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Teaching history and political economy through soccer

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The author draws lessons from having taught ‘soccer courses’ on eight occasions in a wide variety of settings: a Californian liberal arts college; a German university; and Californian and Ugandan prisons. In outlining this experience he makes four arguments. First, it is not difficult to craft academically rigorous courses focused on the game. Second, soccer courses lend themselves to experimental pedagogies, particularly with regard to community engagement. Third, the immense popular appeal soccer classes have can make getting students to think critically about the game difficult. Finally, anyone thinking about teaching a soccer course should do it; it could be the best teaching experience of your life.

Introduction

In this essay, I draw some lessons from having taught eight academic ‘soccer classes’ in a wide variety of settings. At Pitzer College, a small liberal arts college near Los Angeles, I have twice co-taught a ‘History and Political Economy of World Soccer’ as a lecture course with an historian, Andre Wakefield, and I also taught a modified version of this course as a community-engaged first-year seminar ‘Soccer and Social Change’. I taught ‘History and Political Economy of World Soccer’ as a seminar at the University of Koblenz-Landau, a large public university in Germany while on a Fulbright there in 2008–2009. I led a teacher professional development institute for California high school teachers, ‘The Global Game, Women’s Soccer and Germany’ in which I taught a version of my Pitzer course and then led a group of schoolteachers and Pitzer students on a study tour of Germany for the 2011 Women’s World Cup. I have taught ‘History and Politics of World Soccer/Futbol’ twice at CRC Prison in Norco, California, a medium-security men’s prison. In summer 2014 I co-taught ‘History & Politics of Football and the World Cup’ at Upper Prison, Luzira, Uganda’s maximum security men’s prison.¹

The essay is divided into five sections. First I review my experience teaching soccer classes at Pitzer College in 2006 and 2010. It is out of this teaching experience at my home institution that I developed the core content for what I have taught at other institutions. In the second part of the chapter I present an outline of the academic content: what I teach through soccer. I next review teaching a soccer class at a German university in 2009, and the 2011 teaching and study abroad initiative that resulted from this German experience. I then report on my experiences explicitly connecting teaching about soccer with community engagement, a 2011 first-year seminar at Pitzer on ‘soccer and social change’ and then using soccer to teach in

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prison education, and classes I have taught at prisons in California and Uganda. In the last part of the chapter I draw out lessons regarding course content and pedagogy, and I make some recommendations for colleagues who are interested in teaching similar courses.

Teaching soccer classes at a liberal arts college, seriously?

I am not a soccer scholar. I am a political scientist, a comparativist, an historical institutionalist and a Europeanist whose research is focused on European welfare state politics. At a small, west-coast liberal arts college I have had both the requirement and the liberty to teach a wide variety of courses. One of my original motives in teaching through soccer was to establish the curricular relevance of European political-economy and European integration. I readily acknowledge that the loss of the privileged status European Studies enjoyed during the cold war, and the larger intellectual Eurocentrism that this institutional privilege perpetuated, is not to be mourned. But I was keen to refudiate the notions that there is little ‘demand’ for European-related courses and that Europe is no longer theoretically interesting in the globalized twenty-first century. That the political economy of world soccer provides an interesting counter to those who conflate globalization with Americanization has always been striking. For sport as commodified mass culture it is the ‘American’ games that have remained somewhat parochial by comparison. But even within field of European and EU studies the dominant school of thought² stresses the unexceptional nature of European integration: Europe may have been the first to undergo the selective bargaining away of areas of sovereignty in order to attain other desired nation state goals, but there was nothing unique to the circumstances which generated this. My own analytic approach emphasizes both the specifically European determinants of European integration, and the importance of distinct and variable national-level factors: the varieties of European states and capitalist economies and the different ways in which these shape events. This approach stresses the need for historically rooted knowledge of European societies, not mere ‘area studies’ but an approach focused on path-dependent development.

