

World Cup

Did England rig the result?

This resource was produced using documents from the collections of The National Archives. It can be freely modified and reproduced for use in the classroom only.

Introduction

England's victory in the 1966 football World Cup is one of the most celebrated events in 20th century British sport. Geoff Hurst's hat-trick, the disputed third goal, the commentator's line "They think it's all over!" have become legends. But at the time, during the tournament itself and in the weeks afterwards, England was the subject of widespread popular hostility in some parts of the world, especially in South America.

World Cup Football is extremely important in South America. Of the seven World Cup tournaments before 1966, South American countries had won four times: Uruguay twice and Brazil twice. However, of the three South American teams in the 1966 World Cup, Brazil failed to qualify in their group, and Uruguay and Argentina were both knocked out in the quarter finals.

The South American protesters claimed that England, also the hosts, had rigged the whole tournament, with the help of West Germany. They particularly complained about the referees. English officials refereed most of Brazil's games. The England-Argentina match was refereed by a German; it was a bad-tempered match and the England manager, Alf Ramsay, described the Argentinians afterwards as "animals". The West Germany-Uruguay match had a British referee and two Uruguayans were sent off.

Strong anti-British feeling showed itself all over South America.

Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. This is a confidential Report to London from British Embassy in Montevideo.
 - a) How did the Uruguayan public react to their country's quarter final defeat?
 - b) Do you think this is important enough for the British government in London to need to know all about it?
 - c) What evidence does the writer give that football is very important in Uruguayan politics?
 - d) What harm does the writer think has been done to Anglo-Uruguayan relations?

Look at Source 2

2. This is a confidential Letter sent to 18 British Representatives in South and Central American Countries:
 - a) This letter was sent to the British representatives in which countries?
 - b) Use an atlas to see where these countries are.
 - c) What did they decide to do about all this football protest? Why?
 - d) Do you think the Foreign Office took the protests too seriously? Not seriously enough?
 - e) These letters should have been released to the public in 1996. Why do you think they were kept secret for another four years?

Background

The World Cup

In the early 20th century football between national teams took place as part of the Olympic Games. Then clashes developed between the Olympic organisers, who insisted on everyone taking part being amateurs, and the professional game. Several teams pulled out of the 1928 Olympics and called on FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) to organise an international tournament. This was held in 1930 in Uruguay. Few teams outside South America were prepared to make the long trans-Atlantic sea journey and only 13 took part. The trophy, a gold cup called the Jules Rimet trophy after the Frenchman who played an important part in FIFA, went to Uruguay. They won an exciting final 4-2 against Brazil in front of a record crowd of 200,000.

The 1966 World Cup was the 8th tournament. The next one, in 2010, will be the 19th.

South American dominance

Traditionally South American nations had not been seen as playing a big part in world affairs and were not even regarded as great all-round sporting countries. However, even by 1966, they had unquestionably dominated World Cup football. To date, South American countries have won eight of the eighteen World Cups: Uruguay twice (1930, 1950), Argentina twice (1978, 1986) and Brazil no less than five times (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002). In Europe, only Italy (four times, 1934, 1938, 1982, 2006) and West Germany (three times, 1954, 1974, 1990) have come near to challenging this South American dominance.

British Diplomacy

Britain sends ambassadors, or other representatives, to most foreign countries. These people live there and have a two-way role:

- to keep the British government in London well-informed about events, and
- to promote the reputation and interests of Britain in the country where they are living.

The topics they usually deal with are trade, tourism, military affairs and diplomacy. It was unusual for football to become the subject of such a flurry of diplomatic messages as took place in 1966. There is clearly some uncertainty on the part of both the Foreign Office and Embassy staff as to how to handle the issue.

Secrecy

Diplomatic messages are usually secret. The law concerning secrecy in Britain is that government documents should be normally open to the public after 30 years. However, the documents are reviewed prior to release and some can be held back for longer.

