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Sport and Society: The Case of Brazilian *Futebol*

Robert M. Levine

Following four matches in July 1929 by the touring Chelsea Football Club against Brazilian teams, Mr. Steele, of the British Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, officially recommended that such future visits be discouraged, since the local partisans had behaved outrageously, intimidated the referees, and, twice victorious, "claim as a nation to have beaten England."¹ Soccer, to be sure, has always engendered hyperbole, especially in Latin America, with its reputation for moat-surrounded playing fields and soccer wars. Brazilian *futebol*, known for several decades for its competitive brilliance, has invited its share of sentient analysis, from journalistic obsequities to solemn predictions that *futebol* as a safety valve for "animal energies and irrational impulses" would soon replace the need for militarism and revolution.²

At the juncture between society and politics, soccer in Brazil has always been tied up with social mobility and self-esteem. Its transition from a game for the urban elite to a commercialized national institution reflects eight decades of changing race relations, the maturation of popular journalism, and the creation of a vocabulary of symbolism rivalling (if not exceeding) popular music and folk religion in national impact.

Detractors call *futebol* an opiate, a circus through which the dominant class has manipulated the masses to sublimate their day-to-day misery to the fleeting success of a team or international championship. Admirers view the sport as a ladder for social mobility, a source of group identity, and a powerful agent for constructive national integration. Although both roles co-exist (and even complement one another), *futebol's* chief significance has been its use by the elite to bolster official ideology and to channel social energy in ways compatible with prevailing social values.

Soccer, first played in Brazil in 1864 by British sailors on shore leave, was introduced in 1894 by a Brazilian-born Englishman, Charles Miller, who returned from school in Southampton with

two soccer balls and organized a match between English employees of a railroad and a utility company. The game spread to the local German and Italian community, began to be played in English schools, notably MacKenzie College, and was popularized in Rio by another Englishman, Oscar Cox. Similar development occurred in other Latin American cities with foreign enclaves, especially in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina.

In Brazil, *futebol's* history falls into four broad periods: 1894-1904, when it remained largely restricted to the private urban clubs of the foreign-born; 1905-1933, its amateur phase, marked by great strides in popularity and rising pressures to raise the playing level by subsidizing athletes; 1933-1950, the initial period of professionalism; and the post-1950 phase of world-class recognition accompanied by elaborate commercialism and maturity as an unchallenged national asset.

Gilberto Freyre argues that soccer represented a sharp break with traditional upper class behavior, since the Imperial elite neither played games nor watched them.³ Football became *futebol* when the sport caught the fancy of the Brazilian clubs which had been established on the model of the clubs within the resident English, German, and Portuguese community. Rio's Vasco da Gama grew out of the chic Lusitânia club, which was established in 1898 by prosperous Portuguese merchants and bankers. Fluminense was founded in 1902 as a social offshoot of the British "Rio Cricket and Athletic Association"; from the beginning it screened prospective members, approving applicants only from the top echelons of *carioca* society. The Guinles, one of the wealthiest families in the elite, were its chief patrons in its formative years, just as the Prados and the Mesquitas played major roles in São Paulo's Club Atlético Paulistano.

Botafogo (1904), situated in the affluent neighborhood of that name, started out as a club for rowing—another sport introduced by the English. It drew its initial members largely from the graduates of two preparatory schools, Colégio Alfredo Gomes and the Ginásio Nacional Pedro II. Flamengo began as a rowing club in 1895 and took on *futebol* when a number of athletes defected from Fluminense in 1915.

Over time, team images shifted as neighborhoods changed and *futebol* broadened its appeal. Botafogo lost its upper-class patina, drawing, instead, supporters from the lower middle class of Rio's industrial suburbs, the Zona Norte. América Football Club (1905) attracted a following among old-time elite families from the interior who had migrated to the city, retaining their conservative values and being one of the few clubs where entire families attended its games. Flamengo, led in the 1930s by an aggressive president, Bastos Padilha, who outdid even Vasco and América in recruiting blacks, became the idol of non-whites, winning hundreds of thousands of lower class partisans not only in Rio but for Flamengo affiliates (or namesakes) across Brazil.

Fluminense, on the other hand, preserved its exclusivity as Rio's team of the upper class. Even composer Chico Buarque de Holanda, a thorn in the side of the military government in

the 1970s, maintained unflagging loyalty to "Flu," although the club was the last to admit non-whites as social members (in the mid-1960s) and remained closely identified with the repressive military regime. Rio's experience was by no means unique; in fact, parallel allegiances based on class and ethnic appeal evolved in every other city: Grêmio (Porto Alegre), Cruzeiro (Belo Horizonte) and the São Paulo Football Club as well as Paulistano in São Paulo played the same role as Fluminense; São Paulo's Portuguesa the same as Vasco da Gama; Juventus the same as Bangú; and Corinthians the same as Flamengo.

The social clubs themselves accepted two categories of members: an inner circle of voting shareholders; and social affiliates who paid annual dues. Club directorates set policy. They were elected by the shareholders, who often kept their influence in their family by willing their stock to their heirs. Team players themselves were drawn exclusively from the membership, in the European tradition of amateur sportsmanship. Youths chose their clubs on the basis of social standing. Athletes paid for their own equipment (players fancied uniforms from England), subsidized their own travel, and appeared at team banquets attired in black formal "smokings." When the teams in the 1930s formally abandoned amateurism and turned to hired players, strict rules were enforced to exclude the paid athletes from their club's social functions, much in the same way as golf and tennis clubs in the United States until the 1950s treated their teaching professionals. Coaches could be former players and even blacks, since they too were salaried and barred from membership.

Only two major teams departed from this tradition, Bangú in Rio and Corinthians in São Paulo. The first was founded in 1904 by English technicians at a Zona Norte textile mill, the Companhia Progresso Industrial. Its first team included an Italian, seven Englishmen, and a white Brazilian, but team members taught the sport to some of the factory workers, and Bangú began to draw neighborhood support and an image as a working-class team. In São Paulo, English railroad engineers and managers founded Corinthians in 1910, organizing a club in the traditional pattern and taking its name from a successful English team but recruiting athletes from Italian dockworkers and laborers already proficient in the sport. Corinthians won a reputation for aggressive play, probably a sign of the distaste with which their opponents viewed their ungentlemanly players even though Corinthians was only imitating the new form of semi-professional soccer organization emerging in England. On the pretext that the Corinthians athletes earned bonuses, or *bichos*, the *paulistana* city league expelled the club. But the growing popularity of the sport encouraged other clubs to bend their strict amateurism in search of new talent, and by the early 1920s most of the elite teams began to field players who would not have been admitted to membership a decade earlier. Some of the most aristocratic clubs, like Paulistano, held fast to the old codes, and, as a result, dropped from first-level *futebol* competition.

