

I want to get my teeth into this issue - Biting at the World Cup

Matthew Huish
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The group stage of the World Cup in Brazil has already provided more entertainment, in my brutally subjective opinion, than the last 2 or 3 tournaments. I have vague memories of Italia '90, and I really caught the World Cup bug during the championship of USA '94. I am interested in every single game and, if I could, I would watch all of them. In any given game, I choose to support one of the teams, be they the underdog or the inspiring entertainer, and appreciate the excitement built up across the world as they tenaciously follow 22 grown men kicking a pigs bladder

around a meadow. The patriotic passion is infectious. It's a celebration of many things that are good.

Nevertheless, there are things I regret about the World Cup: The deflating disappointment, as an England fan, is somewhat inevitable. Before the tournament began, I predicted England to draw all three of their group stage fixtures and fail to progress to the second round. While the actual results were in fact even poorer than I had predicted, I'm not terribly disappointed; in fact I am hopeful that this performance will be the catalyst for a change leading to better results for future England campaigns.

The corruption of FIFA (which the Qatar World Cup bid has only served to expose) is another worry. A narcissistic film has been produced by FIFA to tell the story of how a sporting competition was transformed into the political, corporate-sponsored Godzilla that it is today. True Father once had a trusted ally working within the machine of FIFA, and Mr. Chung Hwan Kwak has been serving, at least up until recently, as the Chairman of Social Responsibility for the Asian Football Confederation. The relationship between business and media & culture is something that I might like to explore in another blog, maybe next week. But for now it suffices to say that positive change is possible if God-centred men and women, with their consciences guided by Divine Principle, can work their way into positions of responsibility in such organisations and help reform them.



But the other thing I'd like to get my proverbial teeth into is the bad behaviour that takes place on the pitch. The vulgar language. The play-acting. The violence. As entertainers who will be seen by millions of people around the world, the ambassadors for the sport who are doing the on-pitch business need to

have a high degree of integrity and self-control. There is a threat for the game to fall into disrepute if headlines become about things other than the athletic performances of the teams. And this leads to the issue of Luis Suarez, who has been banned by FIFA for 9 games and 4 months from any football related activities for his aggressive behaviour against the Italian defender Giorgio Chiellini, especially appearing to bite the player.

But what bemuses me most is not the on-pitch behaviour of an emotionally frustrated player losing his temper during a hot-blooded contest, but the failure of virtually the entire Uruguayan nation to condemn his actions. I'd love to find out why the Uruguayan media and football association are defending the inexcusable behaviour of their star forward. Are they burying their heads in the sand, turning a blind eye to the fact that he has bitten another player? Or do they really believe, as they proclaim, that they feel victimised by a smear-campaign from the English-speaking media? I think they've bitten off something more than they can chew.

It's excusable for small children to bite; I haven't studied the psychology of biting, but I reckon it has something to do with the inability to control one's emotions and the frustration of being unable to communicate one's thoughts or feelings effectively. Suarez's behaviour demonstrates that he is emotionally underdeveloped. Evidently, he has a psychological developmental issue that needs to be addressed. The silver lining waiting to emerge from this affair is that if Suarez and his Uruguayan associates admitted the fact that there's something not quite right about the man, they could highlight the wider issue of mental illness amongst the wider population. If men (and women) around the world with short fuses who are prone to lashing out in physically violent ways were to see a worldwide superstar admit their mental weakness and take measures to strengthen their emotional strength, that could inspire a revolution.



I hope Suarez can restore himself and grow – as long as he doesn't score against Newcastle United

The heaviness of the punishment was perhaps just, in order to reflect the order of the problem. Indeed, this is the third time Suarez has bitten a football player, in a controversy-filled career. I'll be one of the first to admit that he is one of the most gifted football players in the world today. But his character needs development. I hope that Liverpool FC retain the player and provide him with the necessary counselling or psychiatric help to improve him as a human being. And this is coming from a Newcastle United fan, whose team would be the first to face Suarez after his ban expires. For his sake, I hope people believe in his ability to change and invest in his

emotional development.

What still worries me, though, is the collective denial of an entire nation. Is biting people socially acceptable in this South American country? Cultural differences certainly exist across the world, and what seems unacceptable in one country may be acceptable in others. This is my request for Uruguayans, and other South Americans, to respond to this issue: Are we making too much out of Suarez's behaviour? Or do you also abhor his actions?

The knock-out stages of the World Cup begin today. I'm thoroughly anticipating an exciting couple of weeks leading up to the final on Sunday 13th July. Let's hope the news over the next 2 weeks will remain about entertaining & competitive sportsmanship.

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