace the Argentine player’s instinctive feel for the game.

Panzeri pointed to a humbling 1-5 defeat to Brazil in 1960 as an example of the problems produced by a strict adherence to tactical systems. During the match, Argentina’s head coach Guillermo Stábile moved his two midfielders to a more defensive position, in order to neutralize Brazil’s potent offense. Stábile then asked two of the four forwards to drop back and fill the void in midfield. The problem for Panzeri was that both

---


of these shifts isolated the two remaining forwards. As a result, they received few balls from their teammates, and when the two forwards did receive a pass, the four or five Brazilian defenders outnumbered them. According to Panzeri, Stábile simply wanted to avoid a humiliating loss by strengthening his defense and preventing Brazil from scoring.  

The lopsided defeat occurred anyway, but the worst aspect for Panzeri was that a strict adherence to tactics stripped Argentine players of their ability to react to changes in a game and adjust. Instead of drawing on their natural “read” of the game, Argentina’s players depended on instructions from the coaching staff to either remain in their positions, or shift to new ones. Panzeri thus portrayed this trend towards the “technical-tactical” as a de-humanizing process. He was not alone. As coaches across Europe and South America began to emphasize defensive-minded tactics and specific roles for players in the late 1950s and 1960s, fans clamored for a more appealing product on the field. This is why creative players like Sívori, Di Stéfano, and Angelillo were in demand among European clubs, and why a new starlet like Pelé attracted the interest of the major club teams in Europe.


18 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, 303. It should be noted that Gramsci’s own view on sports proves contradictory to his larger views on laborers, employers, and the Fordist system. Observing a game of football, Gramsci labeled it a “model of individualistic society.” He noted that the nature of the sport demanded initiative, but within the framework of the laws of the game; players exercise movement, competition, and conflict under a rule of fair play governed by a figure of authority: the referee. If anything, his views were closer to the Taylorist model. Gramsci characterized players as hierarchically placed according to their abilities. He believed that they possessed a “freedom of spirit and tolerance of the opposition” because capitalist societies favored economic individualism and political freedom; see: Antonio Gramsci, “Football and Scopone,” in Antonio Gramsci: Pre-Prison Writings, ed. Richard Bellamy, trans. Virginia Cox (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 73–74.
The 5-1 loss to Brazil allowed Panzeri and Lazzatti to present a third problem with “modern” fútbol, namely that players, officials, and coaches had lost sight of what mattered most: professionalism. Panzeri cited prominent members of the World Cup team in Sweden as examples of arrogance and laziness. Several players skipped practices, others were insubordinate to the coaching staff, and a few even came to blows with teammates. These were signs of decay for Panzeri. They were the result of a growing emphasis on winning in the national league that transferred to the national team. Years before, Panzeri argued, clubs placed greater value on a player’s talent than his sportsmanship or professionalism. When players walked off the field in the middle of the game, simply because they did not want to play anymore, Panzeri believed that something was wrong. Worse, players were refusing to honor their selection to the national team at the behest of club presidents, who saw national team duty as a potential risk to their investments. Panzeri insinuated that club presidents valued profits over patriotism. He also questioned AFA’s failure to enforce resolutions it passed to ensure the availability of players for the national team.

20 Dante Panzeri, “El corazón es mal agente de negocios,” El Gráfico, July 11, 1958, 30-31; “Si la intención es sanear…,” El Gráfico, August 1, 1958, 26-27. Players listed in the media for a lack of discipline in Sweden included Sanfilippo (failure to practice and incident with teammate), Méndez and Zárate (oversleeping), Vairo and Mussimesi (fighting at practice), Carrizo (incidents with Sanfilippo and coach Stábile), and Corbatta (altercation with Argentine embassy employee).
21 Argentina played few matches between 1935 and 1950, so club directors had not been accustomed to allowing players to leave on national team duty. AFA passed a measure requiring players to honor their selection to the national team. See: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Resolución de la comisión intervenitora adoptada en session extraordinaria realizada el 20 de octubre de 1955,” Boletín N° 6, October 20, 1955.
These arguments were a continuation of the ethical, or moral, crises presented by *El Gráfico* in the late 1950s under Panzeri’s direction. The magazine portrayed fútbol as a simple game that honorable men of all classes enjoyed. But instead of promoting a clean and honest game (“*jugar limpio*”), *El Gráfico* insisted that winning was all that mattered to fútbol officials and coaches. As Panzeri later wrote, fútbol leaders had learned the wrong lessons from Sweden. Those in charge of professional fútbol confused progress with prosperity; they replaced humility with a level of aggrandizement that excused the laziness, lack of professionalism, and poor disposition of players.22

By drawing on the past for solutions to the present crisis in Argentine fútbol, *El Gráfico* employed nostalgia in order to sustain the hegemonic discourse about fútbol it crafted since the late 1920s. New approaches to training and coaching from Europe unsettled traditionalists. The general feeling after Sweden was that change was inevitable. An adoption of new concepts was therefore a rebuke of the merits of fútbol criollo championed by publications like *El Gráfico* for decades. The magazine’s nostalgic view of fútbol revealed a conservative reaction to cultural and political transformations in society.

In 1958, the desire for new solutions to old problems extended beyond fútbol. The 1955 military coup had ended a decade of populist rule under Perón; but after three years many Argentines found that the provisional government’s anti-Peronist policies moved the country backward, not forward. This is why Frondizi’s platform of national reconciliation proved attractive to those looking to move beyond the Peronist-Anti-

---

Peronist divide. He ran on the promise to defend the democratic system, tackle inflation, and welcomed foreign capital that would elevate—not exploit—Argentina’s natural resources.  

For intellectuals like Arturo Jauretche, a vote for Frondizi would break the “gorila stranglehold” over mass media and finally allow Argentina to move past old divisions. Jauretche believed that Peronists who did not vote in favor of Frondizi, and were intent in casting a blank ballot as a form of protest, were just as guilty as gorilas of being mired in the past. Likening the election to a fútbol match, Jauretche argued that a blank vote would make Peronists feel good about how they played the game, but would ultimately result in a loss against the other team (gorilas and the military hardliners). For intellectuals like Jauretche, Frondizi and the Radical Intransigent Party offered a new articulation of what Argentine progress and modernity should look like, based on research-based solutions and models of success from other countries. 

Pursuing a similar approach to Frondizi’s “desarrollismo,” coaches and physical trainers offered new “scientific” approaches to fútbol based on foreign models. Both in fútbol and government, officials emphasized the role of technocrats and foreign ideas. A similar process took place in journalism. Although El Gráfico remained the key sports magazine in Argentina, slumping sales led Editorial Atlántida to make a significant

---


24 Arturo Jauretche, “¡Goles contra el gobierno!,” Qué, July 23, 1957, 4-7. In a letter written by “El descamisado” in Qué, the author likened a vote for Frondizi by Peronist voters as similar to a Boca Juniors fan cheering for Chacarita Juniors when it played against River Plate. In other words, if a Chacarita Juniors victory over River Plate benefits Boca Juniors, then any Boca fan should temporarily support another team; see: “¿Seremos tan giles, compañero?,” Qué, July 26, 1957, 10.
change in 1962. The rise of a younger generation of journalists, like Juvenal (Julio César Pasquato), acknowledged the effectiveness of romantic views of fútbol in generating myths and a shared history for fans. But they also viewed this journalistic style as an endearing relic of the past that offered little to an analysis of the modern game. Instead, a new generation of writers dissected matches, tactical formations, and the in-game adjustments by coaches. If a player misbehaved, writers like Juvenal provided the details of the incident without necessarily rebuking the player’s ethical behavior.

Juvenal’s approach to fútbol analysis accepted tactical systems, and the focus on results, as realities of the international game. He found labels like “modern” or “foreign” to be meaningless. When, he wondered, did “yesterday” end and “today” begin? In his view, new tactics and training methods were part of the maturation and evolution of Argentine fútbol. Juvenal was also one of the first sports writers to notice how AFA favored coaches with knowledge of European tactical systems designed to minimize defeats, even if they produced ugly fútbol. Instead of bemoaning the “cero gol” mentality, his articles tried to understand the problems affecting Argentine teams and

---

26 José Sanfilippo was one player Panzeri singled out by El Gráfico under Panzeri. A prolific goal-scorer, Sanfilippo was frequently in the middle of dust-ups and guilty of insubordination at his club and on the national team; see: “Historia de un puñetazo,” El Gráfico, April 1, 1964, 54-55; Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Solicitud de informes a la Football Association,” Boletín Nº 48, February 2, 1956.
offer solutions. \textsuperscript{29} Juvenal believed that most problems had to do with the psychological state of players afraid to lose. It was a conclusion that gained acceptance in Argentina over the years among fútbol officials, journalists, and coaches. Fear of losing explained why defensive players were willing to injure opponents to prevent a goal, and why attacking players gave up under strong defensive pressure or retaliated out of frustration. The general consensus was that players were afraid of public scrutiny; they reacted in games instead of proactively looking to score. According to many players, the pressures exerted upon them by club officials, coaches, and fans to succeed, and win lucrative tournaments, led them to play an aggressive and unattractive game.

Whereas Juvenal fell short of repudiating player misbehavior, Panzeri increasingly sharpened his critique during the 1960s. So, when he observed that traditional values of humility and “fair play” were now secondary to winning, Panzeri was more than commenting on the state of Argentine society, he was also criticizing his colleagues in the press for valuing results over quality of play. \textsuperscript{30} After Panzeri refused to run an article he deemed as demagogic, he left 	extit{El Gráfico} by mutual accord with his directors at Editorial Atlántida. Panzeri worked for other magazines and on television and published two best-selling books before he passed away in 1978 at age 56.

\textsuperscript{29} Juvenal, “El fútbol se asfixia por falta de goles, ¿cómo salvarlo?,” \textit{El Gráfico}, November 23, 1965, 66-69. Juvenal argued that coaches should train players to be faster, smarter, quicker, and more ingenious; they should learn how to make the ball move faster, play quicker. If not, aggressive defenders would continue to mark opponents tightly.

\textsuperscript{30} Panzeri, \textit{Burguesía y gangsterismo en el deporte}, 32.
When Borocotó died in June of 1964, two years after Panzeri’s departure from _El Gráfico_, it marked a symbolic end of an era at the sports magazine.\(^{31}\) Replacing Panzeri as editor of _El Gráfico_ was Carlos Fontanarrosa, who also edited magazines like _Gente y la actualidad_ in the 1960s and 1970s. Under his leadership, _El Gráfico_ shifted away from its pedagogical style. Instead, Fontanarrosa’s main concern was to increase the sales of the magazine, which had dropped from 250,000 in the 1940s to 90,000 weekly copies by 1962.\(^{32}\)

Fontanarrosa’s approach to _El Gráfico_ reflected the exitismo (singular focus on success) of the era by emphasizing profits above all else. As a result, the magazine began focusing on the “spectacle” of fútbol. Match reports, for example, placed a greater emphasis on results and noteworthy incidents on the field than the aesthetic quality of play. Fontanarrosa’s approach worked as he turned around flagging sales at the magazine and helped shape the sensationalist coverage of sports that remains in practice at the magazine to this day. There were those who criticized Fontanarrosa; his focus on exitismo bothered public figures like art director Jorge Romero Brest, who throughout his career criticized journalists like Fontanarrosa who treated culture with excessive superficiality, paid no attention to the power of their words, and were concerned with “ratings” above all else.\(^{33}\)

---

31 The respect for Borocotó among his peers was universal. Campeón eulogized his passing in “Se fue un gran periodista: Ricardo Lorenzo ‘Borocotó’,” _Campeón_, June 24, 1964, 4.


**Chantocracia**

The new tenor at *El Gráfico*, represented by Juvenal’s analytical approach, as well as Fontanarrosa’s market-research model and focus on the spectacle of sports, coincided with a larger turn to technocratic specialists in Argentina. Just as AFA and club officials hired more kinesthesiologists and dietitians, the Frondizi government leaned on professionals across various fields who used empirical methods to assess the nation’s problems.

Historian Federico Neiburg argues that this move towards specialization on the part of government policy makers was a product of a desire to break with traditionalism after 1955, as well as the reinstatement on the national stage of intellectuals isolated by the Peronist regime. One such intellectual was Italian sociologist Gino Germani, who settled in Argentina and examined the economic history of Argentina. Germani concluded that Argentina was entering an age of modernity and rapid progress fueled by the nation’s urban middle class. Social historian José Luis Romero agreed with Germani in an interview with *Eco Mundial*. Influenced by scholarship from the French Annales School, Romero felt that the general malaise that affected Argentina between 1955 and 1957 had to do with the lack of political ideology of the provisional government. He also blamed social anxieties on the antagonism towards the democratic process by the abandoned Peronist masses. Romero accurately predicted in 1957 that Frondizi would win the election with the support of the rising middle class, in what he

---

35 Germani, “La integración de las masas a la vida política y el totalitarismo,” 325–327.
called the “bourgeois” evolution of the nation. For these intellectuals, the first step on the road to progress was to “de-Peronize” key sectors of society. In particular, they felt that the university system favored indoctrination over research under the Peronist state. Germani and Romero’s vision was that universities would resume their focus on developing specialists across different fields. Neiburg sees the late 1950s and early 1960s as a moment when the specialist became an agent of change.

In the same way that European scholarship influenced the works of intellectuals like Germani and Romero, a cadre of fútbol specialists looked to Europe for “modern” tactical systems. They believed that the 1958 World Cup exposed Argentine fútbol as bereft of tactical ideas and data-driven conditioning regimens. Argentine coaches and physical trainers assessed what made national teams like West Germany and Hungary successful, and they studied how Brazil co-opted European systems en route to its victory in Sweden. Similarly, club coaches looked to the success of teams like Real Madrid, or Internazionale de Milan (Inter Milan), for ideas on how to improve the performance of their players. Much like in the early twentieth-century, European football reemerged as a model worth emulating, which once again positioned Argentina in the role of the student.

When El Gráfico complained that the emphasis on tactics and training deprived players of their natural ingenuity, they were also equating fútbol coaching staffs to the Taylorist model of scientific management. In the 1910s, Frederick Taylor promoted a “scientific” study of techniques that would make labor production efficient. Experts could

---

37 Neiburg, Los intelectuales y la invención del peronismo, 214–220 and 233–236.
then use data to select, train, and develop the workman to his or her best abilities. The end-result would be a subdivision of labor, where each laborer fulfills and specializes in a specific task.\textsuperscript{38} Panzeri and Lazzatti correctly understood that a shift was taking place in international football that resulted in the “expert” coach and the “specialized” player. Coaching staffs now included medical professionals and psychologists. Coaches earned reputations as innovators for their tactical schemes. These systems, in turn, turned players into specialists based on their positions within a given tactical formation. Sociologist Richard Giulianotti, among others, points to the 1950s and 1960s as a moment when a Taylorist aesthetic took hold in international football.\textsuperscript{39} Although Giulianotti warns about over-generalizing the impact of tactical systems based on the success of a few teams, in the Argentine case a concerted effort among coaches and trainers emerged after Sweden to learn and adopt new systems from Europe.

Before leaving \textit{El Gráfico}, Panzeri engaged physical trainer Adolfo Mogilevsky in a public debate over the necessity of professional experts in fútbol. For Panzeri, the proliferation of dozens of new specialty professions was an unnecessary enlargement of the sport. He was equally dismissive of their attempts to “evolve” fútbol. Even worse for Panzeri was the outsized influence these self-described “outside players” held in coaching decisions. Trainers like Mogilvesky saw themselves as members of the coaching staff by virtue of the trust placed in them by head coaches and fútbol officials.

For Panzeri, this expansion of the coaching staff was nothing more than a *chantocracia*—a management system of hucksters.\(^{40}\)

Sensing that Panzeri was misinformed about the role of technical experts on a fútbol team, Mogilevsky answered his criticisms point-by-point in a series of letters to *El Gráfico* in 1960. He argued that experts trained at recognized institutions would be able to educate players about diet plans, best training practices, tactical awareness, and other issues relevant to playing professional fútbol. Mogilevsky believed that Argentine fútbol needed “artisans” who knew how to carry out their work; what’s more, the sport required “teachers” who understood why such work was needed.\(^{41}\) According to him, the most critical issue for fútbol players was their lack of daily practice sessions. By contrast, European players began their work in pre-season camps removed from the club’s facilities and players’ families. Once the season began, they participated in multiple training sessions each day, focused on conditioning, resistance training, and tactical awareness. Mogilevsky praised the European emphasis on the total assessment of a player’s health. He wanted specialists in Argentina to teach athletes how to properly take care of their feet, maintain good hygiene (especially with teeth and gums), about the dangers of alcohol and cigarette consumption and the effects of sexual promiscuity.\(^{42}\)

---

\(^{40}\) Panzeri, *Burguesía y gangsterismo en el deporte*, 87. “Chantocracia” draws from the *lunfardo* term “chanta,” which was used to describe an aggressive salesman—someone who talks quite a bit without saying much of significance. This would be similar in American jargon to a “used car salesman.”


\(^{42}\) “Mogilevsky sigue trabajando,” *El Gráfico*, April 26, 1961, 32-35. Mogilevsky made several recommendations to AFA. He believed that AFA should schedule all matches one year in advance, structure every team activity off the field so that players, coaches, and clubs, could arrange their professional and personal schedules accordingly, and handle salaries in advance so finances did not
the issue of whether or not physical trainers were coaches, Mogilevsky felt that specialists should coach players, but only in areas delegated by the head coach.\textsuperscript{43}

Panzeri, unsurprisingly, disagreed with Mogilevsky’s position. But this back-and-forth dialogue in \textit{El Gráfico} brought attention to a marked shift in training practices. Various officials and head coaches credited Mogilevsky for revolutionizing Argentine fútbol by emphasizing data-driven and research-based exercises. He also convinced many club teams to mimic the pre-season conditioning and resistance training used in Europe.\textsuperscript{44}

One article published in \textit{Panorama} in 1958 noted the striking differences between European and Argentine players first highlighted by Mogilevsky. In Europe, for example, players only rested on Mondays; they began their conditioning on Tuesday mornings, followed by exercises with balls in the afternoon, repeating this routine each day through Saturday (with games normally on Sunday). \textit{Panorama} questioned why the Argentine player only practiced three times a week, usually after lunch, and only if he deemed it worthy to get out of bed that day. Worse, he skipped breakfast, ate lunch in the afternoon, and ate heavy meals at midnight.\textsuperscript{45} Drawing on stereotypes, \textit{Panorama} also described German teams as “strong, noble, active”; their players were either muscular (and highly disciplined) athletes, or moved and passed the ball with the precision of classical dancers.

\textsuperscript{43} Dante Panzeri, “¿Qué es técnica y quiénes son técnicos?,” \textit{El Gráfico}, July 6, 1960, 30-31.
\textsuperscript{44} “La hora cumbre de Zubeldia,” \textit{Primera Plana}, September 24, 1968, 64. Among the coaches that expressed a high regard for Mogilevsky were Osvaldo Zubeldia, Victorio Spinetto, José D’Amico, and José Della Torre. D’Amico and Della Torre borrowed heavily from Mogilevsky’s training regimen when they developed Racing’s intense workouts in the late 1950s; \textit{see}: Carlos Fontanarrosa, “Racing trabaja…trabaja…trabaja…,” \textit{El Gráfico}, October 31, 1958, 34-36.
Above all, the magazine marveled at how Germans sacrificed their individuality on the field with a spirit of cooperation. On the other hand, Panorama noted how Argentine athletes played for the television cameras. ⁴⁶

Mogilevsky and other trainers sought to change these types of practice habits, as well as the mindset of local players, if Argentine teams were to have any chance of competing for international trophies. After stepping down as physical trainer of the national team in 1961, Mogilevsky found work with Club Atlético Atlanta, San Lorenzo and River Plate. ⁴⁷ At Atlanta, he cultivated a friendship with club President León Kolbowski, who was so impressed with Mogilevsky that he appointed him as head coach in 1964. ⁴⁸ During his stay at the club, Mogilevsky implemented new conditioning methods and adopted the defensive tactical schemes from teams like Inter Milan. ⁴⁹

The respect that many coaches held for physical trainers like Mogilevsky, José D’Amico, and later Jorge Kinstenmacher, only underscored the growing influence of European ideas on training and tactical systems. Head coaches began to ask for a complete staff of physical trainers, pedicurists, psychologists, and kinesthesiologists (to

---

⁴⁶ “Sin olvidar lo que sabemos hay que hallar la fórmula para jugar a los europeos,” Campeón, April 25, 1962, 3.
The Age of the Celebrity Coach

The role of the head coach also shifted after 1958, from a team manager to a tactical specialist. Among the first to coaches embrace foreign ideas were those who played professionally in Europe in the 1930s, such as Stábile and Renato Cesarini. They were among the roughly one hundred Argentine players that left to play in Europe after 1931. Many of them returned to Argentina convinced by the effectiveness of highly structured systems common to European clubs. Therefore, when AFA president Raúl Colombo declared that all of the answers to Argentine fútbol’s problems lay in Europe, and that a European advisor or coach was critical ahead of the 1962 World Cup, he simply echoed a long and historic association in Argentina between Europe and

name a few.\textsuperscript{50} The debacle in Sweden seemed to validate these requests. Towards the end of 1958, AFA organized a series of meetings to address the problems in Argentine fútbol.\textsuperscript{51} Its internal investigation produced a detailed report from the World Cup coaching staff, followed by additional recommendations from the association’s sports council.\textsuperscript{52} The investigation concluded that it was necessary to “rectify concepts and modify systems” based on new ideas in world football. Looking ahead to the 1962 World Cup, Mogilevsky presented detailed plans that AFA welcomed as a basis for the future.


\textsuperscript{52} Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Informes técnicos: (VI Campeonato Mundial),” Boletín N° 370, July 8, 1958; Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “VI Campeonato del Mundo,” Boletín N° 374, July 18, 1958.

\textsuperscript{53} Mason, Passion of the People?, 60; Archetti, Masculinities, 162; Frydenberg, Historia social del fútbol, 265–268; Alabarces, Fútbol y patria, 86.
modernity. The difference after 1958 was that Argentina was now fully integrated into the international football community. New tactics and training methods were also a part of the regular exchange of ideas across nations that accelerated in the 1960s. The increased movement of players and coaches, the rise of televised matches, and the frequency of international matches meant that new ideas quickly traversed borders.

*Panorama* credited the Brazilians for studying the latest tactical and training development in Europe, and then appropriating these approaches within their own style of play. The magazine argued that Brazilian players were able to match the speed, strength, and tactical acumen of their European opponents in Sweden. The key to victory, however, was how their head coach, Vicente Feola, applied an innovative 4-2-4 system in order to maximize the talents of his players. According to *Panorama*, it was an approach that served as a template for Argentine fútbol.

Panzeri, on the other hand, saw the Brazilian model as a path that led to more problems and confusion. He believed that proponents of modernization misunderstood the success of Brazil’s 4-2-4 system at the 1958 World Cup. In their zeal to imitate the

---

56 The origin of the 4-2-4 system is somewhat dubious. FIFA credits its creation to Brazilian coach Flávio Costa and Hungarian Béla Guttman, while Giulianotti sees the 1953 Paraguayan team of the Campeonato Sudamericano as the first example of this system in an international match; see: Walter Lutz, “The 4-2-4 System Takes Brazil to Two World Cup Victories,” Official Website, *FIFA.com*, August 1, 2000, http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/footballdevelopment/news/newsid=74401/index.html; Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game*, 137.
57 Sergio Le Fort Peña, “Debe imponerse una disciplina integral en el fútbol,” *Panorama*, August 4, 1958, 14. Le Fort Peña suggested that Europe should be model for Argentine clubs because Italian clubs converted former undisciplined Argentine players, like Ernesto Grillo, into a model of professionalism. The problem, for Le Fort Peña, was that Argentine clubs pampered athletes and let them act unprofessionally with minimal consequences.
success their South American neighbors, Argentine reformers ignored what Panzeri saw as the true key to Brazil’s success: the genius talent of playmakers Pelé, Didi, and Garrincha. If Argentine coaches persisted in stifling the creativity of players, Panzeri believed that a whole new generation of mechanized players would lack the “necessary picardia” to restore attractive and winning fútbol. Nevertheless, Argentine coaches and officials adopted new systems to replace the old 2-3-5 scheme en vogue since the 1930s.

The rules of international football only stipulate that teams begin with ten field players and a goalkeeper; no reference exists to how the ten field players align and play during a match. Historically, the 2-3-5 “pyramid” (figure 38) was one of the first formations to separate players into defenders, midfielders, and forwards (also called strikers). It lost influence in Europe after the addition of the “offside” rule in the 1920s but remained in use in Argentina up until the early 1950s. The five forwards in this formation—wingers, inside forwards, and center forward—meshed well with the emphasis on “crack” forwards in Argentina, who used their ingenuity and mutual understanding of the game to create scoring opportunities. By the 1930s, the “W-M” system became dominant in international football. Giulianotti credits its creator, Herbert Chapman, as football’s arch-Fordist for his utilizing industrial methods of production to

59 Sociologist Hilmi Ibrahim draws on Remy Kwant’s phenomenological study on expression and human activities to discuss expression in sports. Ibrahim observed a strong relationship between an athlete’s expressiveness and winning. When the pressure to win on a team is reduced, players shoot and dribble with more freedom. In the Brazilian case, the failure to win the 1950 World Cup, which Brazil hosted, produced years of soul-searching. But it also relieved players from high expectations. This was a determining factor in their eventual triumph in 1958. See: Ibrahim, Sport and Society, 21.
increase the production of goals in football. The “W-M” (figure 39) dropped the two inside forwards to play between the midfield and the remaining three forwards, or strikers. In addition, one of the midfielders dropped back to play in front of his defense. The resulting formation, a 3-2-2-3 scheme, resembled the letter “W” on top of an “M.”

The most significant tactical development occurred in the 1950s, when teams around the world began to adopt the ideas of Swiss coach Karl Rappan. In the late 1930s, he developed what became popularly known in Europe as the “Swiss bolt.” This system kept one or two midfielders in front of the defense to crowd the center of the field, forcing rival teams to attack along the sidelines. When opponents played out wide, Rappan’s defenses would shift towards the ball, always ensuring that a defender dropped back in front of the goalkeeper in a “sweeper” position.

The cerrojo (Spanish word for “bolt”) became a part of Stábile’s repertoire, but not on a regular basis. An approximate version of the cerrojo was on display at the 1959 Campeonato Sudamericano, held in Argentina. Hoping for a much better result than in Sweden, AFA appointed a triumvirate of coaches to lead the national team. Among them was Victorio Spinetto, whose Vélez Sarsfield teams employed the defensive

---


approach of the cerrojo. Critics labeled Spinetto’s squads at Vélez Sarsfield as “anti-fútbol.” Nevertheless, Spinetto’s focus on winning over playing style paid dividends. Fielding a malleable group of young players, Argentina produced fourteen goals, as well as a stifling defense, and secured four victories over its first four matches at the tournament. A convincing 4-1 win over Uruguay meant that Argentina only needed a tie against Brazil to win the championship. Spinetto and the coaching staff employed a cerrojo defense for much of the match, mostly designed to neutralize the tournament’s leading goal-scorer, Pelé. Argentina’s bunker mentality paid off when a counterattack tied the game 1-1, securing the title.

Although AFA records do not reveal a concerted effort to adopt foreign approaches after 1958, the selection of head coaches to the national team favored those who embraced “modern” concepts in fútbol. Moreover, the catenaccio (Italian for “bolt”) proved instrumental for Inter Milan, which became the dominant European squad of the early 1960s (figure 42). Teams from around the world—including Argentina—emulated head coach Helenio Herrera’s catenaccio because his defenses were almost impossible to overcome.

---

65 Argentina only needed a tie to win the title based on its better record throughout the tournament.
The “2-3-5” Pyramid  The “W-M”  4-2-4

Figure 38 (top left)- The 2-3-5 formation used by most international teams during the 1920s and 1930s. Argentina continued to employ this system up to the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano, with the famed line of five forwards known as the “carasucias.”

Figure 39 (top center)- The “W-M” formation developed in the 1930s and gained prominence for two decades.

Figure 40 (top right)- The 4-2-4 system Brazil used to great success at the 1958 World Cup.

Figure 41 (bottom left)- The 4-3-3 system that appeared four years later in Chile—here, using a libero, or “sweeper” in the formation—appeared when an injury to Pelé forced changes on the Brazilian team. Alf Ramsey also employed the 4-3-3 without “wingers” around the same time.

Figure 42 (bottom right)- This is the 1-4-4-1 system used by Helenio Herrera at Inter Milan, applying a catenaccio approach that placed the libero behind the defense, and a central midfielder applying pressure from behind. The idea was to funnel rivals towards the middle of the field and suffocate them through numbers.

4-3-3  1-4-4-1 (using the catenaccio)
As journalists around the world increasingly paid attention to tactical systems—especially during international tournaments—coaches attained a celebrity status that eclipsed that of their players. On the national team level, England’s Alf Ramsey (credited for his 4-3-3 “wingless wonder” formation—figure 41), Germany’s Sepp Herberger, or Brazil’s Feola (who unveiled the 4-2-4 system in 1958—figure 40) earned a reputation as tactical innovators. At the club level, Inter Milan’s Herrera, Manchester United’s Matt Busby, or Ajax’s Rinus Michel earned a similar reputation for their tactical acumen, but also as strong-willed “generals” who transformed their players into disciplined “soldiers.” In the same way that Argentines were divided in their preference for creative playmakers and hard-nosed enforcers on the field, the disparity among coaches between tactical innovators and authoritarian leaders shows that competing forms of masculinity existed in international football during the 1960s. Neither form, however, gained prominence. Success ultimately determined emulation. Therefore, teams either modeled themselves after physical squads like Inter Milan, or they tried to copy aspects of the dazzling Brazilian teams of the Pelé era.

The 1959 Campeonato Sudamericano validated the faith AFA officials placed in the coaches and specialists they hired to reform Argentine fútbol. Several coaches followed Spinetto’s use of the cerrojo and mirrored the leadership style of other authoritative figures. Perhaps the most famous coach of the 1960s was Osvaldo Zubeldía.

---

68 Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game*, 118–119. Giulianotti addresses the age of the “celebrity” player in the 1950s and 1960s, but his analysis fails to include many coaches that attained a similar reputation.

69 A second, truncated Campeonato Sudamericano took place in December of 1959. Under Stábile, Argentina’s performance left much to be desired, especially a 5-1 loss to Uruguay; see: *El Gráfico*, December 30, 1959.
A utilitarian player at Boca Juniors, Zubeldía finished his playing career at Vélez Sarsfield under Spinetto.\textsuperscript{70} As a player, Zubeldía engaged his coach in conversations about tactics and training methods. He thanked Spinetto for encouraging him to enter the coaching profession in 1960 with Atlanta. Zubeldía’s respect for Mogilevsky—his physical trainer at Atlanta— influenced his own emphasis on player conditioning. Zubeldía forged a partnership with his new physical trainer Jorge Kistenmacher. Together, they established a system predicated on players possessing a high level of endurance and playing at a fast pace for the entire ninety minutes of a match. Zubeldía’s teams emphasized strength, hard work, and discipline in a dogged pursuit of victory. It was a style that emulated successful club teams like Inter Milan, despite the criticisms that their teams played “anti-fútbol.”\textsuperscript{71} Zubeldía, in fact, recognized Spinetto and Herrera as head coaches who “knew” the game.\textsuperscript{72}

Estudiantes became the ultimate representative of what team captain Carlos Bilardo described in the late 1960s as a more “serious and efficient” mindset. Before he arrived at Estudiantes, Bilardo remembered how he would only train a few days a week with his old club Deportivo Español. At Estudiantes, he credited Kistenmacher and

\textsuperscript{70} Piden la vuelta de Mouriño,“ Sábado, October 6, 1956, 10.
Zubeldía for instilling toughness and the conditioning level that was necessary for success. Over the years, Zubeldía and his “laboratory” of tactical ideas became a topic of conversation in the press. His practices included plays for dead-ball situations (throw-ins, corner kicks, direct kicks), which he felt decided matched when both teams failed to create scoring chances during the run of play. He also possessed a mastery of the rules of the game, sharing with his players the various loopholes in the rulebook they could exploit for their advantage in a match.

Zubeldía’s “laboratory” earned its fair share of criticism. Some accused him of pioneering tactics that ran contrary to the spirit of the game. In critical matches, for example, he assigned jersey numbers that were not in accordance with a player’s position on the field (which was the norm at the time). The goal was to confuse opponents and make it difficult for them to mark man-to-man. Zubeldía also faced questions as to whether his players willfully committed acts not explicitly forbidden by AFA or FIFA rules, such as pulling the hair on an opponent’s neck when referees were not looking. At times, this sort of transgressive behavior was characterized as “viveza”—if a player could get away with it. However, in an age where the head coach became the focal point of his

---

74 “Boca Juniors se aprovechó del desorden aritmético de Atlanta,” Campeón, April 18, 1962, 2.

Traditionally, jersey numbers signaled a player’s location on the field; number 1 was the goalkeeper, number 9 was reserved for the striker, number 10 for a creative midfielder or withdrawn striker, number 5 for a defensive midfielder or libero, etc. Zubeldía defended the random assignment of jersey numbers as a message to his players that everyone played defense, and everyone played offense, so no one had a fixed position. Other coaches began to implement this tactic. In a 1965 exhibition match against Brazil, Minella also switched his players numbers. Rattín laughed thinking about the state of confusion among Brazilian players who struggled to find their assigned opponents during the first five minutes of the match; see: “Una cuestión de vida o muerte,” Primera Plana, June 15, 1965, 97.
team, and television cameras transmitted images of games to a wide audience, improper
behavior elicited more attention than ever before.

The dissemination of new tactics and training methods across the Atlantic
underscores the effects of rapid globalization in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.
The result was a greater hybridity in playing styles and approaches that made it difficult
to describe an Argentine style of play in the same way that El Gráfico constructed fútbol
criollo decades earlier. Even though sports writers complained about the attention figures
like Herrera, Zubeldía, and Spinetto received, it was clear that fútbol coaches were
replacing players as the focal point of a team’s identity.

Herrera, the celebrated mastermind of the catenaccio, was the subject of
numerous pieces in Argentine sports magazines. Born in Argentina to exiled Spanish
parents, Herrera left the country as a child and eventually played in France. He later
coached Barcelona before winning world titles at Inter Milan. Several articles published
in Buenos Aires described “H.H.” as a model for success among coaches.75

For many fans and journalists, Herrera was representative of modern coaches
whose tactics, as unaesthetic as they were, won titles. This is why sports writers like
Juvenal understood that the heavy emphasis on tactics was a logical maturation of the
sport and not an attack on some perceived notion of “Argentineanness” in fútbol. As

Primera Plana noted, the financial demands of fútbol in the 1960s (television contracts,

with the media in Buenos Aires. He felt that the problem in Argentine fútbol was an unwillingness to
learn from other countries, from foreign models. The Argentine player, he observed, was capable of
dominating the ball but lacked physical preparation. And like the English, Argentines isolated themselves
and refused to learn football from other countries. See: Dante Panzeri, “Mister Herrera,” El Gráfico,
November 16, 1960, 38-41.
travel, merchandise) meant that coaches did not last long in their jobs. A coach who lost two matches in a row would likely lose his position that same season.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, coaches felt pressure to deliver results and turn around the fortunes of a struggling team.\textsuperscript{77}

Men like Zubeldía and Spinetto justified their hiring based on a deep knowledge of the game and new tactical innovations. Zubeldía, in particular, appealed to two groups of fans and journalists: those who admired tactical innovators, and those who wanted their own “H.H.”—a no-nonsense personality who instilled discipline in a team. The admiration for Zubeledía during most of the 1960s—especially among those who advocated a “modern” approach to the game—shows how the ideal coach was expected to possess a mixture of toughness and savvy that would merge the best aspects of European and Argentine approached to fútbol.