Journalists, excited by the symbolic connotations of match-ups

between intra-city teams, wrote enthusiastically about the sport. Increased *futebol* coverage coincided with growing newspaper circulations, which in turn were aided by rising interest in *futebol*. The success at the gate of London's touring semi-professional Corinthians club in 1910—the year of the founding of its São Paulo namesake—encouraged editors to expand the usual statistical summaries of matches; by 1913 stories about a single match often covered an entire page. Soon every major newspaper in São Paulo and Rio employed full-time soccer writers, and daily *futebol* newspapers appeared by the end of the decade.⁴

Interest in soccer quickly spread to private schools and clubs in the outlying parts of the country, in keeping with the trend during the Old Republic for hinterland elites to imitate urban culture as a hallmark of status. Even in backlands towns, athletes were *moços distintos*, youths from local leading families, although social distinctions were usually more relaxed than in the big-city clubs.

At the same time, *futebol* as a participant sport began to sweep the countryside, which became dotted with *peladas*, spontaneous pick-up matches usually played barefoot on makeshift fields or on the beach by youths from all social backgrounds. *Futebol* could be played year-round; it required little equipment; the poor could aspire to local recognition even if the established teams were the preserve of the affluent private social clubs.

Brazilian *futebol* so improved in level of performance that the return tour of London's Corinthians in 1913 saw local teams victorious, whereas the visitors had won all of their matches easily three years earlier. But European soccer, increasingly played by subsidized quasi-professional athletes, remained in a distant category. Brazilian club officials were slow to choose a national all-star team (*Seleção Nacional*) to meet an Argentine challenge in 1914, but the Brazilians managed to win, prompting a wave of national jubilation and adding to pressures for the clubs to soften the amateur code and broaden their recruitment of athletes. In 1919, the Brazilians won the South American championship in Rio, the first of many they would win in subsequent years, adding still more fuel to what by now was becoming a national passion.

Brazilian *futebol* caught on during its formative years because it complemented the expansive urban mood. From region to region, it provided a common language of experience to an increasingly mobile population lacking national symbols. The early twentieth century for Brazil was a time of accelerated cultural and intellectual stimulus. Typified by what has been termed the "congress phenomenon," meetings among elites exchanged information at every level from intra-state municipalities to international contact.⁵ *Futebol* fit into this picture. To its fans, it offered group loyalty, emotional release, and a technical knowledge which could be mastered without schooling or pedigree.

Journalists found in the sport a lively alternative to politics, which was dominated by entrenched state machines which usually held little interest for the public. But most clubs, jealous of their status and traditions, resisted pressures to upgrade their *futebol*

schedules or to recruit "ringers." Although significant change did occur during the 1920s in the direction of professionalization of *futebol*, amateurism prevailed throughout the decade, and the 1930 World Cup team, the first such international competition, dismayed Brazilian followers by faring badly. The quandary presented to club officials was a delicate one: not only were the desirable, potentially-professional soccer players to be found among the lower classes, but the overwhelming percentage of them were mulatto or black.⁶

True to the Brazilian tradition of class rather than racial barriers to social standing, the early *futebol* clubs did not bar non-whites either as members or as athletes, *per se*. While most team members through the 1920s were white, mulattos from socially acceptable backgrounds played without incident. When Antônio Prado Júnior took his Paulistano club on the first European tour by a Brazilian team, in 1925, one of its star players was his mulatto cousin, Joaquim, from the wealthy "black" branch of the Prado family. Darrell Levi relates an anecdote from the tour: at one of the matches, Antônio Prado sat with a French relative who pointed to Joaquim and asked for the name of "that monkey." "That is no monkey," she was told; "he is your cousin."⁷

Brazil's first national *futebol* hero, in fact, the athlete responsible for the 1919 South American Cup victory over Argentina, was Arthur Friedenreich, *O Pé de Ouro* ("Foot of Gold"), a coffee-colored son of a German-Brazilian merchant from Blumenau and an "almost black" mother. As a boy, Arthur played for São Paulo's Germânia club, where he was coached by Hermann Friese, a German soccer star who had emigrated to Brazil in 1903. Friedenreich transferred to a Brazilian team, Ipiranga, and at the age of twenty-two was chosen for the first *Seleção Nacional* in 1914.

Accepted by the elite, he was upset when, in pick-up matches between black and white players, he was chosen to play with the blacks.⁸ Like Joaquim Prado, "Fried" played most of his career for the aristocratic Paulistano club; on its 1925 tour he was acclaimed by European spectators who showed incredulity at his German name, his dark skin, and his elegant *futebol* style. When he retired from play in 1932, his club presented him with a house in São Paulo and a pension from the Companhia Antártica Paulista, São Paulo's leading brewery—an act which, given the fact that athletes were still not paid, indicated his team's gratitude.

Friedenreich and Prado, nonetheless, gained acceptance because of their family ties. Few non-white athletes could be found who met the still-stringent club membership requirements. From 1906 to 1922 in Rio de Janeiro, not a single team with a mulatto or black player won a championship match. By the 1920s all of the clubs pampered their athletes, providing housing and meals (*come e dorme*), and allowing wealthy members to slip bonus money to players considered deserving.

When clubs experimented with "ringers" they sometimes drew the ire of their members although the public clamored for better players. Rio's América club engaged a black, Manteiga, resulting in

the defection of a block of angry members to Fluminense. The definitive breakthrough came in 1923 when Vasco da Gama, its directorate frustrated by poor results during its team's first seven years, sent scouts to comb the working-class second division clubs of Zona Norte for prospects. When the 1923 season opened, Vasco fielded a black, two mulattos, and eight whites who, the press reported, "hardly knew how to sign their names."⁹ The venture worked exactly as the club had hoped: Vasco won the 1923 city championship—and repeated the feat in 1924.