Teachers Notes

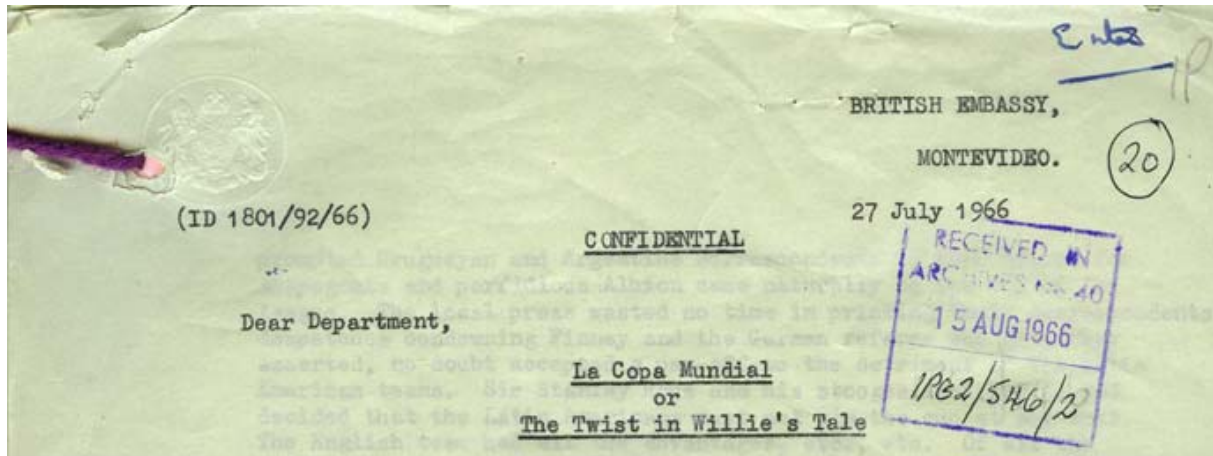
This is not just a football story, although the fact that the World Cup is at the centre of the row may draw in some students.

This is a story about football taking over other parts of life, including international relations. Should it? Why shouldn't it? If, as Bill Shankly famously said, "Football is not just a matter of life and death: it's more important than that", then this is a story about real concerns breaking in on the comfortable world of diplomacy. One can sense, in the part-joke, part-serious tone of the exchanges between the diplomats, that they are not sure how to handle it. This uncertainty can also be seen in their eventual decision to do nothing. But it must have been important enough to delay release of these documents for four years beyond the normal thirty.

Sources 1 and 2 are taken from National Archives file FO 953/2334. The advertising image is COPY 1/304/296.

This lesson is suitable for use at KS3, perhaps as part of the introductory unit or at KS4.

Source 1 : Confidential Report to London from British Embassy in Montevideo (FO 953/2334)



7. The Residence, Chancery and Consulate were now bombarded by anonymous telephone calls, often of an extremely abusive nature, asking, among other things, how much we had paid the German referee. There have been about 300 calls in all. Groups gathered outside the Residence (empty except for the servants), pulled the street-bell out of its socket and threatened the servants: however the Montevideo Police responded quickly and courteously to a request to station two policemen outside (normally done only on special occasions) and this averted further damage.

9. It would be comforting to say that the only moral of the story is, never let a South American team lose a football game. But unfortunately the net result has been to raise doubts in the minds of many normally friendly people as to whether the traditional British "fair play" really exists now, and whether Association Football in Europe has sunk to the meretricious level of professional boxing in the United States. In a country where one of the regular moves of an aspiring politician is to get onto the board of a football team, (several Ministers still retain such posts), this matters more than it would elsewhere. It has (however unfairly), been a bad week for Anglo-Uruguayan relations.

Yours ever,

(A.B. Blackwood)
Information Officer.

Source 1 : Transcript of Confidential Report to London from British Embassy in Montevideo (FO 953/2334)

British Embassy, Montevideo

27 July 1966

(ID 1801/92/66)