\textit{“Toto” Lorenzo and the 1962 World Cup in Chile}

Unlike Zubeldía, who shunned the label of “celebrity” coach, and deferred praise to his trainer and players, Juan Carlos Lorenzo emerged on the national scene in 1961 as a self-professed expert in the latest training and tactical approaches from Europe. Lorenzo played professionally for a few years at Chacarita Juniors and Boca Juniors before he left for Europe in the 1950s. After coaching in Spain, where he first met Herrera, Lorenzo returned to Argentina and began implementing a version of the catenaccio at San Lorenzo. His emphasis on defensive pressure earned his team the

\textsuperscript{76} “Murieron con los buzos puestos,” \textit{Primera Plana}, November 2, 1965, 82.
\textsuperscript{77} “La influencia de un D.T. que cambió su esquema y el score,” \textit{Campeón}, September 22, 1965, 5.
nickname “Inter de Boedo” (referring to Herrera’s Inter Milan team and to the neighborhood where San Lorenzo plays).

Although Lorenzo did not necessarily consider himself a disciple of Herrera’s at this stage of his career, he believed that Argentine players lacked the tools to succeed in the modern game. He spoke openly to reporters about the need for Argentine players to adapt to modern exercise regimens, to learn a variety of tactical systems, and above all to become more disciplined. Critics focused on Lorenzo’s cerrojo at San Lorenzo as an example of the troubles in modern fútbol because he confused defensive pressure with “playing fútbol.” According to El Gráfico, Lorenzo’s team did not know how to play fútbol. The results, however, proved different. Taking over San Lorenzo in mid-season, the team performed well under his direction and moved from the middle of the table to finish second in the league in 1961. This earned him the nickname “Il Mago” (Italian for “the magician”) among the club’s fans.

More than possessing knowledge of the latest approaches from Europe, Lorenzo imagined himself in the same mold as coaches in Italy and Spain—a belief that only grew when he successfully coaches Italian club teams Lazio and Roma between 1962 and 1965. When he returned to San Lorenzo in 1965, he was convinced that Argentine teams would only succeed if they fully adopted European approaches to the game. This did not stop his critics from disparaging what they dubbed the “cattenacio [sic]

---

sanlorencista”—described by Juvenal as a cynical, all-defensive 8-2 formation. Moreover, critics complained that Lorenzo’s confidence in his tactical systems was nothing but vanity and a disregard for the talents of Argentine players. Lorenzo defended his approach, stating that in the modern game “teams are built from the back forward. We’ll give the back-line blocking strength, we’ll reinforce the middle of the field, and the rest will come later.” His casual attitude towards offensive-oriented tactical schemes underscored the emphasis he placed on “fuerza” (strength); he insisted that Argentine players should learn how to “morder” (bite) when playing defense.

Not everyone seemed bothered by Lorenzo’s approach. Campeón observed that at the professional level, the focus was on results, not attractive fútbol; Lorenzo was paid to win, and he won. Based on his turn-around success at San Lorenzo, AFA appointed Lorenzo as national team coach for the 1962 World Cup. AFA initially tried to recreate the triumvirate formula that proved successful at the 1959 Campeonato Sudamericano; but after two of the coaches promptly resigned, Lorenzo remained in complete control of the national team. Lorenzo convinced AFA officials that he would infuse the national team with the latest tactical and training methods from Europe. His detailed manual and presentations won over AFA officials and members of the coaches committee. He credited coaching schools in England and Spain, as well as coaching stints in Spain and

---

83 Juvenal, “San Lorenzó hizo cerrojo, Boca colaboró,” El Gráfico, July 13, 1965, 4-11. When referring to whether the game plan was good or bad, Juvenal demurred and instead quoted Churchill saying “any plan is better than no plan at all.”
Italy, for providing him with a grasp of the European game.\footnote{Osvaldo Ardizzone, “‘Todo está previsto’ Todo está estudiado’ Todo va bien’,” \textit{El Gráfico}, January 31, 1962, 4-7.} According to Lorenzo, the lesson he learned in Europe was that all modern teams enjoyed a complete coaching staff. His personnel requests proved more extensive than those submitted by Mogilevsky. Lorenzo argued that dozens of specialists, including dietitians and pedicurists, were essential to attending his players’ every need, ensuring their maximum performance.\footnote{“La agonía del algebra,” \textit{El Gráfico}, August 16, 1966, 95.} For the most part, AFA officials complied with his requests as a sign of their commitment to improving the national team’s performance after Sweden.

Because few people had heard of Lorenzo before he arrived from Europe in 1961, \textit{El Gráfico} ran a profile designed to burnish his criollo credentials.\footnote{Raúl Goro, “Éste es el hombre (¿será?),” \textit{El Gráfico}, January 24, 1962, 34-38.} The magazine labeled Lorenzo as a product of Argentine fútbol, evidenced by the pictures of his playing days at Chacarita Juniors and Boca Juniors. Compared to previous national team coaches, Lorenzo was an outsider and largely foreign to Argentines. It was not long before \textit{El Gráfico} stopped labeling Lorenzo a “criollo product” and expressed concern over his Euro-centric views on fútbol. Among the magazine’s objections was that he was dismissive about the knowledge Argentines had about modern tactics, he seemed arrogant and critical of the local league, and some writers were particularly bothered by his insistence that Argentine players needed some “toughening up” matches before facing stronger European opponents in Chile.\footnote{Osvaldo Ardizzone, “En Republiquetas 1050: 4-2-4, en Montevideo: 10-1,” \textit{El Gráfico}, March 21, 1962, 4-9. Among \textit{El Gráfico}’s list of complaints, it argued that Lorenzo favored a "war"-like view of fútbol.} \textit{El Gráfico} concluded that Lorenzo’s philosophy
was not isolated; it was the unfortunate culmination of a trend towards "patriotic garra," which emphasized war-like connections to fútbol during international matches. This trend in tactical philosophy led AFA to accept the cerrojo as the only viable approach to winning.89

Argentina’s performance at the 1962 World Cup resolved little in the ongoing debate over foreign influences. Players on the national team bought into his 4-2-4 system; they believed that the quality of Argentine fútbol was improving and evolving with the introduction of new ideas and concepts.90 Similarly, Campeón’s reporters liked the intensity they observed at training sessions and the commitment of players to Lorenzo’s ideas.91 Unlike El Gráfico, Campeón did not see the state of Argentine fútbol as a struggle between criollo and modern fútbol. Rather, it believed that Lorenzo’s emphasis on conditioning and tactical awareness complemented the skills Argentine players naturally possessed. Unlike its first match in Sweden four years ago, Argentina opened with a tough 1-0 victory over Bulgaria. The narrow win drew mixed reviews. Critics labeled Argentina’s defensive focus as unimaginative and dull.92 The foreign press bemoaned the physicality of the Argentine players, but understood it as a response to hard tackles by the Bulgarians.93 This match was not atypical for the quality of matches at

---

91 “Lorenzo confía en destruir el pesimismo antes de ir a Chile,” Campeón, April 11, 1962, 6.
93 “¿Fútbol? ¡'Blitzkrieg'!,” Campeón, June 6, 1962, 5. The 1962 World Cup was the first edition of the tournament where the goal average dipped below 3 goals per match. Observers at the time, and since 198
the 1962 World Cup. Chilean newspapers lamented the violence on display across nearly all matches. Indeed, the 1962 World Cup remains one of the more violent editions in the tournament’s history. Yet, the purpose of reprinting foreign accounts in the Argentine press was twofold: to absolve the physicality of the national team, and to gin up nationalism ahead of two important matches against stronger European opponents: England and Hungary.

Argentina’s match against England was particularly helpful for politicians and military officials, who were looking for a positive performance to distract citizens from recent events. After four years out of power, military officials—never predisposed to Frondizi despite his continuation of various policies of the Revolución Libertadora—forced the president to resign in March of 1962 after another coup.94 Frondizi submitted to a military arrest and left for exile in Patagonia.95 For the nation’s military rulers, a positive performance by the national team could help bring the nation together. When

---


English journalists characterized the Argentines as “savage bulls” before their encounter, it heightened nationalist sentiment at a precarious moment, when divisions within the military threatened to escalate into a civil war.96

The coup did not seem to affect the national team as it prepared for Chile. In fact, nationalist sentiment was rather muted until days before the match against England. Even though the English suggestion that Argentines were “savages” was nothing new, it created excitement for fans and marketing opportunities for the press. But a thorough 1-3 loss to England tempered further outrage over the “savage bulls” comment; the outcome of the game was never in doubt and Argentine fans again wondered what happened to the supposed superiority of fútbol criollo.

Losing against the English re-opened the debate over Lorenzo’s approach. Panzeri described the defeat as a “beneficial slap to the face.” It exposed the emptiness of European tactics, proving that Argentina had no fútbol identity and “lacked hombría.”97 For Lorenzo, the only way Argentina could advance in the World Cup was if his players once and for all ditched the tendency to “improvise” on the field and embraced a disciplined adherence to his tactical system.98

Only a victory over Hungary—one of the favorites to win the tournament—advanced Argentina to the next round. Despite its more assured play, Argentina struggled in the final third of the field against Hungary and failed to create clear scoring opportunities. The match ended in a 0-0 draw. England and Argentina both finished

96 “¿Qué dirán ahora los críticos británicos?,” Campeón, June 6, 1962, 3.
behind Hungary, equal on points; but England advanced to the next round thanks to the new goal-differential rule, which used the number of goals scored by teams as a tiebreaker in the event that two or more teams were tied on points. Lorenzo and AFA officials blamed Argentina’s first-round exit on this new rule. Those looking for a silver lining believed that players had finally begun to grasp Lorenzo’s scheme in the final match against Hungary, even winning over the audience in Chile.

Unlike the “disaster” in Sweden, no angry mob awaited the team’s arrival at Ezeiza airport. There was also no lopsided defeat as embarrassing as the 6-1 loss to Czechoslovakia in 1958. No longer expecting a World Cup victory, fans likely appreciated the better effort in Chile. Despite the positive spin, critics felt that the goal differential issue was a flimsy excuse and proof that the so-called “modern” tactics imported from Europe were detrimental to Argentine fútbol. They pointed to the steady decline in scoring averages as the unfortunate product of the “technical-tactical” approach.

The 1962 World Cup did not settle the debate between “lo criollo” and “lo moderno.” Coaches remained split between both approaches; others were simply more concerned with keeping their jobs than implementing a particular “school” of fútbol. If

---

99 Consejo Directivo, “H. Asamblea,” Memorias y balance 1962 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1963), 25-26; Raúl Colombo, “Éstas son las soluciones de los dirigentes,” El Gráfico, August 1, 1962, 4-9. (Argentina was the first team in World Cup history to be eliminated on goal-differential)
100 “Quedamos fuera del mundial pero con Hungría el seleccionado argentino se reconcilió con el fútbol y su fama,” Campeón, June 13, 1962, 2.
101 Privately-owned channels 11 and 13 televised matches on a 48-hour tape delay, but the vast majority of Argentines could not access televised matches and depended on radio and newspaper; see: Pablo Alabarces and Carolina Duek, “Fútbol (argentino) por TV: Entre el espectáculo de masas, el monopolio y el estado,” Logos 33: Comunicação e Esporte 17, no. 2 (2010): 19.
anything, the editorial change at *El Gráfico* in 1962 produced a more decisive turn
towards an analytical assessment of tactics and training. With the 1966 World Cup on the
horizon, the key question remained: Which system should Argentina implement in order
to succeed on the international level? If anything, the lackluster showing by Argentina
and England at the 1962 World Cup put to rest any lingering notions that the best football
played in the world came from the Río de la Plata or Europe. The new standard in
international football was now in Brazil.\(^{103}\)

\[^{103}\] Juan Carlos Lorenzo noted the importance of the Brazilian model, which won its second consecutive
World Cup in 1962. *See:* “El mundial visto por Juan Carlos Lorenzo (reprinted report to AFA),” *El
4: Second Half

The Crisis Deepens

When Raúl Colombo became president of AFA in March of 1956, he initiated a series of reforms that he hoped would modernize the sport, increase revenue through higher ticket sales, and solve security issues at stadiums. The goal was to attract new spectators and recover those who had found alternate leisure activities. For Colombo, one of the keys to increasing attendance was to improve the quality of fútbol matches. To this end, he championed the idea of a school of fútbol that would streamline and improve the quality of play by hiring experts in various disciplines (tactics, skill exercises, conditioning, diet, psychology) to work with players and coaches. This was not a new idea. Even before Perón commissioned a training program for sports specialists in the early 1950s, a group led by Cesarini, D’Amico, and Stábile established an independent school of coaching in 1948. This school had worked alongside AFA, but Colombo’s idea was for AFA to exert greater control over the quality of coaching for its national team program. In addition, professionals in various fields (medics, psychologists, dieticians) would lead training for new coaches—further establishing a technocratic system in professional fútbol. The plan was for the academy to teach coaches how to inculcate in young players the importance of discipline and conditioning. This would

in turn produce more athletic players better able to meet the demands of new tactical systems, win on the international level, and provide a better spectacle on the field.

Despite AFA’s push for a better quality of fútbol, scoring averages continued to plummet. Between 1961 and 1962, scoring dropped from 3.18 to 2.53 goals per match. It was the first time that the average fell below three goals per game in the professional era, where it stayed for the remainder of the decade.\textsuperscript{107} Officials were most concerned in 1963, when the league average barely hovered above two goals per game (see Appendix B). What bothered journalists the most was the preponderance of dull games that ended 0-0. These matches showed how teams risked little on offense in order to avoid losses. Consequently, ultra-defensive schemes produced a chorus of whistles from fans who were already unhappy with rising ticket prices and club fees.\textsuperscript{108}

Lost in the debates over “scientific” and “natural” styles of play was that the decline in scoring had already begun in the late 1940s. Apart from a few exceptional seasons (1952 and 1958), goals steadily declined until reaching the abysmal numbers of the 1963 season. In other words, goal scoring remained essentially unaffected by the introduction of new tactical systems.

So, what explains the decline of goal scoring over two decades? The general consensus among journalists was that coaches had adopted a pragmatic approach known in Europe as the “English half.” In England, it had become the norm for teams to seek a


win (two points) at home and a tie (one point) on the road. Rather than gamble for a win as the visiting team, it was preferable to settle for a tie, because it simultaneously gave a team a point while depriving its opponent of a point it was supposed to earn as the home team. The result was that teams employed an ultra-defensive mentality on the road in order to “steal” a point. In Argentina, visiting teams began to employ the “English half” in the 1950s when many prolific goal-scorers left the country after the 1948 players strike. In addition, new schemes like the cerrojo offered coaches an almost foolproof plan on preventing goals when they played away from their home supporters.\(^\text{109}\)

The new ultra-defensive mentality also altered how strikers played on the field. By the late 1950s, *El Gráfico* observed that new defensive schemes led to more *cañoneros*, or players proficient at shooting from long distances. On defense, teams were flooding their penalty areas with seven to nine defenders to prevent a goal—a bunker mentality ridiculed by *Clarín* in 1966 (*figure 43*). More problematically for strikers, new conditioning regimens resulted in athletic defenders able to quickly close down spaces.\(^\text{110}\)

---

\(^{109}\) Carlos Peucelle, “Táctica y estrategia del fútbol,” *El Gráfico*, February 10, 1960, 23. A similar reference to “la mitad inglesa” appeared in *Campeón* in a 1965 match between Newell’s Old Boys and Banfield. The author lamented how the home side (Newell’s) content with killing time, playing only defense to secure a point. Banfield, which normally plays a similar game, did not know how to attack. As a result, the game ended in a tie with few shots on goal; see: “El anti-fútbol,” *Campeón*, September 15, 1965, 8.

Beyond the poor spectacle on the field, others worried that high-ticket prices had the effect of segmenting fans. Indeed, some of the earliest studies of Argentine fútbol suggest that the 1960s was a decade when the middle class took over the stadium.\textsuperscript{111} Although consumer spending among middle-class Argentines increased, the lack of available data on fútbol fans makes it difficult to discern the socio-economic makeup at the stadiums. Yet, at least one article suggests that high prices did have the effect of fragmenting sections of the stadium along socio-economic lines. \textit{Campeón} observed in 1964 that the “‘señores’ de palcos” (“‘gentlemen’ of the balconies”) filled the more expensive \textit{platea} and \textit{palco} sections of the fútbol stadium. On the other hand, working-class fans (referred to by the paper as “\textit{descamisados}”) populated the cheaper \textit{popular} section.\textsuperscript{112}

The tone of this passage suggests that the \textit{popular} was the site where fans  

\textsuperscript{111} Sebreli, \textit{La era del fútbol}, 275; Martínez, “Las barras aparecen con la industrialización del fútbol (Interview with Amílcar Romero).”\textsuperscript{112} “A Boca no le hace Mella el ‘sistema’ de Helenio H.,” \textit{Campeón}, September 23, 1964, 4.
exhibited a lack of decorum. *Campeón*’s observations of a divide between civil fans, and the “descamisados” sitting in the popular section, contrasts with Panzeri’s accounts. He lumped the well-behaved and rowdy fans together, without any sense of their location within the stadium. Although Panzeri was an anti-Peronist, he abstained from injecting class-based discourse in his writings. That the term “descamisados” appeared as a pejorative in *Campeón* is also surprising given the solidly working-class readership of the sports paper.

Nevertheless, the value of *Campeón*’s commentary on fans is that it shows how ticket prices had the effect of segmenting fans along class lines in the 1960s.

The continual rise of ticket prices, as well as the persistent disorders at stadiums, further complicated Colombo’s efforts at modernizing the sport, increasing attendance, and improving the product on the field. One area where Colombo wanted more control involved player contracts. In his zeal to make AFA become more efficient and to modernize the institution, Colombo wanted AFA to review deals with players that were placing clubs in debt. In their rush to sign a coveted “crack” player, club officials offered lucrative contracts to either outbid each other, or at the very least bankrupt rivals for a competitive advantage in the near future. This resulted in exorbitant salaries for players and high payrolls for club teams. Colombo envisioned AFA as a mediator, an entity that ensured fiscal balance throughout the league. Of course, this new power over

---

113 AFA was not hurting for money. In its projections for 1961, for example, it collected 1.5 pesos for each ticket sold in the first and second divisions, and 1 peso per ticket in the “B” and third divisions, for a total of 5,880,000 pesos. International matches yielded another 2,000,000 pesos, while various other revenue streams (fines for players, licenses, player transfer fees) brought in over 1,000,000 pesos. In all, AFA earned nearly 9,000,000 pesos in 1961 (adjusted for inflation, 9 million Argentine Pesos in 1961 would equal approximately $811,000 in 2012). See: “Punto 3º del orden del día: Círculo de recursos y presupuesto de gastos para el año 1961,” *Memorias y balance 1960* (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1961), 9-12.

player negotiations threatened the autonomy of clubs and the spirit of AFA as an association of civic institutions. Not surprisingly, club officials rejected this expanded role for Colombo.

Club records from various teams offer insight into why the rising salaries of players worried AFA officials. Between 1958 and 1964, Vélez Sarsfield increased its budget for acquiring players, from 225,000 pesos to nearly 7.5 million pesos. Over that same time period, the club also increased its allotment for player bonuses from 1.1 million pesos in 1958 to over 10 million in 1964 (figure 44).115 Records from San Lorenzo, Boca Juniors, River Plate and Independiente show a similar trajectory in player salaries and bonuses, even when accounting for high inflation rates in 1959 and early 1960.116 For many fans, it was perplexing that the federal government allowed club associations—non-profit civic entities by nature—to go into heavy debt when other businesses faced penalties from the federal government when they accumulated massive debt. The expectation among fans was that club officers should cut back on spending at a

---


time of economic instability. Few clubs demonstrated a willingness to repay their loans.\textsuperscript{117} 

Unable to change the negative trend lines in goal scoring and ticket sales, Colombo looked to new sources of revenue. He proposed the introduction of organized match betting based on the Italian \textit{tottocalcio}. Money from “\textit{la polla}” (as it was popularly known in Argentina) would also go towards developing fútbol programs at all age levels. Colombo saw organized match betting as a logical next step able to excite a passionate fan base across the country, and function as a natural extension of gambling at the racetracks—a popular activity among middle- and upper-class porteños.\textsuperscript{118} He pointed to the effectiveness of organized match betting in Italy and Great Britain, where new revenue helped leagues in both countries quickly recover after World War II.\textsuperscript{119} 

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure44.png}
\caption{Player Salaries: Club Atlético Vélez Sarsfield 1958-1963}
\end{figure}

\textit{Figure 44-} Although the base salary was fairly even for players on the team, star players earned more money through player bonuses. Each club in Argentina listed their player salaries in different ways. Source: Club Atlético Vélez Sarsfield, \textit{Memoria y balance} 1959 and 1964. Courtesy of the personal collection of Mariano Gruschetsky.


“La polla” met resistance from club directors who did not want to risk a backlash from club members opposed to gambling on religious grounds. Others rejected the idea as contrary to secular values traditionally associated with fútbol. Voicing the opinions of many long-standing socios, Qué cited a half-century of service by club associations whose charters focused on meeting the intellectual, cultural, and social needs of their communities.\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, Qué wondered about the consequences of gambling among fútbol’s “addictive masses.” It warned that clandestine elements in society were always ready to profit from new schemes.\textsuperscript{121} Despite these reservations, Colombo insisted that “la polla” offered a proven model for generating new revenue that would stabilize the finances of club associations. The opposition, however, proved to be too strong. It would be another decade before the idea of organized match betting surfaced again under new AFA leadership.

The other major reform proposal introduced by Colombo involved televised fútbol matches. Television engaged fans in a new way. Although broadcasts exposed referees and players to greater scrutiny, fans around the country saw for themselves the quality of matches without depending on the match reports offered by sports writers.\textsuperscript{122} The notion that television empowered fútbol fans became a powerful argument for Colombo to garner public support for his plan. Some politicians believed that televised

\textsuperscript{120} “¿Qué hay detrás de la quiniela deportiva,” \textit{Qué}, June 4, 1957, 27.

\textsuperscript{121} “En vez de alentar el espíritu deportivo auspicia la quiniela futbolística,” \textit{Qué}, May 28, 1957, 25.

\textsuperscript{122} Although there is no clear indication that journalists held similar reservations about televising fútbol matches, a careful reading of newspapers and sports magazines shows that journalists were not initially strong proponents.
matches would be a positive for society, displaying positive role models of athleticism to young children. Advocates in Congress also argued that broadcasts made fútbol accessible to people of various stations in life. One congressional representative believed that televised matches would benefit those unlikely to attend matches at a stadium for physical reasons, such as the elderly and invalid. He believed that club directors opposed to televising matches only stood for their own interests. Although AFA had already agreed on contracts to televise a limited number of matches for the 1957 season, club directors pushed back. They feared that fans would have even less incentive to go to the stadium if they could watch games at home.

The introduction of television contracts into the affairs of professional fútbol posed a threat to a system that club directors had mastered over many years. Even more disconcerting for some club officials was the longstanding friendship between Colombo and Frondizi since their childhood days. These suspicions about their overlapping interests were founded; Colombo’s push towards televising fútbol broadcasts aligned with a larger state effort at increasing programming as a force for cultural good.

125 “Televisación de partidos,” Memorias y balance 1957 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1958), 48-49. The first televised match aired on November 3, 1951 between San Lorenzo and River Plate and sponsored by the national petroleum company YPF. Alabarces and Duek describe a match that used only two cameras and shot in the same narrative style used in films like Los tres berretines. Players and club officials quickly demanded a share of the revenue. Fútbol-specific shows like Fútbol con Opinión and TV Deportes also appeared, usually featuring sports writers like Fontanarrosa and Panzeri; see: Alabarces and Duek, “Fútbol (argentino) por TV: Entre el espectáculo de masas, el monopolio y el estado,” 2010, 17-19.
126 Frondizi, Arturo Frondizi. Su proyecto de integración y desarrollo nacional, 73.
Frondizi administration appointed Emilio Colombo (no relation to the AFA president) as the interventor for the film and radio industries. He met with club officials at various AFA meetings to petition for additional television broadcasts of fútbol. The interventor clarified that the government was not interested in earning proceeds from televised games; rather, state officials wanted all citizens to be able to watch fútbol. He argued that any profits from advertisements would go directly to AFA.\textsuperscript{127} Still, club officials remained leery of the state’s encroachment on professional fútbol through television contracts. Because the television industry was still growing in Argentina by the late 1950s, televising fútbol matches produced more questions than provided answers for club directors who were wary about the impact of new technologies on business.\textsuperscript{128}

Thanks to publications like \textit{El Gráfico} and \textit{Primera Plana}, the debate over televised matches became public. Club officials complained that the government was steamrolling the television project through without regard for the autonomy of clubs. Some readers were opposed to the idea but for what they believed were cultured reasons. In various letters to \textit{Primera Plana}—a decidedly middle-class publication modeled after U.S. magazines \textit{Time} and \textit{Newsweek}—readers grumbled about the interruption of quality programming, such as theatre productions, for common fútbol matches. These sports events, they argued, only displayed the “animalistic” behavior of hinchas and celebrated

\textsuperscript{128} McLuhan observed at the time that new technologies like television produced anxiety among business directors, who were comfortable using “yesterday’s tools for yesterday’s concepts, [but] for today’s jobs.” He also argued that the moral panic among literate people in the West in the age of television derived from the perceived threat new media posed to a civilization built on the acoustic-visual world of writing; see: Marshall McLuhan, \textit{The Medium Is the Massage}, (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 8-9, 125; McLuhan, \textit{Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man}, 82.
the exploits of “anthropoids” who earned millions of pesos (as opposed to “true” professionals who struggled to survive). In the end, club directors voted against the state’s proposal. They saw any contract between the government, AFA, and television stations as an increase in the state’s presence in fútbol and a threat to the autonomy of their clubs.

Colombo’s nearly nine-year presidency at AFA was exceptionally long, which led to criticism and disillusionment that involved issues even beyond his efforts to introduce gambling and televised matches. Stadium security issues continued to plague professional fútbol despite the relative drop in fútbol-related deaths and stadium collapses in the early 1960s. Mario Linker’s death in 1958 caused AFA to ban the entry of bottles, enact stricter control measures on the sale of tickets, and mandate the separation of certain sections of stadiums so that rival fans would not be in vicinity to each other. While this did not eliminate fan disorders, which persisted throughout the 1960s, these measures provided some relief to the cycle of fan disorders and police repression that had escalated towards the end of the previous decade.

Despite Colombo’s security adjustments, El Gráfico called for him to resign in 1964 or at least abstain from re-election. It listed eight years of failure: the general amnesties of 1956 and 1958, AFA’s failure to secure the World Cup hosting rights to the

---

131 With the exception of Valentín Suárez’s nearly five-year appointment under Perón, previous presidents lasted no more than three years in office.
1962 tournament, the “disaster” in Sweden, and the national team’s overall poor performances in the early 1960s. The worst charges leveled by El Gráfico, however, dealt with what the magazine perceived as an abuse of power by Colombo. It accused him of meddling in player-club contract disputes, selecting players for the national team, and denigrating what he perceived as a lack of knowledge about “modern concepts” by Argentine coaches and players. When AFA lost the hosting rights to the 1970 World Cup to the Mexican Fútbol Federation in a vote held in 1964, it was the last straw for critics. Independiente’s president Herminio Sande used Colombo’s connections to the now-deposed Frondizi as a cudgel, and organized a winning coalition in support of Francisco Perette (brother of the new Vice President of Argentina, Carlos Perette) as the new AFA President.

Fútbol Espectáculo

The resistance Colombo faced from club officials frustrated his reformist plans to modernize professional fútbol. It also demonstrated the power held by club directors—

136 “Porqué es México sede del mundial,” Campeón, October 14, 1964, 2. The article suggests that some nefarious plot was at hand that denied Argentina the rights, after several FIFA officials promised to vote for Argentina. But the article also lists economic and political instability as reasons for FIFA’s reluctance to award the World Cup to Argentina. The quality of the candidacy materials also suffered in comparison to what AFA produced when it attempted to win the rights to the 1962 World Cup. The emphasis was on the vast amounts of stadiums in place in Buenos Aires, but not much more. See: Clarín, July 11, 1966, 11; “Fútbol mundial en la Argentina 1970” in boxed collection at the Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, produced September of 1964.
especially from the major clubs—who saw themselves as a check on the power of the AFA president. Furthermore, clubs like River Plate and Boca Juniors were unwilling to back away from ambitious projects, regardless if the opposition came from AFA and other club officials, or if it placed these two major clubs heavier in debt. Starting in 1960, River Plate and Boca Juniors embarked on a decade of heavy spending designed to attract fans to the stadiums by providing a “spectacle”—known to this day as the era of fútbol espectáculo. Major infrastructure projects and the signing of new star players initiated an arms race between major clubs that would deepen the financial crisis affecting professional fútbol.

The enclosure of River Plate’s Monumental Stadium was an opening salvo in this new era of spending. In 1957, one of the “carasucias” of the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano, Enrique Omar Sívori, transferred from River Plate to Italian side Juventus for 10 million pesos—a new world record for a player transfer fee. Some of the club’s fans opposed selling “El Cabezón” on purely emotional grounds, citing his youth and talent as essential for the future of the club. Others favored selling Sívori for practical

---


139 “El Cabezón” referred to his copious hair and short stature, which made him look like he had a “large head.” Bestowing a nickname on a fútbol player, or team, is a sign of admiration. It is a practice with a long tradition in Argentina and most of Latin America.
reasons. They argued that the funds would allow club officials to expand the seating capacity of the Monumental stadium by enclosing the fourth side of the structure. River Plate officials initially declared that the stadium project was already paid in full; the transfer fee for Sívori would instead go towards purchasing several promising players and supposedly to repay debts. The government had provided a loan for the building project years before and official construction on the “Colonia” section began in late 1955 at an estimated cost of over 12 million pesos. The club hoped to repay the loan partially through the sale of raffle tickets. In 1957, for example, the club was able to raise 748,747 pesos through this additional revenue stream. By promoting a series of prizes for winners, River Plate officials involved club members in the construction process as each raffle ticket would help enclose the stadium. The goal was to convert the Monumental into the largest sports structure in the world, surpassing the Maracaná in Rio de Janeiro and Soldier Field in Chicago.

The popular myth surrounding the Sívori transfer was a marketing boon for River Plate. As the story grew—out of what one journalist described as the persistence of an “amateur fútbol sentiment”—River Plate officials saw an opportunity to market the Sívori myth as a vindication of the club and its youth system, or “semilleros” (seed

140 “¿Sívori ó 10 millones?,” River, May 9, 1957, 2-3. In international football, the use of “selling” or “purchasing” to describe the transfer of a player from one club to another is quite common. Absent a system of free agency, clubs negotiate the transfer of players and set a fee that rewards the club that “sells” his rights. In turn, clubs use the money earned from the selling of a player to pay back loans or invest in new players. Players, however, commonly exercise their right to ask for a transfer if they unhappy with a club—even if their contract is years away from expiring. In fact, Sívori saw his salary at Juventus jump dramatically from what he was earning at River Plate.


planters). His popularity among fans, and Juventus’ willingness to spend heavily on his talent, also spoke well of Argentine fútbol in 1957. The club further cemented the association between Sívori’s transfer and the stadium enclosure project several years later. River Plate changed the name of the fourth section from “Colonia” to “Sívori” after Sívori retired as a successful international player in the early 1970s.

On the heels of Sívori’s departure from River Plate, the other two acclaimed young strikers of the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano, Maschio and Angelillo, left to play in Italy for Bologna and Inter Milan respectively (figure 45). These Argentine criollos personified the “good son” narrative chronicled in fútbol films and sports magazines. Before their departure, they posed for pictures sipping mate, walking the streets of Buenos Aires, and standing next to their proud parents and siblings. They also talked about helping older relatives return home to Italy one day. Sívori won the Ballon d’Or in 1961, awarded to Europe’s player of the year and all three players enjoyed successful careers in Europe.

144 Carlos Fontanrosa, “Ángel del fútbol,” El Gráfico, June 28, 1957, 10-14. Some observers complained about the sale of players. In a letter to Primera Plana, one reader compared these high-profile transfers to slavery. Club officials, in the role of a master, treated their players as property and undermined a professional athlete’s ability to determine his own future. In his opinion, this aspect of professional fútbol was worse when the player involved in transfer negotiations was a veteran like River Plate goalkeeper Amadeo Carrizo, who spent his entire career at the club; see: Juan Ramos Mejía, “Fútbol (Letter),” Primera Plana, September 21, 1965, 79.
Like Di Stéfano before them, the desire by European teams to sign heralded young talent from Argentina cemented the country’s status as a producer of world-class talent in fútbol. Club directors saw an opportunity to sell young prospects that earned smaller salaries compared to veteran players. To use Sívori as an example, in 1957 he earned a total salary of 54,908 pesos. Veteran players like Labruna, Carrizo, and Rossi, on the other hand, earned salaries between 343,000 and 408,000 pesos that same year—examples of the high player salaries that were leaving clubs in debt. Because the transfer of young players proved lucrative, it made sense for club officials to sell their players when possible. Education was an integral part of the club’s mission, and adult socios were more than willing to offer their services to help coach young children who

---

145 The owner of a kiosk near the Monumental stadium proudly showed reporters a picture of Sívori. He told the reporter that the picture should have a caption that read: “Industria argentina” (“made in Argentina”); see: Carlos Fontanarrosa, “Soy de aquí…aunque me vaya,” El Gráfico, June 14, 1957, 6-7.
146 “Renumeraciones percibidas por los jugadores profesionales entre el 1 de enero y el 31 de diciembre de 1957,” Memoria y balance 1957 (Buenos Aires: Club Atlético River Plate, 1958), 36.
might become future stars. As the era of fútbol espectáculo unfolded, however, the search for the next “crack” hindered the development of semilleros. The rush to anoint players as stars did not provide them time and space to grow as professionals, as was the case with Sívori, who learned from veterans like Labruna at River Plate.

Using the vast sums received from European teams, River Plate and other large clubs began signing foreign players beginning in 1960, hoping to generate enthusiasm and positive press coverage, as well as increasing ticket sales. In particular, River Plate president Antonio Liberti and his counterpart at Boca Juniors, Alberto Armando (figure 46) led the way in purchasing players from Europe and South America. The media covered the arrivals of “cracks” like Real Madrid striker Pepillo and Brazilian star Paulo Valentim. Boca Juniors’ Armando, in particular, boasted that his club would sign players of the caliber of Brazilian stars Pelé and Garrincha, even if the possibilities were slim to none. Clubs in Buenos Aires also pilfered talent from provincial teams. This was nothing new, but transfer fees for players like Rosario Central’s star striker, César Luis Menotti, reached sums as high as 16 million pesos, numbers that Primera Plana portrayed as ridiculous in a cartoon (figure 47).

---

149 “La figura de la semana: Pepillo,” River, June 7, 1961, 8-9; River, June 22, 1961, 1-3. Although some players arrived from Europe, most “crack” players purchased by Argentine club teams during the 1960s came from Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay. In 1961, River Plate’s starting five forwards were all foreign players, which at the time was shocking for the team’s fans who had seen Argentina’s best strikers (Moreno, Labruna, Sívori, Di Stéfano, Loustau) earn their fame at the club over the years.
150 “Griffa, Pelé y Garrincha los objetivos inmediatos de Boca,” Campeón, November 2, 1960, 1.
Largely due to his confrontational personality and bold claims, Boca Juniors’ Armando became the embodiment of the era of fútbol espectáculo. He earned his fortune as a business executive and owned a series of car dealerships and properties throughout Buenos Aires. As president, Armando spent heavily throughout the 1960s purchasing new players he hoped would bring the club titles. The plan worked to some extent. Boca Juniors won league championships during the decade; yet, it did not carry the same success to the international level.152

The centerpiece of Armando’s vision to transform Boca Juniors into a major

152 Another prominent club president was Leon Kolbowski at Club Atlético Atlanta, who ran the club between 1959 and 1969. Kolbowski was the first Jewish president of any Argentine club. His aggressive policies pushed this small club in Villa Crespo to unprecedented heights in the early 1960s, including growing club membership from 2,000 to over 20,000 socios and the opening of a new 34,000-seat stadium (named today in his honor). See: Rein, Los bohemios de Villa Crespo: Judíos y fútbol en la Argentina.
international brand was the Ciudad Deportiva. The ambitious project was inspired by Real Madrid’s vast sports complex in Spain, built by another towering figure in international football, club president Santiago Bernabéu. Armando’s idea was to create an extensive array of facilities for the socios of Boca Juniors. Due to the physical restrictions of La Boca neighborhood, the plans called for a series of man-made islands to be built along the shores of the Rio de la Plata. The showpiece would be a new stadium capable of seating 140,000 spectators. Armando stressed that club profits and revenue from raffle tickets would finance the Ciudad Deportiva.¹⁵³

Still, government aid was essential for a project this size. In 1964, congressman Reinaldo Elena introduced a motion to cede forty hectares of public land to Boca Juniors, with a stipulation that the club would complete the construction on a timely basis, and that Boca Juniors would pay back any loans from the federal government. After finalizing the project, the club would cede its current stadium and surrounding facilities to the federal government. The Ciudad Deportiva project eventually received federal approval through Law 16.575, which provided Boca Juniors the land transfer needed to begin construction. Congressional leaders who supported the measure believed that the Ciudad Deportiva would expand the city, provide a social benefit to citizens, and would contribute to the “social betterment” of Buenos Aires.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Boca Juniors’ Alberto Armando resorted to lotteries from his very first year in charge of the club in 1954. He would continue this practice throughout the 1960s as a way to finance major construction projects. All of this led critics, as early as 1955, to label his administration of the club, and others like his, as a “mafia” system full of “pirates” abusing the goodwill of members. See: “¡El fútbol se viene abajo!,” Democracia, November 2, 1955, 8.