The bold stroke electrified the *futebol* world and brought capacity crowds to Vasco's matches. There was another, less-welcomed side effect: given the long-standing Brazilian prejudice against Portuguese immigrants, Vasco's hiring of lower class athletes unleashed a new flurry of anti-Portuguese humor, this time with racist undertones. But when the press and the public enthusiastically accepted Vasco's quasi-professional team the die was cast: the *clubes finos* (elite clubs) had to follow suit or drop out of first division competition.

The most powerful threat to the tottering amateur ideal came in the late 1920s when European clubs, now fully professional, began to raid Latin American teams for talent, led by Italian clubs which had been exhorted by Mussolini to contribute to the new Roman Empire. Since the Italians accepted only players of Italian origin most of the first defections came from Argentina and Uruguay, where such players were in greater supply. But the lure of promised contracts proved enticing for Brazilians as well: as a result, Demóstenes Magalhães became (according to his new Italian passport) D. Bertini, and Benedito de Oliveira Marquês became Benedicto Zacconi, borrowing his new surname from his father-in-law.¹⁰ Stung by the raids, the Argentine and Uruguayan soccer federations accepted professionalism and allowed clubs to pay salaries to athletes, thereby adding still another lure to Brazilian talent.

All of this led the Brazilian Sports Confederation (C.B.D.) to reluctantly adopt professionalism in 1933, formally giving athletes the status of employees under the jurisdiction of the new Ministry of Labor. The change drove most of the remaining amateurs from the club teams, since they could not or did not want to compete with salaried professionals, about three-quarters of whom by 1940 came from the lower class.

The about-face was dramatic. In Rio, a Zona Norte team, Bonsucesso, fielded eleven blacks. The 1933 city championship was won, fittingly, by Bangú's team of eight mulattos, a black, and three whites; the *subúrbios* exploded in celebration. Crowd behavior became noticeably rougher, exacerbated by increased betting on games. Whereas mulattos were accepted without incident, some blacks were treated with hostility. Leônidas da Silva, who initially refused to leave Bonsucesso to sign with América, was taunted by América's fans with racial epithets ("moleque," "prêto sem vergonha," "negro sujo,"—Brazilian variants of "nigger") and threatened with lynching.¹¹ But by decade's end, all of the most exclusive clubs competed for black players, although Fluminense

and the more aristocratic clubs (not unlike the New York Yankees in the 1950s) fielded whites wherever possible.

The transition from amateurism to professionalism was helped substantially by the growth of radio in the mid-1930s, just as mass journalism in its infancy had accompanied (and fed) *futebol's* rapid emergence as the national sport before World War I. Playing quality improved as well. Teams outgrew their club facilities, which were replaced by large capacity municipal stadiums. Vargas-era federal legislation regulated the sport, creating regional federations, a system of appeals and arbitration and a feeder system whereby club profits from *futebol* by law were channelled to the state or federal soccer federations to be used to subsidize amateur sports, including junior soccer leagues. The quadrennial World Cup competition spurred club directorates to adopt European tactics and training methods, and, in a few cases, to import foreign coaches.

Individual player salaries remained low, although stars demanded (and received) higher wages at the major clubs. Vasco's *futebol* budget swelled to seven hundred contos in 1934 (\$175,000), and some clubs like Botafogo, faced by a financial squeeze, nearly went bankrupt. The C.B.D., made up of leading club officials representative of the national elite, displayed nervous interest in the racial composition of teams chosen to represent Brazil abroad. The *Seleção* chosen for the Rio Branco Cup (the South American championship) always seemed to have more non-white players than the Brazilian teams sent to compete with the Europeans.

International competition in the 1930s illustrated the concern with Brazil's "image." The C.B.D.'s president, Renato Pacheco, tried to keep Leônidas from playing for the 1932 South American Cup but he gave in to pressure from the press, and the "Black Diamond" led Brazil to victory. At the World Cup matches in France the two best blacks, Leônidas and Tim (Elba Vargas Lima), were without explanation kept out of the semi-finals against Italy, and Brazil lost, 2-1. In the consolation match, Leônidas (who had scored seven World Cup goals) was restored as team captain, and Brazil beat Sweden, 4-2.* In 1950, the *Seleção's* loss to Uruguay was blamed on three of its black players (Barbosa, Juvenal, and Bigode) and, as late as 1958, the C.B.D. hesitated before fielding a predominately non-white squad. Both Pelé and Garrincha, in the end the heroes of Brazil's first World Cup championship, were added to the *Seleção* only at the last minute by worried officials. Once again, public pressure, expressed through the press, helped overcome the C.B.D.'s reluctance.

From the beginning, literary and intellectual figures warmly endorsed *futebol* as a natural adaptation to the Brazilian environment. Olavo Bilac and Henrique Coelho Neto, founding members of the National Academy of Letters, ardently supported Fluminense. The modernists, searching for a national culture, embraced the

*A Rio chocolate factory responded by offering a "Black Diamond" candy bar.

sport. José Lins do Rêgo called the victorious 1932 South American Cup team members "mirrors of our social democracy," lauding the teamwork of the mostly non-white squad.¹² Gilberto Freyre placed *futebol* within his favorite paradigm of Brazil as tropical hybrid (European technology infused with Amerindian and African psychic forces). A champion of the aggressive yet elegant style of such blacks as Leônidas, Freyre declared lower class *futebol* to be "dionysian," in contrast to the inhibited "apollo-nian" skills of whites and Europeans.¹³ On this issue the *futebol* establishment, as we have seen, failed to concur, acknowledging publicly the contribution of the "dionysian" side of Brazilian *futebol* only when a succession of black stars—Fausto, Leônidas, Domingos da Guia, Tim, Jair, Zizinho, Didí, Pelé and others—led the Brazilian sport to international fame.¹⁴

Regarding athletes, a pattern quickly emerged once professional-ism opened the door to all comers; players, most of whom, as we have seen, were blacks and mulattos, were idolized when they were at the top of their game but discarded as quickly as their skills receded. The phenomenon affected not only rebellious blacks, like Leônidas da Silva, but "good" blacks, like Domingos da Guia, the first black to play for Fluminense, who, publicists said, "played like an Englishman," and who had been allowed to play in the 1938 match against Italy. At the height of his career in 1937 he had killed a pedestrian while driving but was let off, scot-free. Four years later he was sentenced to prison for carrying false identity papers. The 1938 World Cup hero was reduced to playing *futebol* with reformatory guards and other inmates.