I had long used soccer examples in other courses to explain ‘varieties of capitalism’ and ‘varieties of national identity’ in Europe. The idea of a soccer-specific course arose in conversation (I confess, over beers) with my colleague Andre Wakefield, an historian of early modern Germany. We taught ‘History and Political Economy of World Soccer’ the semester before the 2006 World Cup in Germany, assuming, correctly, that there would be a high level of student interest. We capped the course at 50 (in a college where average class size is 15), and were besieged by students trying to get in. In 2006 we held the line in enrollment because it was an experimental course and, frankly, we were not too confident about the quality of much of the literature available. There weren’t appropriate books to assign as course texts but we cobbled together a topic-by-topic reader that proved sufficient. Happily the academic literature on soccer has improved exponentially since 2005–2006. Andre Wakefield and I ruefully read David Goldblatt’s *The Ball is Round* a couple of months after the spring 2006 course, but at least we knew that next time we taught it we would have a superb core historical text.

Teaching the course the first time was very rewarding. The huge interest in soccer at the Claremont colleges was not a surprise. Anecdotally it has been clear to us, and to many other college and high school teachers, that soccer enjoys a certain

cache among American youth. It's easy to underestimate the level of interest in soccer in the United States. While Major League Soccer has developed into a strong and stable platform for men's professional soccer, *most* US soccer fans follow European clubs rather than US soccer teams, hence 'American soccer is alive and well and lying on the sofa watching Manchester United on the Fox Soccer Channel'.³ Pitzer and its sister colleges in the Claremont consortium were perhaps sociologically precocious in 2006 in having unusually high proportions of both (a) upper middle-class students raised on suburban youth soccer and (b) students from immigrant communities with strong soccer cultures (including, but not limited to, Latin American soccer cultures).

Generationally, we had tapped into the passions of the 'cosmopolitan millennials'.⁴ The full extent of this became apparent when we taught the class again the semester before the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. Confident in the now robust soccer literature we could assign (Goldblatt, Galeano, Kuper and Szymanski, Wilson) but still thinking that the course would follow the quadrennial cycle of soccer's mega event, we decided to teach the class as a large lecture class with related enrichment programming – a film series, field trips and pick-up games (the syllabus is appended). This time, the class was the most popular course in the history of the Claremont colleges, a belated cap (which meant that only seniors and juniors could register) managed to hold the number to 160, plus a couple of dozen 'auditors'. We even gained some local and international media attention.⁵ But popular appeal posed the pedagogical challenge: how to help a predominantly US student audience understand the predominantly European contexts which have shaped the contemporary world game. A secondary challenge was to combat the Anglo-centric bias evident in US soccer culture, and to some extent in the soccer literature, much of which is written by English authors.

Teaching *what* through soccer? A political economy of globalization 1863–2014

The narrative frame to be used for the 2006 and 2010 'History and Political Economy of World Soccer' courses occasioned interesting differences between the political scientist and the historian co-teaching them. My version of the history of the game, is more 'developmental' in its orientation than an historian like Andre Wakefield may be comfortable with.⁶ The history of soccer has reflected wider European history. The legacy of *Pax Britannica's* long nineteenth century, soccer was shaped by capitalist economic development, the emergence of proletarian subcultures, the First World War, fascism, communism, the holocaust, the dislocated history of cold war Europe, the *Trente Glorieuses*, western European integration, xenophobias, neoliberalism and globalization. But, I also develop a specific thesis: that the modern global game, manifest at its peak levels in the European Champions League and the men's World Cup, has, for better or worse, a *European* character. Only by understanding European history can one understand modern soccer: the way it is organized, the way it is played and the way it is watched. This is not to say that there has been European intelligent design at work. *Au contraire* neither Victoria's governments nor the contemporary EU sought to propagate the game. Rather, the forces that have shaped wider European history have also shaped what has become the irrepressible global game. This narrative frame consisted of four eras, a periodization representing my distillation of what I see as the best of soccer literature⁷: (1) 1863–1925: the English game emanates around the world; (2)

1925–1970: soccer’s metastasis and developmental divergence; (3) 1970–1992: Europeanized rapid, collectivized soccer; (4) 1992–present: the global plutocratic game.

Teaching Fußball & the Weltmeisterschaft der Frauen 2011

A year spent on a Fulbright at the University of Koblenz-Landau gave me the opportunity to teach a version of my soccer class in a Germany basking in the afterglow of hosting the 2006 men’s World Cup and in a somewhat quizzical run-up to the 2011 women’s World Cup. The relationship between the academy and the game is rather different than in the United States. On the one hand I had no difficulty explaining that a course focused on soccer was entirely serious: German academics take the game as a social phenomenon very seriously. On the other hand a high proportion of German academics express personal disdain for the game, I was surprised how many *Luftmenschen* boasted of never having attended a Bundesliga game.