With its canals, walkways, and green spaces, the plans for Ciudad Deportiva reflected a middle-class sensibility towards urban renewal projects that, in the case of Boca Juniors, highlighted the progressive aspirations of the club and its president. As Laura Podalsky argues, architectural projects in the 1960s reflected a middle-class hegemony over consumption and culture that further cleaved society along class lines. The rise and growth of the villas miserias (shantytowns), the proliferation of large skyscrapers built by international companies, and the conjuntos (apartment towers) that housed low-income families, all created marked social boundaries. The result was a more stratified society.

In the case of Ciudad Deportiva, Podalsky makes no mention of this project, but it is worth pointing out the similarities in Armando’s vision for the complex and similar projects in South America—namely the building projects in Brasilia, Brazil. But its location—away from the working-class barrio of La Boca (in the southern end of what is today the upscale area of Puerto Madero)—was unlikely to unite citizens or reflect the population of the old neighborhood. The goal of the Ciudad Deportiva was to present a modern image of Boca Juniors to the world, mirror (or eclipse) similar projects in Europe, and cement Armando’s legacy at the club.

Politicians and fútbol officials believed that projects such as Ciudad Deportiva promoted health consciousness for citizens, presented a modern image for the country, and helped deter youth delinquency by offering a variety of recreational activities. Not to

---


Podalsky, Specular City, 7 and 238.
be outdone, River Plate also proposed its own unnamed project. Club officials met with the recently elected head of state, Arturo Illia, in 1965 to push for the renewal of government funding for sports, a measure known as *La ley del deporte*. The proposed plan received little fanfare and ultimately barely moved past its gestational stage; but it was important for River Plate to show its fiercest rival that it was also capable of producing a major construction project. The arms race between major clubs in the 1960s showed no signs of abating.

Despite the modern image presented by fútbol clubs through notable player signings and construction projects, by 1959 organized fan groups, prone to acts of violence, began to capture attention in the press. Some skeptics dismissed misbehavior at stadiums as the typical actions of irrepressible children. Others, however, noted that unlike the fan violence of the past, which was largely spontaneous and in reaction to the action on the field, “men with moustaches and beards” organized incidents against fans of rival clubs in the seating sections. For Panzeri, these delinquents deserved police repression because of their acts of “savagery,” or as he put it, their “barbarie primitiva”. In a letter to its readers, *El Gráfico*’s Félix Fráscara, applauded parents who organized a “united front for decency.” As he wrote: “Outside of the game, if not while the game was going on, lamentable, embarrassing, and inadmissible acts take place. And not just isolated incidents. They are not exceptional. They are normal!”

As the 1959 season developed, delinquent fan groups extended their attacks in

157 Cecilio de la Vega, “¡Qué vergüenza!,” *El Gráfico*, March 12, 1959, 16.
other sections of the stadium. Racing supporters threatened writers for *El Gráfico* in response to unfavorable comments published in the magazine about their team, even storming the press box during one match to attack journalists. A month later, a weapon covered with sharp nails appeared in the press box, deposited by an anonymous spectator. The following season, press reports detailed how a gang of hinchas from Gimnasia y Esgrima waited for an expelled Boca Juniors player in the team’s dressing room and proceeded to severely beat him. All of these coordinated actions created an alternative spectacle in stadiums dominated by rival fan groups confronting each other.

Another aspect that differed from the past was that fan violence spread beyond the stadium walls. *El Gráfico* commented that “pibes” vandalized local businesses, organized attacks in the stands, and forced the police to escort female spectators to the field for safety. *Campeón* backed this assertion by *El Gráfico*. It labeled this new problem in fútbol as “gangs (‘patotas’) of delinquents disguised as fans of fútbol.” As evidence, *Campeón* described a riot that broke out during a match between Nueva Chicago and Temperley, where the patotas stormed the streets and attacked people, robbing them of their money, jewelry, and clothes.

---

162 “Fue consumada en el tunel y los pasillos cuando fue expulsado,” *Campeón*, June 15, 1960, 1. At a match between Banfield and Talleres, referees could not leave the stadium for three hours fearing their safety; see: “El referee y los linesmen se fueron de la cancha 3 horas después de terminado el match,” *Campeón*, June 3, 1959, 10.
164 “Bandoleros v. Fútbol: Patotas de delincuentes juveniles se han dedicado a atacar y a robar a los auténticos y pacíficos ‘hinchas’,” *Campeón*, May 13, 1959, 4. Nueva Chicago, like many other clubs--
The most notorious incident occurred at a match between Argentinos Juniors and Boca Juniors in 1960. Fans from both sides clashed over the time-wasting antics of a Boca Juniors player, which led police to launch gas canisters and water hoses. In the middle of this disorderly scene lay a knife, thrown from the stands towards an official.¹⁶⁵

Boca Juniors officials denounced the behavior of Argentinos Juniors fans, as well as any suggestion that their club was responsible.¹⁶⁶ Armando accused other club officials (particularly River Plate), the referee of the match, police officers, and the Tribunal de Penas at AFA of discriminating against him and his team in regards to instances of fan disorder. He held a club summit in defense of Boca Juniors’ honor. Reporters on hand described it as a rally more than an actual meeting of club members.¹⁶⁷ It was a clear example of how club officials often shielded their fans—even the most violent—from criticism; such a ploy generated club unity with a “us against the world” mentality that left the club president in the heroic position of defending the honor of the institution—

---

¹⁶⁵ Ernesto Lazzatti, “No pueden ser cosas del fútbol,” El Gráfico, October 5, 1960, 4-12; “Comienza el escándalo,” Campeón, October 5, 1960, 1. Among the many reports, witnesses observed police chasing and striking people outside the stadium, including a couple with a four-year old son. Campeón also makes note that the same day other incidents took place at a match between All Boys and Morón in the “B” division; see: “…y todo pasó en un partido de fútbol,” Campeón, October 5, 1960, 2. More fan disorders took place when both teams the following October; see: Osvaldo Ardizzone, “Marzolini, Ditro, un gran gol…y un gran desorden,” El Gráfico, October 11, 1961, 3-8.


¹⁶⁷ (Various articles) in Campeón, October 11, 1960, 1-5; Ernesto Lazzatti, “¡Pobre fútbol! ¡Cuánto daño se hace!,” El Gráfico, October 12, 1960, 66-69; Laureano Villamañan, “Un domingo sin fútbol: ¿Puede hacerle eso bien al fútbol?,” El Gráfico, October 12, 1960, 70-73. Armando’s most detailed defense of his players can be found found in “Boca no responsibilizaba al público ni a sus hinchas, dice el Dr. Armando,” Campeón, October 5, 1960, 3.
which was especially beneficial during club election season.\textsuperscript{168}

Images of police intervention, fan disorders, and injuries became more commonplace in news outlets (figures 48-49). A stunning piece in \textit{El Gráfico} published in January of 1962 encouraged readers to take matters into their own hands. The writers at the magazine believed that it was the duty of those with moral character to restore decency and honor to the stadiums; by their sheer numbers, upright citizens would easily overpower delinquents. \textit{El Gráfico} believed it was time that the age of barbarism came to an end so that foreigners would stop seeing Argentines as savages.\textsuperscript{169}
This call to arms reflected the reality of the age of “fútbol espectáculo.” Fans were failing to see good fútbol on the field, as evidenced by many 0-0 score lines in the mid-1960s. The lack of quality matches gave the notorious patotas an opportunity to become visible actors in the stands as cynicism set in among fans and journalists. Although club presidents like Armando benefitted from the fanaticism of some fans, stadium disorders raised questions about Argentina’s status as a progressive and civilized nation. As incidents escalated throughout the 1960s, the actions of organized fan groups frustrated those who wanted to project a more positive image for Argentine fútbol.\textsuperscript{170}

The cynicism that emerged during the age of “fútbol espectáculo” was a sharp contrast to the more romantic and idyllic imagery of the 1940s and 1950s, when many films contributed to the myth making initiated by sports writers. Movies like \textit{El hincha} presented a realist take on the business practices in professional fútbol. Yet, in the end, these films portrayed the everyday fan as the true hero whose passion and loyalty allowed him to spot the next great “crack.”

The developing crisis in fútbol was visible in three films of the early 1960s. These films did not depict triumphant heros; rather, the central protagonists were martyrs whose pure spirit was no match for the greed and corruption of powerful figures in fútbol and society. \textit{El crack} (1960) begins like most previous fútbol films. A spectator at a

\textsuperscript{170} If there was any doubt that fútbol had entered a new age of extreme fanaticism, the attempted murder of River Plate coach Renato Cesarini dispelled any notion of a return to normalcy. After his team lost the league championship to their bitter rivals, Boca Juniors, Cesarini spoke bluntly to reporters and listed the faults of his own players and Argentine fútbol in general. A few days later, a bomb exploded at his house (which was vacant at the time). Police never identified the culprit. It was never clear if the intent was to murder Cesarini, or to simply send some sort of message. See: “Definitivo: Cesarini se va,” \textit{River}, December 28, 1965, 2-3; Osvaldo Ardizzone, “¿Bombas a mí?,” \textit{El Gráfico}, December 28, 1965, 4-5.
neighborhood fútbol game notices the stellar play of a pibe, Osvaldo Castro, who lives in a working-class barrio. Osvaldo’s demanding father, a Galician immigrant, belittles his son’s desire to play fútbol, scolding Osvaldo for not working at the family-owned bar. Osvaldo eventually finds support from his caring mother and the neighborhood fans that admire his skills on the field.

As the story unfolds, *El crack* moves away from the triumphant narrative of previous films. It focuses on those who stand to benefit, and lose, from Osvaldo’s rise to fame: a veteran player (Ramiro) who is soon to be replaced by Osvaldo, a girlfriend who is desperate to leave the *mugre* (filth) of their neighborhood, and the agent who discovers Osvaldo. Even Osvaldo’s curmudgeon of a father eventually warms to the idea of his son earning a good salary if it means that he would be able to return to Galicia.

*El crack* thus morphs into a realist account of pitfalls of professional sports. Whether it is the rising star or the aging veteran, club officials viewed their players as commodities whose value in the transfer market would help finance stadium repairs, a new library, or entertainment for club members. Family members likewise seem parasitic by pinning their own fortunes on the talent of their son or fiancée. Trying to counsel his young teammate, one veteran (played by River Plate legend José Manuel Moreno) warns Osvaldo that the agent represents the worst aspect of professional fútbol: greed.\(^1\)

Although this film echoed the views of sports writers like Panzeri and Borocotó, its target audience was the fan base that went to fútbol matches, which was becoming more jaded with each passing season.

---

The lust for money and power becomes the dominant theme in *El crack*, as well as the 1961 film *El centroforward murió al amanecer* (based on a mid-1950s theatre production). In the latter film, the talent of star player Arístedes “Cacho” Garibaldi also serves the needs of multiple parties, including his club team Nahuel, which considers his transfer a sound business decision because of the club’s mounting debts. Another interested party is the mysterious Mr. Lupus: a wealthy man few people seem to know. When several teams vie for Cacho’s services, both Cacho and Club Nahuel ultimately make a Faustian pact with Mr. Lupus. Club Nahuel sells its star player in exchange for Mr. Lupus’ offer to pay off the club’s debt. Cacho, on the other hand, agrees to sign a contract only with the assurance that his dear aunt will receive a monthly stipend. Cacho soon finds himself in an odd situation—Mr. Lupus does not represent a club team, only himself. Arriving at his new owner’s house, Cacho soon realizes that Mr. Lupus paid 10 million pesos (coincidentally, what Juventus paid for Sívori in 1957) to keep him in a collection of human trophies, alongside a court jester, a ballerina, a strong man, and a thespian (to name a few).\textsuperscript{172} The fate of Cacho is exactly what many people decried about professional fútbol: property to be sold and traded like a slave. Or as Osvaldo’s agent in *El crack* reminds his young client, fútbol turns men into merchandise worth millions.

Disillusionment emerges as the main theme in these films, often in gendered terms. For Osvaldo, life is happier back in the potrero. By the end of the film, his growing distance from his neighborhood leads to a series of poor performances and his former fans turn on him. Female spectators label him a *maricón* (faggot) for his inability

to score. Others label him a *patadura* (feet of stone). His girlfriend walks out ashamed at someone who is no longer a man. Angry, Osvaldo re-focuses and in a burst of newfound brilliance scores a goal. The glorious moment is short-lived. An opponent promptly breaks Osvaldo’s leg on a hard tackle, depriving him of his most valuable asset and ability to earn a living as an athlete.

Instead of earning the praise of fans for his selfless sacrifice on the field, the film ends with Osvaldo’s agent shrugging his shoulder and exclaiming that it is time to find a new player. At the same time, Osvaldo’s ex-girlfriend walks the streets of her impoverished barrio, depressed that she cannot escape her condition. Only Osvaldo’s mother mourns his injury. Cacho does not fare any better in Mr. Lupus’ house. After falling in love with the ballerina, he plans their escape and run towards freedom—back to the barrio and his beloved aunt. In a cruel twist of fate, as Cacho tries to flee with the ballerina, she chooses to stay. Betrayed, Mr. Lupus orders the ballerina to marry the simple-minded strong man instead. This prompts Cacho to attack Mr. Lupus and kill him. The film ends with Cacho facing execution at dawn (hence the title of the production).

Greed, disillusionment, and corruption were also major themes in the 1963 film *Pelota de cuero.* The film reunited the writer and star of the 1944 film *Pelota de trapo,* Borocotó and Armando Bo. The film is based on the true story of Uruguayan player Abdon Porte, who in 1918 killed himself on the playing fields of his cherished Club Nacional (Montevideo) after realizing that his playing days were ending. What is noteworthy about this film is how Borocotó and Bo create a different tone than that of their previous production by focusing on the loss of what made Argentine fútbol special.
The main character, Marcos Ferreti (played by Bo), dedicates his life to Boca Juniors. But after more than twenty years of service, club officials discuss moving him to the side for business reasons. Ferreti’s salary is too high and club officials believe that younger, more affordable strikers had a greater value to the club. Ferreti is lost in the world of modern fútbol. A new generation of coaches and players are literate in the latest tactics and training methods, all of which seem alien to Ferreti. Depressed, Ferreti takes a gun with him to the Bombonera stadium by the end of the film. Dressed in a suit, he opens his shirt to reveal a Boca Juniors jersey underneath and points his gun at his chest. Ferreti’s corpse drops onto the field, uniting player and club in death.173

*Pelota de cuero* opened one year before the passing of Borocotó. It is a film that pays homage to “yesterday’s” fútbol through the love Ferreti expresses for his club and the passion of his life: fútbol. More than an ode to the fútbol of yesteryear, *Pelota de cuero* is a scathing critique of the business side of modern fútbol. When Ferreti opens his shirt at the end of the film, he is not only aiming the pistol at his chest, he is also ready to fire the gun at the Boca Juniors jersey. The closing scene of *Pelota de Cuero* encapsulates Borocotó’s views about fútbol. Major teams like Boca Juniors were no longer civic associations for the common good; they had become major companies driven by profits. Like Borocotó, Ferreti saw time pass him by. As a result, the film questions the value of passionately defending the colors of a team that has lost sight of the interests of its fans.

By questioning the romantic view of fútbol, films of the early 1960s addressed modern problems in the sport and treated filmgoers as mature audiences. All three films

---

present fútbol as a complicated business. The allegorical nature of *El centroforward murió al amanecer*, for example, presented audiences with a social critique of power, the state, and the masses. Cacho represents those who think for themselves, who refuse to be manipulated by a charismatic leader like Mr. Lupus. The strong man and the ballerina symbolize the mindless masses, easily swayed and willing to blindly follow orders. Mr. Lupus embodies several figures of society: a charismatic leader (like Perón), the oligarchy (whose wealth buys everything it desires), or the state (which benefits when citizens adhere to their function in society). *El centroforward murió al amanecer*, as well as *El crack*, also portrays romantic ideas about love of family, barrio, and club as a product of the past consumed by the greed of the present. Cacho’s desire to leave Mr. Lupus’ house and return to his barrio, for example, speaks to those who were unhappy with the modern state of fútbol in the same way that Ferreti sees no future for himself and dies a martyr on the field of La Bombonera.

Finally, it is not difficult to imagine Mr. Lupus as any of the powerful fútbol officials of the time, men of personal wealth and political connections who bought players at will. Although the theatrical debut of *Centroforward* predated the era of “fútbol espectáculo,” the film’s 1961 release could have led viewers to see club officials like Armando in the role of Mr. Lupus. Borocotó had long criticized the corruption and greed in professional fútbol. A club like Boca Juniors, therefore, made sense as the setting for *Pelota de cuero*. It was the embodiment of the age of fútbol espectáculo; a club whose officials focused on profits and political connections, and whose president sought to transform a neighborhood institution into a major brand in international football.
“Caudillos” and Changing Notions of Masculinity

Club presidents like Armando who ran their institutions as a fiefdom earned the nickname of “caudillo” presidents—an apt description to describe their management style. This term appeared in sports journalism with greater frequency in the 1960s to describe a leadership style based on personality, strength, and leadership. Caudillismo was a form of nineteenth-century military and political leadership in Latin America, in which charismatic leaders used violence and patronage to expand their base of power. In Argentina, figures like Juan Manuel de Rosas, an early nineteenth-century authoritarian governor of Buenos Aires, who for decades protected the interests of the provinces against federal rule, was known as either a tyrant or a hero—depending on the political leanings of those characterizing his rule. Rulers labeled caudillos embodied a mixture of localism and personalism.

Liberti, Amalfitani, and Armando, among others, exhibited the same mixture of charisma and political shrewdness as the caudillos of the past. Their long rule established them as institutions at their clubs. As a result, these caudillo presidents worried less about their own security at their clubs and instead competed with each other for power within

174 “Caudillo” presidents could also be found in smaller club associations like Estudiantes and Atlanta. An ambitious president like Atlanta’s Kolbowski, however, did not aim to compete directly with Boca Juniors’ Armando. Instead, if Atlanta were to grow as a club, Kolbowski would have looked at a semi-first tier club like Huracán (and its “caudillo” president Luis Seijo) as a more direct rival.

175 De la Fuente, Children of Facundo, 3.

professional fútbol. One reason that these men felt secure in their positions at their clubs was the loyalty they cultivated with their club’s most militant fans. The patron-client association that emerged was not unlike the caudillo-peasant relationship of the past.¹⁷⁷ Leaders of organized fan groups offered club officials their loyalty to the club; in return, men like “Milanesa”—the head of a fan group of San Lorenzo and a charismatic leader in his own right—secured special perks like free tickets, or trips on chartered planes with coach Lorenzo.¹⁷⁸

So, how did caudillo presidents like Armando last so long when most clubs traditionally elected officials on a four-year cycle? While it is not the purpose of this project to analyze internal club politics, it is important to note the conditions that enabled “caudillo” presidents to remain in power for prolonged periods. The crisis in club revenue, low scoring, social anxiety about political events, and the growth of mass media in the 1950s and 1960s all created a climate of uncertainty. Refusing to let a good crisis go to waste, presidents made the case for re-election by promising stability at their clubs during uncertain times, but solidified their power through cronyism. In short, they were nothing but political creatures.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Recent studies of caudillismo have been useful in focusing on the client element of this patron-client relationship. They argue that to understand a caudillo’s appeal, one should examine the social and political conditions faced by their followers, namely gauchos and poor laborers. See: De la Fuente, Children of Facundo; John Charles Chasteen, Heroes on Horseback: A Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillos (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995). A similar argument for the study of the followers of caudillos can be found in: Tulio Halperín Donghi, Una nación para el desierto argentino (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1982), 131–141.

¹⁷⁸ Boca Juniors also offered travel accommodations to the heads of the barras to matches across South America. Also see: Sebreli, La era del fútbol, 62.

¹⁷⁹ To provide but one example, before Armando’s twenty-one year presidency at Boca Juniors, the longest presidency lasted seven years; see: “Anexo: Presidentes del Club Atlético Boca Juniors,” Wikipedia, la enciclopedia libre, October 16, 2012,
When applied to players, the term “caudillo” bestowed honor and respect for a certain type of player: the tough man, or enforcer, in the middle of the field. Unlike the artistic virtuoso player popular in the 1940s, the caudillo player exhibited a mixture of strength, toughness, and a forceful personality that would command presence on the field. This characterization and use of the term “caudillo” emerged in the 1950s and gained more visibility during the 1960s. Typically, he was a defensive midfielder or libero in the catenaccio system, and labeled as a “number 5” based on his location on the field. The centrality of his position allowed his vocal temperament and personality to direct teammates on the field. A caudillo’s physicality, as he sacrificed his body in tough challenges for a ball, appealed to many fans and journalists who felt that the artists of yesteryear lacked the sufficient manliness to compete on the international level.

Figure 50- Police officers escort River Plate’s “caudillo,” Néstor Rossi, off the field after he is expelled in a 1955 match. Cover image to River, June 30, 1955. The caption read: “Culminó la persecución de Néstor Rossi” (The prosecution of Néstor Rossi came to an end). Courtesy of the personal collection of Rodrigo Daskal.

http://es.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anexo:Presidentes_del_Club_Atlético_Boca_Juniors&oldid=57696928. The same occurrence took place at River Plate, Vélez Sarsfield, Estudiantes, and Atlanta, to name a few clubs. The most notable case in recent years is the presidency of Julio Grondona at AFA, which began in 1979 and is scheduled to finish in 2015.

235
Not every team had a “caudillo,” but several clubs did have players that commanded universal respect. One of the first midfield players to be described as a caudillo was River Plate’s Néstor Rossi. His imposing size, boisterous (often vulgar) personality, and physical style of play meant that referees frequently expelled him, and police officers escorted him off the field (figure 50).\textsuperscript{180} Or as El Gráfico put it: Rossi’s style of play “armó el lío,” (armed the mess).\textsuperscript{181} This made Rossi a hated figure among rival fans; but at River Plate, the same behavior made him a hero, even while he served regular suspensions handed down by AFA’s disciplinary tribunal. On the field, Rossi’s style of play and temper made him a marked man for teams hoping to get him expelled, thereby gaining a one-man advantage over River Plate.\textsuperscript{182}

Yet, on the national team, Rossi’s charisma and hard-nosed playing style were widely admired.\textsuperscript{183} His veteran leadership was instrumental to the 1957 champions of the Campeonato Sudamericano. Another leader on the national team, Racing player Pedro Dellacha, shared a similar set of attributes as Rossi and also earned the honorific title of caudillo. In Dellacha’s case, the label had less to do with his charisma. Fans valued his physicality and ability to win balls from opposing strikers. In terms of leadership, both


\textsuperscript{181} Carlos Fontanarrosa, “Hicieron lo que no debian,” El Gráfico, June 22, 1956, 4-7.

\textsuperscript{182} “A la caza del hombre,” River, December, 1955; “No se puede jugar al fútbol atado de pies y manos,” River, June 16, 1955; “Por ahora garra, ya vendrá el fútbol,” River, May 26, 1955. River Plate fans pointed to Rossi’s “marked man” status as proof of the resentment officials and rivals held towards their club.

men made sure that teammates were on the same page. Rossi and Dellacha functioned like player-coaches by ensuring that the team adhered to the tactical plans of the coach.\textsuperscript{184}

The “caudillo” construction reveals varying notions of gender associated with the defining aspects of “modern” fútbol in Argentina: strength, “garra,” and ability to withstand punishment (\textit{el aguante}). In addition, notions about masculinity had a certain middle-class view of about how an ideal fútbol player was to behave. \textit{El Gráfico}, for example, published an article in February of 1961 outlining correct behavior that any “real man” should embrace. Fútbol players must be professional, serious, respectful of fans, and selfless on the field; foul language was a mark of a lack of education. \textit{El Gráfico} lamented that inappropriate behavior had become so commonplace that these ideal traits seemed lost forever. But Rossi was a hero to River Plate fans because partly because he played tough, yelled at opponents and referees, and gave no quarter on the field. The discourse in \textit{El Gráfico}, therefore, was an effort by the magazine to define masculinity along middle-class notions of civility rather than accept the realities of what fans desired in their fútbol players.\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{184} Enrico Scottare, “Sívori el Napoleón del fútbol,” \textit{Campeón}, December 1, 1965, 8. Sivori remembered how Rossi taught him a valuable lesson at the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano. In a match against archrival Uruguay, Sivori, Angelillo, and Maschio each scored a goal in what was quickly turning into a rout. It was a game where “nos salían todas” (“everything was going our way”). With the game in hand, Sivori worked with Angelillo to dribble past the Uruguayan defense until only the Uruguayan goalkeeper remained. Instead of shooting, Sivori recalled backtracking and continuing to dribble, trying to embarrass his opponents. Suddenly, a vicious punch to the head knocked him out. Dazed, he confronted his aggressor only to recognize that it was Rossi. Afterwards, Rossi talked to his young teammate in the locker room and told him that someday he would understand why he hit him. Sivori already understood. He stayed within the game plan for the rest of the match and became best friends with Rossi.

\textsuperscript{185} “Córtese el cabello, levántese las medias, arréglese la camiseta,” \textit{El Gráfico}, February 8, 1961, 30-33. The article included images of “proper” and “improper” teams over the years. \textit{El Gráfico} noticed that the teams that lacked professionalism allowed children and fans to squirm their way into team photographs taken before matches began. Players like Sivori (in his early years at River Plate) were also poor examples because they kept their socks low and their hair long. \textit{El Gráfico} also questioned how
Like many players of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Dellacha dressed like a business executive off the field, sporting the latest fashions in men’s suits. Player profiles in sports magazines also captured images of fútbol players in front of new homes or cars, accompanied by wives and children (figure 5.1). Unlike similar articles in the past, in which the potrero and the extended family were regular elements of a player’s story from rags to riches, players like Dellacha represented middle-class ascendency surrounded by only their wives and children. Their professionalism and work ethic did not typify all fútbol players, but when players like Dellacha succeeded playing the “right” way, they became models according to sports writers—even more so when Argentine players succeeded in Europe.

The most notable example occurred in 1958 when Real Madrid visited Buenos Aires for a series of matches. Articles praised the return of the prodigal son, Alfredo Di Stéfano, who left Argentina in 1949 as a precocious pibe, but returned as a model of professionalism like the rest of his European teammates. Di Stéfano arrived to interviews dressed in sharp suits, cleanly shaven, and with a professional attitude. This, according to reporters in Buenos Aires, was an example of a modern galán professional players, “señoritas,” could shy away from a tackle, or from contesting a ball in the air, out of concerns that their hair or clothes could become disheveled. It called for “men that play like men, but well dressed, which is also very masculine.” River also outlined how physicality on the field could be fair and not excessively violent, a true sign of fútbol “de varones” (“of men”); see: “¡Muy bien Independiente!,” River, May 11, 1961, 3-7.


Magazines would feature Di Stéfano throughout the 1960s (figure 52), along with others like Sívori, Angelillo, and Maschio who, according to some journalists, learned how to act like professionals in Europe.

By contrast, *El Gráfico* pointed to Boca Juniors player Carmelo “Cholo” Simeone as an example of a misguided sense of virility. Simeone prided himself on giving everything he had on the field, coming into tackles as hard as possible, and treating a match as war. It earned “Cholo” a reputation as a dirty player; but worse for the magazine

---

188 Miguel Angel Merlo, “Pagamos REALidad con nuestra PLATE,” *Mundo Deportivo*, August 18, 1958, 32-33; Eduardo Baliai and Héctor Villita, “Fútbol al tanto por ciento; 13 reales,” *Mundo Deportivo*, August 18, 1958, 30-31; “Un gol de blanco,” *Mundo Deportivo*, August 18, 1958, 28-29. One of the more humorous articles in *Mundo Deportivo* was an article that was supposed to show the professional work ethic of Di Stéfano. Instead, it became a lengthy advertisement for Remington electric shavers; see: “Caballeros del Real…aciertó”, *Mundo Deportivo*, August 18, 1958, 24-25.

189 Not to be confused with the latter-day Diego “Cholo” Simeone (no relation).
was that Simeone’s style of play provoked opponents and created opportunities for retaliation and injuries.\textsuperscript{190}

Like many other players in the age of ultra-defensive fútbol, Simeone straddled a fine line between bravery and aggression. An insightful article appeared in \textit{Campeón} in 1965. It unpacked the various terms associated with manhood in fútbol and described “\textit{guapeza criolla},” or being a “\textit{guapo},” as an unconscious impulse that led to aggression and a desire to fight to the end. On the other hand, “\textit{valentía}” (bravery) was a virtue resting between the two extremes of cowardice and recklessness. Further elaborating its analysis, \textit{Campeón} linked guapeza to blood, or passion; whereas reason and prudence marked bravery in fútbol. In other words, a guapo became a victim of fear but a brave player controlled his fear.\textsuperscript{191}

Contradictions lie embedded within framings of the ideal virile player. On the one hand, it was widely accepted that physical confrontations between players were justified, as long as they occurred within the spirit and rules of the game. Various articles show that it was desirable—even heroic—for a player to try to re-enter a match after suffering a serious injury because it showed bravery and a willingness to leave it all on the field.\textsuperscript{192}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[191] Ulises Barrera, “¿Guapos ó valientes?,” \textit{Campeón}, November 17, 1965, 11.
\item[192] For examples, see: Alberto Laya, “El retorno del crack,” \textit{Primera Plana}, May 18, 1965, 84; Alberto Laya, “El otro de Willington,” \textit{Primera Plana}, May 25, 1965, 80; “La otra cara del equipo de José,” \textit{Gente y la actualidad}, October 13, 1966, 16-19. Virility and “guapeza” also had their rewards. \textit{Gente y la actualidad} ran an article about Sívori that featured him breaking ground on a new fútbol field in the small town of Marino, Italy. By his side was the famous actress Sophia Loren. It was an image that conveyed Sívori’s success and virility by insinuating Loren’s desire to be by his side (the article,}
\end{footnotes}
On the other hand, violence outside the rules of the sport—even if it was a mistimed tackle—brought condemnation. A cursory look at records of player indiscipline demonstrates why sports writers grew concerned about player violence. For example, in 1961, AFA penalized 1,205 players for disciplinary reasons: 200 for verbal or physical aggression against referees, 470 for aggression between players, 443 for excessive protestations for fouls. 519 players received official warnings from the referee (booking), 75 players were suspended for the accumulation of 4 warnings, and 86 players were directly expelled. These numbers were not abnormal but rather indicated a steady rise from previous years with no sign of slowing down.

By 1965, cynicism set in among fans and journalists about player behavior and what it meant for Argentina’s image to the outside world. A cartoon published that year in Campeón reproduced the resignation among sports writers that each season seemed to be the same as the last: full of “no-gol,” indiscipline, fake tickets, corruption (figure 53). It was not only an indictment of the state of professional fútbol but it was also a commentary on the complicity of fans. Indeed, sports journalists—particularly at El Gráfico—held fans accountable for how they valued guapeza among players. Crowds were sometimes prone to insult teams for not showing a fighting spirit. In some cases,

however, makes no mention of an amorous relationship); see: “La pizza, remedio infalible,” Gente y la actualidad, December 1, 1966, 40-41.
193 “Jugadores sancionados,” Memorias y balance 1961 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1962), 54. The following season the numbers remained fairly close: 453 players received bookings, 65 were suspended for 4 warnings, and 98 players were directly expelled (aside from the over 20 coaches expelled in matches of the first division.); see: “Jugadores sancionados,” Memorias y balance 1962 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1963), 69.
this shaped how the media reported on a match. For example, *Campeón* criticized Zubeldía’s Estudiantes for the team’s lack of aggressiveness, “sangre,” and “fuerza” (blood and strength) after a listless performance against Racing in 1965. Phrases like “¡mátalo a ése!” (“kill him!”), or “¡rómpelo!” (“break him!”), were commonly heard in fútbol stadiums before 1960. One retired journalist recalls the shift in spectator chants during this time. While chants were generally supportive of teams and players, he recalls that vulgarity and suggestions of violence became prominent by the end of the 1960s.

Despite the attention many sports writers paid to the loss of civility, many fans seemed to put more emphasis in success as a sign of virility. Defenders were supposed to win balls and not allow opponents to get by. Fans expected goalkeepers to keep a clean sheet. Most important, everyone expected strikers to score goals. When they did not, even

---

supporters turned on them—as the film El crack ably demonstrated in one scene, when female spectators question Osvaldo’s virility, or potency, due to his inability to score goals in a game. Although a minority presence inside the stadium, the role of the female spectator is important to consider in the construction of masculinity in fútbol. A recent study on female fandom in Argentina reveals that they were hardly a homogeneous and passive group. Some women were worried about mobs of young men knocking them over, or were fearful of losing their purse; but others, like the mother of Antonio Angelillo, were “bravas” and “respondonas”—female fans known for yelling at referees and at rival teams.197 Their responses degraded players in a sexualized manner that male fans were incapable of replicating in the same manner.

Adding to the complicated discourse about masculinity, and what it meant for Argentina’s image to the international footballing community, were comments from the Argentine press that called for players to toughen up and play a stronger game. At the 1963 Campeonato Sudamericano, Campeón argued that it was time for players to stop complaining, ditch the label of “llorones,” and accept the physicality they would face in international matches.198

As we saw earlier, “llorón” suggested that players were prone to excessive complaining and behavior. It was behavior designed to kill time in a match, or try to influence a referee’s decision. For many sports writers, this unethical trait damaged Argentina’s reputation. But in the more populist discourse found in Campeón or River,


the term also referred to a certain measure of emasculation. “Llorón” was not unlike
calling an opponent, or rival fan, a “son.” To label a rival a “son” was to insult him as a
passive figure in contrast to the “father” who disciplines the child.

More than an allusion to a patriarchal relationship, the term “llorón” suggested a
degree of sexual domination that feminized others. The February 9, 1965 issue of River,
for example, contained a cover and article about the club’s match against Brazilian team
Santos. The image shows River Plate players surrounding the Argentine referee,
Comesaña, and protesting a decision they deemed as unjust. Rather than simply pleading
with the match official, River Plate’s players aggressively confronted him with fists
closed, yelling in his face. The article accused Comesaña of allowing the 75,000
Brazilians in attendance to manhandle him. Worse, the article and accompanying image
portray him as just another Argentine referee that “bends over” in front of the Brazilians
as he picks up the ball off the ground. According to River, the image was “symbolic” of
his performance.199

The model of the caudillo player of the 1960s was Boca Juniors midfielder
Antonio Rattín. Towards the end of his playing career in the late 1950s, Rossi
commented that he had seen in Rattín a successor to his “number 5” position on the
national team.200 A tall and imposing figure, he quickly established a reputation as a
physical player—a guapo. To rival fans, he was a player prone to intimidate, or even

injure, his opponents. Like Rossi, Rattín earned more respect as the leader of the national team. After Argentina’s triumph over Brazil in 1964, Boca Juniors fans showered him with praise by chanting “Rattín…Rattín…Rattín el capo de Brasil.” The term *capo* originated in Italy and stood for a boss (usually the head of a Mafia group). In Argentine fútbol, a capo dominated rivals; he was the best at his profession and a true leader. In this case, Rattín was the caudillo that dominated the Brazilians to the delight of Argentine fans. Not only was he more macho than the Brazilians, he also instilled fear in them like a mafia boss.