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Department,

La Copa Mondial or The Twist in Willie's Tale

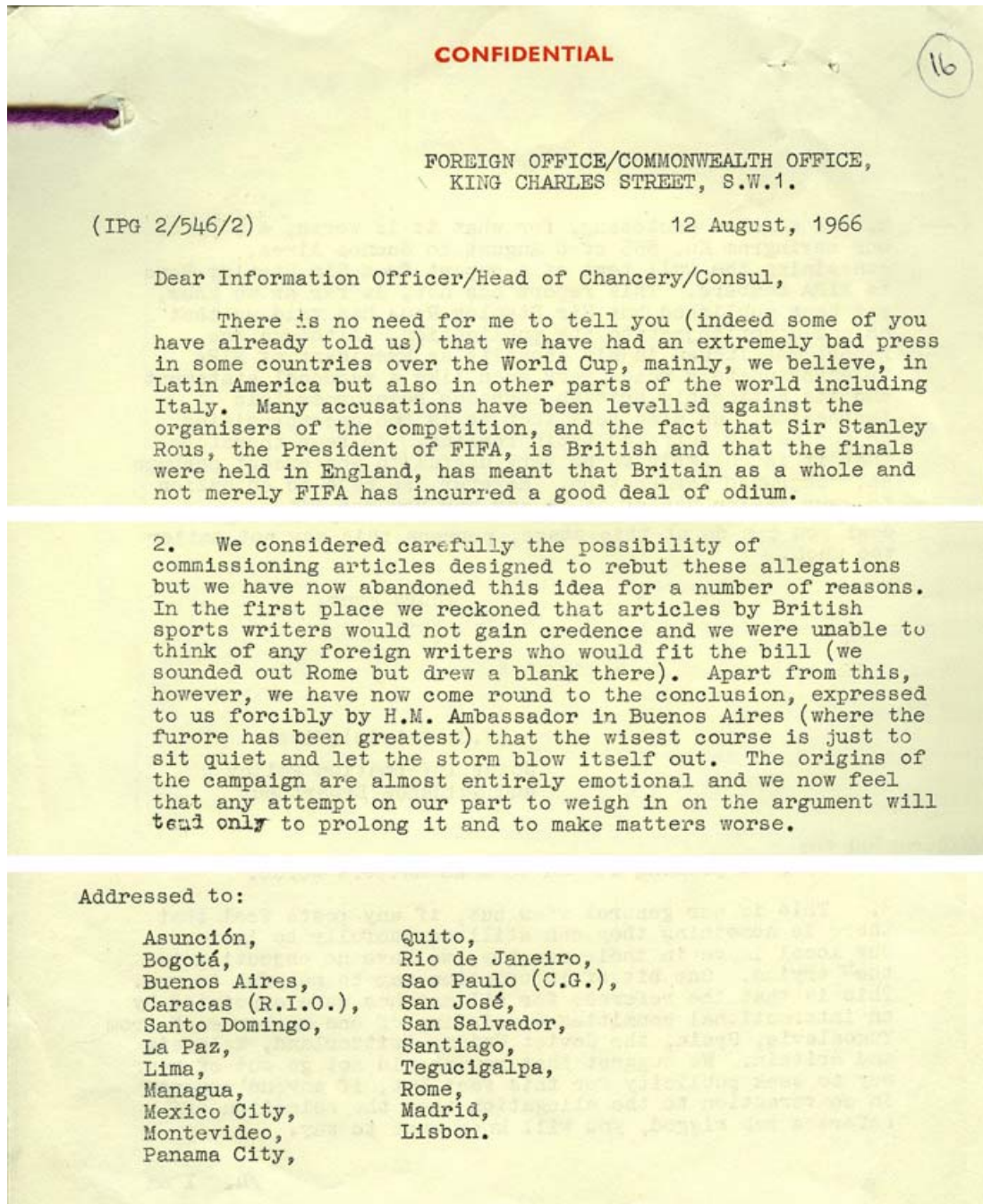
7. The Residence, Chancery and Consulate were now bombarded by anonymous telephone calls, often of an extremely abusive nature, asking, among other things, how much we had paid the German referee. There have been about 300 calls in all. Groups gathered outside the residence (empty except for the servants), pulled the street-bell out of its socket and threatened the servants: however, the Montevideo Police responded quickly and courteously to a request to station two policemen outside (normally done only on special occasions) and this averted further damage.

9. It would be comforting to say that the only moral of the story is, never let a South American team lose a football game. But unfortunately the net result has been to raise doubts in the minds of many normally friendly people as to whether the traditional British "fair play" really exists now, and whether Association Football in Europe has sunk to the meretricious level of professional boxing in the United States. In a country where one of the regular moves of an aspiring politician is to get onto the board of a football team, (several Ministers still retain such posts), this matters more than it would elsewhere. It has (however unfairly), been a bad week for Anglo-Uruguayan relations.

Yours ever,

A.B. Blackwood
Information Officer.

Source 2 : Confidential Letter sent to 18 British Representatives in South and Central American Countries (FO 953/2334)



Source 2 : Transcript of Confidential Letter sent to 18 British Representatives in South and Central American Countries (FO 953/2334)

CONFIDENTIAL

FOREIGN OFFICE/COMMONWEALTH OFFICE,
KING CHARLES STREET, S.W.1.

(IPG 2/546/2)

12 August, 1966

Dear Information Officer/Head of Chancery/Consul,

There is no need for me to tell you (indeed some of you have already told us) that we have had an extremely bad press in some countries over the World Cup, mainly, we believe, in Latin America but also in other parts of the world including Italy. Many accusations have been levelled against the organisers of the competition, and the fact that Sir Stanley Rous, the President of FIFA, is British and that the finals were held in England, has meant that Britain as a whole and not merely FIFA has incurred a good deal of odium.

2. We considered carefully the possibility of commissioning articles designed to rebut these allegations but we have now abandoned this idea for a number of reasons. In the first place we reckoned that articles by British sports writers would not gain credence and were unable to think of any foreign writers who would fit the bill (we sounded out Rome but drew a blank there). Apart from this, however, we have come round to the conclusion, expressed to us forcibly by H.M. Ambassador in Buenos Aires (where the furore has been greatest) that the wisest course is just to sit quiet and let the storm blow itself out. The origins of the campaign are almost entirely emotional and we now feel that any attempt on our part to weigh in on the argument will tend only to prolong it and to make matters worse.

Addressed to:

Asunción, Quito,
Bogotá, Rio de Janeiro,
Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo (C.G.),
Caracas (R.I.O.), San José,
Santo Domingo, San Salvador
La Paz, Santiago,
Lima, Tegucigalpa,
Managua, Rome,
Mexico City, Madrid,
Montevideo, Lisbon.
Panama City,