My students in Landau, who mostly cleaved between the historically important Kaiserslautern and Karlsruhe clubs (with a smattering of St. Pauli leftists and some much-despised Bayern fans) were easy to engage, especially on fan culture. The generation born at *Die Wende*, they were especially animated on the subject of German nationalism and the flag-waving carnival of 2006. Seventy-five per cent male and most deeply engaged in the game at a local level, I was surprised by how parochial and ahistorical their knowledge was (none knew Walther Bensemann – the Jewish founder of the DFB, Kicker magazine, the DFB, and many south German clubs, including Karlsruhe). The contrast to my California ‘cosmopolitan millennials’ was striking: soccer fandom represented a localist not a cosmopolitan identity. I had anticipated the ignorance that most Europeans have about US soccer culture (AYSO, collegiate soccer, women’s soccer, women’s professional and semi-professional soccer, grassroots soccer, as well as the MLS tip of the iceberg) and I devoted energies to enlightening them. The ‘aha’ moment came in a class in which a student noted that soccer was Obama’s America at play: women, Latinos, soccer moms, techies, and the suburban upper middle class. German infatuation with Obama knew few bounds in 2008–2009. The most interesting assignment I gave my students was to have them interview grandparents or other elderly people about their memories of the 1954 Miracle of Bern. That this West German team was built around a Pfälzisch core, including the iconic Fritz Walter, evoked an especially strong response, including many stories that were completely new to the students themselves.

Although the research component of my Fulbright in Germany was on Hartz IV welfare reform not soccer, being close to the Hessian heart of German soccer did allow me to conduct interviews with two rather different German organizations: the *Deutscher Fussball-Bund* and *Ballance Hessen*. The DFB’s overhaul of youth soccer after the Euro 2000 debacle had not yet yielded the results now widely celebrated, and it was in full reactionary mode in seeing the upcoming women’s World Cup as a PR exercise in which the goal was to minimize inevitable financial losses by keeping the tournament small scale. But the politically progressive aspect of the post 2000 overhaul was evident in the development of the *Ballance Hessen* organization. Originally founded as an effort to counter racism and xenophobia in soccer in the state of Hesse, *Ballance Hessen Fussball für Integration, Toleranz und Fair Play* had developed into a national initiative, *Ballance 2006 – Integration und Toleranz für eine friedliche Fußball-Weltmeisterschaft*, sponsored by the DFB to inoculate

soccer from the taint of xenophobic German nationalism in the run-up to 2006. Widely judged a success in associating the game with ‘multikulti’ definitions of German identity, it had greatly expanded the idea of soccer as a vehicle for social inclusion, becoming deeply involved in what I knew as ‘homeless soccer’ in the US, *Straßenfußball* in Germany, as well as focusing on the integration of both women and ethnic minorities into soccer clubs right down to local levels. The DFB had extended and expanded its support of *Ballance Hessen* through the 2011 World Cup. I was able to get some of the leadership of *Ballance Hessen* to speak to my class, which made for some absorbing sessions. That this ‘Californicated’ course scored the highest evaluation ratings of any taught in the political science department that year suggested that I had struck a nerve.

A protracted, and mostly behind-the-scenes, fight within the DFB about the 2011 women’s World Cup occurred in 2008–2009. The old guard (such as Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder) was convinced of the unattractiveness of women’s soccer as a spectator sport and sought to minimize the budget for the event and confine it to small stadia. The progressives, led by Steffi Jones, President of the Organizing Committee of the 2011 World Cup (often identified with the back-handed moniker of ‘the female Beckenbauer’) campaigned for aggressive marketing of the tournament and a maximalist approach to attendance expectations. The progressives prevailed, allegedly after the intercession of Chancellor Merkel (not on the grounds of gender equality but those of national prestige). By the time I left Germany, it was clear that the organizers of the 2011 women’s World Cup saw it as an opportunity to do for women’s soccer in Europe what the 1999 women’s World Cup had done for women’s soccer in the US, an event and a process I had witnessed in southern California.

