

world cup 14 – tournament wrap

### **The Final Score Sheet**

*july 14 2010*

Since Sepp Blatter gave South Africa 9/10 for the staging of the World Cup, let's consider some marks for FIFA and the organisers, too.

The legacy for South Africa itself is a mixed one. Yes, they did a fine job of running the tournament. There were fewer organisational, crime and security problems than expected and as one South African pundit said on BBC World Service last weekend, "even the English visitors were polite and friendly". Some of us actually use rudimentary tools, too, to misquote the great Stephen K Amos. There seems to have been a genuine unifying effect; and the country can be proud of its superb television coverage, perhaps the best ever. But many in the townships tell another story and few if any of the tournament's benefits seem to have trickled down to that level of South African society. 6/10.

The legacy for FIFA is rather better. It retains the entire revenue stream from the event – almost \$1.5 billion – returning none to the host nation, which is also wholly responsible for stadia and infrastructure. There's a case to be made that this time around most of the new infrastructure will constitute a real benefit for the host nation but that's not always a given. South Africa also did itself no favours (or any other countries applying to host the Cup) in caving in to FIFA's disgraceful insistence that local laws be changed to place complete responsibility for its own marketing objectives onto the host country, and for insisting that infractions be determined as criminal, not civil, matters. The 'FIFA World Cup South Africa Special Measures Act 2010' (sounds like an apartheid-era leftover) was placed on the country's statute books in 2006 but the first anyone knew of it was when a company using footballs to advertise its product earlier this year attracted a criminal fine in one the 'special courts' also set up at FIFA's insistence. It's one thing to permit big money to dominate sport; it's entirely another to coerce a nation's lawmaking processes, more or less in secret. It will be interesting to see if politicians and sporting authorities in Australia will take a firmer position in their bid to host the 2022 event. More likely, the 'sport rules, at any cost' culture will prevail and the people will simply not be told much about it. That's the precise opposite of the values sport represents. 3/10.

Talking about big money, the two worst aspects of the tournament were naturally enough driven by solid commercial, rather than sporting, imperatives. The \$2.99 plastic horns known as *vuvuzelas*, blown constantly with official encouragement, ensured players couldn't hear their sideline instructions, the ref's whistle or each other. Introduced in the name of African culture, they destroyed the culture of football. The BBC's Alan Green nailed it when he observed that the constant drone robbed every game of its essential component – crowd atmosphere and feedback. The vital messages provided to players, viewers and commentators by the ebb and flow of crowd reaction were entirely absent from this World Cup. The trumpets did provide a splendid marketing platform for the global beverage whose logo appeared on many of these ridiculous overgrown shoe-horns. But if indigenous culture really was the justification, could anyone tell me where to buy a CD of vuvuzela music?

If that weren't bad enough, not only could the players hear nothing, they couldn't kick the ball either. As this column noted on day one, it was clear by half-time in the opening game, when it was still not too late to address the problem, that the *Jabulani* ball would *not* provide a feast of goals; rather, it would ensure a famine of frustration for players and viewers as shot after shot, set piece after set piece, header after header sailed high and/or wide. It may well have kept the hosts out of the knockout rounds – Mphela's shot against the crossbar, if a touch lower, might have given them a 3-0 score against France, closed down the game before France got one back and put the Bafana through.

There was no need for a new ball and even if there were, the world's major sporting tournament is the last place to trial it. Adidas no doubt expected to sell lots and lots of them but that's highly unlikely now. Good. All that was achieved was that the tournament was robbed of another essential aspect of football. At this level, football's about two things – belief and the quality of the pass. The *Jabulani* ruined one of these and coaches at the highest level have begged FIFA to consult them first, next time the governing body wants to introduce a change like this. 0/10

The quality of match officials has been a World Cup talking point for years. The problem is that to satisfy political correctness the world's best players are refereed by the world's most mediocre officials. Regional bodies apply pressure to FIFA, saying if their national sides can't be there at least their officials should be. FIFA, as usual, takes the line of least resistance. The resulting chaos has been objected to mainly by purists until 2010, when the quality of on-field decision making reached an all time low. The denial of Lampard's brilliant and perhaps game-changing goal for England against Germany in the round of sixteen and of Edu's third and match winning goal for the USA in their final group stage game were perhaps the worst examples, though Kaka's red card also comes close. Ditto Teves's offside goal against Mexico, gorgeous though it was. In every case, and especially for the USA, the decision directly affected the tournament. FIFA later did a back flip and announced a vaguely worded intention to "re-examine" the issue of technology and that's a step forward; but what must happen, too, is for the World Cup to be officiated by a panel of the world's best referees. It's a no brainer, surely. 3/10.

