

4-1-2012

Review of *A History of the World Cup, 1930-2010* by Clemente Lisi

Paul Michael McInerny
Marquette University, paul.mcinerny@marquette.edu

LISI, CLEMENTE A. *A History of the World Cup*, UPDATED ED. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2011. Pp. xvii + 475. Photographs, glossary, appendix of statistics, appendix of World Cup records, and index. \$35.

Clemente Lisi's *A History of the World Cup* is a tribute to the world's most popular sport, soccer, and its famed tournament held every four years. The author details the growth of the World Cup from a fledgling tournament that at first begged teams to compete and which was halted for twelve years due to World War II to a multi-billion dollar operation watched by close to a billion people world-wide. Thirteen national teams competed for the first men's 1930 World Cup championship won by host Uruguay. Two hundred and five teams vied over several years to be among the thirty-two World Cup finalists in 2010, eventually won by Spain.

Lisi adds his final chapter on the 2010 tournament, and one of his best, to his well-received earlier work to produce the second edition. He captures the latest World Cup—from the *vuvuzela* horn blasting fans that plagued South African stadiums to France's questionable qualifying and eventual team collapse due to infighting, and from the numerous errant referee calls marring games to the demand for incorporation of technology to avoid future injustices.

Many of the highlights of 2010 reflect themes that run throughout the previous eight chapters. As Lisi chronicles the eighty years of the World Cup, he emphasizes the changes and decisions that influenced outcomes. Different playoff and seeding formats were used to adjust to the growing number of entrants making each tournament unique. Team tactics and strategies, roster selections, and game substitutions are credited with earning defeat or victory. Blown calls by referees, vicious play to counter superior offensive skills—first notable in 1934—and critical plays in games are vividly recounted as the backdrop for understanding each World Cup. Comparisons between 2010 and previous tournaments abound—South Africa hosting in 2010 helped unite the country after apartheid reminding readers of Chile in 1962 and Mexico in 1986 both of whom used the tournament to bring their people together after devastating earthquakes. Even France's handball in the qualifying rounds is reminiscent of Maradona's "hand of God" goal for Argentina in 1986; the difference in how the world reacted to each attests to the increased influence of technology.

Yet, the play of superior teams and individuals ultimately highlight the history of the World Cup. Brazil playing its *jogo bonito* (beautiful soccer) has appeared in every World Cup. Germany, Argentina, and the defensive-minded Italians have been dominant teams throughout the history of the tournament. Lisi also captures the excitement of the fans' emotional favorites who emerge at each tournament such as Cameroon in 1990, which became the first African nation to advance to the second round. The United States ascent in soccer is followed beginning with its role as fan favorite in 1950 and its stunning defeat of England resulting in the Brazilian fans carrying the players off the field in triumph. Tragic consequences add depth to the work such as the apparent murder in 1939 of Austria's

greatest player Matthias Sindelar who had avoided playing for Hitler's Germany and the killing of Andreas Escobar after Columbia was eliminated from the 1994 tournament. The tensions caused by rampant nationalism runs throughout the book.

Nineteen short biographies serve as sidebars throughout. The author highlights players who had an impact on World Cup competition over their careers and includes such stars as Ferenc Puskas, Bobby Moore, Pele, Mario Kempes, Paolo Rossi, Diego Maradona, Ronaldo, Fabio Cannavaro, and others. Not just the soccer triumphs but personal struggles make these interesting reading such as the numerous players who emerged out of extreme poverty or battled with drugs and alcohol.

The purpose of the book is to "recount the history of the World Cup to an American audience largely unfamiliar with the tournament's past" (p. xvii). Lisi, who describes himself as a "soccer junkie" (p. xiii) and is a reporter for the *New York Post*, has written a book that will be most appreciated by the avid soccer enthusiast. His approach to writing this book is journalistic; in his last three chapters, which are his best, ninety-two of his 106 citations are from interviews or news conferences. Earlier chapters rely on secondary sources; the bibliography is only a half-page long and makes one wonder what could have been written with greater historical research and analysis. Until that book is written, this work will serve any serious student of soccer.

—PAUL M. MCINERNEY
Marquette University

LYONS, ROBERT S. *On Any Given Sunday: A Life of Bert Bell*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. Pp. xv+328. Index, illustrations, and bibliography. \$35.00 cb.

One could idealize Bert Bell as the embodiment of a simpler era when professional sports were more about having fun than about multi-million-dollar player contracts and multi-billion-dollar television deals. After all, Bell in 1936 paid a mere \$4,500 to purchase the Philadelphia Eagles of the National Football League (NFL). He intervened to assist players in need and was genuinely concerned for their wellbeing. As NFL commissioner from 1946 until his death in 1959 he stored the league's records in a few manila folders. Robert S. Lyons' *On Any Given Sunday* rejects this easy nostalgia to position Bell instead as the man most responsible for transforming the NFL from a barnstorming league into today's sporting colossus. Lyons, a longtime journalist and author of *Palestra Pandemonium: A History of the Big Five and The Eagles Encyclopedia*, combines print sources, minutes from league meetings, and interviews with Bert Bell's sons to produce a solid study of this key figure in American sports history.

On Any Given Sunday does not aspire to be a complete biography. It dispatches Bell's first twenty-five years in ten pages and rarely scrutinizes his life outside of football. As Lyons makes clear, however, Bell's life was football. A product of a well-heeled Philadelphia family, he fell in love with the sport while an undersized quarterback at the University of Pennsylvania. After serving a few months in France during World War I he transitioned