I had been the founder and academic advisor of a local branch of a state-supported, California-wide education project, the California International Studies Project, which provided refresher courses and professional development for California public school social studies teachers. With the soccerphile project director, Michelle Dymerski, I hatched a plot to run a 2010–2011 teacher institute with the theme of ‘Europe through a Soccer Lens’ with academic content from southern California scholars and a study tour to Germany during the 2011 World Cup. Anticipating a group of mostly white, female teachers wondering how they could motivate all their Chicharito shirt-wearing students, we in fact drew a very high-calibre group of teachers of all genders and ethnicities, over half of whom doubled as social studies teachers and high school soccer coaches. Never did a group so avidly devour *Inverting the Triangle*. The lecture-based component of the course allowed me to draw in faculty speakers from various disciplines, the most provocative of whom was Jennifer Doyle, who writes on feminist and queer theory and who maintained the late, lamented *From a Left Wing* soccer blog. Jennifer Doyle subsequently agreed to serve as co-organizer of the 2011 study tour.

We were able to integrate 14 Pitzer students and 20 high school social studies teachers into the taught institute in 2010–2011. From these, a subset of 2 students and 13 teachers participated in the 4-week study tour. The tour included non-soccer programming and visits to German schools, the European Parliament, the European Central Bank, concentration camps, and other sites of historical interest that are in the all-important California Social Studies Standards. The soccer portion included visits to FIFA HQ in Zurich, meetings with FIFA and DFB officials in Frankfurt, programming with *Ballance Hessen*, including the national (homeless) streetfootball

tournament, and planned and impromptu pick-up games. It also included attending eight World Cup games, including the Japan–US final, and watching most of the rest in large public fanzones. While the soccer was enthralling (especially the global convergence in technical skill and tactical sophistication, and the ultimate triumph of Japanese tiki-taka) and the crowds were huge, it is the opportunities for sociological observation afforded by a tournament that are still on a more intimate scale than is true for the men’s World Cup that were especially profound. We were able to meet with players (and players’ families) from several teams, including the US and Japan. And camaraderie among the fans of competing teams (we even found Equatorial Guinea fans) led to many conversations about women’s soccer. The omnipresent marketing and sponsorship, slick, with high production values, resulted in a level of public interest that was impressive. We never had to explain why the study tour was there and the record crowds and German viewing figures (higher in 2011 for the first round Germany games than they were for the 2006 men’s tournament) vindicated the DFB maximalists. The tournament’s substantial profit came as a shock to FIFA, as a FIFA official interrogated by Jennifer Doyle acknowledged to the group. Acknowledging that most of the FIFA executive committee had never watched a full women’s game before, and that the sexual violence suffered by South African and Nigerian soccer players was something FIFA was powerless to address were equally candid (jaw-dropping?) admissions which gave the group a good sense of FIFA’s masculinist and corporate mindset.

The teachers and students brought back lesson plans and modules which were implemented into high school social studies classes in 2011–2012. That so many teachers found their own ways to ‘teach history and politics thru soccer’, with particularly strong emphases on gender, global mega-events and sport-for-social-change impressed me greatly.

Community-engaged courses and soccer courses in US and Ugandan prisons

Inspired by the study tour of teachers and students, I decided to try an experimental first-year seminar in the fall semester 2011, ‘Soccer and Social Change’, at Pitzer college. Essentially, I combined a condensed version of my standard course with community-engaged projects. Students studied cases where soccer had been used for social or political mobilization (including the evocative *Kicking It* documentary about the Homeless World Cup), and then also got involved with local groups doing the same, including day labourers soccer teams/leagues (through which significant union/community organization has been done) and the LA homeless soccer team. Students became involved in founding and coaching the LA women’s homeless team. The course culminated with the students organizing a fundraising tournament featuring 12 teams from community organizations and students/faculty, with funds raised to send the LA homeless men’s and women’s teams to the national homeless tournament in New York. As a course, as a way of engaging students with local communities, and as a team-building exercise unleashing entrepreneurial skills which astonished me, the seminar worked remarkably well. This group has remained involved in soccer-related social action, and one, Lilli Barrett-O’Keefe, made ‘Global/Local Community Organizing through Soccer’ her major, to my knowledge the first-ever soccer major.