The jury is out, perhaps, on the decision not to wipe yellow cards until the end of the Quarter Finals. The intention is laudable but given the inadequacy of on-field officialdom some real injustices were guaranteed. This is one FIFA may want to re-visit. 5/10

So what worked well, apart from the splendid TV pictures? By and large, it should be said in fairness that the quality of often tight offside decisions by side line officials was mostly first class. The nations most guilty of cheating went home early. In Australia the tournament received its best and most comprehensive coverage yet, with the Sydney Morning Herald's reporting particularly good. The SBS TV coverage was good where you'd expect it to be (technical, team and player analysis) and less so where you'd also expect it to be (lots of political correctness and the awful contrived chumminess of 'Fozzie', 'Bashie' and 'Muskie'). But they did show every match live and deserve appreciation for that.

The addition of UK commentator Paul Dempsey added hugely to the studio end of proceedings. David Basheer's continuous leaking of the score from the parallel game during Australia's last match, though, when goal difference was relevant, displayed a parochial disregard for anyone who might want to watch the Germany – Ghana replay

immediately afterwards. Martin Tyler's commentaries, as you'd expect, were much more considerate and as polished as ever; and John Helm's chatty political incorrectness was a welcome relief. ABC Radio gave a grudging coverage of the most basic details, preferring the more familiar ground of Rugby League (a primitive form of football, apparently) and Wimbledon. There were some innovative new commercials, although the Optus ad showing leaping crocodiles and dribbling cheetahs became tired despite its technical wizardry. The Qantas ad held up better than expected over the month; but there is just no place in television watched by children for a cartoon kangaroo telling us that live betting during games is an essential part of enjoying sport.

The glory of central and south American football has seldom been better illustrated than in this tournament, with seven splendid sides and the one least expected to endure establishing itself as a deserving semi-finalist. At its best, football on this continent is as much about what you don't do as what you do, which creates a doubling of options and loads of flair. Argentina's running off the ball was exquisite. Mexican feints were breathtaking. Thanks, amigos. 10/10.

### **The Cheats Hall of Fame**

**Puyol** (Spain, vs Portugal) – for his second half dive with no contact

**Van der Wiel** (Netherlands, vs Brazil) – for his second half dive with no Brazilian within touching distance

**Van Bommel** (Netherlands, vs everyone) – for gratuitous malice in almost every tackle

**Dedic** (Slovenia, vs England) – for his sideline dive with zero contact by Johnson, when Johnson was already on one yellow card

**Vorsa** (Ghana, vs Uruguay) – for his second half dive a metre from Suarez

**Müller** (Germany, vs Argentina) – for his dive on the slightest of contact with Di Maria

**Klose** (Germany, vs Argentina) – for his theatrical rolling dive early in the second half

**Maicon** (Brazil, vs Chile) – for his first half dive with closest opponent a metre away, and then protesting the decision

**Okazaki** (Japan, vs Paraguay) – for a dive with no contact with Alcaarez, at 0-0 to get a free kick on the edge of the penalty area

**Santa Cruz** (Paraguay, vs NZ) – falling for no reason, just outside the area, at 0-0

**Mucha** (Slovakia, vs Italy) – the Slovak keeper fell for no reason at 1-0 up after a minor collision with an Italian, then feigned agony and collected a dead ball much too slowly