Rattín embodied a new type of “caudillo” player, one who adapted to new tactical systems. He was a disciplined player and adhered to his coach’s tactics. For Rattín, the key to success was a team’s ability to execute the game plan; playing as if one was still on the potrero was a recipe for failure. From a tactical standpoint, Rattín was less of a pure “number 5.” He did not necessarily dictate the tempo of a game from midfield; instead, his job was to complement the defense by double-teaming the player with the ball, or by marking the best player on the opposing team. On offense, his job was to try to score with his head when outside midfielders or forwards crossed the ball into the penalty area, or to take shots from long distance. The emergence of this new type of caudillo player was a result of the greater emphasis on the cerrojo approach and defensive

---

201 For an example of how rival fans characterized his style of play, see: “Señor Ubaldo Rattín:,” *River*, June 7, 1961, 8-9. For his role as a classic number five on the field, see: “A Boca no le hace Mella el ‘sistema’ de Helenio H.,” *Campeón*, September 23, 1964, 4.


203 Today, “capo” is a term reserved for the head of Argentina’s notoriously violent fan groups, known as *barras bravas*.

pressure, which lent itself to dangerous forms of masculinity. Other “caudillos” of the 1960s similar to Rattin included Racing’s Alfio Basile and Estudiantes’ Carlos Bilardo.  

“Killing It”: Independiente and the Intercontinental Cups of 1963-1964

“¿Fútbol ó pelotita?” As we consider the run-up to the 1966 World Cup, it is worth revisiting the question posed at the beginning of this chapter. It had been many years since the “disaster” in Sweden propelled a shift towards a modern, scientific approach to fútbol. Yet, Argentine fútbol demonstrated a tension between playing a modern game (fútbol) or the old attractive style of short passes (pelotita). If any consensus emerged by the mid-1960s, it was that Argentine players needed to assimilate both. They should master “technical-tactical” fútbol, improve their athleticism, but also maintain their ability to possess the ball with a short possession-type passing game. One Spanish observer noted that excessive dribbling had become an unfortunate vice for Argentine players in an age when catenaccio neutralized that style of play. As a result, the shift towards scientific fútbol brought with it a redefinition of success among Argentine sports writers. More than an aesthetic style, “la nuestra” had become synonymous with collective sacrifice and hard work.

---


While the editorial change at *El Gráfico* in 1962 played a part in shifting the narrative, a key moment occurred in 1964 when Argentina finally achieved success against European opponents. AFA tasked José María Minella to prepare Argentina for the Cup of Nations.\(^\text{209}\) He was a well-regarded coach, who, unlike his peers, possessed an unusually quiet demeanor that seemed to lack the passion needed to coach fútbol. Dubbed by journalists as a “mini World Cup,” this four-nation tournament celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Brazilian Sports Confederation. Along with the World Cup champions and host nation Brazil, the other participants included England, Portugal, and Argentina. To the surprise of many, Argentina’s initial match against Portugal was a clear 2-0 victory for the South Americans. Minella’s team exhibited a clear defensive scheme, but one that allowed players to shift and adjust to the spaces offered by the Portuguese defense.\(^\text{210}\) The victory was in some ways cathartic. Since 1958, Argentine teams struggled to defeat European opponents. Journalists labeled it the “European phantasm” and over the years reinforced ideas about Europe’s dominant place in international football.\(^\text{211}\)

The victory against Portugal raised expectations, but the tone in the Argentine press was mostly guarded ahead of matches against Brazil and England. Against the host nation, Minella used a 4-3-3 formation. He assigned Rattín the job of marking Brazilian star Pelé throughout the match. The idea was to solidify the defense by asking the three


\(^{210}\)“Ganamos por mejores: Portugal no sabe del fútbol más que nosotros,” *Campeón*, June 3, 1964, 2; *La Nación*, June 1, 1964, 22.

midfielders to pressure from behind. Once Argentina recovered the ball, these midfielders would quickly initiate the offense and use the width of the three strikers to open up the Brazilian defense. It was a lighter version of the cerrojo because Rattín’s specific assignment on Pelé forced the other midfielders to fill his role of clogging the middle of the field. A key substitution in the second half, Roberto Telch, brought a new level of energy to the match that broke the Brazilian defense.\(^{212}\) Minella’s tactics worked perfectly. Argentines defeated the reigning world champions by a convincing score of 3-0. Even more, Argentina’s final 1-0 victory over England proved that the “European phantasm” was no longer an issue.\(^{213}\) The Cup of Nations cemented in the minds of Argentine fútbol fans the ability of the national team to succeed on the international level.

The victory over Brazil garnered massive attention in Argentina. It was a convincing triumph over the world’s best team. Defeating England—the historic “other” in Argentine fútbol—almost seemed like a footnote.\(^{214}\) Argentina’s clean sheet over three games was even more impressive, but not surprising considering the ultra-defensive schemes en vogue at the time in the national league.\(^{215}\) Old complaints about “anti-

\(^{212}\) “Un plan perfecto que llevó a sacrificar un hombre le dio el gran triunfo a Argentina,” *Campeón*, June 10, 1964, 3; Osvaldo Ardizzone, “Pacaembú se llenó de Telch,” *El Gráfico*, June 10, 1964, 1-5.


\(^{214}\) For an example, see: “Argentina cedió la iniciativa a Inglaterra y buscó la victoria cuando el rival se había agotado,” *Campeón*, June 10, 1964, 4. The article acknowledged the fall of England as a major power in world football, but also asked if the English, after recognizing the superiority of the Brazilians, would now do the same for Argentine players after the convincing victory over Brazil.

\(^{215}\) For a counter argument on these victories, which questioned the insistence on defensive tactics, see: “El tango de la derrota,” *River*, June 11, 1964, 4-5; Diego Lucero, “¿La justa conquista no debe llamar a engaño,” *Clarín*, June 1, 1964, 2; Diego Lucero, “En Pacaembú, a la búsqueda del milagro o de la hazaña,” *Clarín*, June 3, 1964, 23; Diego Lucero, “Una figura que devolvió el fútbol argentino su antigua gloria,” *Clarín*, June 4, 1964, 29.
fútbol” were now virtues. Journalists described excessive fouls as “tactical maneuvers.” They also described the strict adherence to Minella’s game plan as essential to Argentina’s success. Brazil also ceased to be the model for success. Pelé earned respect over the years for his skill; now he was persona non-grata for his unsportsmanlike behavior during the match (including a head-butt delivered to an Argentine defender).

Upon the return of the national team, Campeón reported how jubilant fans greeted the “heroes” and “conquerors of the two battles” at Ezeiza airport with music, tears of laughter and joy, and congratulations for their role in restoring Argentina’s “place in the concert of universal fútbol.” President Arturo Illia (elected in 1963) welcomed the national team to the ceremonial house of government—the Casa Rosada—in recognition of the prestige the national team provided to all Argentines. This jubilant reception was far different from the hostility of 1958, if not somewhat overblown. After all, the Cup of Nations was an exhibition tournament involving only four participants. Yet, the celebration that accompanied Argentina’s success demonstrated the hunger fans possessed for any meaningful victory on the international stage.

A third moment that tilted popular opinion towards scientific-tactical fútbol came with Independiente’s two-year run as South American club champions. En route to its

---

216 Lisandro Lanala, “Triunfo de Argentina ante Brazil: Oportuna estrategia,” La Nación, June 4, 1964, 14; “El control a Pelé fue el primer paso; Ganó el partido una disciplina estricta,” La Nación, June 5, 1964, 12.

217 “El rey manchó su corona,” El Gráfico, June 10, 1964, 15. One should not miss the racial implications here. Brazil’s ability to win major tournaments was a tough pill to swallow for Argentines who suffered through the national team’s many failures. Likewise, the general consensus that Pelé was perhaps the best player in history seemed to diminish the legacy of Alfredo Di Stéfano. But Argentina’s success was not without criticism. The haphazard selection of players just before the tournament continued to bother fans and journalists; see: “Esta vez resultó bien, pero que sea la última improvisación criolla,” Campeón, June 10, 1964, 2.

continental championship, Independiente defeated Pelé’s vaunted Santos team in 1964. Asked about their tough, aggressive style of play, Independiente players defended their approach as an issue of virility, stating that fútbol “was for men, not for señoritas (ladies).”\(^{219}\) Again we see how relationships in fútbol take on a dominant-passive relationship in a form of masculinity that seeks to feminize, or emasculate, an opponent. Here, Independiente players ascribed to their opponents, Santos, the label of “señoritas” after defeating the Brazilian team in a major tournament. Rather than referring to a type of femininity that denoted a caring mother figure, or an aggressive dominatrix, the term conveys passivity and physical weakness. By defeating Santos—the most successful team in South America—and its star player, Pelé, Independiente laid claim to a level of manliness that signified power. Conversely, Santos (or the referee Comesaña in River) lacked sufficient manliness and was thus feminized.\(^{220}\)

Sports writers further characterized success as a measure of toughness using violent discourse. For instance, Juvenal praised Independiente for its grit, determination, and because it “went out to kill it” (“salió matando”).\(^{221}\) Equating violence with success had become a common feature of colloquial discourse in sports in the 1960s and extended to other areas of popular culture by the end of the decade—advertisement, television,

\(^{220}\) Joan Scott’s definition of gender is helpful in analyzing power relationships in Argentine fútbol. She argues that gender is a primary way of signifying degrees of power, a field “within which or by means of which power is articulated.” The near absence of women at the stadiums meant that men would look to other, “weaker” men to fulfill the role of the submissive female. See: Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott, Oxford Readings in Feminism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 42–45.
even fashion. Independiente’s head coach, Manuel Giudice, employed similar terminology when he described the mindset of his players before their encounter against Santos: “We cannot afford to be wrong again. For many years, we played ‘prettier’ but those who played ‘to win’ beat us. Independiente is built for that: to come out ‘killing it’ and to win ‘killing it.’ In other words, it was better to be the male in a competitive public match than to be the “señorita” who played “prettier” but lost.

It is not clear why violence became a part of everyday language in the early 1960s. A decade of political turmoil that began in 1955 with the ouster of Perón, and continued with two additional military coups in 1962 and 1966, influenced the use of violent imagery and vernacular. These events produced a level of anxiety across the country compounded by the frequency of student and worker strikes, as well as the brief but violent conflict within the military between 1962 and 1963. Within the world of fútbol, fan violence had long been a part of the experience at stadiums. By the 1960s, many fans seemed de-sensitized to the brawls among hinchas in the stands, as well as the police’s use of water hoses and gas canisters to quell disturbances. If anything, the biggest worry for fans was that a physically defensive style legitimated violence on the field and produced a poor product.

As the representative for the continent, Independiente became the first Argentine squad to reach the finals of a relatively new tournament, the Intercontinental Cup. This

---

222 Although he does not address fútbol, historian Sebastián Carassai notes the rise of violent phrases in Argentine popular culture in the 1960s; see: Carassai, “The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Violence, Political Culture, and Memory (1969-1982),” chap. 4.

two- (or three-) game series pitted the European club champion against its South American counterpart. Independiente’s physical and defensive schemes under head coach Manuel Giudice seemed ready-made for the catenaccio approach of their opponents, Herrera’s Inter Milan. Both teams specialized in the catenaccio style and possessed players that applied heavy defensive pressure. Because of the large purse that awaited the winners of the Intercontinental Cup, the series quickly became a physical affair. After Independiente defeated Internazionale 1-0 in the first match in Buenos Aires, journalists praised the Argentine team for its strength, tight man-to-man marking, and its “warrior-like spirit.” Across various news outlets, it was clear the club from the Buenos Aires barrio of Avellaneda now represented all of Argentina. When the series shifted to Europe, Inter Milan found its groove and defeated Independiente twice—at home in Milan and in Madrid for the decisive third game tiebreaker.

Despite the Italians’ victory, the press in Buenos Aires praised Independiente’s valor across three highly physical matches. Seeking a scapegoat, journalists blamed the loss on various factors, including, unsurprisingly poor decisions by the referee. The following year, Independiente again lost to Inter Milan in the Intercontinental Cup. Although the team had successfully defended its title as South American champions, expectations for the matches against Inter Milan were low. Club management angered

224 Every Olympic and World Cup finalist came from either Europe or South America. As a result, international football minimized the quality of teams from Asia, Africa, Oceania, and North America. In previous years, Uruguayan sides Peñarol and Brazilian Santos represented South America, defeating Benfica (Portugal) and AC Milan (Italy). See: Osvaldo Ardizzone, “Copa de campeones- No hubo Santos: Todos pecadores,” El Gráfico, November 20, 1963, 58-61.

225 Juvenal, “¿Y el fútbol señores?,” El Gráfico, April 7, 1965, 4-6.


227 Campeón, September 30, 1964, 6-7.
supporters with what they saw as poor financial and personnel decisions that failed to capitalize on the success of the previous year.\textsuperscript{228}

In light of Independiente’s losses, debates over traditional or modern fútbol temporarily resurfaced. Journalists analyzed the keys to success in the modern game and arrived at disparate conclusions.\textsuperscript{229} The same recurring issues arose, including the poor work habits of Argentine players (poor diet, late-night dancing, unprofessional attitudes, selfishness, too much emphasis on dribbling, individualism on the field), or the values that seemed to be disappearing from fútbol criollo (fearlessness to shoot, love for club and country, ingenuity).\textsuperscript{230} But with a few exceptions, most players and coaches were more interested in winning than engaging in debates over a national style of play.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The “disaster” of the 1958 World Cup produced significant changes that were nowhere more visible than in sports journalism. A new generation of sportswriters and coaches embraced innovative tactics and training methods from Europe. They legitimized their new approaches based on a supposed knowledge of the latest trends in fútbol, as well as by arguing against past models as recipes for success.

“Modern” fútbol also gave rise to a new breed of coaches. Zubeldía, in particular, earned respect among journalists and fans for his innovative tactics and training methods,

\textsuperscript{228} “Hoy como hace un año a un paso del campeonato mundial de clubes,” \textit{Campeón}, September 8, 1965, 6-7; “Los héroes están cansados,” \textit{Primera Plana}, September 7, 1965, 76-78. Club members were angry because officials failed to use additional revenue from international matches to purchase new players. Club’s president Herminio Sande’s public declaration, that there was little chance that his team could win in Italy, made matters worse. \textit{See: “Sande: ‘Gana el Inter’,” Primera Plana, September 7, 1965, 78.}

\textsuperscript{229} “El crack de ayer y el crack de hoy. ¿Cubilla juega igual que Perenetti?”, \textit{Campeón}, August 4, 1965, 5.

\textsuperscript{230} “¿Qué debe olvidarse y qué debe rescatarse de un pasado feliz?,” \textit{Campeón}, August 25, 1965, 6.
in journalists referred to as his “laboratory.” The rise of the celebrity coach thus heralded a new age in Argentine fútbol, where the goal was to produce faster and stronger players that competed and, most importantly, triumphed in international tournaments. Trainers like Mogilevsky also represented the rise of technical experts in fútbol. Their desire to modernize fútbol reflected a larger middle-class attitude that embraced new ideas, and that associated “Argentineness” with tradition and backwardness. As a result, the foreign perception about Argentina’s progress and modernity in fútbol mattered greatly to coaches, trainers, and journalists.

Despite the obvious shift in how officials, coaches, and players approached training and matches, the experiment with “scientific” fútbol proved inconclusive by 1965. On the one hand, Argentina once again failed to qualify for the advanced stages of the World Cup in 1962. Scoring in the professional leagues also dipped to an all-time low, while at the club level Independiente twice lost to its European opponent in the Intercontinental Cup. On the other hand, the general consensus in Argentina was that Independiente’s triumph in South America was a moment of national pride. Even more significant, Argentina defeated England and Portugal at the 1964 Cup of Nations—shedding the “European phantasm” that haunted national team players since Sweden. But it was the national team’s 3-0 victory over Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, that was the occasion for the biggest celebration. The victory gave hope that the 1966 World Cup would prove different for Argentina and that the experiment with fútbol moderno was finally beginning to yield fruit.
5. Nationalism, the Military State, and Fútbol, 1966-1968

Buoyed by the recent achievements of the national team at the 1964 Cup of Nations, as well as Independiente’s two-year run as South American champions, many fans looked at the 1966 World Cup with renewed expectations. Yet, Independiente’s successive losses to Inter Milan in the 1964 and 1965 Intercontinental Cups also produced a measure of fatalism among fans about Argentina’s ability to win in Europe and to shed the old “European phantasm” once and for all. These mixed emotions left many fans questioning the validity and usefulness of “modern” tactical concepts and playing styles. Now, with a World Cup in England looming, it was the time for the national team to show how much Argentine fútbol had progressed since the “disaster” in Sweden in 1958. The tournament’s location in England also provided an opportunity for journalists and fans in Argentina to resurrect nationalist discourses in fútbol. Therefore, a successful performance in England would not only cement Argentina’s return to international prominence in world football, it would once again reverse the student-teacher dynamic ingrained in the national consciousness since the early 1900s.

This chapter explores the various discourses of national identity emanating out of the 1966 World Cup and continuing in the Intercontinental Cup the following two years. It argues that between 1966 and 1968, a series of volatile matches between Argentine and British teams produced a shift in fútbol discourse about national and masculine identity.
Whereas conversations about Argentine fútbol in the early 1960s were introspective and focused on the deficiencies of teams and players, from 1966 onwards these conversations turned xenophobic and at times employed metaphors of war and violence. The catalyst for this shift was English coach Alf Ramsey’s remark that Argentine players were “animals” following the quarterfinal match at the World Cup. As Argentine and British teams met over the next few years in high-profile matches, accusations of savagery and lack of civility flew across the Atlantic. Indeed, Ramsey’s comment endured for several decades—giving Argentines an undesirable label that cast a shadow over future matches between both countries.

A preoccupation with the foreign gaze—especially that of the British—extended beyond the fútbol field. Since Frondizi’s election in 1958, the interests and anxieties of middle-class Argentines—who were beginning to take center stage in the post-Perón era—shaped the development of urban centers, consumption patterns, cultural trends, and even political interests. Although the military deposed Frondizi in a coup in 1962, another Radical Party leader, Arturo Illia, won the free presidential election of 1963. A moderate politician, Illia assuaged anti-Peronists who were fearful of leftist influences in the Frondizi government. But as more foreign cultural influences—mainly from Europe and the United States—entered the country in the 1960s, social conservatives began to portray Illia as a weak leader who was allowing the country to enter into moral ruin.

---

2 For a general overview of the anxieties and consumption preferences of the middle class, see: Adamovsky, Historia de la clase media argentina, 366–370; Podalsky, Specular City, 176–183.
Beatniks, “happenings,” increasingly sexualized art forms, and the growing militancy of university students all troubled members of the upper and middle classes, as well as conservatives within the military. Moreover, conservatives felt that the democratic experiment that began in 1958 produced instability and failed to address inflation, threatening the security of their own personal finances. Led by General Juan Carlos Onganía, military officers deposed Illia in 1966 in what they labeled as the Revolución Argentina. They took power, justifying their actions by claiming that a vacillating government had left the public fatigued. Their goal was to restore the social order, stamp out immorality, and eventually to combat subversiveness. This third coup in eleven years came weeks before Argentina played in the World Cup in England. It was a political move designed to restore social order and morality to the country, but the coup also raised questions in Europe and throughout the Western world about Argentina’s status as a modern and developed society.

For the military government of the Revolución Argentina, the World Cup was a fortuitous moment in public relations. Onganía capitalized on the outpouring of patriotism directed at the national team after their controversial exit from the World Cup. He welcomed players as heroes and as representatives of the nation. The new president also thanked the team for “putting Argentina’s name where it belongs,” and giving the

---

3 Podalsky, Specular City, 188–198.
nation to something to celebrate.\(^5\) Over the next few years, Onganía continued to praise Argentine players after their victories over several British club teams.

Although teams like Racing and Estudiantes engaged in on-field behavior that straddled the line between overt physicality and violence, success turned their rugged style of play into a virtue. As a result, metaphors of war and battle turned criollo players into soldiers, and the fútbol field into a battlefield against British adversaries. Instead of criticizing the use of “anti-fútbol” by Racing and Estudiantes, sports writers argued that it was the British teams, in fact, who were the aggressors and who betrayed their own ideals of “fair play.” This chapter thus examines changes in the fútbol-specific vernacular that redefined national identity, as well as notions of masculinity tied to the defense of the nation.\(^6\) Populist nationalism and xenophobia became a regular part of narratives in sports publications starting with the 1966 World Cup.\(^7\) Nationalist discourse revolved around an old symbiotic relationship between Great Britain and Argentina where the goal was to beat the British “masters” at their own game. This time, however, victory meant out-muscling, out-running, and out-smarting British opponents instead of producing an alternate criollo playing style.


\(^6\) Nicolas Shumway’s characterization of nationalist thought of the 1950s and 1960s—as isolationist, protectionist, and obsessed with conspiracy theories—is useful when examining debates over modernity and national identity in fútbol after the controversial match against England in 1966. It is not my contention that these intellectuals shaped sports coverage in the mid-1960s, but it would be foolish to dismiss their discussions of identity as inconsequential when Argentine teams repeatedly faced off against British opponents. See: Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, 183–185. For a thorough overview of the various debates among Argentine intellectuals, see: Terán, *Nuestros años sesentas*.

\(^7\) Ernesto Laclau’s examination of populism and nationalist discourse during and after the Perón regime can also help contextualize fútbol narratives when Argentina faced British teams—whether it was 1953, 1964, or during the late 1960s. Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1977), 189.
The “Moral Champions”

Despite Independiente’s losses against European champion Inter Milan, fútbol fans in Argentina were hopeful that the national team would fulfill its potential at the World Cup in England. Conventional wisdom among fans held that if Argentina defeated the best team in the world—Brazil—just two years prior, surely it was among the best in the world. Adding to the high expectations were comments from European journalists reprinted in local papers listing Argentina as one of the favorites to win the World Cup.

Fans were also hopeful over AFA’s selection of Osvaldo Zubeldía, who was well respected by fans and players, as national team coach in December of 1965. Zubeldía. Unlike previous coaches, AFA provided Zubeldía with almost complete control of the national team. His early hire, the trust AFA placed in Zubeldía, and adjustments to the league schedule were all signs of a serious effort to try to win the World Cup. Matters soon unraveled for the national team. Zubeldía insisted that his chief assistant coach, Antonio Faldutti, receive the title of co-coach of the national team along with a

---


commensurate salary. AFA voted down the request and both men promptly resigned in April—just two months before the start of the World Cup.

Without much time remaining, AFA turned to the last man to coach Argentina at a World Cup: Juan Carlos Lorenzo. His last-minute appointment generated criticism and controversy among fans and journalists. Some pointed to the national team’s uninspired performance in Chile as evidence that he was unsuited for his position as head coach, while others took Lorenzo at his word when he insisted that during the intervening years he had learned much about international football by coaching in Italy.

The more common reaction to Lorenzo’s hire—especially after the first exhibition matches in Buenos Aires and Europe—was pessimism. First, Lorenzo openly professed his admiration for Argentina’s first three opponents at the World Cup: West Germany, Spain, and Switzerland. Despite the confidence in his own players, Lorenzo believed that Argentina’s opponents understood the latest tactics and positioned their players well on the field. The insinuation, of course, was that Argentine fútbol remained behind its the preparation and tactical knowledge of European rivals, and that only he offered the national team a fighting chance. Second, Lorenzo was open about his willingness to use

---

11 *Crónica* was perhaps the only major paper to question Zubeldia and Faldutti, especially on the matter of Faldutti as “co-coach” of the national team. Some fútbol officials, particularly Boca Juniors president Alberto Armando, also chaffed at Faldutti’s insistence to be recognized as Zubeldia’s equal; see: “De lo sublime a lo ridículo,” *Primera Plana*, April 26, 1966, 71-72.

12 “El método ideal en su etapa decisiva,” *Campeón*, August 4, 1965, 4; “¿Qué le falta al seleccionado?,,” *El Gráfico*, August 24, 1965, 5-7. Among the reasons *Campeón* argued in favor of Lorenzo’s selection was that he understood “modern” tactics and he repeated, verbatim, the recommendations submitted by Mogilevsky to AFA in 1961.


cerrojo approach in England, emphasizing a compact defense in the first half, and only looking for scoring opportunities in the second half.\textsuperscript{15} Third, reports surfaced of internal strife in the national team camp. Players griped that Lorenzo misled them about playing opportunities. They labeled Lorenzo as aloof and questioned why he would not look them in the eye during conversations. Even more perplexing for them was Lorenzo’s occasional mix of Spanish, Italian, and lunfardo when speaking to the team.\textsuperscript{16} Cartoons in the press characterized Lorenzo as a coach who was oblivious or unwilling to accept that he had lost control of his team (figures 54-55).

\textbf{Figure 54-} Cartoon pokes fun at Lorenzo’s nickname, “El Mago” (The Magician), which he earned during his first stint at San Lorenzo after turning around the team’s fortune at the end of the 1961 season. Here, the illustrator ridicules Lorenzo’s insistence in a tactic scheme that does not fit his players on the national team. \textit{Gente y la actualidad}, July 7, 1966, 20. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional.

\textsuperscript{15} “La agonía del algebra,” \textit{El Gráfico}, August 16, 1966, 94-96. Lorenzo told reporters that he wanted an “English defense” and to play “la nuestra” on offense.

A significant development back home added to the fatalist view of the team’s chance of winning the World Cup. On June 28, with grenade launchers at hand, military officials, led by General Julio Alsogaray, asked Arturo Illia to resign as President. Magazines like Panorama, Primera Plana and Crónica all portrayed the democratically elected Illia as a simpleton, an old man, or a moderate who was out of his depth in dealing with Argentina’s problems (figure 56). Critics also pointed to various measures by the Illia government that exacerbated social tensions: the Ley de Defensa Nacional (which allowed zones or cities to be militarized if deemed as essential to national industries), the proliferation of what social conservatives saw as immoral “happenings”

---

17 Tcach and Rodriguez, Arturo Illia, 154–155. The authors argued that Illia was somewhat to blame for his portrayal in the press. He did not understand the importance of a professional team of communications that could refute his portrayal as an old man who spoke slowly. Various accounts from people who worked with Illia (supporters and opponents) described him as an “honest,“ “moral,” “respectable” man who was also quite stubborn. The US State Department described him as a colorless provincial figure who was inept and unable to exert his authority (pgs. 177 and 180).
and beatnik culture, a rise in delinquent crimes, and the influx of sexualized images from U.S. and European popular culture and fashion. For parents, in particular, sexual images in film and music threatened to corrupt or confuse their young teenagers.

Mostly, Illia lost the confidence of military leaders after Peronist candidates won a series of local elections. Like Frondizi, Illia opened the political process to Peronist groups once proscribed by military leaders. In the weeks leading to his ouster, various publications hostile to the president—like Primera Plana—polled citizens on and political figures on whether a coup was necessary to restore faith in the government.

The goal was to discredit Illia and highlight what opponents saw as eight years of failed democratic reforms and cultural modernization that began under Frondizi. Yearlong tensions between sugar mill employees in the province of Tucumán and the Illia

---


20 Tcach and Rodríguez, Arturo Illia, 123 and 142–151; Altamirano, Peronismo y cultura de izquierda, 62–63. For portrayals of Illia as a weak president in the weeks leading to the coup, see: “Mensaje: Una vaga recluta de aliados,” Primera Plana, May 3, 1966, 12-14.


government reached a boiling point in May of 1966. The public standoff gave military officials an opportunity to point to the failures of the state and to pressure Illia to reign.  

Unlike the coup of 1955, military officials did not see their grab for power as provisional. Onganía declared an indefinite suspension of any further national elections.

It was also unclear what the leaders of the Revolución Argentina meant by “revolution,” and what the coup meant for democracy as a whole. Some journalists immediately worried that the military regime would attempt to restore social order by silencing opposition, thereby threatening the freedom of the press. As a result of these events, the national team left for England receiving a farewell from President Illia at Ezeiza airport, faced questions in Europe about the coup back home, and then returned to Buenos Aires to meet with the new de-facto head of state, General Onganía.

The press in Buenos Aires drew comparisons between the military coup and the player mutiny on the national team. The democratic experience of the previous eight years failed to produce its desired objectives; likewise, the national team seemed destined

---


to yet another failure on the world stage. Most articles blamed Lorenzo, either for his ultra-defensive tactics or for his aloofness. Some pieces were also critical of “vedette” players, whose demands included a shipment of Argentine beef to provide them a familiar diet in a foreign land.\(^\text{28}\) The use of the term “vedette” not only painted a picture of spoiled athletes, but it also feminized players as men who lacked the mental toughness necessary to succeed on the international level.

In order to restore some order and save face, AFA appointed Banfield president, and former AFA president, Valentín Suárez as an advisor to the team.\(^\text{29}\) His job was to salvage Argentina’s performance by mediating the divisions within the team and establishing a positive climate. To his credit, Suárez was successful in earning the respect of players—even if Lorenzo was reportedly furious at this “complot” by AFA.\(^\text{30}\)

According to reports, Rattín—team captain and chief critic of Lorenzo—backed Suárez and re-focused his teammates on their debut match against Spain.\(^\text{31}\)

Argentina’s surprisingly effective performances during the first round of the World Cup renewed hope in the national team among fans. Victories over Spain and Switzerland, as well as a tough draw against one of the favorites, West Germany, were signs

\(^{28}\) Justo Piernes, “La gloria o devoto,” Clarín, July 6, 1966, 28; Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Información,” Boletín N° 1376, June 2, 1966. Not all news reports out of England were negative. La Nación observed that players continued to work hard and tried to learn Lorenzo’s system; see: Luis Mario Bello, “Fé para un equipo,” La Nación, July 8, 1966, 12.


\(^{31}\) “El mundo de la diplomacia,” El Gráfico, July 12, 1966, 10-13. Players credited Suárez with improving the team spirit and Lorenzo for becoming more flexible in his tactical approach, even consulting players on their opinions; see: “…y el telón se levanta,” El Gráfico, July 12, 1966, 4-9.
that European opposition no longer intimidated Argentina. The initial victory over Spain, in particular, served as a release valve for coaches and players. In the locker room after the victory, members of the national team openly cried out of joy or relief.\textsuperscript{32} One reporter characterized these performances against European rivals as the removal of a mental "cobweb" that plagued the Argentine player since 1958.\textsuperscript{33} In this regard, the 1966 World Cup was already a success story because the national team moved past the psychological hurdles that affected their preparations in the past.\textsuperscript{34}

Optimism over the national team’s chances against England quickly turned into jingoism and over-confidence in the days immediately preceding the quarterfinal match—despite the obvious advantages England possessed as the host nation. Journalists questioned the psychological state of the English squad, the so-called "inventors" of football. They highlighted England’s failures in international football in recent years, which, according to Argentine sports writers, belied England’s self-proclaimed status as the teachers of the game.\textsuperscript{35} One journalist argued that national team’s strong performances in the first round—especially against a physical German side—demonstrated that Argentina would win against England because its players were more

\textsuperscript{33} Osvaldo Ardizzone, “¡Gracias...! A los once,” \textit{El Gráfico}, July 19, 1966, 21-24; "Justo Piernes, “Tiempo para escribir con la cabeza fresca,” \textit{Clarin}, July 21, 1966, 7. Naturally, \textit{River} highlighted the performance of the national team’s players from River Plate, but it also concluded that Argentina demonstrated over the course of its three matches that the team’s quality was no fluke; \textit{sec}: R.A. Neuberger, “Argentina ya no es un milagro,” \textit{River}, July 19, 1966, 2-5. \textit{River} also qualified the tie against West Germany as an achievement against the favorites to win the tournament, a sign that Argentina would go far in the World Cup.
\textsuperscript{35} “Invento de ellos, aunque todavía no lo ‘registraron’,” \textit{Clarin}, July 11, 1966, 3.
As the match approached, more and more references appeared in the Argentine media that juxtaposed criollo modesty with English arrogance. Several articles concluded with the cry “¡Viva Argentina!” and reprinted comments that supposedly revealed an English disdain towards Argentina. One journalist wrote that when he saw the colors of the Argentine flag while walking in London, he could not help but repeat the “South American Indian chant of ‘¡Argentina!’” The match, then, became a tale of David versus Goliath according to media outlets in Buenos Aires.

In the same way that news coverage reflected a nationalist fervor before the quarterfinal match that bordered on over-confidence, jingoism also produced conspiracy theories of a potential English “fix.” Newspapers and magazines published a series of prebuttals that anticipated a possible loss to England, including an errant (or dubious) decision by the referee, collusion between the English Football Association (FA) and FIFA to ensure European victory, or simply the efforts by the World Cup organizing committee to make sure that England would win at home. Simply put, journalists warned readers in Argentina of a possible act of injustice that would prevent any South American team from winning in Europe.

Players used these suspicions to their advantage. On the eve of the match at Wembley, the Argentine team captian, Rattín, as well as several of his teammates, suggested a possible swindle by the referee of the match. Rattín, however, admitted that

this was an act of gamesmanship: “We said, for example, that only the referee could take victory away from us.”³⁹ By telegraphing the possibility of foul play, Rattín demonstrated how players used carefully timed words to dictate the narrative in the press, play mind games with opponents, and intimidate referees. In a similar fashion, journalists referenced the nationality of FIFA’s president to raise suspicions. Sir Stanley Rous became FIFA president in 1961 after years as General Secretary. Throughout his thirteen-year tenure as FIFA president, critics accused Rous of favoring Euro-centric policies. At the 1966 World Cup, rumors swirled that he chose officials for key matches unbeknownst to FIFA’s referee commission—a clear sign for critics that the tournament was indeed “cooked.”⁴⁰ In addition, questions arose as to why a German referee was in charge of England’s match against Argentina, while an English referee would officiate the West Germany-Uruguay match.⁴¹

Suspicions of an English plot to win the World Cup echoed Peronist and Frondizist rhetoric—both of which placed imperial Britain as the external cause for the exploitation of Argentina.⁴² The belief that British imperialism denied Argentina’s destiny also appeared in works of historical revisionism that first appeared in the 1930s. Publications like Argentina y el imperialismo británico by Jorge and Rodolfo Irazusta, as well as works published through the Instituto Juan Manuel de Rosas de Investigaciones Históricas, accused the elite of favoring trade relations with Great Britain that only

⁴¹ Newspapers also reprinted noted that Brazil and Uruguay—winners of three of the last four tournaments—were on the receiving end of constant abusive play.
⁴² Halperín Donghi, La democracia de masas, 7:113; Frondizi, La lucha antiimperialista: Etapa fundamental del proceso democrático en América Latina.
favored their own interests. The confluence of the quarterfinal match, ongoing trade disputes, and the unresolved issue over the Malvinas islands, reinvigorated anti-British sentiment in 1966—even if British pop culture was en vogue among young middle-class Argentines.

Sports coverage not only drew on political and academic traditions, but also reflected contemporary discussions among intellectuals like Scalibrini Ortiz and José Hernández Arregui. Both of these writers questioned the “colonized mentality” of segments of the middle class, who continued to see Europe as civilized, and Argentina as backwards—savage even—and incapable of success. Similarly, media outlets in Buenos Aires reprinted critical comments from London with the intent of discrediting England as a model of civility. English papers lamented the playing style of the “barbarous” Argentines, and accordingly portrayed their South American opponents as unorganized and unprofessional.

Argentine journalists argued that it was the English, in fact, who lacked manners and a sense of decorum by publicizing such baseless accusations at a moment when England welcomed the world. The Argentine press thus inverted the traditional juxtaposition of “savage” and “civilized” that first emerged in the writings of nineteenth-century historians.

---


century Liberals and intellectuals. Rather than feign insult, papers like Clarín proclaimed, “24 hours before the match against Great Britain the Empire shakes...English fans fear Argentina.” Likewise, Campeón held that England could not win on merit; it would resort to thievery—as it had in its possession of the Malvinas islands—in order to win.