I initially became interested in prison education through the involvement of some of my students in the volunteer Prison Education Project, founded by Cal Poly

Pomona political scientist Renford Reese. He persuaded me to try teaching a version of my soccer class at a local medium-security state prison, the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) at Norco, suggesting that with a 2/3rds Latino inmate population it had a natural constituency for this class. I taught it in fall semester 2013 in the prison's 'Sensitive Needs Yard' (inmates unsafe on the General Population yard – primarily those who have fallen foul of gang politics, but also those convicted of sex crimes, and gay and transsexual inmates). The class of 19 was ethnically mixed (three African-Americans, one Native American, four white, three Mexican-born, four bilingual Mexican-Americans, one Guatemalan-born and three non-Spanish speaking Chicanos). All these students were already involved in educational programming at the prison. With my limited access to visual aids, it was helpful that inmates could share their Chivas and Club America tattoos with the class. Student knowledge about the history of the game in the US, Mexico and globally was very patchy, but I was delighted with the enthusiasm with which they read assigned material, and some exceptional essays that they generated. One interesting theme which developed concerned Mexican-American identity, the notion of soccer as a 'Latino' game, and whether US-born *pocho* Chicanos were 'real Latinos' if they did not play soccer. I was able to have the film-maker Pablo Miralles show his *Gringos at the Gate* film about US–Mexico soccer rivalry, which generated a lot of discussion about symbols of national identity. The class really took off once my (female) student TA and I realized that the scheduling would allow us to play a short pick-up game after the end of classes. We would play games between four 5-a-side teams, including me and 'the girl', with an enthusiastic crowd of 100+ cheering. Having Gwen Oxenham come as a guest speaker talking about her film *Pelada* was a great way to connect the playing of the game with class-based content. The games were fun, but they also served to change the atmosphere in the class, where the participants became super-engaged with the material and uninhibited in both class discussion and written work. It was a great teaching experience I was sad to see end.

In spring 2014 I taught the class again at CRC, this time on the General Population Yard, in which gangs are very active. This was a larger group of 35–45; few were involved in educational programming. There were eight African-American participants, the rest were Latino, some monolingual Spanish speakers, some monolingual English, most bilingual Mexican-Americans. Irregular participation and lack of enthusiasm for completing reading made this group a much more challenging one to teach. They were happy enough to listen to me (and on one occasion guest speaker David Goldblatt) talk, but discussion was inhibited. I belatedly realized that this group was most interested in soccer as recreation, so I attempted to organize a 9-a-side pick-up tournament in an indoor gym. But, I ran into gang politics when I was informed by Latino participants that games involving African-American and Latino players on the field at the same time contravened violently enforced gang proscription. Flummoxed, I eventually allowed separate African-American and Latino games, on condition that they wrote essays about the proscription and what they thought of it. All essays I received conveyed that the writers bore no personal animosity to the 'other' group, but that this was just 'gang law on the lower yard'. This argument was consistent with my observations of body language. The staff person present noted his surprise at interested spectating of the 'other' game by those sidelined, and some hand-shaking across the divide that took place at the end of games.

For the last day of the class, I planned an afternoon-long 2-court tournament for which I brought in a Pitzer student team, and programming around a film I knew

from previous use to be a great pedagogical tool. I had both my 'inside' students and my Pitzer students watch Gwen Oxenham's film *Pelada* (about pick-up soccer in the unlikeliest settings around the world) earlier in the week, and I was able to invite her in to talk about the film, and then participate in a CRC prison 'Pelada'. Gwen Oxenham led a fantastic discussion in which we were able to get the 'inside' and 'outside' students to mix and discuss the film and the universal appeal of playing soccer. The segments featuring a Bolivian prison league and the Israeli-Palestinian pick up drew the most animated discussion, CRC students noting that although Israelis and Palestinians could play on the same field (unlike the CRC groups) the evident malice and spite in the game showed sport cannot overcome hate. In the tournament which followed, the African-American and 3 Latino teams never shared the same court. The (multiethnic and co-ed) student team, deemed 'neutral', could play everyone and stayed on a court continuously and were utterly wiped out, as well as exhilarated, by the end. This second experience at CRC enlightened me about prison politics, but as an exercise in teaching the soccer class it was chastening.

