

A SINGULAR PASSION? THE WORLD CUPS AND THE COUNTRIES OF LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE (1962-2026)

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On the occasion of the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup, organized for the first time by three countries (the United States, Canada, and Mexico), the editorial board of *Materiales para la Historia del Deporte* has devoted a special issue to this competition examined through the prism of Latinity. The historiography of the World Cup in football history is extensive, as illustrated by the works of Dietschy, Gastaut, and Mourlane (2006), Wahl (2013), Rinke and Schiller (2014), Brizzi and Sbeti (2018), and González-Aja (2023), as well as the special issues published by *ISTOR* (2018), *Soccer & Society* (2020 and 2022), and *Football(s). Histoire, culture, économie, société* (2022). Nevertheless, the historical object constituted by the FIFA World Cup remains far from exhausted.

This special issue of *Materiales para la Historia del Deporte* seeks to deepen our understanding of the multiple geopolitical, economic, cultural, media-related, social, and historical implications generated by the organization of the World Cup, both in the Latin-language and Latin-culture countries of the American continent (including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay) and in the European territories shaped by Latin languages and cultures (Spain, France, Portugal, Italy, and Romania). Far from referring to a homogeneous essence, Latinity is understood here as an open category marked by hybridity, cultural mixing, and the circulation of practices and imaginaries (Dicenta 2011). As a historical and social construction, Latinity is characterized by instability and by the tensions that shape its contemporary uses, particularly in terms of identities, power relations, and dynamics of recognition (Caminero-Santangelo 2025). Within the sporting field, it may be approached as a space of cultural production where traditions, appropriations, and rivalries intersect, revealing both forms of proximity and lines of fracture between national contexts.

The choice of these countries is first and foremost intended to address the question of a footballing “Latinity,” understood both as a particular way of conceiving, organizing, and playing football, and as a sporting expression of the promotion of Latinity and the construction of forms of solidarity among Latin countries, a project embodied by the Latin Union founded in Paris in 1948. The Latin Cup, contested between the best Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese clubs from 1949 to 1957, constituted in this respect an early sporting prefiguration. The men’s FIFA World Cup may likewise be considered another of its expressions. Conceived and founded by two Latins, the

Frenchmen Henri Delaunay and Jules Rimet, the competition was both organized and won in its first four editions (1930, 1934, 1938, and 1950) by countries of Latin culture. Known as the Jules Rimet Cup between 1950 and 1970, it also functioned as a genuine laboratory of footballing Latinity, revealing both commonalities and differences, as well as occasionally exacerbated rivalries.

Since the early decades of World Cup history have already been extensively studied, this dossier focuses on the period extending from 1962 (Chile) to 2026 (the designation and preparation of the edition co-hosted by Canada, the United States, and Mexico). These decades form a period marked by the growing importance of television, the expansion of the tournament format, and the transformations of FIFA promoted notably by a Latin American president (João Havelange, 1974–1998). This era also witnessed the organization or co-organization of nine out of seventeen editions by countries of Latin language and culture, while twelve out of sixteen editions were won by European or Latin American teams. In other words, between Europe and the Americas, Latin countries secured the lion's share of World Cup success. It should nevertheless be noted that the Women's World Cup, created in 1991, presents different characteristics due to the highly unequal development of women's football across Latin American and Latin European countries. Of the nine editions held to date, only one has been hosted (France) or won (Spain) by a Latin country.

In continuity with these perspectives, the six contributions brought together in this special issue, written in French, Spanish, and English, are structured around the four thematic axes proposed in the call for papers. This framework makes it possible to approach football "Latinity" through a variety of empirical configurations, ranging from organizational processes to dynamics of globalization, including playing practices and constructions of memory.

The first axis, devoted to the hosting and organization of competitions, is approached through a perspective that moves beyond strictly material and logistical dimensions in order to situate them within broader configurations of power, legitimacy, and the governance of sport. The contributions gathered here thus highlight the political, economic, and diplomatic logics underlying the attribution and implementation of major football events in Latin contexts, while also examining the tensions they crystallize in terms of costs, public controversies, and communication strategies. From this perspective, the article by García-Arjona and Verschuuren analyzes the 2023 Women's World Cup and the #SeAcabó movement through the prism of the mediatization of scandal in the #MeToo era. Drawing on a comparative press corpus (Spain, France, and Mexico), the authors show how the assault suffered by the player Jennifer Hermoso at the hands of Luis Rubiales, president of the Spanish Football Federation, was progressively reconfigured as a public issue through processes of visibility, media framing, and the transnational circulation of discourse. The analysis highlights the structuring role of the media in transforming the event into a scandal, as well as the interpretative conflicts accompanying it, thereby revealing the power relations and forms of resistance operating within the field of women's football. The scandal thus appears as a mechanism for the politicization and the scandal thus appears as a mechanism for making gender inequalities visible, capable of generating transformative effects, even if these remain contingent, uneven, and not necessarily embedded within lasting structural reconfigurations.

