

Thesis Prospectus

RESEARCH QUESTION

In the early decades of the 20th century, South American countries utilized soccer and the increasing amount of international competitions to differentiate and establish themselves as the best, turning soccer into a central component of their national narratives and identities. The historic relationship between soccer and nation in South America began to be challenged in the 1990s with a new phase of globalization. Player transfers, media and information circles, and European club fandoms reached an unprecedented global level. At the same time that local players began to leave the country in larger numbers, free market ideals began to be implemented in the sport industry to create a global marketing campaign that along with technology began to transform the sport's best players from local heroes into international celebrities. As players left Latin America at younger and younger ages, fans no longer identified them with the national values previously associated with the national team and the players themselves struggled to develop the national style of play associated with their national team. Players spent less time with their national side, losing their characteristic national styles and endangering their relationship with fans.

My thesis will look at how this phase of globalization affected one of South America's most historic soccer countries, Uruguay, and how the country adapted to the globalizing trends in attempt to salvage its soccer culture. I will first look at how Uruguayan soccer was weakened by the forces of globalization in the late 20th century as the local clubs became export factories and the increased power of foreign club teams negatively affected the unity and cohesiveness of the national squad, *La Celeste*. The early 1990s, the beginning of the crisis in Uruguayan soccer that

made fans feel abandoned and unable to identify with the national team and its stars, will serve as my primary case study of how the impact of globalization threatened the traditional tie between the sport and the country's identity. This time period is representative of the number of Uruguayans playing abroad and the tension between Uruguayan players abroad and the people at home in Uruguay. Players that once were perceived as local heroes and representatives of national character had their loyalty to the country questioned due to the disparity between their successes with clubs abroad and their failures with the national team.

Although Uruguay was negatively affected by the changes of globalization, it found ways to revive its rich soccer culture, a feat visible in the strong relationship between the national team and people in 2010. The second part of my thesis will focus on what Uruguay did in the mid-2000s to adapt and reinforce the relationship between soccer and national identity. I will delineate the long term institutional projects, like the redesigning of the youth divisions and the redefinition of standards for the national team players, that the new coach, Oscar Washington Tabárez, implemented in 2006. His policies mandated more behavioral, character, and educational changes than tactical ones and were not accepted by the public until they were backed up by results. Once the team came in fourth at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and won Copa America in 2011, the relationship between the national team and fans started to improve, the people commenced to once again identify with the national team, and soccer's role in Uruguayan national identity began to be reconsidered.

BACKGROUND

Uruguay, a small country with few battles and historical figures to commemorate, derives some of its most important national heroes from the soccer world, earning the sport a pivotal role in its national identity. Its victories in the first half of the 20th century facilitated the nation building of a country of immigrants by creating a common culture and identity. The 1924 Olympic victory marked the beginning of soccer's role in Uruguayan national identity, but the country's victory in the 1950 FIFA World Cup against local Brazil cemented soccer's role in the national memory and identity. Due to the vacuity of its political history, Uruguay has turned to its soccer glories to fill the void in its national identity. Manuel Frau describes soccer as a fundamental element of Uruguayan identity due to "not only being a metaphor for the Uruguayan, but also an element that fills the vacuum of a country that sees itself as an orphan of History".¹

"Globalization" refers to the increased integration and interdependencies of the global economy, politics, and society. Roland Robertson divides globalization into six phases with the last two phases being the "uncertainty phase", which occurred from the 1960s until 2000 and consisted of the expansion and concentration of wealth and digital information systems, and the "millennial" phase, which began in 2000 and includes the development of a consumer mindset and nations' preoccupation with differentiation.² The effects of these last two phases of globalization can be seen in soccer through the increase and concentration of capital in Europe, the resulting transfer of players to the old continent, the expansion of sports media and technology, the emergence of club versus nation predicaments, and the development of a soccer consumer mar-

¹ Manuel Frau, "Fútbol e Historia: La Esquizofrenia Oriental," *Caravelle* 89 (2007): 135.

² Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, "History: The Global Sport and the Making of Globalization" in *Globalization & Football*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2009), 3-5.

ket. I will refer to these soccer-related developments of both the fifth and sixth phase of globalization as the ‘new phase of the globalization of soccer’ throughout my thesis.

As the disparity between European and South American countries increased in this new phase of the globalization, Uruguayans began to question their identity as a soccer nation. The best players left to go play in Europe, the once world class clubs of Peñarol and Nacional became indebted, and the national team, losing its confidence and style, began to play an aggressive and violent game. This crisis culminated in the 1990s when an impasse between the players abroad and the national team coach resulted in a player boycott and the further deterioration of the relationship between Uruguayan fans and star players. Uruguayan soccer remained at a low point, qualifying to only one of the next four World Cups, until the country began to adapt to the ramifications of the globalizing trends.