**Yahia** (Algeria, vs USA) – The Algerian captain elbowed Clint Dempsey, drawing blood

**Özil** (Germany, vs Aust) – for falling with no contact in front of goal

**Schweinsteiger** (Germany, vs Aust) – for falling with no contact in midfield

**Keita** (Côte d'Ivoire, vs Brazil) – for feigning an elbow to the face, resulting in Kaka's sending off

**Valdivia** (Chile, vs Honduras) – for falling with no contact

**Matmour** (Algeria, vs England) – for reversing into John Terry, then falling in pain to gain a free kick

**Pepe** (Italy, vs Slovakia) – for scything down an opponent without going for the ball – a deserved straight red which gained only a yellow

**Quagliarella** (Italy, vs Slovakia) – for bumping the Slovak keeper violently trying to get the ball after Italy scored, and (when pushed away) for falling to the ground with "fingers in the eye" routine #7

**de Rossi** (Italy, vs NZ) – for his fall in the NZ penalty area (he was held, but fell after being released)

**de Rossi** (Italy, vs NZ) – for his fall and feigned agony in front of goal, with no contact

**Camoranesi** (Italy, vs Paraguay) – for sustained foot stamping on opponents

**Cannavaro** (Italy, vs Paraguay) – for several agonised rolling falls without being touched, including one after he just slipped over on wet turf

**Chiellini** (Italy, vs NZ) – for several untouched falls and for dramatic skills of the highest order, repeatedly beating the ground in agony while holding his face

**Chiellini** (Italy, vs NZ) – for his attempted mid-air eye gouge on Reid

**Zambrotta** (Italy, vs NZ) – for harassing the referee when no foul was awarded for a non-existent infringement against Chiellini

### **The Team Award**

The Team Award for co-ordinated harassment of referees and for the highest number of citations (seven, some of them multiple entries) goes to Italy. Runners up Germany earned four citations but no multiples. In third place The Netherlands, had two citations – though some may say that van Bommel himself was worth a dozen. His fouls were just too many to count, though.

### **Highly Commended**

A special ‘Highly Commended’ Award goes to Nigeria’s President, Goodluck Jonathan, for banning his national side from international football; then caving in to FIFA pressure; and finally for reversing his decision as “an act of Presidential generosity”. What a plonker.

### **Two Honorary ‘Highly Commended’ Awards**

**Thierry Henry** earns an honorary award for his handball to put France into the tournament ahead of Ireland; as does Italy’s **Fabio Grosso**, sadly absent in 2010, for the memory of his glorious dive with nil contact just inside the area to gain a penalty against Australia in 2006, with three minutes to play. We will not forget you, gentlemen.

### **Tournament Quotes**

“When the world’s best player skies it, you know everybody else has a problem with this ball, too” – John Helm, following Messi’s shot high over the bar against Germany

“A lot of people said Argentina didn’t have a Plan B. For me, they didn’t have a Plan A” – Ned Zelic, SBS TV

“If The Netherlands win this, it will have been a poor tournament” – Craig Foster, SBS TV

“Yes, we can” – USA crowd banner at their game against Algeria

“Cares Doll H – it’s lick quid in gin ear ink” – Cristiano Ronaldo, TV commercial for Castrol Edge

“Someone stole my NZ shirt” – seen on a Kiwi’s T Shirt at the Paraguay game

“It begins to look like a new world order for football” – Paul Dempsey, SBS TV

“Lucio would not look out of place in the Springboks front row. He’s a monster!” – Steve Banyard, Sky TV UK

“He’s unable to supply the artistry in midfield that’s quite evident on his arms!” – Steve Banyard, on Portugal’s Raul Mereiles’s tattoos

“Well, Sepp Blatter has a meeting every couple of years to discuss video technology. And says no” – Martin Tyler, on Lampard’s disallowed goal against Germany

“There are 49 million of us, just 11 of them” – crowd banner in Johannesburg for a South Africa game

“This World Cup has passed Wayne Rooney by” – Martin Tyler

**Your Homework For The Next Four Years:** there was a Kaka, a Gaka and a Cacau at this tournament. Find a Lithuanian and ask him what it means.

Well, it’s over for another four years. Now we can get back to normal life, and it’s safe once more to listen to the morning news bulletins. It’s good to catch up with what’s been going on in the unreal world for the last month or so. Here in Australia we apparently have a new prime minister.

What’s that? A woman, you say?