Futebol evolved into a national industry by the end of World War II, closely regulated by the government. Newspapers and radio continued to boost its popularity. Urbanization, moreover, produced a major change: while directorates remained inner sanctums for the elites, club membership opened to the middle class, which was attracted by club social activities (Carnival balls, restaurants, swimming pools) and by the status now available to them for the first time. Membership swelled from a few hundred to several thousands by the early 1940s, and as many as 65,000 at Flamengo and 150,000 at Corinthians a generation later. Not only did *fute-bol* open horizons for the middle class but it affected the public at large. Rising interest enhanced group loyalty, a sense of intra-city diversity, and horizontal linkages among class groups in a society dominated by vertical and hierarchical ties.

By the late 1940s, the Brazilian sport, spared the terrible impact of World War II on European soccer powers, found itself on the edge of international supremacy. Brazil welcomed the 1950 World Cup matches to Rio de Janeiro by constructing the world's largest stadium, Maracanã, an awesome, modern structure with a total capacity of 220,000 spectators. To the chagrin of the Brazilians, as we have seen, Uruguay defeated Brazil in the final match. Thereafter, the early 1950s saw the rise of a remarkable Hungarian team which crowded Brazil from the limelight. But by the end of the decade Brazilian *futebol* was universally recognized for excitement and ballet-like elegance, and a source of national pride.

For the players, as Ilan Rachum demonstrates, *futebol* reflected "more of the old than the new." Coaches lacked authority and were subject to the whims of club directorates. The paternalistic *come e dorme* tradition persisted: athletes were housed in special barracks and kept under surveillance lest they partake in drinking or *macumba* rituals, practices believed common to (and harmful for) the lower classes. Salaries remained low. *Futebol*, now played professionally at hundreds of clubs across the country, bred journeyman athletes, itinerants who wandered from town to town seeking temporary contracts, often for a game or two at a time. Most soccer professionals found themselves unemployable by the age of twenty-eight or thirty, and legislation still provided inadequate pensions and no insurance against disability.¹⁵

At the same time, *futebol's* infrastructure grew. Clubs perfected recruitment techniques, sending their scouts to interior cities to sign the most promising youths, often ten or eleven years of age, to contracts, then guiding them through a network of junior and affiliated teams to the upper divisions in the major cities. Television, by the late 1950s, furthered *futebol's* reach and boosted revenues, although the clubs, forbidden from profits by law, passed proceeds to the national C.B.D., the regional federations, local municipalities, and to advertisers.

The only country to gain the World Cup finals (sixteen teams out of nearly one hundred) in every championship since the start of the series in 1930, Brazil reached the pinnacle of international success between 1958 and 1970, when it became the first nation to win three championships (1958, 1962, 1970), retiring the Jules Rimet Cup. During this period, salaries, at least for the very top players among Brazil's six thousand professional athletes, finally arrived at world-class levels. By the 1970s the country boasted an aggregate stadium capacity of nearly four and a half million spectators. The new era was symbolized by the electrifying appearance of Pelé, undeniably black and Brazil's most idolized national figure from the moment he stepped from the field as a seventeen-year-old as the hero of Brazil's victory at the 1958 Stockholm World Cup.

Five representative athletes whose career patterns illustrate some of the different stages of *futebol's* evolution are Fausto, Gentil Cardoso, Pelé, Tostão, and Afonso. Fausto dos Santos, a black, was born in 1908 in Codó, in rural Maranhão, a town which in the 1870s had become a place of refuge for slaves fleeing to the northeastern provinces which had abolished slavery. As in the case of many athletes born in poverty, Fausto's life is condensingly idealized by biographers: "He was born with the same primitive nobility of his people," João Máximo writes. "He lived to know glory, suffer at its hands, and to die of it, as poor and as Christian as he had entered the world."¹⁶

The boy's family migrated to the slums of Rio. A street athlete, Fausto, tall and thin, and somewhat of a lower class dandy, asked for a tryout at the Bangú factory in 1926 and was placed on its team. Once established, he switched to Vasco, the rich

Portuguese club which had broken the lower class barrier and which was riding high. In 1930 he was chosen for the ill-fated World Cup national *Seleção*, which was boycotted by the paulista soccer federations and which, as has been noted, performed badly. His statements to the press blaming his teammates' fear of their opponents intensified his notoriety.* His career was short and tumultuous, indicating that there was really no place for the "Black Marvel" (*Maravilha Negra*) in the *futebol* world of his day.

In 1931 Fausto abandoned Vasco during a tour of Europe and signed a professional contract with Barcelona; he said he was tired of under-the-table payments (*bichos*) and angered at the abuse dealt to him at home. Months later, after disappointing play, he left the team and turned up in Switzerland, where he signed another contract with a club called Young Fellows, but again he quit, plagued by poor health, and travelled home. His detractors attributed his return to homesickness and to his inability to adjust to Europe; his supporters noted that he had acted the way he did because of his lingering asthma, which later turned out to be pre-tubercular, and because he refused to abandon his Brazilian citizenship. As a professional signed to a foreign team, he was barred from the 1934 World Cup played in Italy. As a result, Fausto left Brazil again, spending seven months with teams in Uruguay and Argentina (Nacional and Peñarol). He returned once more for a final stretch with Vasco, then moved on to Flamengo, which was now developing its reputation as the team of the "people." Still aggressive, Fausto fought with club officials, and, in 1937, drew a fine and suspension. Now seriously ill, he managed nonetheless to play brilliantly for the first six months of 1938. When six months later, newly married, he died in a sanatorium for indigents, his Flamengo club refused to pay for his funeral.