Renford Reese's Prison Education Project in California has forged a connection with a prison education project in Kampala, Uganda led by Arthur Sserwanga at Makerere University and focused on Uganda's top maximum security prison, the Upper Prison, Luzira. A colonial prison (complete with art deco entrance gate) of notorious harshness, in post-colonial Uganda until the mid-1990s, it was best known for incarcerating political prisoners from whatever constituted the opposition at a given juncture. Starting in the mid-1990s, as the inmate population became predominantly non-political criminal, a more progressive regime emerged out of: (a) human rights campaigns led by an Italian Catholic priest Fr. Agostini (initially against the death penalty – now in moratorium – later for the right to education); (b) a professionalization of the prison service as university-educated staff replaced earlier colonial hold-overs; (c) the Museveni government applying a model of army-supervised education programming for soldiers who had helped bring him to power but had missed out on an education; (d) self-organization by inmates who pressed for greater educational programming (e) the involvement of university-based faculty from Makerere University. This has led to a system of education in the prison which runs from basic literacy to degree-level.

The most remarkable feature of this progressive system is the extent to which inmates are allowed to run their own affairs. Inmates conduct much of the education (there is an inmate co-principal of the school and many inmate teachers), as well as much of the prison's security, healthcare and cultural organizations. I was aware that there was a 10-team soccer league in UP Luzira, but I was not aware just how important the soccer clubs were in the history of the prison. Soccer had been played in the main courtyard in the entire post-colonial period, but organized soccer had been prison-organized, based on 'wards' (the chronically overcrowded dormitories in which inmates sleep). But starting in the late 1980s, independent inmate-organized soccer clubs developed, sometimes reflecting cleavages among the inmates (ex-army teams for example). By the late 1990s, these congealed into 10 clubs competing in the Upper Prison Football Association (UPFA): Manchester United, Liverpool, Aston Villa, Leeds, Chelsea, Arsenal, Barcelona, Juventus, Newcastle and Everton. Soccer became the primary associational activity undertaken by inmates and one that was in a position to negotiate with prison leadership on narrow soccer issues such as the use of the field, but also larger ones such as the right to contact

outside organizations for sponsorship and for greater leniency in allowing families to bring food and other items to inmates.

I went to Luzira to co-teach a version of my soccer class with my colleague Lako Tongun, a specialist on East African politics. We taught the course for four hours per day (2 h in the morning, 2 after lunch) over the two-week period immediately prior to the World Cup in Brazil. We had over 60 students, who ranged from some who were in university-level programmes to some illiterate, non-English-speaking ex-Kony soldiers. The class contained most of the leadership of the 10 clubs and UPFA. In terms of soccer knowledge, the vast popularity and viewership of the Premiership in Uganda meant that our students were very knowledgeable about current Premiership soccer, as well as African international soccer and Ugandan professional soccer. However, knowledge about the history of the game (including in Africa) before the 1990s was thin, even figures like Maradona, Eusebio and Pelé were only dimly known. In the light of our educationally mixed student population, we dispensed with much of the planned syllabus. In particular, we decided to ditch the plan to have students write individual short essays and instead formed them into 10 groups charged with writing the histories of the 10 clubs at Luzira. This occasioned an enormous effort to gather, collate and then consensually arrive at a narrative for each club history. During class time, Lako Tongun and I responded to student questions regarding the history and political economy of the game (with a strong focus on Africa and the history of soccer leagues in carceral settings such as English private schools, Robben Island, and the Terezin concentration camp), and the groups of students talked about their club histories and soccer at Luzira.

Lako Tongun and I used the large amount of unmediated access to inmates afforded by the *laissez-faire* prison administration to interview inmates about where the history of soccer 'association' intersected with the history of the prison. The UPFA constitution, and the constitutions of the constituent clubs, are astonishingly sophisticated documents in which everything from player and fan behaviour is tightly self-regulated, from a ban on tribally oriented soccer clubs to an elaborate player transfer system modelled explicitly on the Premiership (complete with transfer windows, fair play financial rules, etc.). The units of currency are a bar of laundry soap or kilos of sugar. The clubs are able to extract resources from their supporters such that UPFA is now wrestling with the problem of asymmetric competition: rich clubs (Liverpool, Manchester United and Aston Villa) vs. poor clubs (Chelsea and Barcelona). Some clubs (Newcastle and Everton) function as feeder teams for the rich clubs via loaning systems. We were also able to interview both the custodial and educational staff at the prison. This unanticipated opportunity to conduct ethnography has resulted in a wealth of research material.