For the most part, the quarterfinal match was typical of hotly contested encounters at major international tournaments. Argentina lined up in a 4-2-4, while England head coach Alf Ramsey put out a 4-3-3 formation. Both teams used a libero-sweeper who could play behind a defense or between defenders and midfielders (Rattín for Argentina and Jackie Charlton for England). The pace of the game, however, revealed differences between both teams. Argentina was content to play a conservative approach predicated on absorbing English pressure with nine defenders, and then playing quickly along the sidelines. This plan had worked well for Argentina in the opening round matches. England, on the other hand, played with more urgency against Argentina. Its passes were fast and typically directed forward or diagonally to its three strikers.

The contrast in styles produced a game that became contentious at times, with nearly a dozen fouls in the first fifteen minutes. Most of the fouls occurred when teams lost possession; Argentina’s slow pace frustrated the quicker English players, while

---

47 “¿Campeonato del mundo o complot internacional contra el fútbol?,” Campeón, July 27, 1966, 2–3. The Malvinas reference in this article was also timely. Argentina had recently appealed to the United Nations the return of the islands from British control, which the British government rebuffed. A commentary in Primera Plana accused the English of approaching its match against Argentina with a mentality of colonialism—the most difficult form of domination for Argentines; see: Enrique Pichón-Rivère, “Fútbol y política,” Primera Plana, August 2, 1966, 53.
Argentine defenders struggled to slow down their opponents when they pushed the ball quickly up field. The German referee, Rudolf Kreitlein, however, waved off minor fouls and encouraged play to continue. His initial leniency generated a climate of ugly tackles and sharp elbows from both teams.

Trying to reassert control over the game, Kreitlein warned players that they would be booked or even expelled from the match if they continued with the physical play. His admonition failed to clam tempers; fouls committed by Rattín, Bobby Charlton, and Norbert “Nobby” Stiles raised tempers to a boiling point at the thirty minute mark of the first half. Rattín, who at 6’2” towered over the diminutive Kreitlein, said something to the referee in his role as captain. After England’s ensuing direct kick went wide, the referee whistled and sent Rattín off the field. Livid, Rattín pointed to his captain’s armband. Kreitlein soon found himself surrounded by a group of hostile Argentine players. Rather than restoring order to a contentious match, Kreitlein’s decision to expel Rattín exacerbated matters. For nearly eight minutes the entire Argentine team threatened to walk off the field in protest. Rattín argued that he had also asked for an interpreter, but in the FIFA post-match report, Kreitlein admitted that he did not understand Rattín; however, the Argentine captain’s demeanor seemed threatening and was in the German

---

49 When analyzing match footage, the vast majority of fouls in this match came from a player’s sudden change of speed, when he “cut” the ball away from a defender, or when a player made a deft move (a “gambeta”). Ibid.

50 Before the introduction of yellow and red cards in the 1970 World Cup, referees would “book” a player for a serious foul, unsportsmanlike behavior, or other egregious behavior. If players collected a certain number of booking, they could be suspended for a game and face monetary penalties.

51 Martín Leguizamón, “La expulsión de Rattín y los incidentes alteraron el match,” La Prensa, July 24, 1966, 12.
referee’s mind a sufficient enough reason to expel him. BBC commentators surmised that Rattín committed a “violence of the tongue”—a serious offense per FIFA rules.52

Aside from several nasty blows, the second half of the match passed without major incidents. Indeed, for much of the second half, Argentina’s goal was clear: waste as much time as possible, keep possession of the ball, and hope that an English player would be expelled. After Geoff Hurst scored in the 78th minute, the roles suddenly switched. Now up 1-0, England tried to slow the game with short horizontal passes while Argentina pressed forward with long balls down the sidelines to the outside strikers. When the final whistle blew, Argentina had once again bowed out of a World Cup short of the expectations of fans back home.

The quarterfinal match at Wembley Stadium redefined the relationship between Argentina and England in world football for decades. Unlike its performances in Sweden and Chile, when journalists and fans pointed to failed tactics, or AFA’s lack of preparedness, Argentines directed their ire at external factors to explain Argentina’s early exit. The basis for this shift was rooted in the anti-British, or anti-imperialist, discourse used by politicians in the past. But the tone in pre-game press accounts also played a part and drew on past moments of jingoism (such as Argentina’s matches against England in 1951, 1953, 1962, and 1964). Thanks to a television contract that made this the first World Cup widely accessible across the country, nearly five million Argentines viewed

52 “Sin gol sí, pero contra doce jugadores,” El Gráfico, August 16, 1966, 84–88; 1966 World Cup: England vs. Argentina DVD, 1966. The BBC commentators also added that South American players get away with verbal abuse in their domestic leagues, much more than their European counterparts.
the game by television. They blamed the German referee, accused the English World Cup organizing committee of corruption, and suggested collusion among European officials to deny Argentina its victory—all of which repeated the prebuttals before the game (figures 57-58). For porteño papers, it was an “I told you so” moment that the press used to defend their conspiracy theories.

The defining moment came minutes after the final whistle. Argentine and English players began shaking hands and tried to swap jerseys—a ritual symbol of sportsmanship. But England coach Alf Ramsey rushed onto the field to physically stop his players from completing the exchange (figure 59). Ramsey was unhappy with what he considered was the poor behavior of the Argentines. When asked by reporters about his thoughts on the game, he replied with the now infamous line: “We have still to produce our best football. It will come against the right type of opposition, the team who come[s] out to play football, not act as animals.”

Ramsey’s comment—published in papers and broadcast on television in Argentina—was an insult for many Argentines. For some, his remark was proof that it was the British, in fact, who lacked civility. As River declared: “The English continue...

54 “¿Campeonato del mundo o complot internacional contra el fútbol?,” Campeón, July 27, 1966, 2–3; Miguel Alfredo D’Elía, “Con un aire europeo…,” La Nación, July 26, 1966, 14. According to newspaper, the number of fouls that took place in a match of West Germany and the Soviet Union amounted to an astounding ratio of one foul per minute. It was evidence that European teams committed more fouls than their American opponents, but received fewer warnings from match officials.
57 La Nación, July 26, 1966, 13. In a formal letter to FIFA, the AFA Disciplinary Committee requested a punitive measure against Ramsey for his “unfortunate observations” about Argentine players televised around the world.
to sow hatred… they will become isolated on their little island.” Papers accused English players of abandoning “fair play” by resorting to dirty tackles and FA officials of possibly bribing the German referee. Papers in Argentina declared that the World Cup was “Made in England”—meticulously prepared to ensure the host nation’s success.

Figure 57 (top left)- Cover of sports section, Clarín July 24, 1966. The image on the left shows Argentine national team captain, Ubaldo Rattín, protesting his dismissal. Over the referee, it simply states: “The one guilty for the defeat.” On the right is the suggestion that “fair play” did not exist. Courtesy of the U.S. Library of Congress.

Figure 58 (top right)- “Unbelievable images from the scandal”-Gente y Actualidad, July 28, 1966, cover. Head coach Juan Carlos Lorenzo (on the left) passively tries to stop one of his players, Pastoriza, from grabbing Kretlein’s jersey after the match. The interpreter for the match calls for the police. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de Argentina.

Figure 59 (bottom)- England coach Alf Ramsey prevents one of his players, George Cohen, from participating in the ritual jersey swap after the Argentina-England quarterfinal match at the 1966 World Cup. Image in public domain.

After the match, Argentine players were more frustrated than despondent. The expulsion of Rattin seemed like an unjust decision by the German referee. Players felt that Kreitlein’s decision helped England as the host country at the expense of Argentina. This sense of injustice turned into a moment of patriotism in the locker room, when a physical trainer led an impromptu singing of the national anthem. One player’s anger also revealed a nationalist frustration with the English: “they scored a goal and won, all the rest we will never be able to come to grips with. The English were not content with taking the Malvinas, now they are stealing fútbol games from us.” It was a belief that the English had again denied Argentina its destiny. As one player painfully told reporters: “we were champions, we were champions… this time things were working our way.”

The despair in the Argentine locker room was understandable. After years of futility, which created pressure for those selected to the national team, players began to believe that this tournament would turn out differently. Early success against European opponents gave Argentine players hope of finally delivering a major international title to its fans back home. A cartoon by Garaycochea (figure 60) in El Gráfico summed up the frustration. In the cartoon, the World Cup mascot, Willie the Lion, walks past a church with a ball hidden behind his back. Two observers (likely Argentine) comment that Willie must be headed inside the church to once again confess his sins. The church setting allowed Garaycochea to remind readers of past English transgressions against Argentina.

62 The choice of a lion as the mascot of the 1966 World Cup was in reference to the nickname of the English national team, “The Three Lions.”
Argentina. Religion, nation, and fútbol all merged together in this cartoon to make sense of an act deemed by Argentines as unjust.

Once again, Ezeiza airport became the site of a collective outpouring of emotions by fútbol fans. Whereas the national team faced an angry and embarassed crowd when it returned from Sweden in 1958, or indifference after Chile 1962, players and coaches arrived at Ezeiza airport welcomed by thousands of joyous fans chanting: “¡Argenti-na! ¡Argenti-na!”

64 “La tarde de Ezeiza con lluvia, risas y llanto…,” Campeón, August 3, 1966, 2.
Ezeiza, and along the roads to the center of the city, that surprised the national team.65

Fans and dignitaries welcomed the national team as victors in jubilant scenes splashed across media outlets (figures 61-63).66 One paper declared, “the Argentine fútbol team loses a match, and yet still all of us became winners.”67

---

67 “El hincha ingles no siente ningún orgullo por el triunfo obtenido contra Argentina,” Campeón, July 27, 1966, 4. (The Queen was not in attendance, which allowed Rattin to squat down on the royal red carpet in the seating area).
68 The caption above the picture, in part, reads: “With the hand of the president of the Republic, Lt. Gen. Juan Carlos Ongania, which stretches towards the right hand of Rattin, the acknowledgment of all
When the team reached the end of the parade route at the presidential house, General Onganía congratulated the national team for a remarkable achievement. “Your courage and fighting spirit, makes you deserving of the jubilant reception that awaits you from the people and the government of the nation.” In a carefully orchestrated scene, Onganía stretched out his hand to Rattin—the team captain who spoke out against an act of injustice by defiantly sitting in the Queen’s sitting area before heading back to the locker room. Although not known an avid fútbol fan, Onganía recognized the political opportunity at hand. He welcomed the 1966 national team as the nation’s moral champions vis-à-vis British treachery. In lieu of the actual World Cup trophy, AFA created gold medals that were awarded to players at one the organization’s meetings.

The most important consequence of the 1966 World Cup for Argentine fútbol was that the debates over “traditional” or “modern” fútbol gave way to an aggrieved sense of injustice that redefined notions of masculinity and nationalism in fútbol. In particular, journalists emphasized the foreign lens, not to highlight the deficiencies of Argentine fútbol but rather to stir up xenophobia. Magazines and newspapers published damning labels from Europe about Argentine players: “Butchers of the Wild Pampas,” “Beasts,”

---

69 Telegram from Juan Carlos Onganía to the national team, “El Presidente,” Clarín, July 24, 1966, 2.
“Inhuman,” “Crazy” and “Assassins.”\textsuperscript{72} These were all variations of Alf Ramsey’s characterization of Argentina’s national team as “animals.”\textsuperscript{73} Although some animosity existed towards the Argentine national team from the English squad, porteño journalists used the aftermath of Wembley to construct a particular narrative: European disdain towards Argentina ensured a predetermined outcome. Some journalists and fútbol officials considered whether AFA should leave FIFA and spearhead the creation of a new international federation. Ultimately, the mood in 1966 was not too different than in 1928 and 1930, when anger over a significant loss turned into a moment of celebration for a “team of gold” that suffered “the most dignifying of all defeats.”\textsuperscript{74}

**Racing, World Champions: The 1967 Intercontinental Cup**

Although the 1966 World Cup did not produce a re-assessment of imported tactics from Europe, one club team’s playing style altered the fútbol landscape that year. Under head coach Juan José Pizzuti, Racing developed an attack-minded style of play known as “la olla,” (the pot) that was a breath of fresh air in an increasingly defensive league.

\textsuperscript{72} “¿Campeonato del mundo o complot internacional contra el fútbol?,” \textit{Campeón}, July 27, 1966, 2–3.

\textsuperscript{73} “Micromundial,” \textit{La Nación}, July 27, 1966, 14 (the paper reprinted comments from the Swiss paper \textit{Tribune de Lausanne}, among other European papers). One Swiss paper claimed that Argentines lacked discipline and dignity. FIFA official Helmuth Kaeser agreed. He recalled that when Argentina lost the right to host the 1970 World Cup to Mexico in 1964, its delegation to the FIFA congress stormed off without shaking hands. According to Kaeser, the “Argentine mentality” was well known among football officials: “They yell, deliver kicks and punches, having spit at a FIFA official.” The goal here was to show how European football officials already held a bias against Argentina. See: “Llegará hoy el team de fútbol de la Argentina,” \textit{La Nación}, July 27, 1966, 15.

\textsuperscript{74} “Una multitud recibió al seleccionado,” \textit{La Nación}, July 28, 1966, 16; Juvenal, “La más digna de la derrotas,” \textit{El Gráfico}, July 26, 1966, 4-8. This was not the first time that Argentine newspapers labeled the national team as champions after a loss. In the wake of its loss to Uruguay in the championship match of the 1928 Olympics, periodicals like \textit{La Cancha} declared Argentina as the “true champions.” Hundreds of fans welcomed the team as heroes. See: “Un triunfal recibimiento se tributó a los jugadores olímpicos argentinos,” \textit{La Cancha}, July 21, 1928, 8-9.
According to Pizzuti, it was borne out of necessity because his team lacked the creative players necessary to play in the traditional criollo style. Pizzuti agreed that Argentine fútbol had moved on from the older style of play, and that teams had to change their methods in order to succeed in the modern game. Yet, he still believed in attacking fútbol. If opponents specialized in the bunker-mentality of the cerrojo, then it made sense to Pizzuti to find a system able to break such a defense. The philosophy behind his system was to send balls down field into the opponent’s penalty area, or “la olla” (the pot), and have numerous players run onto it. It was similar to the “long ball” style widely used in England. But with anger still lingering over the World Cup, the press in Buenos Aires re-appropriated Racing’s vertical attack and instead labeled it a “revolution” in Argentine fútbol.

Racing won the 1966 championship and became the second Argentine team to win the Copa Libertadores after Independiente’s titles in 1964 and 1965. In 1966, “el equipo de José” lost only one match, after which it would not suffer another defeat for thirty-nine consecutive matches. Although Racing did not play in the traditional criollo style, it earned a following for its high-octane approach. Scoring seventy goals in 1966—

---

75 Osvaldo Ardizzone, “Y ésta es la verdad de Pizzuti,” El Gráfico, October 11, 1966, 26-27. Led by Roberto Perfumo, Racing’s defense was physical but coordinated in its positioning on the field. In front of the defense was the team’s “caudillo,” Alfio Basile, in charge of breaking up the opponent’s attack and going forward to score off headers. One other midfielder worked as a link with the team’s four forwards. But in reality, two of the forwards played like outside midfielders. They pinched in and allowed the two outside defenders to play up and down the sidelines.

the highest total since 1960—Pizzuti’s team represented a new mentality. While much was made in the press about Racing’s offensive prowess, it was a team that also applied heavy pressure on defense. Players like Roberto Perfumo and Alfio Basile epitomized the physical and tough style of play of the 1960s. The novelty that Racing presented was that it balanced its vertical style on offense with a stingy defense that allowed only 24 goals all season (0.63 per game). Racing became the first team since 1956 (and the second since 1944) to lead the league in goals scored and fewest goals conceded.

Racing was not averse to using a cerrojo defensive approach in key league and Copa Libertadores matches. This was a team that understood its own strengths and limitations; its players understood how to read a game and were smart enough to improvise when needed. During crucial matches in Argentina and in South America, Racing played with what El Gráfico characterized as “more legs, lungs and courage” than attractive fútbol. The team’s “garra” was evident in the 1967 Copa Libertadores against Uruguayan champions Nacional, when a series of matches turned physical, and eventually violent by the end of the series. In a similar manner, league matches against

---

77 Juvenal, “¿Dónde quedó la revolución?,” El Gráfico, June 13, 1967, 30-31; Memorias y balance 1960-1969 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1961-1970). Racing scored 1.84 goals in 1966. By contrast, the top offensive teams in 1965, Boca Juniors and River Plate, averaged a mere 1.62 goals per game. The historically worst high-scoring teams were San Lorenzo and Atlanta, which in 1964 led the league with a paltry 1.53 goal-per-game average. However, it should be noted that Racing’s average was not the highest in recent years. Independiente averaged 2.05 goals per game in 1967, while River Plate’s average in 1962 fell just under at 2.03


Independiente and Estudiantes became contentious and even turned into brawls. *El Gráfico* declared that Pizzuti’s “revolution” had seemingly met a premature end; but despite its concerns, the magazine praised Racing for “putting all its players on the attack, at times with irresponsible and even suicidal disregard...[Racing] generated in 1966 everything a fan can ask of his team: spectacle, drama, entertainment and victories.”

The team’s gritty performance at the Copa Libertadores raised questions about whether Racing had succumbed to “anti-fútbol,” or if the team would revert back to “la olla” when it competed against European and Scottish champions Celtic for the Intercontinental Cup. Prior to the first match, the press in Argentina once again drew on history to generate publicity for these matches. Just as magazines and newspapers recalled the influence of Alexander Watson Hutton before the 1928 visit by Motherwell, in 1966 the Argentine press paid homage to the Scotsman who introduced “football” to the country.

Nevertheless, the main focus of these articles centered on the famous Racing team of the 1910s—“La Academia”—which won seven consecutive national championships from 1913-1919. These articles were patriotic in tone, remembering the first “criollo champions” in Argentine history.\(^{82}\) Beyond stirring up nationalist sentiment, journalists hoped that Racing would avoid the type of behavior Europeans had come to expect of Argentines after the World Cup in England. Ahead of the game in Glasgow, papers warned that Racing players faced adverse conditions, similar to what the national team

---


\(^{82}\) Frydenberg, *Historia social del fútbol*, 113.
endured in England the year before.\footnote{83}{Justo Piernes, “‘Honrosa derrota’ según el marcador, \textit{Clarín}, October 20, 1967, 30; “Glasgow: una cita con la esperanza argentina,” \textit{Campeón}, October 18, 1967, 1-2. The Argentine press also warned readers that Racing players faced difficult circumstances: a lighter match ball, a long flight, alien surroundings, passionate Scottish fans, and even the lack of “chemically pure” Argentine steaks for their diet, see: \textit{La Nación}, October 17, 1967, 15.}

The 1967 Intercontinental Cup revealed a preoccupation with the foreign gaze that was similar to the quarterfinal match of the 1966 World Cup, but with a greater emphasis on ethics. Across the three matches, each encounter turned progressively more physical. In the opening game in Glasgow, Racing exhibited little of its vertical attack. Celtic players physically manhandled Pizzuti’s men, applying strong shoulder charges to knock Racing players off the ball. The imposing height of the Scottish defenders also negated the few long passes Racing players sent to their strikers. While Racing’s late tackles were a product of its inability to contain Celtic’s players, the home team’s fouls were the result of its aggressive forays into the Argentine defense.\footnote{84}{1967 Game One Copa Intercontinental: Racing vs. Celtic.} Tempers flared after William McNeill scored a goal for Celtic in the second half. Racing frantically tried to tie the game. Celtic, on the other hand, was now content to bunker on defense and successfully held onto the 1-0 lead.

Suárez, who rated Celtic as an inferior squad that was no better that team from the Argentine “B” division.  

British papers were equally engaged in inflammatory analysis. They criticized Argentine players for pushing, knocking down, and harassing their opponents. In one case, journalists framed the Intercontinental Cup as an ethnic struggle in sports. The Times noted that since the tournament began in 1960, only teams from “the Latin races” played for the title. The paper warned that Celtic would have the odds stacked against it in South America, “where every trick in the book is used” and where “attack is life, and stifling defense merely death.”

English observers thus resorted to old generalizations of Argentines, and South Americans, as barbarous and uncivilized peoples.

The second match in Buenos Aires began with an unfortunate incident that did little to counter the “animals” narrative established by Ramsey the year before. Minutes before the match, a projectile from the stands cut open the head of Celtic goalkeeper Ronnie Simpson. Although Racing applied their vertical “olla” approach from the outset, the game turned when Humberto Maschio, who returned from Italy the previous year, cleated an opponent in the leg challenging for the ball. Perfumo also caused a fracas by elbowing an opponent in the back. Celtic players turned aggressive, frustrated by Racing players who they believed were wasting time in order to force a decisive third game in Montevideo, Uruguay. They retaliated to every hit and hard tackle and shoved

---

87 Comments from Willie Waddell, an ex-Scottish international, to The Daily Express reprinted in “Críticas por el juego brusco que usó Racing,” La Nación, October 20, 1967, 13.
their Argentine opponents in an effort to quickly put the ball back in play.\textsuperscript{90} Afterwards, Celtic coaches and club officials claimed that its players were not used to this culture of aggressive behavior—once again equating barbarity with Argentine society.

Ahead of the final match, papers in Buenos Aires focused on the virility of Pizzuti’s men, who played “a lo guapo, a lo hombre.”\textsuperscript{91} Journalists argued that if there was any blame to assign, it belonged to Celtic players, who bore the larger responsibility for the battles that took place on the field. In their opinion, the display by Celtic showed that it was the Europeans, not the Argentines, who were uncivil and whose tempers “burned like a true Sicilian.”\textsuperscript{92} Celtic players and coaches initially refused to go to Montevideo; they were incensed about the game in Buenos Aires but eventually relented and traveled to Uruguay.

Tens of thousands of Argentine fans crossed the Rio de la Plata to support Racing in a series that had turned into a proxy war between Great Britain and Argentina—at least according to the local papers.\textsuperscript{93} As many feared, the third match turned decidedly violent. Twice as many fouls took place than in the previous matches. The Paraguayan referee warned both captains about the physicality on display, but this did not prevent several incidents outside the rules and norms of the game: knees to the back, cynical tackles to prevent goal-scoring opportunities, and outright efforts at knocking a player out of the game. The referee expelled Racing’s Basile but not before Celtic’s John Clark chased

\textsuperscript{90}1967 Game Two Copa Intercontinental: Racing vs. Celtic, DVD, 1967.
\textsuperscript{91}Clarín, November 2, 1967, 2.
\textsuperscript{92}Diego Lucero in Clarín, November 4, 1967, 3.
\textsuperscript{93}“El entusiasmo está atravesando el río,” La Nación, November 3, 1967, 16.
after him ready to fight. During this melee, a few Uruguayan police officers took advantage of the situation to land a few kicks on Racing players and throw others to the ground. The second half of the game turned worse. Sharp elbows and kicks to the back of the legs produced the desired result: retaliation. In the waning minutes of the match, a projectile from the stands hit Racing’s goalkeeper, Alberto Cejas. Celtic players grew incensed believing that he was using the incident to exaggerate his injury. Celtic’s John Hughes kicked, punched, and then stomped on Cejas’ groin, which led to his expulsion (figure 64). In all, five players—three from Celtic and two from Racing—received an outright dismissal from the referee. Watching the events unfold on the field, one Argentine television announcer indignantly declared to viewers watching at home: “They [the Scottish] said they were the victims and we were the animals. You have the evidence [to the contrary]…” The violence spilled onto the streets of Montevideo after the game. Argentines and Uruguayans clashed as the visiting fans tried to head back home across the Rio de la Plata.

While some papers in Buenos Aires celebrated Argentina’s long awaited triumph on the world stage, others focused on the behavior of Celtic players. El Gráfico employed sarcasm by publishing the image of Clark confronting Basile with closed fists and the following headline: “A ‘savage’ Argentine in front of an ‘educated’ Scot.” (figure 65). Another image questioned the civilized behavior of the Scottish players, showing the

---

94 This particular image of Clark with a closed fist ready to fight appeared in numerous publications, including “La proeza de Racing: Fotos que viven,” Gente y la actualidad, November 2, 1967, 4-9; Juvenal, “Este milagro llamado Racing,” El Gráfico, November 7, 1967, 7.
effects of Hughes having kicked Cejas in the groin with the caption: “How under-developed we are!”⁹⁷ Although Argentine journalists admitted that Racing shared some of the blame, the worst criticism naturally fell upon Celtic for “savage, delinquent, and psychotic” behavior. River labeled Celtic players as the “pseudo-gentlemen of sport.”⁹⁸

Similar to the aftermath of the 1966 World Cup game, the Argentine media reprinted some of the worst criticisms in the British press. Papers like The Sunday Express labeled the scene in Uruguay as “the field of embarrassment,” and Racing as a team of “ruffians.” The Times portrayed the match as “victory without honour for the Argentines” and excused Celtic’s acts of violence due to the “ruthlessness of the Argentines.”⁹⁹ In other words, both sides—Argentines and Scots—used the supposed lack of civility of the “others” as a way of defending their own brutal behavior.

Just as he did after the 1966 World Cup, President Onganía received Racing’s players and coaches with full honors in an official ceremony (figure 66). It was a ceremonial gesture meant to contrast a successful and civilized Racing team vis-à-vis Scottish impropriety. The difference in 1967, however, was that Racing was more than the nation’s “moral champions.” Its victory over European champions Celtic gave Argentines their first world title in fútbol. If Sweden 1958 burst the myth of fútbol superiority, Racing’s triumph now resurrected the notion that Argentines were indeed the

---

⁹⁹ “Victory without honour for the Argentines,” The Times, November 6, 1967, 11. Some journalists, however, shared the opinion of the Uruguayan press, which accused both teams of perpetrating a sham for the paying public where “sport was the great loser yesterday.” For examples of the foreign press, see: Clarín, November 6, 1967, 4.
sport’s ultimate practitioners and had finally fulfilled their destiny.

Figure 64-(left) Seconds after the referee expels him, Basile stares down a Celtic player itching for fight. *El Gráfico*, November 7, 1967, 7. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

Figure 65 (right)- *El Gráfico*, November 7, 1967, 10. Celtic player John Hughes had just kicked Racing goalie Alberto Cejas in the midsection. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

Figure 66- President Onganía (center) meets with Racing players after becoming South American champions. *El Gráfico*, September 5, 1967, 3. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

**War and Fútbol**

The hostile climate on display between Celtic and Racing alarmed many people in Argentina. More than ever, the fútbol field had become a place where players legitimized violence as a necessary means to achieve success. Players often applied “tactical” fouls with the aim of injuring an opponent out of the game, or by provoking him to retaliate and earn an expulsion. The increasingly violent spectacle on the field helped create a war-like environment. Headlines such as “El campeón perdió la guerra” (“The champions
lost the war”) equated playing fútbol with engaging in a battle.\textsuperscript{100} Phrases like “salimos a matar” (“we came out to kill it”) were a common part of the fútbol lexicon. Some verbs, such as fusilar (to gun down), quemar (to burn), or reventar (to burst or blow up), also took on new meanings in the context of fútbol. Similar to phrases of combat and warfare, these terms described a team’s ability to dominate a rival and to show strength.\textsuperscript{101}

The mixing of war and sports was not new and by no means exclusive to Argentine fútbol. Sports scholarship shows that since the late nineteenth-century, definitions of “manliness” in Western society included militaristic soldiers and athletic qualities, such as discipline, bravery, strength, and loyalty.\textsuperscript{102} In Argentina, scholars have shown that over time the duels that elite men used to defend their honor transitioned into sporting events like fencing, boxing, and fútbol. Plebeians on the streets of early twentieth-century Buenos Aires also possessed complex notions of “manliness” associated with battles and the defense of one’s neighborhood.\textsuperscript{103}

Similar equations of warfare and fútbol extended to fandom. A recent study shows how references to violence became common features of advertising in the late 1960s. Images of guns, and phrases like “lo mató” (“he killed it”) made violence chic, particularly among middle-class consumers. The reasons for this are unclear, but the

\textsuperscript{101} Sebreli, \textit{La era del fútbol}, 81.
\textsuperscript{102} Examples of American and British militarism and sports include, but are not limited to: Mrozek, “The Habit of Victory: The American Military and the Cult of Manliness,” chap. 11; McDevitt, \textit{May the Best Man Win}.
study suggests that a growing resignation emerged within the middle class that only a revolution, or a clean break, could fix the nation’s problems.\textsuperscript{104} Others point to the rise of the Peronist Youth on the left in the 1960s as young revolutionaries found inspiration in the Marxist revolution in Cuba, the subsequent death of Che Guevara, student protests in North America and Europe, and, more locally, the growing clashes between the state and workers.\textsuperscript{105} Hostilities, or the threat of violence, had also become more commonplace—from the bombings of the Plaza de Mayo in 1955, to the series of military coups since 1955, and most famously during the military conflicts of 1962 and 1963. All of this likely desensitized Argentines to violence. Television programs and films—primarily from the United States—also had their fair share of war-like imagery and were popular among the Argentine middle class.

Of course, violence at stadiums was nothing new to Argentine fútbol; but television programs like Teleonce’s \textit{Polémica en el fútbol} encouraged open confrontation and heated arguments among panelists and studio audiences.\textsuperscript{106} Even if we discount the impact of television and film, coaches and players—as we saw with Independiente in 1964—used phrases like “killing it” on the field as part of their normal discourse. Their comments suggest that metaphors of war and violence were already a characteristic part of the fútbol lexicon before the matches between Racing and Celtic in 1967.

The military government held players as ideal representatives of the nation. When Estudiantes de La Plata defeated English team Manchester United in 1968, General Onganía sent a telegram congratulating Argentine players for their magnificent victory. He wrote that their fervor, abilities, inner strength, and team spirit, were examples that “makes us [the nation] proud and provides prestige to the national sport.”

Fútbol and government officials welcomed Estudiantes at Ezeiza airport as conquering heroes. They praised the team’s triumph as an example of the best aspects of the “national character.”

Although war metaphors were already a part of fútbol culture in Argentina, the series of high profile matches against British squads between 1966 and 1968 turned fútbol matches into a proxy battlefield. Triumphs against British teams were symbolic achievements and were co-opted by a military government that proved deft at exploiting athletic achievements for its own vision of national unity. During Estudiantes’ first match against Manchester United at La Bombonera stadium, a large banner hung from the rafters that read (in broken English): “Malvinas Pirates Going Back Your Home” (figure 67). This crudely designed banner shows that by 1968 criollo players had been transformed from artists into virile soldiers defending the homeland.

108 According to Alabarces, et al., it is easier for a smaller team like Estudiantes to embody inclusive generalizations about “Argentineanness.” It is also likely that the team’s location outside of the city of Buenos Aires facilitated such inclusiveness as well. Alabarces, Coelho, and Sanguinetti, “Treacheries and Traditions in Argentinean Football Styles: The Story of Estudiantes de La Plata,” 243.
109 “And now what?,” Primera Plana, October 1, 1968, 64.
The Rise of Estudiantes de La Plata

No team better embodied the marriage of war and fútbol than Estudiantes. Before Zubeldía’s arrival as head coach in 1965, the team played an attractive brand of fútbol but achieved minimal success. Zubeldía, however, recognized that Estudiantes needed to play faster and with more grit. From a nucleus of young players, he crafted a team that outran opponents, fought every possession, and possessed a new mentality that one key player—Carlos Bilardo—described as “poniendo la pierna” (“sticking in a hard leg”). Zubeldía disagreed with critics who accused his team of playing “dirty” with the goal of winning games 1-0. In his opinion, Estudiantes simply worked hard and played defense all over the field. It was at Estudiantes where Zubeldía’s coaching influences were most visible, from Mogilevsky’s revolutionary conditioning regimen and emphasis on shared sacrifice, to Spinetto’s pragmatism in tactics and coaching philosophy. Like his mentor Spinetto,

---

Zubeldía’s approach to coaching was to recognize the abilities and limitations of his players, maximize their potential, and then instruct them on how to take care of themselves on the field. He wanted his Estudiantes players to become hard workers that would fight for every ball across the field.

Under Zubeldía, Estudiantes broke the mold for success in the age of “fútbol espectáculo.” Whereas the largest clubs spent heavily on bringing in new star players, Zubeldía prided himself on keeping spending down at the club, drawing talent from the club’s “semillero,” and hiring up-and-coming players from other mid-sized clubs.

Estudiantes also de-emphasized the role of creative players. “Caudillo” midfielders like Bilardo and Carlos Pachamé were perfect for Zubeldía’s system. They were physical, tough, and smart enough to make it difficult for opponents to quickly recover the ball.

Estudiantes’ greatest strength, in fact, was to relentlessly mark rival players throughout a match and stifle their opponent’s game plan. Players were also well-versed in “icing” a match if Estudiantes was ahead by a goal.

In other ways, Estudiantes established the mold for this “modern” age of fútbol in Argentina, particularly when it came to generating controversy. The team, for instance, consistently found itself in the middle of hotly disputed affairs (for an example, see: figure 68). Games—especially against other physical teams like Racing and Independiente—turned violent on a regular basis. Estudiantes players gained a reputation

for inciting reactions from opponents through the use of derogatory language, insidious tactics, and overt physicality.116 After Estudiantes’ match against Brazilian side Palmeiras in the 1968 Copa Libertadores, Panzeri lamented that the team’s “institucionalizados recursos guerrilleros” (institutionalized warrior-like methods) were not brave, nor legal, but rather served as the antithesis of “argentinidad” (Argentineanness).117 The more analytical Juvenal summed up the difference between Estudiantes and its league rivals: Zubeldía’s men knew when to switch from physical to practical fútbol, while their rivals did not.118 In short, Estudiantes “dirtied” games with the purpose of provoking opponents to anger. More than reactionary aggression, its players premeditated their provocations. It did not help Estudiantes’ image when players boasted that no team was “more guapo.”119

Figure 68- Police officers separate players from Estudiantes and San Lorenzo in a league match due to violent actions on the field. “Incidentes durante el partido por la final del campeonato Metropolitano de primera división, entre los equipos representativos de los clubes San Lorenzo de Almagro (campeón) y Estudiantes de la Plata, jugado en el estadio de River Plate,” Caja 3699, Sobre 25, Negativo B.126.279, Inventario 302070, August 4, 1968. Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación.

By historical standards, Estudiantes was one of the unlikeliest champions in Argentine history. Not only did it lack a true “crack”—save perhaps Juan Verón—it was also the first national champion from outside of the city of Buenos Aires. The “Pinchirratas” (Rat Stabbers) translated that success to become South American champions in 1968 (figure 69).¹²⁰ This title gave Argentina its second consecutive representative to the Intercontinental Cup, where Estudiantes would face European champion Manchester United.

Unlike Celtic the year before, a team comprised almost entirely by Scottish players, Estudiantes would face several members of the English squad that eliminated Argentina from the 1966 World Cup, including Bobby Charlton and “Nobby” Stiles. This fact alone gave many Argentine fans a reason to support Estudiantes in what amounted to a grudge match against England. Already vilified in Argentina after his rough play at the World Cup, the temperamental Stiles became a target for Estudiantes players. As expected, Stiles retaliated, which led the referee to expel him, making him unavailable for the return match due to suspension.

The game possessed nationalist overtones for Manchester United as well. Like Celtic the year before, the team complained about the “brutal” style of play of the Argentines. Manchester players showed reporters their bruises and cleat marks. Charlton revealed the large gash to his left leg that required several sutures to close. When asked

---

¹²⁰ The name Pinchirratas, or “Rat Stabbers,” originated either as a nod to the medical students that helped found the club in La Plata—a city nationally known for its university environment—or as a reference to a local vendor known for stabbing rats with his trident.
by reporters about the quality of football, another player said, “You can’t play football that way.” Estudiantes won the first match at La Bombonera Stadium in Buenos Aires by a score of 1-0. The “Red Devils” were eager to leave Argentina and head home.

Before the second match, members of both teams tried to temper the heated tone surrounding these games. Estudiantes welcomed the English press to its training practices and locker room in Manchester. Bilardo and Madero surprised many who were startled to listen to well-spoken athletes—not “animals”—a fact Bilardo and Raúl Madero, both of whom were also professional doctors, were happy to point out at every opportunity. These two players wanted to change minds, articulate how insulting the “animal” label had become for Argentines and to remind the English that their league was no less physical.