Gentil Cardoso, known as the *Moço Preto* (Black Boy), was one of the few black athletes who near the end of his life publicly blamed racial prejudice for hindering his *futebol* career, which continued as a coach after he retired as a player. From 1926 to his death in 1961 he led more than twenty teams, including Fluminense in its prime years during the 1940s. But when he was replaced at the last minute as the head of the 1958 World Cup team by Feola, the *técnico* (coach) of the São Paulo Futebol Club, Cardoso complained bitterly, charging that "discrimination based on race [in Brazil] is a fact hidden by hypocrisy."¹⁷ Disappointed at his lifetime of low salaries (when he led Flu to its championship in 1946 he earned Cr\$2,500 a month, roughly \$50, as well as a bonus of Cr\$15,000 or \$300), he won one final victory: both of his sons became university graduates—one a lawyer, the other a physician.

Even in the 1960s and 1970s, blacks and mulattos continued to fare poorly once their *futebol* playing careers ended. Signed to contracts as adolescents, many were barely literate. Garrincha, a

*Other players blamed the cold, the food, and the dirty play of the Europeans.

mulatto who rose from the slums to three World Cup teams and whose colorful style brought him movie-star status, returned to poverty as soon as he fell from the spotlight. Four or five black ex-players who died soon after their retirement in the 1950s, including Leônidas's teammate Marisco, are presumed by many to have been suicides.¹⁸

Pelé's coronation as the "king" of Brazilian soccer in the early 1960s symbolized the readiness of the *futebol* establishment (and society at large) to shed its reluctance to exult in the brilliant personal *futebol* style which Freyre, in Fausto and Leônidas, had called "dionysian." Pelé's emergence as a superstar coincided with rising Brazilian ambitions in international soccer and with a new willingness among the elite to celebrate the black athlete as a point of national pride.

Pelé's story is well-known; more than a dozen biographies have been published in the last decade, making him the most written-about person in Brazilian history. Edson Arantes do Nascimento, the son of an itinerant *futebol* player, Dondinho, was born in Três Corações, Minas Gerais, in 1940. He grew up in Baurú, in the interior of the state of São Paulo. At eight he was playing in *peçada* matches with teenagers; at twelve he played with adults. In his first professional game he scored five goals; at one point in his career, against Botafogo de Ribeirão Preto, he scored eleven.

He was discovered by Valdemar de Brito, a scout who, after negotiating with Edson's father, offered him a contract with Palmeiras, the first-division club of the *paulista* Italian colony (the club was known as "Palestra Itália" before 1942), but when the youth, at fifteen, was treated the way the club treated other blacks, he refused to train. De Brito then brought him to Corinthians, but the same impasse ensued. Finally, he signed with Santos Football Club, a team struggling to achieve a national reputation whose reward would be international status as Pelé's career unfolded.

At sixteen Pelé led Brazil to the Rio Branco Cup over Argentina. A year later, held back in the early matches of the World Cup, he contributed significantly to victories over Argentina, Wales, France and Sweden. Once famous, Pelé displayed a shyness and personal modesty that endeared him to the public. Months after his triumph at Stockholm, he was inducted into the army; characteristically, he became a model soldier, never asking for special treatment. Army publicists pictured him in recruitment posters to enhance the image of military service, which, although obligatory for all young men, was easily evaded by upper-class youth. A year after his discharge, he turned down a lucrative offer to play professionally in Italy. In response, Santos tore up his contract and presented him with one guaranteeing him an unprecedented minimum of five thousand dollars per game, befitting his stardom. The Brazilian Coffee Institute formally named Pelé its international representative. His certification as a national resource was approved unanimously by the legislature and published, with fanfare, in the *Diário Oficial*.

The pinnacle of Brazil's idolization of Pelé came on the occasion of his marriage in 1965 to a white woman of German descent, Rosemeri Cholby. The couple had courted for several years but had rarely appeared in public; their wedding, by contrast, was blown up into an international event. Surrounded by press *papparazzi*, the newlyweds were flown to Germany, where they honeymooned as the guests of the president of Munich's Bayern soccer club. The publicity given to the racially mixed marriage underscored its significance: before the event, mixed marriages at the level of the elite were rare, and almost never between a white woman and a black man. Now a poor black could attain the highest social level and retain his black identity; indeed, it could be broadcast to the world.

Publicists carefully programmed Pelé's subsequent career. The "national resource" became a national figure: Pelé performed for European royalty; his one thousandth goal was commemorated by a postage stamp. The foreign ministry sent him on good-will trips to Africa, where he appeared in native dress. He endorsed dozens of commercial products, the first black to integrate an advertising industry which heretofore had portrayed blacks as Sambos and consumers as Nordics.

Sports writers proclaimed his blackness aggressively, even belligerently. Typical is Mário Filho's description of his early years:

Dondinho [his father] was black, dona Celeste [his mother] was black; his grandmother, Ambrosina, black; his uncle Jorge, black . . . his brother and sister, Zoca and Maria Lúcia, black. How could he shame his parents' color, the blackness of a grandmother who taught him to pray, his good, black uncle Jorge . . . his brother and sister, whom he was obliged to protect? Their color was the same as his. It had to be black. If he had not been born black he would not be Pelé.¹⁹

Several factors, then, converged to make Pelé the ideal role model for Brazilian blacks. First, he was a genuine hero, the greatest soccer player in the history of the sport. An unquestioning patriot, he allowed the *futebol* establishment to use his image to rally national pride and desirable civic values in a country characterized by cynicism among the affluent and profound personal alienation among the masses. He was appreciative, humble, and politically mute. He was an image-maker's dream. When asked by a foreign journalist if he sympathized with the plight of slum-dwellers, Pelé characteristically replied that God had made them poor; to him God had given athletic greatness, so that he might bring joy to the less fortunate. Queried, in 1972, about his country's military dictatorship, Pelé responded:

There is no dictatorship in Brazil. Brazil is a liberal country, a land of happiness. We are a free people. Our leaders know what is best for [us], and govern [us] in a spirit of toleration and patriotism.²⁰

What Pelé never implied was that blacks or the poor should aspire to the success which he had attained in their behalf, his message fitting neatly into prevailing Brazilian social values. When Mohammed Ali, then Cassius Clay, refused induction into the United States Army, Pelé publicly criticized him, recalling his own military service. In return, *civismo* (civic education) textbooks for schoolchildren invariably included his picture, not only as a sports hero but to emphasize teamwork and the virtues of hierarchy. Despite his departure for the United States to play for the Cosmos for a multi-million dollar contract (*futebol* purists in Brazil criticized his decision) and his legal separation from his wife in 1977, Pelé remained an idol even if some—especially upwardly-mobile Afro-Brazilians—came to view him as an Uncle Tom. In 1978, asked by the press his opinion of President Geisel's concept of "relative democracy," Pelé replied that the Brazilian people were too uneducated to vote and therefore benefited from the government's paternal authoritarianism.