We watched several games at the prison including a tournament between the 10 clubs, a game between the select prison team and another prison team (Murcheson Bay Prison), and one between the a prison team (Arsenal) and the prison staff team. All games were competitive but free of any ungentlemanly conduct and spectated by the vast majority of the 3500 inmates. Games are the primary entertainment at the prison. I managed to put together a team of US students and students from Makerere University (on which I played) in a game against the Arsenal B team. I scored and finally had the thrill of a 3000 crowd roar at something I did on a soccer field, for the first and, almost certainly, last time in my life. As this narrative indicates, this was an extraordinary teaching and learning experience.

Lessons from teaching soccer classes

As I embark on my 20th year as a college professor, I can say that teaching soccer classes has been among the most fulfilling work I have done. It has also been among the best teaching I have done. The near universal appeal of the game can lend itself to a wide variety of teaching opportunities, both as 'straight' academic courses and as courses modified for different types of community-engagement, in which the instructor can build from the lived experience of students with the game. In the US setting, that European soccer has replaced British rock as American youth culture's most commercially significant cultural import is a guarantee of student demand, and the increasing breadth and quality of the academic literature means that crafting rigorous courses is not difficult: syllabi will pass muster with the fussiest Curriculum Committees. Courses quite different from the disciplinary and theoretical focus shown in mine are possible across the humanities and social sciences.

I have noted that academic classes that also involve playing the game in some form have been particularly successful. The levelling equality of the field is a factor here: it informalizes the teacher–student relationship, and also creates opportunities for students to interact with others as players, as humans. In a huge variety of cultural and social settings, the ability to 'play' opens up chances to learn and to teach (my experience at Luzira has convinced me that human rights must be inclusive of the ludic). My experience suggests that soccer courses lend themselves to experimental pedagogies, particularly with regard to community engagement. Studying homelessness is important for students; playing with homeless person and getting to know your teammate, as a player and as human can take understanding to another level.

One problem in teaching soccer classes is that they tend to draw soccer 'fans'; the immense popular appeal soccer classes have can make getting students to think critically about the game difficult. Student fans may be quite tribal in their loyalty to a team (as was true for many of my students in Germany) or they may be among the global 'brand consumers' for whom the Premiership shirt is a fashion statement. Disabusing students of the idea that a soccer class is just 'fun' is not too difficult (100 pages of David Goldblatt usually does the trick). Reading and assignments can be devised which induce students to use the game as a way of understanding colonialism or homophobia. But, a more subtle problem exists in the idea that the game is a 'good thing'. Students may perceive the soccer communities to which they belong as a social movement. This is not unique to soccer, since fields from Women's Studies to Business Studies are populated by scholars and students who are ideologically committed to the phenomena being studied. But the perception among US millennial cosmopolitans that soccer and its culture is more enlightened than the American sports, or among German students that contemporary German soccer nationalism is a healthy sign of the 'normalization' of German national identity, or among CRC prison students that soccer is the rising game of a rising, Latino people, or even in Luzira the idea that soccer is a liberating activity and form of association exposes the instructor to the risk of being an advocate instead of a teacher, a dilemma I have wrestled with repeatedly. But with this proviso, I unhesitatingly urge colleagues to devise and teach their own soccer courses. Galeano has reprimanded intellectuals for not taking the global game seriously. I urge teachers not to make the same mistake.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. Syllabi for all of these courses are available from the author.
2. The rational choice analytic framework most fully articulated by Moravcik, *The Choice for Europe*. Moravcik's parsimonious thesis is that EU integration was driven by rational national economic preferences and interstate bargaining (and not by EU institutions, as neo-functionalists such as Haas had asserted).
3. Kuper and Szymanski, *Soccernomics*, 178.
4. Strauss and Howe, *Millennials Rising*.
5. Coverage by BBC TV, BBC Radio 4, Canadian CBC Radio, as well as local radio and newspaper coverage. We even drew Nike's attention.
6. Academics teaching soccer courses might well use other disciplinary lenses and pedagogical approaches. Laurent Dubois's soccer courses at Duke in 2009 and 2013 are great examples of courses taught (a) by an historian of the Francophone world and (b) as research seminars rather than lecture courses. Having Lilian Thuram in a residency attached to the course is staggeringly impressive.
7. Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*; Kuper and Szymanski, *Soccernomics*; and Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*.

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