The goodwill between both teams did not last long. Manchester’s star forward, George Best, decided to escalate matters. He encouraged local supporters to show their “warrior” spirit when the Argentines arrived to Manchester. Supporters complied by harassing Estudiantes at their hotel. To make matters worse, coach Busby penned a letter—widely circulated in the British press—that described the Argentine players as

---

121 La Nación, September 27, 1968, 16; “Fue fiasco como expresión de fútbol,” Campeón, October 2, 1968, 6.
122 The selection of Boca Juniors’ stadium was largely a financial decision. Estudiantes’ stadium in La Plata was much smaller. The city’s location (an hour outside of Buenos Aires) also made it a less ideal location for visiting officials and journalists. But the selection of La Bombonera was also a symbolic and tactical decision. The intimacy of the stadium made it difficult for opponents who were often abused by a home crowd that seemed to be on top of visiting players. Moreover, the national team played its matches at La Bombonera during the 1960s; Estudiantes, more than simply playing for the glory of the club, represented Argentina. Whereas English television announcers dubbed the Intercontinental Cup as “unofficial” matches, often not worth the trouble, in Argentina a world championship was at stake.
“cruel.” The outspoken Bilardo fired back, saying that Manchester United was the product of a football league that was significantly violent; players should consider themselves lucky if they were not killed after playing in England for more than a few years.\textsuperscript{124}

The match itself was not particularly noteworthy until the end. After a quick goal by Verón, Manchester upped the tempo with the urgency of now needing two goals to force a third match. This played into Estudiantes’ hands. Zubeldía’s emphasis had always been on physical preparation and instilling a belief in his players that they could out-run and wear down any opponent. Without much incentive to attack, the “Pinchirratas” were happy to simply maintain possession of the ball with short passes. The home crowd grew frustrated with the tactics employed by Estudiantes. Match announcer Hugh Johns shared their irritation by noting the Argentines’ “time-wasting tactics” and “extraordinary acting.”\textsuperscript{125} The only notable incidents of the first half occurred when the referee booked Verón for kicking Pat Crerand in the groin, and when José Hugo Medina’s half-hearted leap over a fallen Dennis Law produced a large gash, which forced an early substitution.

In the second half, tensions escalated after Bilardo struck at Charlton’s ankles several times. Best—widely regarded as the most talented forward in England—grew frustrated with Estudiantes’ physicality and punched Medina in the face out of frustration.\textsuperscript{126} Expelled by the referee, Best headed into the locker room; however, Medina confronted Best daring him to fight. This led the referee to also send off the

\textsuperscript{124} La Nación, October 16, 1968, 14.
\textsuperscript{125} 1968 Game Two Copa Intercontinental: Manchester United vs. Estudiantes, DVD, 1968.
\textsuperscript{126} La Nación, September 26, 1968, 17.
Estudiantes defender, who became the target of dozens of projectiles from British fans as he left the field. Despite Manchester’s tying goal in the waning seconds of the match, Estudiantes won the title as a result of the aggregate score from both games. The new champions were unable to celebrate on the field as a barrage of objects rained down upon them (figure 70).\textsuperscript{127}

The language used by the Argentine and English press reveals the level of xenophobia that remained from the 1966 World Cup but increased in intensity with the Intercontinental Cup. English journalists referenced Ramsey’s “animals” remark. After Racing’s series against Celtic, this comment had become an automatic way of describing

\textsuperscript{127} 1968 Game Two Copa Intercontinental: Manchester United vs. Estudiantes.
Argentine fútbol players. As Estudiantes left for the tunnels, the fans at Old Trafford stadium chanted: “Animals! Animals!” In the locker room, the Argentine players retorted that it was the so-called English “gentlemen” who were animals, attacking them with projectiles, saliva, and every insult imaginable. A few English journalists, however, acknowledged that while Estudiantes played a rough game, players from both teams were responsible for the physicality of the match.

Argentine journalists were also critical of their English colleagues. With headlines like “Savages of the Pampas” and “The Savage Men of Argentina,” they argued that English journalists revealed themselves to be nothing more than “hinchas del tablón”—a phrase used in Argentina to describe over-zealous and irrational fans at stadiums. In particular, they were bothered by comments from the English press that accused Argentine players of mastering the tactical foul as “a low and perfect art,” and that labeled them as thugs who would “fit right in with Al Capone.” Some journalists, on the other hand, seemed more bothered by the portrayal of Argentines as a collection of Indians and gauchos. Such commentary, according to El Gráfico, betrayed the

---

128 This characterization produced an unintentionally funny remark by one English journalist. Warning about the violence Manchester players could expect at La Bombonera, he observed that even “the very name of the stadium has an alarming ring.” He must have been surprised to discover that a “bombonera” is a chocolate (or candy) box, not a bomb factory. See: Geoffrey Greene, “Football Discipline Facing Big Test in Argentina,” The Times, September 23, 1968, 12.


131 Brian Glanville, “Argentines Perfect the Tactical Foul,” The Times, September 27, 1968, 17; “La prensa británica no escatima sus censuras,” La Nación, September 28, 1968, 14; “Los colegas ingleses y los ‘salvajes de las pampas’,” Campeón, October 2, 1968, 6-7. El Gráfico even went so far as to accuse English media of purposefully distorting the events of these matches by focusing on Argentine aggression and ignoring the dirty play of the English. This, according to El Gráfico, was similar to Joseph Goebbels tactics: if you say it enough times, people will start to believe; see: Juvenal, “La pobreza de un final del mundo,” El Gráfico, October 1, 1968, 18.
supposed genteel nature of the English and invited Argentines to ask the question: “Who were the animals?”132 One reader agreed. He felt insulted by the “animals” label and wondered if such insults were not more reflective of the English, who were unable to deal with their own “impotence” and failures.133

Similar to their coverage of Argentina’s matches against England in 1953 and 1964, journalists wrote articles that ran the gamut—from expressions of national pride to antipathy towards the English. Papers declared that the English “masters” were now the losers, who could only stand and applaud the Argentine victors.134 Tango composers wrote numbers celebrating what became a national triumph, including numbers like Estudiantes de La Plata and La bruja pasó la escoba.135

**Conclusion**

What began at Wembley in 1966 as a moment of indignation had now become a sustained discourse of national identity vis-à-vis the British. At times, such conversations dealt with might and notions of masculinity wrapped up in metaphors of battle. It was not uncommon to read how Argentina had become a team of “guapos” more “macho” than the English. Strength, not picardía, was now the defining characteristic of Argentine fútbol to the outside world.136 As one paper in Buenos Aires boasted, the “Río de la

---

135 Ziperstein, Tango y fútbol, 104–105. The latter song celebrates Verón’s goal at Old Trafford. Verón’s nickname, “La bruja,” referred to his mesmerizing ball handling skills.
“Plata” was now the “Río de los Guapos.”  

Whereas previous articulations of masculinity and national identity in fútbol focused on the differences from British culture—particularly the gauchesque and criollo long articulated by sports journalists—the late 1960s produced a re-imagination of identity predicated upon surpassing European physicality, strength, and toughness. Tough men like Rattín, Bilardo, and Basile were the new stars in Argentina. Unlike the “cracks” of yesteryear, these players earned respect among fans and opponents for their guapeza.

By defining the Argentine player as stronger and tougher than his British opponent, journalists, coaches, and players re-imagined Argentineaness in fútbol. Teams like Racing and Estudiantes embraced the “whatever—it–takes” mentality of the time, which prized winning over a visually pleasing style of play. Most importantly for fans, defeating British in consecutive years helped shed the “European phantasm” that affected Argentine teams for much of the 1960s. But for critics of “anti-fútbol,” who were dismayed by the violence on the field, victories by Racing and Estudiantes seemed to be pyrrhic victories that would eventually lead Argentine fútbol to the abyss. What would happen when the victories vanished? Could players continue to “stick a leg in” and fight opponents on the field without serious consequences?

---

137 “La Revolución comenzó en Brasil, ¡No Inglaterra!” Campeón, July 20, 1966, 2.
In the winter months of 1969, Argentina played a series of home and away matches against Peru and Bolivia. The goal for these three teams was to qualify for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. Among the weaker fútbol nations in South America, Peru and Bolivia had rarely provided much of a challenge to Argentina. For most fans, these matches represented an easy road for Argentina to return to the World Cup. Most fans expected the national team to make it to Mexico and build upon its quarterfinal performance in England in 1966. Nevertheless, the recurring instability at AFA and the deteriorating quality of league matches, created doubt among fans and journalists that this version of the national team had the talent required to succeed. When Argentina posted a series of poor results in Peru and Bolivia, the worst fears came true. In its lowest moment since the “disaster” of Sweden, the national team failed to reach the World Cup finals for the first and only time in history.¹

The tactics, playing style, and training systems imported from Europe during the 1960s failed to produce the success its advocates promised. By the end of the decade,

---

only a few teams were able to point to any measurable success using these approaches. This chapter contends that the fútbol discourse of the late 1960s reflected a widespread anxiety about the continual failures of Argentine teams, the loss of civility on the field, and what was perceived as a general moral decay. These anxieties came at a time of growing violence and state repression under the Revolución Argentina. In 1969, authorities clashed with rioters in the cities of Rosario and Córdoba, and soon thereafter with new guerilla groups. For many people, the violence that erupted in 1969 was evidence of the ultimate failures of the Revolución Argentina.

It is important, then, to contextualize the national team’s failure to qualify for the World Cup in 1969 as part of the larger narrative of failure and national shame produced by the state’s repression of its citizens. For example, Estudiantes’ reckless behavior during the 1969 Intercontinental Cup damaged Argentina’s image to the outside world and led the Onganía government to arrest and ban several players. Both national and foreign journalists were in agreement that Estudiantes crossed the lines of propriety and sportsmanship. Brain Glanville, writing in The Times of London, contrasted “what Argentine football had become to what it once was” when he wrote: “…the Argentines, once renowned as the artists of South America, have now over-compensated and become the hard-men […] Where Di Stefano, Pedernera, Labruna, and Sivori once trod, we now have a generation of gladiators.”

The inability to reach the World Cup was a watershed moment for Argentine fútbol. It was the first time that criticisms of the so-called “scientific,” or “modern,”

---

approach to fútbol extended beyond the few purists like Panzeri who yearned for the fútbol of the past. Journalists, who had not been up until this point critical of fútbol moderno, saw the failures of 1969 as the culmination of the wrong lessons learned since the debacle in Sweden. In their opinion, instead of understanding why the best aspects of the Argentine fútbol proved ineffective, fútbol officials and coaches turned to an “alien” and “foreign” defensive style of play predicated on the fear of losing. In other words, those who had once favored a “scientific” approach to fútbol, now believed that the desire to match European strength and speed came at the cost of the Argentine player’s natural instincts.3

Of course, such arguments were hardly new; sports writers like Panzeri maintained their criticism of foreign influences for much of the decade. What changed in 1969 was that a general fatigue set in among fans and journalists. “Anti-fútbol” matches had become the norm. The vendetta climate on the field produced matches that stirred passions but did little to improve the quality of play. After Argentina tied Peru at home in La Bombonera Stadium—ensuring its failure to qualify for the 1970 World Cup—Ardizzone published an article in El Gráfico entitled: “Concluyó la agonía” (“The agony has ended”). Argentina’s loss gave him a sense of relief because it exposed the fallacies inherent in adopting an alien approach to the game. His recipe? “Volver a la nuestra”—a return to the old style of play.4 Goles agreed with Ardizzone. The paper claimed that the crowning of Argentina as “moral champions” in 1966, and the Intercontinental Cup titles

by Racing and Estudiantes foolishly validated approaches that were never compatible with Argentine fútbol.⁵

A secondary focus in this chapter lies the high level of interconnectivity between fútbol, social movements, and politics of the late 1960s. This chapter shows that structural reforms and heavy spending in fútbol failed to achieve their stated objectives of improving the spectacle on the field. Under state intervention, AFA enacted a series of measures that produced innovative changes to professional fútbol. By 1970, however, the finances of clubs were no better. The quality of play on the field had become a serious problem for fans. Violence also worsened as the so-called “barras bravas” became a more visible presence in the stands. Fan violence claimed the life of one young fan and the neglect of club officials towards stadium security led to the worst tragedy in the history of Argentine fútbol. Collectively, these problems produced an image of a sport and society in crisis.

The fall of Estudiantes signaled a change in Argentine fútbol. A provincial team from La Plata became an avatar for the successes and failures of the fútbol moderno experiment of the 1960s. Its players helped define particular notions of masculine identity through their emphasis on “garra,” “aguante,” and the pride they held in out-lasting their opponents. Estudiantes coach Osvaldo Zubeldía created a culture at the club where “meter la pierna” and “morder” became synonymous with virility. But Estudiantes took part in a litany of matches that turned violent. Players exceeded the boundaries of what was permissible in fútbol, ultimately leading the Ongania government to take the

unprecedented step of directly intervening in player discipline. As a consequence, Estudiantes exposed the sporting and moral failures of the nation to the world. It was their transgressive behavior that led many people to ask if the singular focus on winning benefited Argentine fútbol in the long run.

**Intervention at AFA: The Reforms of Valentín Suárez**

There was little indication coming out of the World Cup in England that coaches and officials were going to re-evaluate playing styles, tactics, and training methods in the same manner as 1958 and 1962. The focus of Argentina’s quarterfinal exit was on external factors—namely suggestions that England “fixed” the tournament to ensure its victory. On the contrary, the general consensus in Argentina was that the national team matched—if not surpassed—the physicality of its European opponents.

The larger conversation after the 1966 World Cup centered on reforming professional fútbol. Starting with the appointment of Valentín Suárez as AFA interventor in 1966, the government of the Revolución Argentina sought to nationalize fútbol and place heavily-indebted clubs under state supervision. Military officials appointed a series of interventors over the years and tasked them with reforming fútbol in order to produce financial and sporting success. It was the longest such intervention in the history of AFA. The revolving door of interventors, however, produced an incoherent vision for

---

7 “Intervención,” *Memorias y balance 1966* (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1967), 4. These interventors meant the end of Francisco Perette’s presidency at AFA president. Perette’s brother, Carlos, was the deposed Vice-President. After the new regime threatened to remove him from power if he traveled to England with the national team, Perette stepped down at AFA. See: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Campeonato del Mundo 1966,” *Boletín N° 1382*, June 23, 1966.
fútbol that lacked the consistency of the second quinquenal under Perón, or the singular task of proscription under the military intervention that followed Perón’s ouster in 1955.

For the government of the Revolución Argentina, limiting the power and influence of club officials was key to its effort at exerting its control over fútbol. Its expectation was that Suárez would repeat his diplomatic magic in England working with players and coaches, but now dealing with club presidents opposed to intervention. Despite Suárez’s previous connections to the Peronist regime, the Onganía government chose the Banfield president, and assessor to the national team, believing that his selection would be a show of good faith to the clubs. A colleague and peer, Suárez knew most of these club officials. What’s more, he understood the inner workings of AFA.

Eventually, the majority of club presidents approved of Suárez. They saw his appointment as the best option if the government would not budge on intervention. Suárez promised to mediate club affairs rather than imposing directives from above.

Despite the humble persona he projected in interviews, Suárez’s career as club director, assessor, AFA president, and now interventor, revealed an ambitious man. His goal was to alter the traditional power structure that benefited the largest clubs but did nothing to stabilize the long-term health of professional fútbol. Two of his top priorities were to seek new source of revenue and to nationalize the professional league by expanding the number of regional clubs in the top divisions. Suárez’s plans were part of

---

8 Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Informe,” Boletín N° 1376, June 2, 1966. The government wanted Suárez to immediately take over as interventor after his role as assessor to the national ended at the World Cup. It did not want Suárez to return to Banfield. Suárez’s “carrots and stick” approach was representative of how the Onganía government initially tried to mediate between powerful labor unions and businesses for the good of economic development. See: Novaro, Historia de la Argentina, 1955-2010, 93.
what César Tcach describes as the corporate and paternal approach to governance by Onganía. Bickering and divisions between club directors at AFA meetings left the sport’s governing body somewhat paralyzed over the years. Onganía wanted Suárez to streamline the finances and management of professional fútbol. It was an unprecedented power grab by the federal government over the affairs of fútbol.

One of his first reform measures to increase revenue was to re-introduce organized match betting. Little had changed since AFA last debated la “polla” in the late 1950s. Back then, opponents worried that organized match betting would dilute the essence of fútbol as an association of non-profit civic clubs established for the social good. Suárez, however, reiterated the same arguments Colombo raised ten years prior. He pitched la “polla” as a necessary way to help clubs pay off their debts. To those worried about the quality of fútbol in the late 1960s, Suárez claimed that earnings would help finance the clubs’ youth divisions. Nevertheless, club presidents remained fearful of reprisals from those members in their institutions that rejected gambling for religious or moral reasons. Critics in the press also raised questions about how club officials would handle vast new sources of income when they had proven in the past to be irresponsible administrators of revenue. Ultimately, Suárez failed to convince opponents that the money served the social good—even after citing the Vatican’s stance that gambling was not immoral if the funds benefitted those in need.

_____________________

10 Tcach, “Golpes, proscricpciones y partidos políticos,” 50–51.
13 Interview with Valentín Suárez, “Totocalcio ¿qué es eso?,” Gente y la actualidad, November 10, 1966, 24-25. It was not clear that Ongania himself approved of the idea of state-run gambling in fútbol. The
Suárez revived another reform proposal from the Colombo era: the televising of fútbol matches. By late 1960s, television had become a larger part of life for many Argentines, especially among middle-class families. During the 1966 World Cup, fútbol fans watched games on their television set, or accessed programming by visiting a bar or neighbor’s house. But just as they had in the late 1950s, club presidents pushed back against the idea fearing a loss of revenue in ticket sales. Other officials had long worried about exposing children—a captive television audience—to the improper behavior that often occurred at stadiums. Some citizens continued to voice contempt towards televised matches. In an angry letter to Primera Plana, one reader expressed his anger that a fútbol match, “an example of society’s lack of culture,” interrupted a televised theatre production of Lady Godiva.

Yet, the popularity of the 1966 World Cup in Argentina demonstrated the potential for lucrative broadcast contracts. AFA wanted to recover the money it paid to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for the television rights to the tournament.

---


14 In the porteño neighborhood of La Paternal, “Clarita” recalls that bars became meeting location for those without televisions at home to watch matches. But these games were tape delayed, so it was more common for families to congregate before and after a home game in the living rooms of family members. Everyone would eat and discuss the match of the day. Then the men would head to the stadium while women usually stayed back and heard the game over the radio. It was important for the women in the family to know what mood to expect from the men when they come home from the stadium. Clarita, interview by Rwany Sibaja, Audio recording, August 9, 2012.


Suárez eventually succeeded with this reform proposal. Unlike Colombo, Suárez had the full backing of the military government behind him and did not need congressional approval, since the legislative body was not in session under the dictatorship. League matches soon aired on state-run Channel 7. In a nod to the concerns of club presidents, only one match would air each week—on Monday or Friday nights—after the print media and radio publicized the scores for the weekend matches. Some clubs used this new income, as designed, to help pay off their debts to the state. The largest clubs, however, abused the intent of the television contract and prolonged the spending wars typical of the age of “fútbol espectáculo.”

In order to solve a decade-long decline in stadium attendance, Suárez proposed his most radical reform initiative: the restructuring of the league format. Instead of one season, teams would now compete in two: the “Nacional” and the “Metropolitano.” This shift would not only open doors for smaller teams to succeed, but it also expanded the first division to include twenty-four teams over both seasons. The larger goal of this expansion was to include more provincial teams so that the league was truly national.

Even in 1966, the dominant teams in Argentina continued to be from Buenos Aires.

---

18 Jorge Llistosella, “El estado, la polla, la gente,” Primera Plana, October 13, 1970, 74; Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Filmación y televisación de partidos,” Memorias y balance 1967 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1968), 48; Cirelli, interview. Cirelli confirms that matches began to air after the 1966 World Cup on Friday nights. Advertisements show Monday nights as a second programming option for games. Beyond Channel 7, privately owned television station Tevedos secured the rights to transmit games from the lower “Primera ‘B’” division on Saturdays (an advertisement for Tevedos can be found in El Gráfico, November 14, 1967, 70).


20 “Resoluciones sancionadas por la intervención desde el 19 de agosto de 1966,” Memorias y balance 1966 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1967), 18-24. Up until then, only Rosario Central and Newell’s Old Boys, both from Rosario, were constant fixtures in a Buenos Aires-heavy top division.
Every champion in the first division came from the so-called “big five” clubs. As a former president of a mid-sized club, Suárez understood the concerns that many institutions faced in an era of heavy spending.\textsuperscript{21} Namely, they could not afford the type of players and coaches to compete for titles on a consistent basis. Despite Suárez’s intent to level the playing field, smaller clubs required a guarantee that the new format, which included nearly one hundred additional matches in 1967, would not put them at an economic disadvantage by siphoning revenue to large clubs in heavy debt.\textsuperscript{22}

The restructuring of the professional league accomplished several of Suárez’s goals. Smaller clubs like Vélez Sarsfield, Estudiantes, and Chacarita Juniors won three of the first four national titles in the new format. This ended the stranglehold by the “big five” clubs on the first division (see Appendix C). Total revenue increased as well, but the additional profits were in large part due to the greater total of matches, which rose from 380 to 491.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, twenty-four different clubs participated between both seasons—an increase from the traditional twenty clubs in the top division. Yet, by the middle of the second season it was becoming clear that the new format was failing to yield the economic benefits promised by AFA. Attendance did increase slightly, but not enough to disuade major clubs from continuing to pursue bank loans in order to finance their high payrolls. Scoring improved as well but on a gradual basis. Nevertheless, the military


\textsuperscript{22} “¿Qué pasó con Don Valentín? Esto de la reestructuración del campeonato en muchos clubs se acabó,” Campeón, December 28, 1966, 2. Also see: Enrique Walker, “Quiero renunciar...pero no quiero,” Gente y la actualidad, March 16, 1967, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{23} The Argentine fútbol season traditionally consisted of 240 matches per year from 1941 to 1965 (the exceptions were 1949 and 1950 [306 games], 1951 [264], and 1965 [306].)
regime of the Revolución Argentina proved more adept than previous governments at imposing its will on professional fútbol.

Despite the changes that Suárez introduced, he was unable to address one problem that vexed previous AFA officials: the lack of safety for fans at stadiums. After a match between Boca Juniors and River Plate finished in 1968, seventy-one spectators died in the worst stadium disaster in Argentine history. Fans at the Monumental Stadium tried to exit through gate number 12. In this instance, organized fan groups were not to blame; rather, many survivors claimed that stadium employees left the gate and turnstiles locked, which led to a massive pile-up and suffocation. River Plate officials vociferously denied this conclusion.

The tragedy of Puerta 12 exposed the lack of safety measures at stadiums. Venues offered spectators only a few, inadequate exit doors. President Onganía, once again in the middle of a national story surrounding fútbol (figures 71-72), visited the injured at hospitals and police stations as a way to help the nation heal from the disaster. Few, however, believed that serious reform would come about because of Puerta 12. Club and AFA officials had shown little interest in the past of curbing the growth of violent fan

---

24 “Una avalancha en el estadio de River Plate al finalizar el encuentro causó 70 muertos,” La Nación, June 24, 1968, 1.
26 In 1968, one reader wrote to Primera Plana about the poor designs of fútbol stadiums as a major problem; see: Primera Plana, July 23, 1968, 6. Verónica Moreira and Garriga Zucal offer Independiente’s stadium, with its poorly designed exit routes at stadiums, as an example of the continued negligence of fútbol officials to update structures to meet FIFA regulations on fan safety.
27 Extensive coverage appeared in most newspapers, see: La Nación, June 24, 1968, 9-11; La Nación, June 25, 1968, 18;
groups. And now they seemed equally hesitant to overhaul stadium safety due to the excessive costs associated with altering the structure of fútbol stadiums.  

Figure 71 (left)- Cover to River, June 25, 1968. Courtesy of the personal collection of Rodrigo Daskal.
Figure 72 (right)- Campeón asked the question that was on the minds of many fútbol fans, June 26, 1968, 1. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

The Limits of Hombría in Fútbol

Puerta 12 solidified the association between fútbol and social violence among those who were already critical of the state of Argentine fútbol—regardless of whether or not a definite link existed in this case. The “superclásico” match between River Plate and Boca Juniors—the most intense rivalry in Argentine fútbol—typically produced great

---

passions and a heated environment inside of the stadium. But as one retired journalist recalled, that day fans from both teams were on opposite sides of the stadium and separated by security. Nevertheless, many people assumed that fan disorders caused the tragedy at Puerta 12. This supposition remains to this day and demonstrates the pervasiveness of violence in fútbol in the public imagination during the late 1960s. Although physical confrontations among fans and players had always been a part of the culture of fútbol, these skirmishes were now entering a new phase of intensity.

Data from AFA records shows that between 1967 and 1969 player impropriety spiked, evidenced by the record number of fines and suspensions levied by the disciplinary tribunal (figures 73-75). Offering an explanation for the physicality on the field, some players complained about the corrosive effect of money on Argentine fútbol. In their opinion, club officials placed great pressure on them to perform and succeed because of the extra money associated with exhibition and international matches. The result was that players grew less concerned with the physical well being of their opponents and instead became more focused on winning at any cost. Players also acted in an aggressive manner to protect themselves from injury. They were fearful of what opponents were capable of in their pursuit of victory.

29 Pablo Tesoriero, Puerta 12, DVD, Documentary, 2008. Several witnesses recalled years later that the seating section near Puerta 12 contained more spectators than seats. This overcrowding was not abnormal, but it produced in them a sensation that it was an unsafe situation. One survivor remembered that those around him leaving through Puerta 12 all wanted to leave quickly, and, as a result, fans began to walk faster and faster in order to leave.

30 Ibid.


The notion of fear as a driving force for player violence is not often discussed in fútbol scholarship. However, it appears with frequency in interviews with officials,
players, and coaches at the time. Suárez attributed the fear of losing to the persistent failures of Argentine teams in international matches, a point he repeated after Argentina performed poorly at the 1967 Campeonato Sudamericano.\(^{33}\)

Players on the national team saw their poor performance a different way. In a revealing comment from team captain Rattín in 1966, he remembered telling Lorenzo before the World Cup began: “We are played. If we lose, goodbye, we wouldn’t even return to Ezeiza; on the other hand, you are here [in Europe] with your family and you can stay to coach some team over here […] officials will continue being officials, but us? Who saves us? Have you forgotten what happened after Sweden?”\(^{34}\) At the 1967 Campeonato Sudamericano, Rattín expressed a similar sentiment about the pressures players faced. They were not afraid of corporal punishment; rather, Rattín believed that his teammates played out of a fear of what fans and journalists would say after a loss. It was one thing for rival fans, like the Uruguayans, to shout “faggots!” and accuse the Argentines of being “our sons.” It was quite another for Rattín to hear supporters back home question the sense of honor and virility of Argentine players.\(^{35}\)

What was clear was that success defined player violence. When teams like Rácing and Estudiantes triumphed, the punches and kicks they delivered were honorable because

\(^{33}\) Head coach Jim Lopes agreed with Suárez’s statement. He believed that fear was a destructive mentality that had gripped Argentine players for many years. See: Osvaldo Ardizzone, “De Wembley al Centenario la historia se repite, ¡basta!,” El Gráfico, February 14, 1967, 34-35; “La trastienda de una derrota,” El Gráfico, February 7, 1967, 14.

\(^{34}\) Cherquis Bialo, “El caudillo se ‘confiesa’,” El Gráfico, August 2, 1966, 11.

they played with pride and defended their honor and that of the nation. Defeat, on the other hand, turned excessive displays of virility into acts of fear and “great cowardice.”

In the late 1960s, one team controlled its fear more than others and used it to its advantage. Osvaldo Zubeldía forged Estudiantes de La Plata into a team where everyone played defense and whose goal was to use every tactic available to harass opponents. As Primera Plana observed, when pitted against “tough teams” like Independiente and Racing, Estudiantes demonstrated that they were the ones who truly “wore the pants” and made dirty tactics a “cult.”

In the semi-finals of the 1968 Copa Libertadores, Estudiantes met Racing. Magazines billed the match as an encounter between two revolutionary teams. Afterwards, however, observers characterized the game as a “dark night for Argentine fútbol.” El Gráfico summarized the two matches as so brutal and outside the norms of the sport that they defied description. Campeón labeled the series as “an unhinged barbarity caused by the desire to win the many pesos at play in fútbol.” Aware of the possible reaction by those witnessing these games on television, Suárez entered the two dressing rooms at halftime of the second match and threatened to withdraw both teams from the Copa Libertadores if they did not change tactics. Estudiantes won using three

---

41 “El campeón perdió la guerra,” Campeón, June 12, 1968, 2.
men—Carlos Bilardo, Pachamé, and Ramón Aguirre Suárez—to hound Racing’s best players and, in their words, “marcar a muerte” (‘mark them to death’).43

Two of the more notorious figures in the Estudiantes, Bilardo and Pachamé, rejected the idea that they were dirty players. In interviews with sports reporters, they wanted to present a different side of their personalities. It was a publicity move designed to protect Estudiantes from accusations of dirty play. Pachamé, for example, invited reporters to his house and came off as a modest family-oriented professional. He dismissed the idea that he was a “matón”—the tough guy on the street corner. Instead, Pachamé prided himself on possessing a strong work ethic. He appreciated opponents who gave no quarter when fighting for a ball. Although he agreed that his attitude could lead some to think of him as some guapo, Pachamé maintained that he never played with bad intent: “I confess, I am not a little angel…I go in strong, but I stick my leg in down low, against the ball.”44 In his opinion, the idea that certain players were “caudillos” was a literary trope sports writers used in order to sell papers. The interview with Pachamé reveals the fine line between aggressive play and violence on the field.

In an article published by El Gráfico in 1968, the magazine created an accompanying poster that read “Wanted-Buscado,” complete with a stylized font that echoed the saloons of the American Wild West (figure 76). The subject of the piece was Bilardo, labeled as the ringleader of a team that El Gráfico felt went beyond the limits of acceptable behavior in fútbol on a regular basis. Bilardo earned a reputation for

provoking opponents, feigning injury, and complaining each adverse call to the referee. As a result, he became one of the more vilified players in the league. Zubeldia revealed that at times he refused to play his midfielder out of fear of his safety.

Bilardo, like Pachamé, wanted to portray a different picture to the public. A medical doctor (along with teammate Raúl Madero), he was philosophical about fútbol. He regarded his own style of play as normal. In his mind, trying to find a psychological edge and playing tough were simply necessary for players to “survive” a game. The difference, according to Bilardo, was that he did not complain when a game turned “dirty.” He did not conflate guapeza with a poor attitude. Rather, Bilardo credited his reputation as a cold-blooded player to his ability to remain calm and outthink opponents in heated matches. The goal for any player, he noted, was to seek all the advantages possible to help his team win. This is why he respected opponents like Racing’s Basile, who never complained and played just as tough. Or as Bilardo put it: “He knows I go in hard, I know he goes in hard, and we endure (‘aguantamos’).”

Physicality and endurance replaced artistry during the 1960s as idealized forms of masculinity on the playing field. The “injustice” of the 1966 World Cup quarterfinal, as well as the anger and aggression displayed by teams like Celtic, proved to many fútbol fans in Argentina that the British ideal of “fair play” was for “giles,” or dupes. Teams like Racing and Estudiantes, on the other hand, demonstrated that toughness and endurance were more vital to success. Therefore, “el aguante” became central to notions

of masculinity in fútbol during the late 1960s. Other phrases denoted a similar emphasis on the virtue to endure punishment in a match. Players talked of “meter la pierna” ("to stick a leg in") as a noble sacrifice of their bodies in the pursuit of victory. To play “a lo guapo,” or like a “macho,” however, was more than simply administering punishment to opponents. A guapo timed his hard tackles to win the ball first and thus avoid a warning from the referee. Because not all tackles were well timed, “aguantar” became a vital trait to possess if a player hoped to have a long career in professional fútbol. For others, however, the brutality displayed on the field offered a poor example of manliness. Players, it seemed, had lost any sense of responsibility to their fans by making each game a battle to be won at all costs.

Conservative Argentines, typically of an older generation, and middle class, were concerned with the influence that fútbol players held over the youth of the country.\textsuperscript{47} In numerous articles of the late 1960s, reporters characterized Estudiantes’ behavior as the product of a “putrefied” environment. Echoing Sarmiento and other Liberal thinkers of the past, they argued that players were rejecting “civilización” for “barbarie.”\textsuperscript{48}

Recent scholarship shows that some of these concerns revolved around the supposed loss of morals among the youth in the late 1960s, a sentiment largely expressed by government officials and social conservatives. These young Argentines were frustrated with their rigid and stifling middle-class upbringing and education. In

\textsuperscript{47} Manzano talks about the moralizing campaign under Onganía, where the assumption among conservatives and military officials was that youth immorality, communism, and revolutionary ideas are all intertwined; see: Manzano, “Sexualizing Youth,” 453–457.

\textsuperscript{48} Numerous articles in the press borrowed the phrase “civilización ó barbarie” from the nineteenth-century Argentine intellectual, and former head of state Domingo Sarmiento, to explain the rise of social violence and “hippies.”
particular, they questioned the authoritarianism of the military government in power.\footnote{Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina*, 382; Manzano, “Juventud y modernización sociocultural en la Argentina de los sesenta,” 364–365.} Players like Bilardo, who skirted or eschewed the rules of the game, had become what historian Valeria Manzano describes as the modern pibe: a “source of authenticity and a guarantee of a rebellion against the norms of a society that [the youth] saw as submissive and hypocritical.”\footnote{Manzano, “Juventud y modernización sociocultural en la Argentina de los sesenta,” 388–389.} Although Manzano is describing the pibes on the streets with long hair and wearing blue jeans, the idea that young fútbol fans viewed subversive behavior as a positive trait is plausible, especially considering the violent discourse and countercultural trends that were becoming more commonplace by the end of the 1960s.

The other concern held by social conservatives was that some athletes were in fact acting like “hippies.” Players like River Plate’s goalkeeper Hugo Gatti scandalized journalists, as well as the club’s more conservative fans, with his long hair and countercultural fashion tastes.\footnote{“Gatti: revolución en la cancha,” *Primera Plana*, October 10, 1967, 1 and 55-57; “Nuestro llamado no fue en vano,” *River*, December 19, 1967, 16-17} These “hippies,” who saw themselves as fashionable and modern, became the new face of fútbol (figure 7). Critics, however, saw in them a burlesque and foreign notion of masculinity that blurred gender identity in fútbol.\footnote{Fashion and clothing also played a role in the perception of gender lines becoming blurry, as Manzano describes in her look at the influence of blue jeans in Argentina; see: Valeria Manzano, “The Blue Jean Generation: Youth, Gender, and Sexuality in Buenos Aires, 1958-1975,” *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 3 (March 1, 2009): 657–676.}

In some cases, players transgressed traditional notions of masculinity in fútbol

---

\footnote{In discussing gender roles and expectations, informants stressed the importance of exhibiting proper dress and behavior in public under the military government. Parents felt powerless to criticize their children for adopting a counter-cultural mindset because deep down they felt guilty for the politicization that existed in the late 60s. They agreed that a more significant loosening of expectations occurred in the turbulent decade of the 70s and intensified after the return of democracy in 1983. Clarita, interview; Cirelli, interview.}
through their physical appearance and their style of play. Players like River Plate’s Carlos Rodríguez and Racing’s Victorio Cocco were both “vedettes” and “caudillos.” They sported long sideburns but also ran afoul of match officials with their hard-hitting style of play. One sports writer complained about how fashions inspired by John Lennon and London’s “Carnaby Street” threatened traditional notions of professional athletes. By attributing indecency to English modernity, and associating civility with Argentine traditionalism, journalists inverted Ramsey’s “animals” critique to discuss the problem of “hippies” in fútbol. It also furthered the notion that English society was a source of disorder and immorality, which dovetailed with the succession of matches against England, Celtic, and Manchester United.

Figure 76 (left)- Wanted poster for Bilardo—a marked man by opponents for his tenacity and sometimes dirty play. “Captura para Bilardo: ¡A ése, a ése!,” El Gráfico, August 6, 1968, 22. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.

Figure 77 (middle, right)- Flamboyant goalkeeper Hugo Gatti, Iselín Ovejero moved away from the clean-cut fútbol player with closely cropped hair to the chagrin of older generations of fans and sportswriters. “Los ‘hippies’ copan el fútbol,” Goles, May 27, 1969, 22-23. Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos.