In the mid-2000s, progress could be seen in both the country’s soccer and politics. In 2005, as Coach “Maestro” Tabárez was preparing to take over the national team, the politician Tabaré Vázquez was voted into the Uruguayan presidency, becoming the first non-traditional party president in the country’s history. The election of his successor, José Mujica, in 2010 marked an even stronger period of change for the country. Mujica received recognition throughout the world not only for his philosophical rhetoric, but also for his policies that allowed Uruguay to adapt to inevitable modern-day realities, such as illegal abortions and the failure of the war on drugs. This is parallel to Tabárez’s understanding that players’ transfers were inevitable and that adaptation through institutional reforms was the only possibility. Mujica’s and Tabárez’s reforms each fostered Uruguayan national identity by permitting Uruguay to adapt and once again have an external identity in the world.

STRUCTURE, SOURCES, & METHOD

My thesis will be divided into two main parts. The first part will consist of one chapter introducing the existing literature on the globalization of soccer and its impact on South American countries and a second one delineating globalization's impact on Uruguay, specifically. The second part of my thesis will delineate the way in which Uruguayan society adapted to the impact of globalization with a chapter explaining the institutional changes implemented in 2006 by the new coach, Tabárez, and another showing how those changes and the accompanying outward support expressed by the government, commercial sector, and media allowed for a reconciliation between the national soccer team and the national identity.

Chapter One:

The opening chapter will delineate the impact of globalization on South American soccer countries. Existing literature suggests that soccer culture in the late 20th and early 21st century is moving towards being transnational rather than national. The transition can be seen in the international transfer of players, the emergence of TV technology, and the creation of a global commodity market surrounding soccer. Numerous studies discuss how Latin American fans feel deserted by players who leave the national leagues to play abroad and how those players are often accused of being sell outs who trade in passion for high salaries. Club competitions are more lucrative than international competitions, meaning that players are required to spend all but a few days per year with their clubs, which leads to the sacrifice of the national team's unity, cohesion, and style. I will look at how technology, player transfers, and a the development of a global consumer market have caused a transition in soccer players from local heroes representing values

and country characteristics to international celebrities and distanced cultural images and products.

For this opening chapter, I will use secondary works to delineate the globalization of soccer and its effects on peripheral countries. Much has been written on the globalization of sport in the last decade, so I will limit my search to studies concentrating on soccer. Writings such as *Sociology of Football* by Richard Giulianotti and “Recovering the Social: Globalization, Football, and Transnationalism” by Giulianotti and Roland Robertson will be utilized to develop the sociological foundation for the study. After defining basic terms like glocalization, the adaptation of international elements to local traditions, transnationalism, and globalization, I will move on to identifying the globalizing trends of the last three decades and their sociological ramifications. Articles, such as “The Neoliberalization of Football: Rethinking Neoliberalism Through the Commercialization of the Beautiful Game” by Sam Dubal and “Soccer in the Age of Globalization” by Osvaldo Croci and Julian Ammirante, will be used to explain the actual changes that occurred like the implementation of free market ideals, while case studies on specific countries, such as the Netherlands, Brazil, Finland, and Hungary will offer examples of how these changes affected specific peripheral countries.

Chapter Two:

The second chapter will discuss how this globalizing trend impacted Uruguay specifically and caused a rupture in the relationship between Uruguayans and the national team. All of the effects mentioned in chapter one affected Uruguay in the end of the 20th century: the decline of Uruguayan clubs, like previous South American giants, Peñarol and Nacional, the exodus of players abroad, and a strained relationship between the players and the public. I will trace the

economic decay of the large clubs and the number of *repatriados*, national team players playing abroad that were accused of ‘saving their legs’ and blamed for a lack of dedication and passion, called to the national team over the last thirty years to gauge the speed and intensity of globalization’s impact. The tension between the people and the players abroad began to be seen in the early 1990s, so it will serve as the primary evidence of globalization’s detrimental effect on Uruguayan soccer.

First, I will utilize existing literature that concentrates on the early decades of Uruguayan soccer and its role in the development of its national identity to introduce the historic relation between the sport and country. Next, I will compare income, player sales, and debt of Uruguayan and European clubs to measure the growing disparity between the clubs of the two continents. This data is available online. Finally, I will analyze the 1990-1993 *repatriados* crisis as a consequence of the effects of globalization. In the case that newspapers from the time period cannot be found, the foundation of information will come from the chapters on the topic in *Yo Paco: un antes y después del fútbol uruguayo* by Mario Bardanca and *La Crónica Celeste* by Luis Prats. To demonstrate how the players abroad were portrayed and perceived during that time period, I will utilize the Gallup Poll conducted after the 1990 World Cup and perform interpretive analysis on Luis Cubilla’s famous 1991 interview, Uruguayan television clips from *Estadio Uno* after the 1994 Qualifiers, international press articles, and informal interviews I conducted in Uruguay. In order to gauge the reoccurring ideas in the diverse mediums, I will code the repetition of themes such as *repatriados*, european, money/luxury, sell-outs, individualism, attitudes, lack of passion, sadness, and loss of identity/*garra*. If newspapers are found, I will perform the same technique on the newspapers.