The stories of two other *futebol* players, both white, represent quite a different career pattern. Tostão, born Eduardo Gonçalves to a middle-class *mineiro* family, rose from mascot of Atlético Mineiro, Belo Horizonte's Flamengo counterpart, to its first team in the mid-1950s, then moved on to Cruzeiro, its archrival. A physically small man whose success was attributed to his intelligence and conditioning, his career was brilliant but short, curtailed by an eye injury and, according to some, his excessive candor on the subject of *futebol's* exploitation of lower-class athletes.

Tostão used his clean-cut image and playing credentials (he was a star on the victorious 1970 *Tricampeonato*) to lend weight to his call for reform. He wrote a book about the *futebol* system and even allowed himself to appear in an autobiographical film instructively titled "Tostão: *Futebol's* White Hope." Disappointingly for opponents of the military regime who encouraged his willingness to speak out, Tostão downplayed his campaign once he retired in 1971 to enter the University of Minas Gerais. Asked by a team of women journalists in 1972 for his personal philosophy about life and sport, he played the *mineiro*, praising religion and the family and remarking that things would be nicer ("mais bonito") if Brazil could return to the days of amateurism.²¹

Another white athlete, Afonsinho, became a *cause celebre* for being the first *futebol* player to challenge the system directly. A middle-class, part-time medical student and excellent player for Botafogo, Afonsinho initiated a legal suit in 1974 within the Ministry of Labor for the right to purchase his own contract and to play for clubs of his own choosing. Victorious in court, he jumped from team to team, "renting" his services for six months at a time and openly proselytizing for the rights of professional athletes to become free agents. Rambunctious, he organized a barnstorming squad called "Frente de Alegria," a collection of over-the-hill professionals, non-conformists like himself, and aspiring youth league stars seeking publicity. As an articulate

white he was tolerated, although he was declared unwelcome at his original club and eased off the 1974 World Cup *Seleção*. At one point he played with Pelé on Santos, an odd combination of two symbols of the *futebol* world.

All of this suggests broader significance for *futebol* as a vehicle for social analysis than is often attributed to it. Theories about the sport generally fall into two categories: opiate hypotheses (*futebol* as social control) and integration hypotheses (*futebol* as an unifying agent). Opiate theorists stress the role of sports as balm for the anxieties produced under capitalism. An eye-opening study in the late 1960s by Antônio Euclides Teixeira offers evidence supporting this theme: it showed that industrial production in São Paulo rose by 12.3 percent in weeks when the Corinthians won and that industrial accidents rose by 15.3 percent when they lost.²²

The background to the 1970 World Cup provides the most striking example of how *futebol* has been used to lend political legitimacy to the government. At a low ebb of unpopularity following the intensification of repression after 1968, the President, General Garrastazú Médici, began to curry public favor by visiting Flamengo's matches almost every week, taking a personal hand in the selection and training of the national team, firing its outspoken coach, João Saldanha, and, as the matches progressed, predicting the point spread of Brazil's victories. When the *Seleção* finally won the Cup it was flown directly from Mexico City to Brasília, where the team was personally received by Médici at the Planalto Palace. The two days of Carnival-like national celebration which followed pointedly emphasized the championship as an affirmation of Brazilian aspirations for greatness and a victory for the regime and its policies.²³

The military government's reliance upon *futebol* as a source of international prestige and its emphasis upon centralization and technology have combined to bring about further change within the *futebol* establishment. Having taken over the training side of preparations for the World Cup in 1970, the regime soon afterward moved to take over the C.B.D. itself, which was given to an Admiral, Heleno Nunes, also the president of the pro-government political party (ARENA) of the State of Rio de Janeiro. Not unlike the Eastern Europeans, the military government's emphasis for the *Seleção* has been physiological, stressing muscular coordination and disciplined play—the antithesis of Freyre's dionysian model. Many grumbled at the changes. Heightened attention to international play hurt regular season attendance and put several leading clubs in financial difficulty, forcing some to sell off real estate holdings. Sportswriters complained bitterly, noting the harmful consequences of politicization on club leadership.

Brazil's uncharacteristically poor showing at the 1974 Cup at Munich, when the Brazilian *Seleção*, badly coordinated and subject to enormous pressure from home, resorted to feigning injuries, reinforced the campaign. For the 1978 World Cup, the C.B.D. appointed Claudio Coutinho as coach. Coutinho, a retired army

captain, was a physical training specialist who had been assigned to the *Seleção* in 1970 after Médici fired Saldanha. Countinho described his players to the press as a "light armoured unit" and decked out his training camp with patriotic banners and military bands. Team members, who by this time had become unusually restive at this treatment, neared rebellion; they were kept at a distance from the press by bodyguards and ordered not to make unauthorized public statements on pain of suspension.²⁴ Paulo César Lima, a black athlete who had been the first *futebol* player to sport an "Afro" and complain publicly of Brazilian racism, was kept off the squad.

Thousands of Brazilian fans travelled to Argentina for the matches, and millions more watched on television. The *Seleção*, playing a mechanical (Apollonian) defensive game started slowly, played a number of ties, and, due to the rules, was eliminated in the semi-finals without having lost a single match. Incredulous at the turn of events and Argentina's lopsided victory over previously tenacious Peru to remain in the finals, the Brazilian public fell into as near a state of national disbelief and shock as can transfix a population of 115 million.²⁵

The question remains: is *futebol's* hold sufficiently malefic to support the opiate/social control thesis? Brazilians on the dissenting left have come to disparage what they have called the "monoculture" of the sport. *Futebol*, they note, acts as a conservatizing agent, offering to a lower class whose relative economic position has declined since 1964 an elusive success substitute, a fleeting point of identification with the (briefly) glamorous stars of the *futebol* panoply.