Although the fear of “hippie” influences was palpable in examining the writings of older, more conservative journalists, the largest problem they saw in fútbol was the prevalence of violence as a demonstration of virility. To no surprise, critics pointed to fans as the chief culprits as fan violence had become more virulent and commonplace than ever before. Much of this was due to the continual evolution of organized fan groups and the increasing presence of gangs on the streets of Buenos Aires. Specific to fútbol, the patotas, or “barras bravas,” were now structured in a hierarchal manner and led by a charismatic leader, or capo. They took on specific names, at first associated with the capo, as was the case with Boca Juniors’ “La Barra de Cocos.” Others took on more colorful nicknames, such as Boca Juniors’ “La Doce” (“the twelfth man”) or River Plate’s “Los Borrachos del Tablón” (“the drunkards of the stands”).

Capos like Cocosa, or San Lorenzo’s Quique “El Carnicer” (“The Butcher”), were well known by players and fans earlier in the 1960s. By the end of the decade, however, they earned a notorious reputation for fighting in the stands and on the streets against rivals from other clubs. Violence was thus a positive element among patotas, critical to their construction of identity. Bodies became contested terrains to affirm one’s

57 Gustavo Grabbia, La doce: La verdadera historia de la barra brava de Boca (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2009), 19.
masculinity and to defend a group’s reputation. A corporal loyalty to the team earned these organized fan groups attention from various cub officials, who tolerated their excesses in return for the enthusiasm and support they generated.

Among these fan groups, Garriga Zucal and Moreira see similar discourses of toughness, and aguante that were a part of what defined fútbol at the time. An hincha able to “poner el pecho” (“to stick your chest out”) earned the respect of other fans, who equated corporal punishment with the love for the colors of the team. It was a demonstration of hombría. Those who demonstrated their valor time and time again were “gordos” (thick) or “duros” (hard). Their eagerness to engage in fights earned them symbolic capital. Such duros expected to rise through the ranks of the “barras bravas.”

On the other hand, those who backed down lacked “huesos” (slang for testicles) and were thus “putos” (“faggots”). These terms implied that men who backed down from a fight were passive and ripe for domination by other men. By the late 1960s, chants that accused rival groups of being “putos,” that threatened their mothers, or suggesting that they would endure some form of rape (i.e. “romper el culo”) became a regular part of the spectacle in the stands.

Fan violence and hooliganism in football was a transnational phenomenon borne of the 1960s, as Peter Alegi and Robert Edelman discovered in their studies of football in

---

58 Garriga Zucal, Nosotros nos peleamos, 28.
59 Ibid., 94 and 147; Moreira, “Aguante y honor: La visión nativa.” For a comparative anthropological look at fan violence and masculinity in Mexican fútbol, see: Magazine, Golden and Blue Like My Heart.
60 Garriga Zucal, Haciendo amigos a las piñas, 14.
61 Garriga Zucal, Nosotros nos peleamos, 80–82.
62 Ibid., 71–72; Cirelli, interview. Cirelli heard very little of these chants himself as a reporter, but he also admitted that he was not paying much attention to the “barras” of young men in the stands. However, he does see the end of the 1960s, and especially the 1970s, as the moment when vulgarity and disorder increased dramatically.
South Africa and the Soviet Union (respectively). Similarities to the Argentine case emerge in Alegi’s study, which lists alcohol and gambling among the vices that were banned by the government but readily available in notorious sections of the stadium, with names like “The Congo.” Edelman also shows that football under the Khrushchev and Brezhnev-era Soviet Union turned increasingly violent, at first due to the “thaw” of the Khrushchev state, and the lessening of fears among people of state reprisal, and later as part of the reaction to the tightening of social behavior under Brezhnev. In England, frequent altercations on the field, rampant corruption, and hooligan groups dominated news cycles as well. The British press, for example, sounded the alarm on hooliganism and coaches like Manchester United’s Matt Busby called for better behavior among fans. He feared that looting, hurling objects at players and rival fans, and the increasingly dangerous play of athletes would eventually destroy English football. These examples show that Argentina’s problem with organized fan violence was far from isolated; it was part of a transnational phenomenon.

63 Alegi, *Laduma!,* 130–131. Alegi also reveals that for young black men, with little hope for the future, gangs and football provided either escapism or, for a few, a path to fame and a true escape from poverty. Hooligan groups exploited this to enlarge their presence on match days, and to expand their influence at the club.

64 Edelman, *Spartak Moscow,* 224 and 270.

65 “Violence is all part of the game now,” *The Times,* October 7, 1968, 8.

As more matches became televised in Argentina, the audience for these “barras bravas” multiplied. Broadcast matches offered fan groups a medium that amplified their performance inside the stadium. As a result, their actions became bolder and a part of the match-day spectacle—especially when matches were regularly listless and ended in scoreless draws.\(^66\) By 1967, these groups had also become emboldened by the protection they secured through connections with public authorities.\(^67\) The death of a young fan before a league match between Huracán and Racing in 1967 brought national attention to the rise of organized fan violence.\(^68\) According to witnesses, some Racing supporters confiscated a Huracán umbrella. This taking of a rival group’s emblem was a common way of provoking other “barras bravas.”\(^69\) Fifteen minutes before kick-off, Huracán’s fan group, known as “Los Cinco Dedos” (or “Five Fingers”), invaded the Racing fan section and targeted Héctor Souto, a seventeen-year old who happened to be holding an umbrella with Racing’s colors.\(^70\) Souto died during the massive brawl. In interviews with family members and friends published across various newspapers, his friend’s father, Roberto Heym, recalled how he invited the boys to go to the game after a fishing expedition fell apart. As the brawl began, the Heyms ran away from the avalanche caused by the mêlée,

\(^{66}\) Scher and Palomino, *Fútbol, pasión de multitudes y de elites*, 103 and 118.
\(^{67}\) Ibid., 118.
\(^{68}\) “Un muerto y un herido en Huracán,” *La Nación*, April 10, 1967, 16.
\(^{70}\) The name of Huracán’s group, “Los Cinco Dedos,” only appears in Sebreli, *La era del fútbol*, 50–51.
looked back, and saw Souto brutally attacked. His body collapsed instantly amid a torrent of kicks, with fans pleading for the attackers to stop kicking the lifeless corpse.

Souto’s death provoked a backlash against those responsible for the incident. *Campeón* called for each club to weed out these mobs of unruly fans, which were well known to club officials and increasingly shameless in carrying out their “bone-chilling” acts of violence. Such “morbid” scenes, the paper claimed, could be observed in places like Africa, where racial tensions led to “cannibalistic” acts, but one should not expect to see the same in a “civilized” place like Buenos Aires. Others held club officials responsible for enabling these violent groups and providing them impunity at stadiums.

The lack of security for fans, and the ease by which Huracán’s supporters were able to invade the Racing section, raised many questions about the competency of police authorities, club officials, and the civility of Argentine society.

**“Fútbol Espectáculo” Comes to an End**

The death of Souto and the rise of the “barras bravas” brought into question the priorities of club officials. Financial investments by the “big five” clubs in high-profile players and coaches did not create the expected spectacle on the field—much less provide

---

73 “Ha muerto un muchacho…,” *Campeón*, April 12, 1967, 2.
74 “¡Basta!,” *Clarín*, April 10, 1967, 21. Boca Juniors’ General Secretary from the early 1960s, Luis María Bortnik, recalled how leaders of the nascent “La Doce” group met with him at the club. Together, they discussed which coaches or players who were not performing well, with the understood agreement that “La Doce” would apply some “motivational” pressure. In return, Bortnik provided to the leaders of “La Doce” tickets and special travel arrangements; *see:* Grabbia, *La doce: La verdadera historia de la barra brava de Boca*, 22–23.
greater safety for fans. Moreover, attendance and goals did not improve either (see Appendix A-B). By the end of the 60s, the era of "fútbol espectáculo" was a bust. Fútbol officials began to reconsider their objectives. Only a few clubs, like Independiente and Racing, were able to win international championships and lead the league in scoring. At Boca Juniors, producing an attractive goal-scoring team eluded Armando for much of the decade, but heavy spending did secure domestic trophies for the club. San Lorenzo and River Plate, on the other hand, won only one title between them during the decade. Because few clubs matched Boca Juniors’ spending, they began to re-invest in their semilleros as a way to cut down on inflated payrolls. Smaller clubs, in particular, found it profitable to groom young talent as the nucleus of their teams, or when possible sell a player to help their finances. When Suárez introduced the Metropolitano/ Nacional season format in 1967, mid-sized clubs like Vélez Sarsfield, Estudiantes, and Chacarita Juniors capitalized on the decision to retain a nucleus of young players and won three of the first four titles under the new format.

The success of smaller institutions offered a new path for Argentine fútbol, but also undercut the rationale of heavy spending from the “caudillo” club presidents that

---

75 After Racing recorded 70 goals in 1966, Independiente won the scoring title the following year with 76 goals (in one fewer game). See: Memorias y balance 1966-1967 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1967-1968). Independiente also led the league in scoring (53 goals) in 1963, the year it qualified for the Copa Libertadores (and subsequently won the South American championship a year later).

76 San Lorenzo’s league title in 1968 came after it abandoned the heavy spending earlier in the decade.

77 The curtailing of player salaries and high-profile signings did not mean that clubs did not continue to spend on other projects, as evidenced by Huracán’s sprawling new training complex outside of the city, see: “La flamante concentración de los jugadores a 40 kms. de la capital, puesta a disposición por Seijo,” Noticiero Huracán, March 1969, 12-13.

78 Although run by the wealthy Luis Seijo at the end of the 1960s, Huracán boasted of its ability to field a competitive team made up of mostly young players, many of whom rose through the ranks of its “semillero.” See: “Mirar hacia adentro: Creer en la juventud,” Noticiero Huracán, March 1969, 1.
dominated the landscape in the 1960s. Some of the club presidents with longevity at their clubs, such as Vélez Sarsfield’s Amalfitani (1941-1969) and Estudiantes’ Mariano Mangano (1960-1970), died in office. Their passing allowed a new generation of club officers to shift the identity of their institutions. On the other hand, others, like River Plate’s Antonio Liberti, stepped down from power after losing the confidence of club members in club elections. In Liberti’s case, River Plate’s title drought in the 1960s proved to be too much for fans accustomed to a higher standard. The new president, Julian William Kent, ran on a campaign to end the regime of “that good man,” whose “absolutist and paternal” administrative style was ruining the club. Kent promised a return to River Plate’s youth system in the hopes of replicating the success of the legendary La Máquina team of the 1940s and 1950s.

One should also keep in mind the impact of government intervention on the weakening of the position of these club presidents. Unlike the previous one-year intervention of the Revolución Libertadora, the government of the Revolución Argentina showed no signs of relinquishing control of AFA under Onganía or his successors. Club presidents proposed several measures to end government control and return AFA to normalcy. They suggested “fútbol-men” like Huracán’s Luis Seijo as an attractive alternative to intervention because of his entrepreneurial and non-political background. Club presidents argued that Seijo’s selection as AFA president would provide the

---

81 Seijo understood fútbol’s social importance and found the presidency of AFA attractive. He described fútbol as the third element in any discussion of power in Argentina, alongside the government and the CGT.
upcoming World Cup tournament legitimacy and popular support. None of this is to say that club presidents presented a united front; deep divisions and animosities persisted at AFA meetings, as chronicled in a 1968 piece in Primera Plana entitled “Los amos del fútbol” (The Lords of Fútbol—figure 78). Nevertheless, a sufficient number of clubs spoke openly about the need to democratize AFA once again. The military government, however, continued with intervention. It wanted to be in full control of the preparations for the 1978 World Cup with the hopes of reaping the expected rewards—political, social, economic—associated with hosting a major international tournament.

Figure 78- "Los Amos del Fútbol"—Cover of Primera Plana, April 16, 1968. Featured on the cover are Alberto Armando (top left), Antonio Liberti (top right), and Valentín Suárez (bottom). Courtesy of the Biblioteca del Museo Evita.

The story of Alberto Armando at Boca Juniors best captures the spirit and eventual demise of the age of “fútbol espectáculo.” Armando endured similar challenges to his presidency at Boca Juniors as Liberti faced at River Plate in 1967. Armando’s reputation as a temperamental figure rankled AFA and government officials. He was often on the receiving end of reprimands and fines for ignoring suspensions, failing to address safety issues at La Bombonera stadium, or for outspoken comments to the press.  

The tipping point for Armando came when AFA’s interventor in 1970, Juan Martín Oneto Gaona, and city officials stipulated a series of improvements to La Bombonera stadium before it could reopen. The military government had just begun preparations to host the 1978 World Cup after FIFA ratified Argentina’s selection as host nation. La Bombonera would be a key venue for the tournament but it was in poor condition. According to Armando, the requests from AFA and the city of Buenos Aires would have drained the club’s resources. Moreover, he argued that his willingness to continue at the head of the club had diminished with each fine and suspension. Armando’s threat of resignation, however, was designed to illicit sympathy within Boca

84 Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, “Antecedentes elevados por la intervención (declaraciones del presidente del Club Boca Juniors Expte. 1943),” Boletín N° 177, August 27, 1970.
85 “De lances a renunciantes,” Panorama, August 25, 1970, 31. These requests included improvements for bathrooms. The most die-hard fans saw the insufferable bathroom situation as a measure of “aguante,” or the ability to withstand difficult circumstances through displays of virility. Besides, they found other, more useful, purposes for bodily fluids and plastic containers when it came to confronting fans. Zucal’s work on “aguante” is helpful to understand the inner dynamics of barras; see: Garriga Zucal, Nosotros nos peleamos, 46–49.
86 The stadium requests from AFA were part of the governing body’s effort at improving stadium conditions across the country per FIFA standards for a World Cup venue. La Bombonera ran afoul of these standards. The stadium closing was a message to Armando about the seriousness of the military government’s push to have Argentina ready to host the World Cup. See: “Estadios,” Memorias y balance 1970 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1971), 15-17.
Juniors. By 1970, the aura surrounding Armando at Boca Juniors diminished. For the first time in a decade, opposition to his rule grew within the club. Critics pointed to rumors of blackmail, and questioned the regularity of stadium closings and the growing influence of organized fan groups like “La Doce.” Armando’s ploy nonetheless worked. After announcing his resignation in 1970, he backtracked and ran for re-election that same year, eventually remaining as president until 1980.

Finishing the Ciudad Deportiva was a key rationale for club members who elected Armando to another term. In many ways, the project embodied the era of “fútbol espectáculo”: it was ambitious, expensive, and ultimately failed at delivering on its promises. Four years after receiving approval and federal funds for the Ciudad Deportiva project, Armando scheduled an opening ceremony for the partially completed complex. With a functioning swimming facility, canals for sunbathers, and ample walkways, the project had begun to take shape.87 Footage of the complex adorned with flags appeared in newsreels, which promised porteños a wonderful facility that would serve all citizens, not just socios of the club.88

The lack of progress on major parts of the complex soon began to raise suspicions. The 342,192 square meters of land required by law for the massive new 140,000-seat stadium had yet to be developed by 1970.89 The delays in construction were a major problem, namely because the existing land amounted only to an 80,000 square meter island in the Rio de la Plata. Even with various ribbon-cutting ceremonies

publicized in the press, mounting debts and instability at the club made the completion date of 1975 seem unlikely. By the end of the 1970s it was clear that the Ciudad Deportiva was a failed project. To this day, the site remains abandoned and is no longer property of Boca Juniors.

Argentina’s absence from Mexico 1970

The national team inspired little confidence heading into qualifying matches for the 1970 World Cup in Mexico for several reasons. Since 1958, AFA demonstrated an incoherent plan for its national team program. Rather than capitalize on the goodwill players received upon their return from England in 1966 as the nation’s “moral champions,” a succession of nine different government-appointed interventors prolonged the confusion between 1966 and 1974.

A lack of consistency at the head coaching position was also to blame for the national team’s woes. Between 1939 and 1958, Guillermo Stábile was the sole caretaker of the national team over 127 matches. By comparison, AFA appointed seventeen coaches for the national team between 1958 and 1969. One explanation for this

---

91 All of the problems Armando faced between 1968 and 1970 should not minimize his legacy. More than any club president, he defined the era of “fútbol espectáculo.” Armando’s bombastic and outsized personality matched his ambition to convert Boca Juniors into a global brand on the level of a Real Madrid. The esteem held for Armando extends to this day with the renaming of the stadium in his honor in 2000.
93 Between 1958 and 1970, Argentina won only one South American championship and the number of winning matches decreased to a mere 48 percent. By comparison, during his nineteen years as coach, Stábile led Argentina to six South American championships, recorded eighty-five victories, and lost only twenty-one matches—a 67 percent winning record. See: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, Cien años con
revolving door was that the national team began to lose to opponents traditionally seen by fans in Argentina as weak, such as Bolivia and Chile. Club coaches understood the perils of coaching the national team and many of them refused to take the position. When asked why AFA selected him to return as coach of the national team in 1968, after he was hastily dismissed in 1964, José María Minella responded: “no sé” (“I don’t know”).

*Primera Plana* offered its own answer: he was available, healthy, and malleable for AFA officials. In short, capable coaches did not want the position. When AFA hired Adolfo Pedernera in July of 1969 as the fifth hire during the qualifying process for the 1970 World Cup, it generated a humorous reference to the head coaching position on the national team as “*el salario del fracaso*” (“the salary of failure”). The carousel of head coaches and interventors failed to produce a stable foundation for success.

Beyond the inconsistencies produced by multiple coaching changes was the problematic model of success produced by Estudiantes at the time. In many ways, the club from La Plata embodied the physicality, athleticism, and toughness that coaches and trainers felt was needed after the “disaster” in Sweden in 1958. Moreover, Estudiantes achieved success by winning titles in Argentina, South America, against the champions of Europe. Some national team coaches sought to reproduce the Estudiantes model on the national team level in 1968. But they soon discovered that Zubeldía’s team succeeded
because its players thrived under the specific roles its head coach designed for a defense-oriented system. When selected to represent Argentina, Estudiantes players failed to adjust their style of play to different systems.

The specter of Estudiantes also loomed large for AFA when it came to safeguarding the ethics of professional fútbol. The club’s increasing reputation as a dirty team, willing to do what was necessary to win, ran contrary to the Onganía government’s rhetoric of order and morality. When AFA interventor Armando Ramos Ruiz hired recently retired Racing player Humberto Maschio in 1968, the goal was to instill an attacking style with the national team. To this end, Maschio purposely omitted players from Estudiantes. Some felt that the omission was due to the intense rivalry between Racing and Estudiantes in recent years when Maschio was still a player. Others believed that Zubeldía did not want his players to join the national team at the expense of the club. Speaking to reporters, Maschio questioned whether any Estudiantes players even desired to play for the national team.

After a series of unconvincing exhibition matches against Chile and Paraguay in 1969, Maschio and Ramos Ruiz resigned, nearly four weeks prior to the first qualifying match for the 1970 World Cup. Government officials were determined to salvage

---

96 One of the “carasucias” of the 1957 Campeonato Sudamericano, Maschio returned from Italy in 1965 to retire as a player with Racing and was part of the 1967 world championship squad.
Argentina’s qualification process at a time when the massive uprisings in Rosario and Córdoba threatened to explode into further protests against Onganía’s regime.

Maschio and Ruiz were casualties of a regime’s determination to avoid the ultimate embarrassment: the failure to qualify for the World Cup.99 What should have been easy results for Argentina became losses to both Perú and Bolivia in August of 1969, with the match in La Paz turning particularly ugly among players and local police.100 El Gráfico proclaimed the match a “disaster” because Bolivian players outplayed the Argentines, not simply because of the fights on the field.101 Argentina’s situation worsened after a loss in Perú, followed by a narrow victory against Bolivia back in Buenos Aires. A draw at home against Perú sealed Argentina’s fate. Argentina failed to qualify for the World Cup finals for the first time in the nation’s history.102

Argentina’s failure in 1969 was on par with the “disaster” of Sweden. It was a debacle so profound that it brought into question the entire experiment with fútbol moderno. Argentina’s absence from the World Cup was damning on other levels as well.

First, the 1970 World Cup was a reminder that Argentina had lost to its third bid to host

99 The AFA chose not to let the Argentine national team participate in the qualification process for the 1938, 1950, and 1954 World Cups. The world’s governing body, FIFA, cancelled the tournament between 1939 and 1949 due to the Second World War.
100 Jorge Llistosella, “Qué has hecho tú en La Paz, Argentina?,” Primera Plana, August 5, 1969, 61-62. A reason for concern was the recent history between both national teams. In a World Cup qualifying match in 1957, Argentine and Bolivian players came to blows on the field. Six years later, Bolivian fans and police attacked Argentine players and journalists during a match in the 1963 Copa Sudamericana. It is no surprise, then, that tempers flared again in 1969. Bolivian fans began throwing objects in protest to Argentine physicality on the field. Local police intervened and, according to press reports in Buenos Aires, landed a few punches and kicks on Argentine players and reporters. (For coverage of previous matches with Bolivia see: Félix Fráscara, “45 minutos de oprobio,” El Gráfico, November 1, 1957, 4-9 and El Veco, “Página negra en Cochabamba,” El Gráfico, March 20, 1963, 6-13.)
the game’s premier tournament to Mexico (after also failing to out-bod Chile for the 1962 edition). Second, the national team’s elimination came at the hands of “lowly” Bolivia and Peru. That the decisive match took place in Buenos Aires only compounded matters even more, by failing to qualify in front of the local fans and the unforgiving national press corps.

Perhaps the worst aspect of Argentina’s failure to qualify for Mexico 1970 was that the eventual winner was Argentina’s closest rival, Brazil, now the world champion for the third time since 1950.¹⁰³ The underlying racial component at hand are also worth noting. Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil were all nations of predominantly darker complexion. Racial discourse in Argentine fútbol always maintained certain ambivalence towards people of darker complexion. On the one hand, dark-haired “morochos” and images of Argentine players as Indians was a useful metaphor when contrasted with Europeans in the 1920s.¹⁰⁴ But when the “others” were not European, and were instead rival South American countries, constructions of national identity in Argentine fútbol switched, emphasizing Argentina’s European roots.¹⁰⁵ Brazil’s triumph, and the manner in which its national team earned praise around the world, as perhaps the greatest squad in history, was a reminder for Argentines that any notion of an Argentine superiority in fútbol was clearly unfounded.

¹⁰³ Ezequiel Fernández Moores, Breve historia del deporte argentino (Buenos Aires: Editorial El Ateneo, 2010), 166.
The Fall of Estudiantes de La Plata

Estudiantes’ success in the late 1960s proved to be a double-edged sword for the government. President Onganía’s embrace of a “smaller” club team from La Plata as national heroes was a tacit acceptance of its “win at all costs” mentality. Critics in the national and foreign press, however, questioned the celebration of players who feigned injury to kill time, regularly intimidated referees over adverse decisions, and exploited any advantage that was not explicitly prohibited by AFA or FIFA rules. The team’s reputation as “aguerrido” (war-like) became less desirable over time, amid growing social unease and hostility to the authoritarian government.106

Comments made by Estudiantes players shifted public opinion against them as well. In an interview after the decisive third match of the semifinals of the 1969 Copa Libertadores, Luis Ubiña revealed that teammates agreed beforehand to put rival players from Uruguayan side Peñarol on the ground:

“We took from them the first game by playing fútbol; in the second, we lost, and Peñarol played dirty. Dailies and radio stations from Montevideo said that they had passed us by, that Peñarol had won like machos. We got together and decided that, in the tiebreaker, everyone who said those things were going to have to shut their mouths. We all sought out [Peñarol’s] Tornillo Viera, who had played like a madman, and we left him on a stretcher. Afterwards, even though we tied without goals, all of those Uruguayan liars stayed quiet.”107

106 Cirelli, interview.
107 “Fútbol como antes, más que antes,” Primera Plana, May 27, 1969, 63. (“El primer partido se lo ganamos jugando al fútbol; en el segundo, perdimos, y los de Peñarol jugaron sucio. Los diarios y las radios de Montevideo dijeron que nos habían pasado por arriba, que Peñarol había ganado de macho. Nosotros nos reunimos y quedó decidido que, en el desempate, todos los que dijeron esas cosas se iban a
Notice how Ubiña characterized the Uruguayans, as “mad men,” “liars,” and as people who “played dirty.” By contrasting his team to the “savage” Uruguayans, Ubiña justified the actions of Estudiantes. Moreover, the end justified the means as Estudiantes advanced to the final of the South American tournament.

For Bilardo, the emblematic “caudillo” of the team, winning mattered above all else. The lack of talented players at Estudiantes, he insisted, made his team fearful when playing against the world’s best club teams. But rather than be controlled by fear, Bilardo believed that Estudiantes used fear as a way to gain a psychological advantage over opponents: “[we play] to run hard and put in [strong tackles], to bite and be ‘annoying’.” Instead of acting out of irrational impulses, Bilardo admitted that his team knew when they should tighten the screws and when to loosen up by reading the faces of their opponents and “their willingness to keep on fighting.”

Despite the criticism, Estudiantes’ style of play was effective. The provincial club from La Plata not only became world champion in 1968, but it also repeated as South American champions the following year. It was important, then, for Estudiantes to succeed in the 1969 Intercontinental Cup against European champion AC Milan in order
tener que tapar la boca. Al Tornillo Viera, que había metido como un loco, lo buscamos todos y quedó en cama. Después, aunque empatamos sin goles, todos aquellos mentirosos se quedaron callados.”)

108 (“…pensamos que somos un equipo para corer y meter, para moder y ser ‘fastidiosos’…”) The translation of this quote is difficult due to a particular jargon developed in Argentina for approaches to fútbol. “Meter la pierna”, or to stick a leg in”, meant a hard tackle. “Morder”, or to bite, meant to put some “sting” into these tackles. Another term Bilardo used, which had become commonplace in popular discourse, was “salir matando” (to come out and kill).

Carassai points to the late 1960s as a moment when advertisements in decidedly middle class publications employed images and lexicon of violence. In large part, the social unrest and growing foment among students (and later terrorist groups) seemed to de-sensitize Argentines, who saw no problem in consuming violence through advertisements. See: Carassai, “The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Violence, Political Culture, and Memory (1969-1982).”

to validate its place in international football. If it repeated its triumph against European
opposition for a second year without major controversy, Estudiantes’ achievement would
show that coaches like Zubeldía were correct in moving away from the traditional style of
play to something more “modern.”

The backdrop for the 1969 Intercontinental Cup involved months of growing
social unrest and protests against the military government of President Onganía. Between
May and September of 1969 the political winds in Argentina changed. The rise of broad
labor alliances like the CGT de los Argentinos facilitated mass protests by workers who
saw the gains they achieved under Peronist rule dwindle over the last decade.110 Citing
over 1.5 million unemployed workers, and infant mortality rates similar to
underdeveloped countries (especially in remote areas of Argentina), the CGT de los
Argentinos blamed the Onganía government of ignoring workers in favor of the oligarchy
and multinational companies.111

Young demonstrators, mostly from middle-class families, also protested against
the military regime along leftist ideological lines. In the wake of Che Guevara’s death,
the massacre of Mexican youth at Tlatelolco, and violent confrontations between police
and youth in Paris and the U.S. in 1968, young Argentines joined workers in a fight for

110 Adrián Gustavo Zarrilli, “Estado, economía y sociedad en la Argentina entre 1966 y 1983,” in Estado,
sociedad y economía en la Argentina (1930-1997), ed. Noemí M. (Noemí María) Girbal-Blacha (Buenos
Aires: Editorial Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2004), 194. Zarrilli sees the government’s economic
policies as specifically aimed at weakening the advantages labor unions gained under Perón. Such
policies were designed to produce an “institutional and political discipline” for the working class. In
order for them to work, economic policies targeting laborers had to be drastic.
111 CGT de los Argentinos, “Mensaje a los trabajadores y el pueblo argentino–Cuadernos de Marcha, N°
71,” in Bajo el signo de las masas, ed. Carlos Altamirano, vol. VI, Biblioteca del pensamiento argentino
social justice against a government they viewed as repressive. Their moral opposition to the Onganía government was not too dissimilar from the emphasis by Latin American clerics on lessening the suffering of the poor. What began as a reform at the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s became a call to end the violence plaguing Latin America at the 1968 Bishop’s Conference in Colombia. Clerics denounced the government-sanctioned violence toward citizens that was becoming common in many countries.

The Onganía government, which justified its coup in 1966 through the need to restore order and morality to the country, now found serious opposition to its rule on ethical grounds. In May of 1969, strikes took place in Rosario, Córdoba, Santa Fé and on university campuses—mirroring similar student movements in the United States and Europe. Protests turned violent as protestors attacked police stations and other government offices leaving two dead.

The situation reached a crescendo in Rosario on the 20th of May when protestors took partial control of the city. Further confrontations with police left two hundred injured, three fatalities, and twenty-three students arrested. As historian Marina Franco notes, the use of violence as social protest in Argentina was not only in line with the political climate of the late 60s in many parts of the Western world, it was also the

---

113 Romero, A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century, 185–186.
115 Ibid., 14-18.
product of unresolved tensions since the Peronist era.116 Argentines across the social spectrum blamed the deaths of the three students in Rosario on the government’s excessive use of force.117 The CGT de los Argentinos and other unions organized large-scale strikes for May 30th in Córdoba to protest the state’s actions.118 After police officers killed a worker from the IKA-Renault plant, news spread quickly. Protestors overwhelmed the police and momentarily took over large parts of Córdoba. The Onganía government blamed communist forces and the revolutionary left, sending military forces to retake Córdoba. Violent images appeared across media outlets and reports of at least fourteen deaths stunned the general public.

Whether or not leftist rebel groups orchestrated what became known as the Cordobazo, images of state-directed violence on television raised doubts about the government’s ability to defend the social order and morality of the nation. Mónica Gordillo sees the Cordobazo as the first of two events in 1969 when insurrectional forces began to take center stage in Argentina through a “cycle of protests.”119 The second major upheaval occurred in Rosario between September 16th and 17th when nearly 10,000 people took to the streets to demonstrate.120 Chants of “Argentina” and “Perón” ran through the streets and in front of police and military barricades. Ongania ordered

116 Franco, Un enemigo para la nación, 301.
117 “La semana trágica de Juan Carlos Onganía,” Primera Plana, May 27, 1969, 18. Interviews published in Primera Plana asked Argentine men and women, from various parts of the country, who was to blame for the violence.
118 James, Resistance and Integration, 222.
massive military intervention and a ban on any organized manifestations as a way of limiting zones for protest. With orders to prevent clashes with protestors, military forces retook the city on the 17th with minimal civilian injuries. Hard-line factions within the military favored the use of force to deal with subversive elements in society. Rumors spread of the state’s use of indefinite detainment, torture, and murder to quell the so-called “subversive elements” of society. These reactionary measures incited more opposition to the Revolución Argentina by the early 1970s. Montoneros and other guerilla groups soon emerged, expanding violence and terror throughout the country.

The rapid succession of the Cordobazo and Rosariazo signaled the beginning of the end for the Revolución Argentina. They also explain why the Onganía government was now cautious of supporting Estudiantes, which left for Italy just weeks after the Rosariazo. In light of the growing incidents of violence on the streets of Argentina, Estudiantes’ physical and often violent style of play proved to be a risky association for politicians and military leaders. No government dignitaries or officials from AFA traveled to Ezeiza Airport to send off Estudiantes before its match in Italy.

Estudiantes saw the 1969 Intercontinental Cup as an opportunity to prove its

---

121 “Otra semana violenta,” *Panorama*, September 23, 1969, 6-9. Destruction of property was estimated at around 1,500,000,000 pesos according to the article.
122 “Onganía: Mes 40, hora cero,” *Panorama*, September 30, 1969, 6-9; Gordillo, “Protesta, rebelión, y movilización: De la resistencia a la lucha armada, 1955-1973,” 360.; Franco, *Un enemigo para la nación*. Franco’s work is part of a re-assessment of the military’s war on what it deemed as Argentina’s “subversive elements.” Although scholarly attention to the “Dirty War” has largely looked at the period from 1975 to 1983, Franco argues for a *longue-durée* approach whereby the tactics used by the military actually began under Onganía on a limited scale. The junta that took over in 1976 was led by officers who felt that an excessive use of force against elements of Argentine society was not only necessary, but should have been put in place after the Cordobazo and Rosariazo. By not stamping out dangerous leftist ideas in 1969, previous military leader were partly responsible for the subsequent turmoil and rise of guerrilla groups in the early 1970s.
critics wrong and dispel any notion that their style of play had somehow caused a moral decay in Argentine fútbol.\textsuperscript{123} Many, however, doubted whether Estudiantes was capable of playing a clean game—especially when the Italian champions, AC Milan, were the new masters of the catenaccio system.\textsuperscript{124} The first leg of the 1969 Intercontinental Cup, a resounding 0-3 loss for the Argentine champions, gave critics of Estudiantes plenty of fodder. Italian news outlets focused on the Argentine club’s violent style of play. “Moral disqualification” wrote the \textit{Gazzetta dello Sport}, which described Zubeldía’s team as “inhumane.” European newspapers observed that the dirty tactics by Estudiantes only surfaced when Milan’s victory seemed inevitable towards the end of the game. The foreign press lamented the provocation, dirty play, and “useless brutalities” of Estudiantes, which was no surprise after Argentina’s “poor behavior” at the 1966 World Cup.\textsuperscript{125}

The three-goal loss to AC Milan was somewhat reminiscent of Argentina’s 1-6 loss to Czechoslovakia in 1958.\textsuperscript{126} Like the “disaster” in Sweden, Estudiantes would be returning home to face critics. But unlike 1958, television broadcasts in Argentina exposed Estudiantes’ failure and violent behavior on the field to a national audience. It was an almost feral response to humiliation influenced by the knowledge that friends and family back home were witnesses to their shame. If they were going to lose, Estudiantes

\textsuperscript{124} “La carga de los valores taponados,” \textit{Panormama}, September 30, 1969, 62. AC Milan’s head coach, Nereo Rocco, was among the earliest pioneers of the \textit{catenaccio}, even before Helenio Herrera at Inter Milan.
\textsuperscript{125} Excerpts from the European press reprinted in \textit{La Nación}, October 10, 1969, 20, included \textit{Corriere della Serra}, \textit{Corriere dello Sport}, and the French daily \textit{France Soir}.
\textsuperscript{126} Archetti, \textit{Masculinities}, 162.
players figured that it would at least be productive to intimidate their rivals and let them know that a second humiliation in Argentina would not be acceptable. At minimum, matching the Italians’ level of physicality was a defense of honor by athletes who prided themselves as being able to out-work any opponent.

One of the more damaging critiques back in Argentina was that maybe the Europeans were right about the savagery of fútbol players and, by extension, of Argentine society. Some wondered if Ramsey's description of Argentine players as “animals” rang true. Similar to how middle-class journalists and fútbol officials in Chile defined what were acceptable forms of aggression through their public commentaries, porteño journalists understood aggressive behavior as a sign of masculine prowess as long as such physicality remained within the norms of the sport. Thus, virility and self-restraint were indicators of a civilized society, whereas negative forms of aggression in fútbol revealed a primitive people. When Europeans labeled Argentines as “animals,” “beasts,” or “savages,” it was a suggestion that they were uncivilized and uncultured. And that suggestion mattered a great deal to a middle class who did not see itself in such terms but acknowledged the growing social tensions in the country.

The second match of the 1969 Intercontinental Cup became a notorious chapter in the history of Argentine fútbol and changed the relationship between fútbol and the state.

127 “Clarita” remarked that the level of violence and the lack of respect on television was “too much.” She felt that the violent behavior was not enjoyable to watch and worried about her grandchildren emulating uncivilized models like some fútbol players. Clarita, interview.
129 Elsey, Citizens and Sportsmen, 26. Matthew Karush explores a similar association during the 1920s, when fútbol officials in Argentina worried about the inclusion of dark-skinned savages into the sport, only to appropriate the Indian as a symbol of prowess when playing against European teams See: Karush, “National Identity in the Sports Pages: Football and the Mass Media in 1920s Buenos Aires.”
The pressing questions for fans were whether Estudiantes was the type of team constructed to overcome a three-goal deficit, and if it was capable of winning and playing a clean game. The final result of the match actually favored Estudiantes; but despite the 2-1 victory by the Argentines the aggregate score over two matches left AC Milan as world champions.