Chapter Three:

Starting off part two, the third chapter will dissect the institutional changes implemented by Oscar Washington Tabárez to overcome the negative effects that globalization had on Uruguay. Tabárez, known as *El Maestro*, the teacher, mixed philosophical teachings with his coaching, asking more from his players than results on the field. As a condition for returning to the position of head coach, Tabárez presented a long-term proposal for the national team. His reforms, now known as the Tabárez Process, included the redesigning of the youth divisions to teach the national style before players left for Europe and the overhaul of the national team image to one of a family and society oriented group of educated professionals. The development of *Fundación Celeste*, a network of thirty sport for social development schools across the country that was founded by the members of the 2010 Uruguayan national team, is a primary example of the type of image and mentality that Tabárez asked of his players. I will look at how Tabárez's push for players' involvement in society, as well as his request for players' constant interaction with fans and journalists alike, led to the rekindling of the relationship between the players and the people.

For this chapter, the foundation of information will be drawn from the official documents written by Tabárez, such as his 2005 speech at the Uruguayan Soccer Museum, "The formation of the soccer player," and 2006 project proposal, "The institutionalization of the processes of the national teams and the formation of their players". I will perform interpretive analysis on my informal interviews, an array of interviews with Uruguayan players and public figures, such as Tabaré Vazquez, about the Tabárez Process that is found in *El Camino es la Recompensa: Conversations with Oscar Washington Tabárez*, press conferences held during the 2010 World Cup

qualifiers and tournament, the 2011 Copa America, and the 2014 World Cup qualifiers and tournament, and newspaper articles from the same time periods. For the interpretive analysis on the Tabárez Process, I will code themes such as history, professionalism, youth, globalization, humanity, society, formation, adhesion, solidarity, teamwork, meaning of second place, and journey.

Chapter Four:

The way that Uruguayans reacted to the changes implemented in 2006 by the coach is the core topic of the fourth chapter. Tabárez's unique personality and lecture-like press conferences transformed the mindset of Uruguayans. Those who had traditionally treated second places as tragedies, began to value effort, playing style, and behavior. As Uruguayans began to accept his famous phrase "the journey is the reward", the media, commercial markets, and government followed suit, encouraging and exploiting the reconciliation between the soccer team and national identity. The media, once very critical of the same players and coach, jumped on the bandwagon halfway through the 2010 World Cup, the government, led by President Mujica, tied the image of the national team to themselves and the country as a whole, and businesses took advantage of the new fervor and utilized the national team and their Uruguayan characteristics in advertisements to appeal to the newly energized fans. The new image of the national team, combined with the positive results, the philosophical teachings of Tabárez, and encouragement from the media, government, and commercial market, allowed the fans to once again identify with the national team, and therefore, the national players living abroad.

First, I will concentrate on the media's delayed jumping on the bandwagon. I will compare clips from television sports show, *La Hora del Deporte*, from before and after the 2010

World Cup to show the complete reversal of the portrayal of Tabárez and the players from a critical, questioning one to praiseful and lauding. Then, I will use interpretive analysis on post-2010 newspaper articles published in *El País*, the main newspaper in Uruguay, soccer book titles, politicians' speeches, and both print and video advertisements to gauge the reoccurring themes of values, respect, sportsmanship, discipline, quality, work ethic, pride, passion, humility, and heart in the descriptions of the national team members. I will pay particular attention to the coverage of the controversial and epic moments lived by the Uruguayan national team, such as the 2010 Ghana game, Diego Forlan's MVP Award, and the 2014 Suarez case.

The perception and portrayal of Uruguayan soccer players playing abroad shifted in the mid-2000s due to the long-term planning and psychological lessons of *El Maestro* Tabárez and the support the team received from the government, commercial sector, and media. Uruguayans learned to appreciate effort and behavior and not just first place wins, while players became involved in society and transitioned to a professional image. These changes serve as a contrast from the 1990s and early 2000s, years during which Uruguayans grew frustrated with their best players due to the new globalizing trends that allowed the old continent to reclaim its place as the center of the soccer world. Although Uruguay's national team experienced a successful phase from 2010-2014, the post-2014 World Cup results have started to resemble the pre-Tabárez era. While calls to replace the coach have begun to be heard, the passion of the players has not been questioned. The losses are blamed on poor tactics or playing and not individual players' character or dedication to the national side. This shows that the changes implemented in the mid-2000s could have a long lasting legacy — redefining the meaning of success in Uruguayan soccer cul-

ture, the lifestyle and personality standards players are held to, and the relationship between players abroad and the national fan base.

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