The way that *futebol* has been used to emphasize dominant social values suggests that its role as an integrative force may reflect as much symbol as substance. Officials at the top, the *cartolas*, have more successfully used the sport to further their own careers than most players. Some recent examples illustrate this point: Fluminense's president became an ARENA Senator; Laudo Natel, the president of São Paulo F.C. and the Bradesco banking cartel, used his *futebol* credentials to gain the governorship of the state. In addition, Mário Américo, the *Seleção's* ex-masseuse, was elected to the São Paulo legislature in 1978 on the MDB (Movimento Democrático Brasileiro) ticket.

Still others have pointed out that *futebol's* hero worship of Pelé masks a surviving undercurrent of racism among the middle and upper classes. When the 1966 *Seleção* began to play sloppily, it was subjected to a barrage of attacks, ranging from allegations that its members were ugly and too fat to a published remark that the team was the "best ever—since not a single case of syphilis was discovered among the players."²⁶ One well-known coach declared that "owing to the mixture of races, the Brazilian athlete is still undernourished, and is affected by diverse 'social' deficiencies."²⁷ A popular joke from the 1920s was resurrected and followed the usual rounds of street humor: blacks made good *futebol* players because of their experience in fleeing from lions in the jungle.

The problem with the opiate thesis is that it paints a manichean

view of social processes. "Football clubs," Lincoln Allison reminds us, "were founded to play football, not to pacify plebians."²⁸ The changing demands of Brazilian society, not the collective will of club directorates, caused *futebol* to evolve in the way it did, although the power of the media and government fiscal and administrative intervention undoubtedly helped shape that evolution.

Many of the same arguments used to paint *futebol* as a mechanism for social control may be turned around to show its role as an agent for bridging social distance and encouraging national pride. For every argument about *futebol* and circuses, another may be put forward crediting the sport with heightening local identity and reducing intra-class hostility (or transferring that hostility, at least, to the relatively harmless format of a Fla-Flu match).

For the public at large, *futebol* provides an integrating counter-force to traditional local and regional isolation. The first telecommunication links between northern Brazil and the affluent Center-South were completed, through a network of orbiting satellites, on the eve of the 1970 World Cup. Given Brazil's historically low rate of literacy and its rural backwardness, soccer has provided powerful symbols for social groups. We have seen how international play has transformed *futebol* into a nationalistic weapon; success against other national teams has acquired the value of any other victory in foreign affairs.

Pervasive sports coverage in the media offers a continuity to day-to-day life and a common ground for interaction across class lines. Women, who historically have been kept at a distance from the *futebol* world lest they be exposed to offensive language and coarse physical behavior at matches,* have been welcomed as fans at the World Cup level, which has become "sanitized" by the media. Celebration (and mourning) over international matches have become community-family affairs, reaching even to the normally reserved urban upper middle class. Thousands of more economically-privileged Brazilians flock abroad to World Cup series. Support for the Brazilian team is so rabid that foreigners have called Brazilian fans "animals" for their behavior before crucial games.**

Since each major city boasts no fewer than four or five and as many as a dozen first division professional clubs—in a country where *futebol* remains the only professional sport—intra-city rivalry dominates *futebol* interest. Matches between traditional foes arouse strong feelings of solidarity and loyalty based on such real social divisions as class, ethnicity, or neighborhood identity. The weekly *futebol* lottery, introduced by the regime in 1970 to capitalize on the ubiquitous (and untaxable) numbers game (*jôgo de bicho*), forced fans to study prospects of teams across Brazil, raising awareness of geography and contributing no small

*In smaller cities and towns, however, women have not traditionally been excluded, but have been fervent rooters of local teams. In the 1970s, on another level, "groupies" flaunted the fact that they have borne children fathered by *futebolistas*.

**The British press has used the same term to describe Argentine fans as well.

measure to the breakdown of traditional regional provincialism. Seventy million lottery fliers were distributed each week across Brazil, and more than ninety percent of Rio's residents were estimated to have purchased at least one weekly lottery ticket, a vivid illustration of the extension of *futebol's* rags-to-riches promise from would-be athletes to the population at large.

Georg Simmel and others have noted that the proximity of tens of thousands of partisans rooting en masse in the streets and in seating blocs at matches raises team identification to a fever pitch, stirred even further by the physical proximity of the rival group.²⁹ Researchers measure social tension by rating fan intensity: Bolivar Lamounier, for example, blames what he sees as cooling emotional temperatures among Flamengo partisans in the late 1970s on rising urban anxiety and alienation.³⁰

For the typical Brazilian, *futebol* offers a link to a larger world. Only when the elite game became a mass sport did it reach its full potential as a socializing agent. Promoted by intellectuals, the media, and the dominant classes as a symbol of Brazilianness, *futebol* achieved the fullest extent of its influence when blacks, like Pelé, were given full recognition within the system. The outpouring of national pride and self-esteem which accompanied the three World Cup victories could not have been imagined under other circumstances. In this context, the two themes of this essay converge, becoming two sides of the same coin. Under authoritarian rule *futebol's* power to integrate society complements and strengthens its effectiveness as an instrument of social control.

Afterword:

Futebol, then, has evolved in keeping with Brazil's emergence as authoritarian, industrializing society seeking coherence and motivated by strong aspirations for international recognition and an equally firm desire to limit social change within boundaries acceptable to the dominant class. Brazil's experience is not exclusive. Juan Perón used sports to extoll nationalism during his dictatorship; the Argentine military regime gambled by hosting the 1978 Cup matches amidst a political crisis, and, by holding down expected demonstrations, managed to enhance its image and tighten its grip on the country by co-opting its team's triumph.³¹

Only a few have publicly complained that *futebol* has excessively dominated Brazilian sports. This fact, and the fact that soccer, boxing and popular music are essentially the only professional competitive activities open to the entire (male) population, may explain, in part, the unusually high level of success *futebol* has achieved. Earmarking *futebol* revenues by law for other sports has lately begun to produce winning teams in basketball, volleyball, and swimming,* although Brazil's remarkable success in soccer is contrasted by its woeful showing in Olympic sports. Aware of this,

*Basketball, in fact, has arrived at the level of *futebol* in the 1920s in that the best athletes, all amateurs in theory, are subsidized by *bichos* and other rewards.

some have pointed to the unhealthy condition of most of the population and to the virtually non-existent facilities for physical education in Brazilian schools.