The game was fast-paced and atypical of the style preferred by Estudiantes. The team pushed forward from the outset looking for a quick goal to close the three-goal deficit. Estudiantes also played with only two or three defenders as Zubeldía added extra players on offense. This gamble left the Argentines exposed to AC Milan’s counterattacks numerous times and resulted in a series of fouls by Estudiantes players frantically recovering on defense. Desperation set in when AC Milan scored first. Estudiantes players shoved their rivals in a rush to quickly put the ball back in play. Cameras also captured several of them striking the Italians when the referee turned his back, hoping to provoke them into retaliating. Goalkeeper Alberto Poletti, for example, kicked the back of an injured player on the ground. Two goals by the locals, a minute apart at the end of the first half, breathed new life into the game. As the minutes ticked away, the frenetic pace established by Estudiantes backfired. The referee expelled defender Ramón Aguirre Suárez—easily guilty of committing the most fouls during the match—for breaking the nose of AC Milan’s Néstor Combin with a flagrant elbow. With minutes remaining, the referee dismissed a second player, Eduardo Manera for punching

an opponent away from the ball.\textsuperscript{132}

The most egregious episode took place after the match. Already chastised by the local broadcast announcers for several instances of incomprehensible behavior, Poletti attacked AC Milan players and staff as they celebrated their triumph.\textsuperscript{133} Fans began to throw objects onto the field. Several Italian club officials and other foreign guests suffered minor injuries in the mayhem.\textsuperscript{134} Upon their return to Italy, AC Milan players and coaches admitted that they had never seen such behavior. Coach Rocco echoed Alf Ramsey’s sentiment from 1966 by describing the Argentine players as “bestias.”\textsuperscript{135}

According to most observers, the match at La Bombonera was a black eye for Argentine fútbol and for the country as a whole. The behavior of several Estudiantes players exhibited a form of masculinity now unmistakably “animalistic.”\textsuperscript{136} In an era when the Onganía government struggled to maintain social order, the display on the field seemed excessive. Middle-class Argentines were especially sensitive about foreign perceptions of Argentine society and wondered if Estudiantes was the ideal representative of the nation, as many had claimed after its world championship in 1968. Journalists lamented how the actions of several Estudiantes players single-handedly undermined any sense of Argentine progress and modernity to a world watching on television. A writer

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. Milan players, perhaps as a matter of self-defense, pride, or both, began to respond in kind to the hard tackles they received throughout the match; see: “Lo que no se borra,” \textit{La Nación}, October 24, 1969, 19.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{134} “Un día de gran agitación,” \textit{La Razón}, October 24, 1969, 18.

\textsuperscript{135} “Los técnicos explican,” \textit{La Razón}, October 23, 1969, 19.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{La Razón} interviewed people on the streets for their reaction to the match, which included a remark from Lucrecia Lubarym 23 years old, whose thoughts after watching the match on television reminded her of the “animal” label attributed by the English three years prior. See: “La Voz de la calle,” \textit{La Razón}, October 24, 1969, 19.
for Clarín lamented that one violent night at La Bombonera set back years of development and undermined the role of sports as a constructive force in society. 137 Sports writers called for a clean break—“a fútbol revolution, especially moral”—that would restore order to the sport. 138

Media coverage in the television age colored perceptions about morality and civility in fútbol. Media outlets on both sides of the Atlantic published graphic images of Combin’s bloodied face (figures 79-80). As an Argentine who played professionally for AC Milan, Combin wondered if he was selected for abuse because he was, as Estudiantes players claimed, a vendepatria (traitor). 139 Whereas Argentine papers reprinted negative comments from the European press in previous years to gin up nationalist outrage, this time European opinions appeared to be a validation of a truth that was unavoidable: “another black evening for world football”; “[overt] machismo”; “savage bestiality”; “a manhunt”; “an example of judo, karate, boxing, but little fútbol.” Perhaps the most damning headline simply read, “the English were right…animals.” 140

137 “El deporte y la conducta,” Clarín, October 24, 1969, 16.
138 “La ley y el orden,” Clarín, October 24, 1969, 49. Sebastián Carassai’s analysis of various polls conducted in Argentina in 1971 shows that the idea of a clean slate, or a new beginning, was popular among many middle-class Argentines troubled by the ongoing political unrest and social violence. Over half of the middle-class respondents in these polls—conducted in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, Córdoba, and Rosario—desired a total and radical change in society. See: Carassai, “The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Violence, Political Culture, and Memory (1969-1982),” 319–321.
What *El Gráfico* labeled as the darkest page in the history of Argentine fútbol was evidence for many critics that brutality and madness had overtaken the national game.\(^{141}\) *Clarín* went so far as to argue that such brutality was not spontaneous, but rather a tactical decision.\(^{142}\) *River* placed the blame for Estudiantes’ behavior on the current state of Argentine fútbol, calling the team “the sick child of a sick family.”\(^{143}\) Papers thus sounded the alarm on the “war-like” climate increasingly taking place on fútbol fields.

Video footage was also unforgiving. When Estudiantes players tackled their opponents from behind late in the match, audible chants of “Ar-gen-tina!” emanated from the stands. Cameras also captured Aguirre Suárez applauding fans as he walked off the

---


\(^{143}\) “Lo de Estudiantes,” *River*, October 28, 1969, 7. (“el hijo enfermo de una familia enferma”—the phrase “familia enferma” could also be translated as a “demented family,” or one that is “mentally ill.”)
field, expelled for his punch to Combin. In return, fans gave Aguirre Suárez a standing ovation.\textsuperscript{144} These images and sounds led \textit{Goles} to ask: “Is a victory worth so much?...Is the meaning of a conquest so significant that it should come to this?”\textsuperscript{145}

After months of violent protests against the military regime, Onganía acted quickly to make examples out of the Estudiantes players. He rebuked their behavior as “an embarrassing display of conduct” that “compromised and damaged Argentine prestige around the world.” Onganía felt that what happened at La Bombonera merited quick disciplinary action for the “few irresponsible [players]” whose actions provoked “the rebuke of all citizens” and adversely affected “the sporting culture of the nation.”\textsuperscript{146} Onganía’s comments perplexed Zubeldía, who questioned the motives of officials trying to make examples out of his players. “To think that last year, at this stage, we were models for the country,” said Zubeldía, “now we are delinquents. I remember perfectly when the President of the nation asked me, when he received us triumphantly on that occasion: ‘What can we do to maintain this team that is an example for all of us?’”\textsuperscript{147}

For the head coach, nothing had changed in his team, but the political climate was far different than in 1968.\textsuperscript{148} A month after the Rosariazo, the president’s public reproach

\textsuperscript{144} 1969 \textit{Copa Intercontinental}: AC Milan vs. Estudiantes.
\textsuperscript{145} Various articles from \textit{Goles}, October 28, 1969, 7-15. (“¿Vale tanto una Victoria?...¿Es tan grande el significado de una conquista como para llegar a esto?”)
\textsuperscript{146} “Serías medidas tras el partido con Milán” and “Lo que no se borra,” \textit{La Nación}, October 24, 1969, 1 and 19.
\textsuperscript{147} “O. Zubeldía: ‘Defenderé siempre a mis jugadores’,” \textit{La Nación}, October 25, 1969, 21. (“Pensar que el año último, a esa misma altura, éramos el ejemplo del país. Ahora somos delincuentes. Recuerdo perfectamente cuando el Presidente de la Nación me preguntó, cuando nos recibió triunfantes en aquella ocasión: ‘Qué podríamos hacer para mantener este equipo que es un ejemplo para todos?’”)
\textsuperscript{148} Match footage shows that with the exception of the three worst offenses, Estudiantes played in its typically aggressive manner. The referee called over twenty fouls against Estudiantes but this was not an absurd number at the time. Moreover, the most penalized players—Bilardo, Malbernat, and Madero—
was his attempt at re-establishing social order. Whereas the military had long
celebrated fútbol for its sportsmanship, its ideal masculine traits (athleticism, strength,
discipline, training, and respect for established rules), and its relative isolation from
political ideology, the players at Estudiantes were now transgressive figures. They skirted
the norms of decency, not unlike scoundrels typical of South American popular culture
like the Argentine compadrito, the Brazilian malandro or the Chilean barrio hero.

The three chief culprits at La Bombonera—Poletti, Manera, and Aguirre Suárez—
were not so lucky in escaping the ire of the Onganía government. AFA’s current
interventor, Oscar Ferrari, condemned the “shameful episodes” that affronted the general
culture of the Argentine people. He met with the body’s Tribunal de Penas
(Disciplinary Tribunal) before handing down severe penalties: Poletti received a lifetime
ban, while Aguirre Suárez and Manera received suspensions for thirty and twenty league
games, as well as five and three years from international fútbol (respectively). All three
penalties were announced to the press by Ferrari himself, rather than through a press
release. Through Ferrari’s statements, the military government used fútbol to send a
message that it would not tolerate further social disorder and subversiveness.

received no punishment from the government because their actions did not exceed what could be


150 Roberto Di Giano sees the 1960s, and especially the 1970s, as a moment of twin identity crises for the
military and for fútbol. This is an interesting connection addressed by Joseph Arbena in the early 1990s
and worth exploring in greater detail. See: Di Giano, Fútbol y cultura política en la Argentina, 8–9 and
Arbena, “Generals and Goles”; Elsey, Citizens and Sportsmen, 166. For a discussion of the Brazilian
malandro, see: McCann, Hello, Hello Brazil.


Although Estudiantes reached a third consecutive Intercontinental Cup final in 1970, the damage to its reputation was not easily overcome. Poletti unsuccessfully appealed his lifelong ban from professional fútbol. The new AFA new interventor, Juan Martín Oneto Gaona, denied his request citing the damage Poletti inflicted on the image of the country. Estudiantes was also a shell of its former self in the wake of the sanctions levied by the government. Its substandard league season left many fans surprised that it reached the 1970 Intercontinental Cup. Observers, both in Argentina and in Europe, wondered which Estudiantes would appear: the “animals” from previous years, or a team that had learned its lesson? Campeón asked a simple question in an October issue: “Has the Estudiantes cycle ended?”

Estudiantes’ two matches against European and Dutch champions Feyenoord exhibited a sterilized version of the Zubeldía’s team. It played like a team wanting to avoid the new disciplinary measures enacted by AFA. Moreover, Feyenoord had little problem dealing with Estudiantes’ physical approach. Teams in Europe had grown tired of the catenaccio and developed a style of play known as “total football”—perfected by Dutch side Ajax. Predicated on using all ten players on offense and defense, all of

154 “¿Terminó el ciclo de Estudiantes de La Plata?,” Campeón, October 14, 1970, 6.
156 “Técnicos: La mudanza de Don Helenio,” Primera Plana, May 28, 1968, 62-63. In “total football,” every player on the team possessed multiple roles and could switch positions based on how they read the game. At the heart of this approach was a short-passing game that kept the ball moving until a hole in the
whom rotated in and out of positions, “total football” emphasized possession of the ball capable of wearing down compact defenses. Feyenoord used a variant of this approach to great success in Europe and against Estudiantes. In the first match in Buenos Aires, Feyenoord proved to be the more aggressive team even after facing a 2-0 deficit early in the match. Estudiantes lacked the same “bite” as in previous years and allowed Feyenoord to tie the match 2-2 in the second half.\(^{157}\) *La Nación* complimented Estudiantes for a cleaner game, but with the caveat that the presence of military leaders must have influenced the team’s respectable behavior.\(^{158}\)

As many had predicted, Estudiantes faced an uphill battle in the second match in Rotterdam. Feyenoord won the match 1-0 and with it the title of world champions. Zubeldía’s men offered a better performance, but as the game moved towards its conclusion, Estudiantes players exhibited their physical style of play. Players were desperate to score a goal and force a third match. Feyenoord coach Ernst Happel qualified the players from Argentina as “gangsters.” Dutch papers like *De Telegraaf* and *Volkskrant* mocked the Argentines for playing like little lambs in front of its military leaders, but then reverting back to savages in Holland. They labeled Estudiantes as the opponent’s defense could be exploited. Ajax’s star player, Johann Cryff, introduced this concept at Barcelona, where its modern-day variant, “tiki-taka,” has been key to the club’s success.


“emperor of the corrupt game” and their style of play as anti-propaganda for the sport. In AFA’s Memorias y balance, the 1970 Intercontinental Cup received only a perfunctory mention. Even Zubeldía conceded that his team had to change its approach. Tragically, the storm surrounding Estudiantes proved difficult for the club's long-standing president, Mariano Mangano, who faced debilitating health issues and ultimately took his own life in 1970.

Conclusion

The winter of 1969 was a moment when Argentine fútbol was once again at a crossroads. Argentina’s failure to qualify for the 1970 World Cup and the savagery displayed at the Intercontinental Cup delivered a final verdict on the age of fútbol moderno. It was an approach that ultimately produced moments of success but at a heavy cost. The reputation of Argentine teams and players reached a low point at home and abroad. Goal scoring and attendance remained low; violence and a loss of civility were seemingly everywhere—from the vendetta climate on the field, to the death of fans in the stadium, and to the emergence of “barras bravas” as a powerful presence in the stands and within their clubs. Critics and advocates of the so-called “modern” style of fútbol

agreed that the sport in Argentina had changed to the point where aesthetic play and respect for the rules of the game mattered less than the outcome.

At the center of what critics considered the decay in fútbol was Estudiantes. Its players transgressed notions of honor and civility in fútbol. Zubeldía’s team became a model by which other teams developed their own “win at all costs”-approach to the game, willing to cynically take down any opponent if it prevented a goal. When the team from La Plata became world champions in 1968, fútbol and military officials praised its fighting spirit. A year later, however, the team crossed the line of acceptable conduct in a high profile match. Its players became criminals in the eyes of a regime struggling to maintain its authority. Officials arrested players and handed down severe punishments.

The fall of Estudiantes came at the same time that alternative models emerged at home and abroad. Teams like San Lorenzo and Boca Juniors in 1969, as well as European teams like Ajax, demonstrated that an offense-first approach provided success. The fatigue among Argentines with the lackluster quality of matches of the 1960s allowed some fans to welcome the fall of Estudiantes. Even one the club’s players, Raúl Madero, understood that the Estudiantes cycle had come to a close after the infamous night at La Bombonera in 1969, stating: “a rey muerto, rey puesto.” (“the king is dead, long live the [new] king”).

This same phrase applied to the rule of General Onganía. The Argentine winter of 1969 saw protests across the country, and the rise of Montoneros and other guerilla groups, which weakened him and led to his ouster in 1970.

The debate over playing styles, training methods, and tactical systems did not end with the fall of Estudiantes. Over the next two decades show that the discussion endured and even solidified into opposing philosophies embodied by two players of the 1960s: Carlos Bilardo and César Luis Menotti. As Argentines re-assessed their sense of identity after 1970, and what it would take to win on the world stage, Bilardismo and Menottismo offered two extreme answers to the enduring question that dominated sports pages after 1955: fútbol moderno or fútbol criollo?

Both Bilardo and Menotti provided Argentine fútbol great moments of success in the 1970s and 1980s, including the nation’s long-awaited triumph at the 1978 and 1986 World Cups. But it is also difficult to separate each coach’s tenure as national team coach from the political and social events of their time. For Menotti, a romantic at heart, who believed in the natural talents of the Argentine player, winning only mattered if players performed on the field in the right way. He believed that fútbol was an art form, the playing field a canvas, and the player a performer or artist. Yet, it was under Menotti’s tenure that Argentina endured its darkest period in history. A military coup in 1976 brought to power a brutal regime, known as the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, which killed tens of thousands of citizens in the name of combating subversive elements.
in society. The disparity between the liberal, philosophical Menotti and the ultra-conservative and repressive military junta was jarring.¹

Bilardo, on the other hand, was a protégée of Zubeldía and believed that winning was all that mattered in fútbol. Every trick, every act, and every hard tackle was justified in the pursuit of victory. Yet, it was under Bilardo’s tenure as national team coach that Argentine emerged from the shadows of the Proceso and the catastrophic war it waged against Great Britain over the Malvinas islands in 1982. The new democratic governments of the 1980s offered hope and a positive vision for the future. Bilardo’s teams, however, were physical, aggressive, and not averse to cheating when needed.²

Defenders of Menottismo and Bilardismo considered their preferred approach the embodiment of a truly Argentine style of play. Moreover, each approach originated from debates that came to a head in 1969, when the Onganía government arrested three Estudiantes players, the national team failed to qualify for the World Cup and two club teams produced an offense-first attacking brand of fútbol that provided a new (or old) model of how to win.

“Golden Age” Coaches and Nostalgia

Alfredo Di Stéfano was widely regarded as one of the greatest players of his time in world football when he retired in 1966. His fame began in Argentina as the youngest star of the famous *La Máquina* team at River Plate of the 1940s. Like Pedernera and Rossi, Di Stéfano left amid the 1948 players’ strike and signed with Millionarios of Colombia, before ultimately heading to Spain to play for Real Madrid. ³ With Di Stéfano anchoring the offense of Real Madrid, the team became one of the more dominant teams in Europe winning five consecutive European championships during late 1950s and early 1960s. Although Di Stéfano left his native country twenty years prior, Argentines followed his exploits in Europe and greeted his return to coach Boca Juniors in 1969.

For those with a nostalgic view of Argentine fútbol, his return was like the prodigal son returning home to save the sport. Di Stéfano maintained a visibility in Argentina through occasional visits with Real Madrid. After the end of his playing career, he moonlighted as a guest commentator in the Argentine press. His views on how the sport should be played, and what ailed fútbol in Argentina, suggested an unmistakable criticism of “anti-fútbol.” For Di Stéfano, the fear of losing shaped how teams like Estudiantes played fútbol. The number of midfield players a team employed was less important in his opinion than *how* coaches used players in a match. Di Stéfano preferred using two or three of the midfielders as secondary attackers; four defenders, one

³ Di Stéfano’s signing with Real Madrid remains a controversial topic in Spain. The rivalry between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona—perhaps the most intense in all of sports—is rooted in Spanish history, between Catalans and Castilians, and even linked to the Spanish Civil War. Much has been written about Di Stéfano’s initial signing with Barcelona, only to have Real Madrid swoop in and take the Argentine star in a dubious manner that still rankles Barcelona fans to this day. For a current, Catalan, view of the coup, *see:* Luque, “El golpe del siglo,” 49. http://t.co/CXgyPOgr.
defensive midfielder and a goalie should be enough for a defense. By pushing the remaining midfielders forward, Di Stéfano wanted to increase scoring opportunities. Or as he put it, “con goles es como se resuelvan los partidos” (matches are resolved with goals). According to Brazilian star Pelé, Di Stéfano’s Boca Juniors team in 1969 was the welcome return of Argentine fútbol. El Gráfico concluded that the era of fear seemed to be over and that a new period of attacking fútbol was on the horizon.

Older generations of Argentine fútbol fans shared Pelé’s nostalgia for the older, more traditional style of play that had seemingly disappeared. Club presidents, fully aware of the lucrative possibilities in signing former “cracks” as head coaches, hoped to generate a buzz in order to increase attendance, ticket prices, and club membership. With the exception of Néstor Rossi, who was one of the first in a long line of “caudillo” midfielders, the hires that generated publicity in the late 60s were all players who were known for their offensive abilities: Pizzuti, Maschio, Labruna, Di Stéfano, Pedernera, and even Didi—Pelé’s former Brazilian teammate on the 1958 World Cup winning squad. In the early 1970s, other players of the same pedigree, such as Sívori and Menotti, continued the return to the traditional style of play. For younger fútbol fans, these head coaches offered a link to a highly acclaimed past.

Along with Di Stéfano’s Boca Juniors team, San Lorenzo also played in a style reminiscent of the “golden age” of the 1940s and 1950s. These two teams provided a counter argument to how successful fútbol could be played, as well as a rebuke to “anti-

fútbol.” Zubeldía himself revealed that a degree of hostility existed from other coaches in Argentina. He singled out Labruna for supposedly feeding information to Estudiantes’ Peruvian rivals before a key match in the Copa Libertadores tournament. Zubeldía also accused Di Stéfano of meeting with AC Milan coaches before the 1969 Intercontinental Cup. By suggesting that Di Stéfano had offered advice to the Italians on how to defeat Estudiantes, Zubeldía questioned the patriotism of someone who spent most of his career in Europe, and who possessed a dual citizenship that allowed him to play for Spain on the international level. Accusations of “vendepatrias” were somewhat shocking, but not surprising to those already critical of Estudiantes’ brand of “anti-fútbol.”

**Menottismo and Bilardismo**

Di Stéfano returned to Spain at the end of the 1969 season citing family reasons; but his team’s success provided the space for another club from Buenos Aires, Huracán, to full embrace the traditional fútbol criollo style during the early 1970s. Coached by Menotti, the 1973 championship was celebrated by fans and journalists as one of the most attractive teams of the modern era. Menotti’s success at Huracán led AFA to offer him the head coaching position of the national team after Argentina’s less-than-convincing performance at the 1974 World Cup.

---

6 By 1969, few coaches openly admired Zubeldía’s Estudiantes. In one of the few examples I could find, Huracán’s newest coach, Benicio Acosta, stated his preference for a strong defense and an overall balance for his team. He argued that winning high-scoring games did not interest him because “no team would like to score six goals but receive 4.” Acosta preferred winning games to playing attractive fútbol. See: “Benicio Acosta: Conceptos: No dar ventajas–buscar resultados,” *Noticiero Huracán*, November, 1969, 6-7.

Menotti had long been a favorite of writers like Panzeri, who wrote effusive articles about the (then) striker of Rosario Central during his time at *El Gráfico* in the early 1960s. In their opinion, Menotti was reminiscent of the “cracks” of the past.\(^8\) Articulate, thoughtful, and opinionated about how fútbol should be played, Menotti’s philosophy about fútbol aligned with those belonging to the writers at *El Gráfico*. In an interview in 1962, he attributed his confidence as a striker to how “felt” fútbol and learned the game by playing, not by adhering to structured tactical systems.

Menotti was not a fan of “modern fútbol” or of the coaches who adopted it.\(^9\) His lucrative transfer from Rosario Central to Racing garnered headlines in 1964. According to *El Gráfico*, the sixteen million-peso transfer fee was a sign that clubs valued the rare “crack.”\(^10\) To be sure, Menotti received positive press in the magazine because he was always willing to engage in long conversations with reporters about the state of Argentine fútbol and his own philosophy.\(^11\) When Menotti failed to replicate his success with Racing, and later at Boca Juniors, fans and journalists described him as a fish out of water: the boy from Rosario incapable of making the transition to the capital city. Other publications like *Campeón* and *Gente y la actualidad* ridiculed his poor form.\(^12\) In 1966, *Gente y la actualidad* ran a satirical piece that poked fun at Menotti’s self-described


\(^12\) “César Luis Menotti: El tigre herido,” *Campeón*, June 17, 1964, 6-7. Menotti eventually lost the confidence of coaches at Boca Juniors, who sent him to the reserve team to see if he could rediscover his form. See: “Mataron a patadas la ilusión de presenciar un buen partido,” *Campeón*, September 23, 1964, 5; “Lo que va de Menéndez a Menotti,” *Campeón*, November 17, 1965, 3.
confidence in “knowing” how to play fútbol after he missed a penalty kick in an exhibition match against Real Madrid in Morocco. The author hoped that maybe Menotti would finally learn a lesson about humility from his failures.\(^\text{13}\) Tired of the criticism and state of professional fútbol in Argentina, Menotti eventually left for a brief spell with the New York Generals, before finding a kindred spirit in Pelé and joining his successful Santos team.

Despite his up-and-down career as a player, Menotti remained convinced in his philosophy about fútbol. He continued to see the game as a paradox, which required professional players to study each aspect of the game but then depend on their natural instincts and skill on the field.\(^\text{14}\) Remembering the 1960s, Menotti argued that the problem in Argentine fútbol was the tendency to adopt models that were “foreign to our characteristics. Every year we copied something different…instead of perfecting and amplifying the natural talents of our players, which have no match in the world, we wanted to replace them with those of others.” He described this tendency to substitute the “natural characteristics of the Argentine player, his way of seeing and feeling the game” as the same process that led Argentines to look towards Paris in the construction of Buenos Aires, copying even the smallest details and then trying to change the city with

\(^{13}\) D’Adentro, “El penal de Menotti,” *Gente y la actualidad*, September 1, 1966, 47.

\(^{14}\) “Teoría sobre el mundial,” *Así*, July 12, 1974, 20-21. After brief co-coaching spells at Central Córdoba (Rosario) and Newell’s Old Boys (Rosario), he became head coach at Huracán in 1972 and led the team to the national team a year later. Menotti’s team earned admiration from fans for its return to “la vieja,” or traditional style
every new trend. Nevertheless, he believed that the adoption of foreign styles did not change the character of the porteño, or the soul of the barrio.

As he prepared Argentina for the 1978 World Cup, Menotti understood that his approach would engender criticism but that in the end fans would appreciate the national team’s performance if it stayed true to what he saw as the ideals of the Argentine fútbol fan. Of course, Menotti faced additional pressure after 1976 when the military junta took over and escalated its plans to host a successful World Cup. Plans had already been put into place by the AFA interventors of the 1970s, most of who followed specific outlines on stadium readiness and promotional outreach per FIFA guidelines.

With less than two years before they welcomes foreign visitors, including human rights observers, military officials were adamant that Argentina host a successful tournament. The junta hired foreign consultants, promoted a positive image, and received support from FIFA and U.S. officials in attendance. Admiral Carlos Alberto Lacoste, the head of the organizing committee (the Ente Autárquico Mundial ‘78), even received a commission as FIFA Vice-President in 1980. Despite the government’s best efforts, teams like Holland protested in their own way. Star players like Johann Cruyff refused to travel to Argentina. Among those players who traveled to the tournament,

\[17\] For an overview of how the military government prepared for the 1978 World Cup, and the conflicting feelings among fútbol fans, see: Lia M. Ferrero and Daniel Sazbón, “Argentina ’78: La nación en juego,” Caravelle no. 89 (December 1, 2007): 139–155; Smith, “The Argentinean Junta & the Press in the Run-up to the 1978 World Cup.”
several of them spoke to reporters about what they saw as a repressive regime determined to use the World Cup as a way of improving its own image.\textsuperscript{19} Relatives of the thousands of Argentines who had disappeared also used the tournament to bring international attention to their plight. Argentina’s victory thus proved problematic for fútbol fans. Many fans wanted to celebrate this victory, which represented the apex of the national criollo style and the fulfillment of Argentina’s predestined triumph in international football—a concept that after the 1958 “disaster” in Sweden lost some of its potency.\textsuperscript{20} Other, however, felt conflicted about celebrating at a time when rumors of torture, genocide, and kidnappings were common.\textsuperscript{21}

Despite the obvious contrast between the military government and the liberal, philosophical head coach, Menotti continued at the helm of the national team program past his initial four-year contract. He helped guide a heralded new generation of talent to a world championship at the youth level, including one of the rising talents in world football, Diego Maradona.\textsuperscript{22} But an unimpressive performance at the 1982 World Cup led to Menotti’s ouster and the selection of Bilardo to guide Argentina in a new direction. Bilardo enjoyed success as a coach after he retired as a player in 1970. He served as

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} For a detailed look at the goals of the military regime in hosting the World Cup, and the complicity of the press, see: Smith, “The Argentinean Junta & the Press in the Run-up to the 1978 World Cup.”
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ferrero and Sazbón, “Argentina ’78,” 143.
\item \textsuperscript{22} The 1979 Youth World Cup in Japan was an important tournament in two aspects. One was Maradona’s performance, which cemented his status as the most talented player of his generation and earned him lucrative contracts going forward. The other was that many family members of the disappeared in the Argentine “Dirty War” used Argentina’s triumph, which coincided with the one-year anniversary of the 1978 World Cup triumph, to protest against the government and to demand some information about their family members. The mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo gained international attention and wanted foreign guests, especially human rights observers, to understand the political situation in Argentina.
\end{itemize}

365
Zubeldía’s assistant at Estudiantes, before taking over the head coach role in 1971. Like his mentor, Bilardo left to coach in Colombia a few years, before returning to coach Estudiantes in the early 1980s.

Bilardo’s success at Estudiantes made him an ideal candidate to replace Menotti, even if the men had diametrically different views about how to play fútbol. He surrounded the genius talent of Maradona, and another young “crack,” Jorge Valdano, with players from his Estudiantes squad, as well as from other teams that played in a similar manner. The result was a national team that competed in Mexico for the 1986 World Cup with a mix of the craftiness of fútbol criollo and the pragmatism of what had been known in the 1960s as fútbol moderno. The most noteworthy moment of the tournament took place in another quarterfinal match against England, twenty years after Ramsey accused the Argentines of playing like “animals.” Maradona opened the scoring with what is known today as the “Hand of God” goal, running after a ball in the air and punching it into the goal. His position obscured the referee’s view of the act, and Maradona promptly celebrated before the officials had any time to confer over what happened. It was a goal that typified the ingenuity of fútbol criollo and was representative of the Bilardista mindset that anything is permissible as long as the referee does not notice and it gives your team an advantage. The second goal was pure gambeta (a skillful dodge) and fútbol criollo. Maradona slalomed past six or seven English defenders before scoring what many consider to be the greatest goal in World Cup history.

The 1986 quarterfinal match against England was cathartic on two accounts. The
more immediate consequence was that victory on the fútbol field helped many Argentines, including Maradona, earn some measure of respect after Argentina’s war with Great Britain in 1982. As Maradona told reporters after the match, “England, in Mexico 1986, was more than anything about defeating a country, not a football team. We said, before the game, that fútbol had nothing to do with the Malvinas War, but intimately we knew that many Argentine pibes died over there, that they [British] had killed them like little birds…it was a lie that things were not mixed up, it was a lie…We blamed all the English players for what had happened…We were defending our flag, our pibes, that’s the truth.”

Yet, the victory over England—twenty years after Ramsey’s “animal” remark—also helped Argentines move past the stigma that its players played dirty, or that the team’s success in 1978 was a product of a “fix” by the military junta that had governed the nation between 1976 and 1982. The 1986 national team embodied the two competing philosophies of the past few decades by supplementing the creativity of Maradona and Valdano with a cadre of players preferred by Bilardo who were skillful but above all else strong. In fact, it was the 1990 national team that best embodied the tenets of Bilardismo. Argentina advanced to the championship game of the World Cup in Italy, but its style of play was not as convincing as in 1986. After losing the title to Germany, critics questioned the type of coaching Bilardo offered, which held that any advantage was permissible in pursuit of victory. For Menotti, Bilardo’s Argentina squad was an

---

affront to the aesthetic beauty he imagined as the national style of play.25

Reaching the championship game in three of the four editions of the World Cup between 1978 and 1990 was a remarkable achievement for Argentine fútbol. It allowed Argentines—perhaps for the first time since the 1957 South American Championship—to once again imagine themselves as the best “natural” practitioners of the sport in the world. Argentina’s achievements under Menotti and Bilardo have also cast a shadow since then, as success has not come so easily in international tournaments. The period since 1990 has also seen Argentina’s neighbors, Brazil, once again dominate international tournaments. Just as in the period after Sweden in 1958, Brazilian “futebol” has become both a model to emulate and an “other” by which Argentines have measured their level of play and sense of identity.

Ignored in the conversation over fútbol moderno and fútbol criollo is that both models have coexisted to some degree in Argentina. It is more useful to understand this debate less as a reflection of the actual play on the field, and more as the product of how sports journalists interpreted what they saw on the field. As Archetti and Pablo Alabarces have pointed out, sports writers constructed identity in the 1920s and 1930s to emphasize humility and the life of the barrios. This emphasis served as a contrast to the elitism and exclusivity of football played in British clubs. Sports writers like Borocotó and Chantecler, and later Panzeri and Ardizzone, attributed the grit and creativity of the Argentine player to the mentality required to survive in impoverished neighborhoods and

on the streets. Cunning and trickery consequently gave the criollo player a unique advantage in a match. Yet, players like Bilardo and Maradona also attributed illicit tactics to their creativity and cunning because they got away with breaking the rules of the game. Similarly, purists criticized the physicality and violence on the field in the 1960s; yet, players like Di Stéfano remembered that the so-called “golden age” of the 1940s had its fair share of hard tackles and sharp elbows.

Perhaps, then, scholars should balance the coverage of fútbol with an analysis of the play on the field that interviews with players and coaches and game footage can help provide. One of the goals of this project has been to employ a wide variety of sources outside of print journalism to offer a more complex picture. Still, this project is only the beginning; more analysis is needed about the language used in fútbol discourse and how it has evolved over time. A “linguistic turn” in academic studies about fútbol, as well as a more expansive analysis using materials largely ignored until now, will help produce a more complete analysis that shows us how notions of masculinity and “Argentineanness” changed over time.
Figure 81- This line graph shows the total goals scored in the Argentine league between 1931 and 1970. The total goals scored after 1950 declined dramatically, from 1,085 goals to 848 in 1952. A second major decline took place after 1960, reaching its lowest point in 1963 and 1964. The increase that took place from 1965 to 1968 is largely due to the increased number of matches each season. *Memorias y balance, 1931-1970* (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1932-1971).
APPENDIX B

Average Goals Per Match in Argentine First Division, 1931-1970

Figure 82—This line graph shows the goals-per-game average in the Argentine league between 1931 and 1970. The number of matches per season varied. Until 1940, the number of matches totaled 306 games per year. Between 1941 and 1964, the number of matches per year was 240 matches afterwards, with the exceptions occurring in 1950-1952 and 1966-1970. An abnormally high year for goal scoring occurred in 1938 with nearly 5 goals per game. Between 1931 and 1952 the typical fútbol match yielded between 3.5 and 4.0 goals per game. Averages plummeted to nearly 2.0 in 1963 and remained below 3.0 throughout the 1960s. See: Memorias y balance, 1931-1970 (Buenos Aires: Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, 1932-1971).
Figure 83 (top)- The "big five" dominated the Argentine league between 1931-1966, before the format changed under the intervention of Valentín Suárez. (Numbers correspond to the national league champions won by clubs).

Figure 84 (bottom)- Smaller clubs won national championships after the new split-season format began in 1967, which crowned two champions per season. This is also the first time when teams outside of Buenos Aires (*) became national champions. (Numbers correspond to the national league champions won by clubs).
REFERENCES

Archives


———, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires.

Biblioteca Nacional de Argentina, Buenos Aires.

Biblioteca del Congreso de la Nación, Buenos Aires.

Biblioteca del Círculo de Periodistas Deportivos, Buenos Aires.

Biblioteca del Museo Evita, Buenos Aires.

Biblioteca de la Asociación del Fútbol Argentino, Buenos Aires.

Films / Footage Consulted

Alton, John. Los tres berretines. DVD, Comedy, 1933.


———. *El hincha*. Comedy, 1951.


**Selected Bibliography**


Alabarces, Pablo. Dodaro, Conde, Mariana, Dodato, Christian, Fernández, Federico, Ferreiro, Juan Pablo, Galvani, Mariana, Garriga Zucal, José, Moreira, María


Balsa, Juan Javier, Adrián Gustavo Zarrilli, and Noemi M. Girbal-Blacha. Estado, sociedad y economía en la Argentina (1930-1997). Edited by Noemi M. Girbal-


———. “Restructuring the New Middle Class in Liberalizing India.” Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 20, no. 1 (2000): 88–104.


Horowitz, Joel. “Historia de fútbol, economía, y política en la Argentina durante la época de la posguerra.” presented at the Seminarios del PEHESA, Universidad de Buenos Aires, October 27, 2011.


Metford, J. C. J. “Falklands or Malvinas? The Background to the Dispute.” *International Affairs* 44, no. 3 (July 1, 1968): 463–481.


CURRICULUM VITAE

Rwany Sibaja is a professional researcher and educator of history. He holds a Master of Arts in History from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). His graduate research interests at UNCG focused on constructions of identity in modern Britain among football hooligans and post-war immigrants from the West Indies. In addition, he holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from Elon University (NC). Prior to his doctoral studies, Sibaja spent over a decade as a public school educator and curriculum director in North Carolina. He has presented at several conferences on a variety of topics, including US-Latin American relations, digital tools for the teaching and learning of history, and the influence of soccer on Argentine social and political history.