For their part, Gozillon, Bréhon, and Hidri Neys mobilize a socio-historical approach to the institutionalization processes of Italian women's football, emphasizing the role of unofficial competitions such as the *Coppa del Mondo* and the *Mundialitos*. Their contribution makes it possible to conceptualize the organization of sport outside stabilized institutional frameworks, highlighting forms of sports entrepreneurship situated at the intersection of private initiatives, activist logics, and gender-related social constraints. The analysis underlines the ambivalent character of these dynamics, at once pioneering and marginalized, while also revealing the social and political conditions limiting their capacity to produce durable institutionalization.

The second axis, centered on the unfolding of competitions, focuses on forms of play, footballing styles, and modes of participation that contribute to the construction of a sporting "Latinity," both in practices on the pitch and in the expressions of publics and the various actors involved. From this perspective, the game is not reduced to a technical or tactical dimension; rather, it appears as a social language, carrying values, norms, and collective identities.

Buarque's article contributes directly to this reflection by offering an analysis of the 1982 World Cup through the oral accounts of players from the Brazilian national team. By shifting the focus from media discourses to the memory of the actors themselves, the article highlights the processes through which a collective memory of the tournament is constructed, structured around key moments such as the team's preparation or the episode of the "tragedy of Sarriá." The analysis thus underlines that footballing styles do not depend solely on tactical configurations, but are embedded in broader symbolic processes in which memory, identity, and collective narrative are recomposed.

The third axis extends this reflection by examining the place of Latin countries within the globalization of football, understood as a set of circulations, transfers, and recompositions operating on a transnational scale. The aim is to analyze how sporting models, forms of expertise, actors, and symbolic resources circulate, are transformed, and are reappropriated in differentiated contexts, thereby contributing to the production of plural forms of "Latinity." From this perspective, the globalization of "Latin" football cannot be reduced to a mere process of homogenization; rather, it brings to light dynamics of circulation involving models, practices, and actors, as well as the production of differentiated representations of Latinity, between convergence and plurality.

Cabañes Martínez makes a particularly significant contribution by analyzing the influence of the Spanish model on the reform of Chinese football between 2015 and 2025. The author shows how this model, grounded both in international sporting success and in specific styles of play and structured training systems, is established as a reference within a process of institutional transfer and adaptation. The article thus highlights the mechanisms through which models circulate, as well as the logics of selection, translation, and reappropriation that accompany their implementation in differentiated national contexts.

From another perspective, the article by Pilatti, Herrera Cantorani, and Renaux examines the effects of the internationalization of Brazilian players on the performance of national football. Drawing on a quantitative and socio-economic approach, the authors show that the early export of talent forms part of an international division of sporting labor, contributing to the weakening of the competitiveness of Brazilian clubs and of the national team. The analysis thus highlights the structural effects of the globalization of the football market, insofar as economic dynamics redefine sporting balances, professional trajectories, and forms of identification with the game.

Finally, the fourth axis addresses issues of legacy and memory, understood as social processes of construction, selection, and transmission of the meanings associated with World Cups. It examines the ways in which these events become inscribed over time through material and immaterial forms—infrastructures, narratives, and symbols—while also analyzing the political, cultural, and economic uses of the event. The legacy of mega-events is thus conceived not only as a set of tangible outcomes, but also as a space of symbolic production, frequently mobilized in discourses on geopolitical gains and soft power.

The article by Fernández-Cruz, Koch, and Llorca contributes to this reflection by analyzing the evolution of the naming logics of stadiums that hosted World Cup matches between 1962 and 2030. The authors highlight the shift from models based on territorial rootedness and commemoration—through toponyms and eponyms—toward forms of commercialization linked to naming rights, before the emergence of hybrid configurations. This transformation reveals the tensions between memory, identity, and the global economy, showing how stadiums, far from being reducible to mere infrastructures, function as supports of heritage-making and as spaces in which social and symbolic relations are inscribed. The analysis thus underlines that contemporary forms of sporting legacy result from an unstable compromise between logics of preservation, strategies of economic valorization, and recompositions of collective identities.

Ultimately, this special issue invites us to move beyond an essentialist reading of footballing "Latinity" and to understand it instead as a historical, relational, and evolving construction, shaped by dynamics of circulation, conflict, and reconfiguration. Through the diversity of empirical settings and approaches mobilized, the contributions gathered here show how World Cups constitute both laboratories of social experimentation and revealing sites of contemporary transformations in football. In this sense, this special issue seeks to contribute to historiographical and sociopolitical

reflection on football by calling for an articulation of scales of analysis—from the local to the global—as well as temporalities—from the event to its legacy—in order to better understand the ongoing recompositions at work in contemporary sport.

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