For now the *futebol* establishment seems satisfied with the *status quo*. In November 1978, Fluminense officials defended their sale to the New York Cosmos of Marinho, the twenty-six-year-old star of the 1974 Cup, because of his long hair, high shoes, and penchant for nightclubs. Rivelino, another major star of the period and ringleader of the 1978 grumblers, was sold to a team in Kuwait.³² Asked about Brazil's Olympic prospects, the President-designate, General João Baptista Figueiredo, brushed aside suggestions that amateur sports be given greater emphasis, attacking the Olympic Games as "political propaganda for nations who need that sort of thing."³³ In the meantime, speculation is already being focused on the 1982 World Cup.

NOTES

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¹*Annual Report, 1929*. Mr. Steele to Foreign Office, London, in Public Record Office File FO 371/14207:3746.

²Gilberto Freyre, Preface to the first edition of Mário Filho, *O negro no futebol brasileiro*, reprinted in second edition, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1964, pp. vii-ix. Without this "purifying act," Freyre added, urban life would turn violent, *samba* would stagnate and *malandragem* would sate Brazilian society. See also Janet Lever, "Soccer as a Brazilian Way of Life." *TransAction* (December 1969), p. 138.

³Gilberto Freyre, *Order and Progress: Brazil from Monarchy to Republic*. New York: Knopf, 1970, pp. 51-53, cited by Ilan Rachum, "*Futebol: the Growth of a Brazilian National Institution*." (Typed manuscript), pp. 3-4. I would like to thank Professor Rachum for his cooperation.

⁴Flávio Costa, "Considerações sobre a evolução de futebol brasileiro." *Na boca do tunel*. Ed. by Milton Pedrosa. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Editora Gol, 1968, pp. 87-89; Mário Filho, pp. vii-viii. The first successful daily sports newspapers appeared in 1930. In the mid-1970s Brazil was the only country in the world with two daily sports newspapers, one in Rio and the other in São Paulo. Only twelve countries have one.

⁵See, for example, John D. Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977, pp. 192-202.

⁶See Lincoln Allison, "Association Football and the Urban Ethos." *Manchester and São Paulo: Problems of Rapid Urban Growth*. Ed. by John D. Wirth and Robert L. Jones. Stanford: Stanford

University Press, 1978, p. 219.

⁷Darrell E. Levi, *A família Prado*. São Paulo: Cultura 70, 1977, p. 131. Courtesy of Linda Lewin.

⁸Allison (Note 6, above), p. 219.

⁹Mário Filho (Note 4), p. 120.

¹⁰Mário Filho (Note 4), p. 200-201.

¹¹Marcos de Castro, "Leônidas." *Gigantes do futebol brasileiro*. Ed. by Marcos de Castro and João Máximo. Rio de Janeiro: Lidor, 1965, pp. 114-121; Mário Filho (Note 4), p. 208.

¹²José Lins do Rêgo, in Preface to "Copa Rio Branco, 32," cited in Mário Filho (Note 4), p. 214; Rachum (Note 3), p. 16, citing Paulo Coelho Netto, *Coelho Netto e os esportes*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Minerva, 1964, p. 17.

¹³Gilberto Freyre (Note 2), p. i.

¹⁴Freyre, in Mário Filho (Note 3), p. 244; Rachum, p. 15.

¹⁵Rachum (Note 3), pp. 11-12, citing Brian Glanville, *Soccer: A History of the Game*. New York: Crown, 1968, pp. 119-136; also Lever (Note 2), p. 153.

¹⁶João Máximo, "Fausto." *Gigantes*, p. 42.

¹⁷Obituary, *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), 1961. Clipping courtesy of Leôncio Basbaum.

¹⁸Lever (Note 2), pp. 154-55.

¹⁹Mário Filho (Note 2), p. 399.

²⁰Pelé, interview with Amália Barrán, in *La Opinión* (Montevideo), 1972. Clipping courtesy of Leôncio Basbaum.

²¹"Tostão: cinco mulheres em cima de um homem." *Folha de Eva* (Rio de Janeiro), 1:4 (January-February 1972), pp. 6-7.

²²Lever (Note 2), pp. 154-55.

²³*Veja* (São Paulo), 95 (July 1, 1970), pp. 19-29.

²⁴Political opponents charged that Coutinho, as interrogator for a five-year period with the First Army, had tortured prisoners. *Latin American Political Report* (London), 12:21, June 2, 1978, p. 161. See also Renato Pompeu, "Quem não tem, cria." *Veja*, 509 (June 7, 1978), pp. 56-57. For Coutinho's side, see "Força e arte, o ideal," *Veja*, 457 (June 8, 1977), pp. 100-102.

²⁵See *Placar* (Rio de Janeiro), 427, June 30, 1978, especially the article "O Perú exagerou!" pp. 40-42; "De volta da terra," *Veja*, 513 (July 5, 1978), pp. 52-54. Public opinion in Brazil widely held that the Peruvian team had been bought. See also "O futebol como jogo político," *Folha de São Paulo*, July 4, 1978, p. 31, on Coutinho's disparagement of the Peruvian team's patriotism.

²⁶Courtesy of Janet Lever.

²⁷David Ferreira, "Brasil dificilmente ganhará a Côpa do Mundo nos próximos anos." *Na boca do tunel* (Note 4), p. 56. See also Walter Miraglia Alves, "O jogador de futebol: mentalidade e educação." *Na boca*, pp. 167-169.

²⁸Allison (Note 6), p. 222.

²⁹Janet Lever, "The Social Organization of Soccer in Brazil." Paper presented to the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, August 25, 1975, p. 5, citing Simmel.

³⁰Renato Pompeu, "Uma arte feita pelo povo," *Veja*, 475 (Oct. 12, 1977), p. 130, citing Lamounier.

³¹See *Perón: El Hombre del Destino*, No. 25, Buenos Aires: Ed. Abril, 1974; *Latin American Research Report*, 12:25 (June 30, 1978), pp. 196-197.

³²Júlio Mazzei, quoted by Alex Yannis, *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1978, V, p. 3.

³³Figueiredo, cited in *Istoé* (São Paulo), 97, Oct. 31, 1978, p. 85.