

## Hispanic American Historical Review (August, 2010)

### Book Reviews

**Ese gol existe: Una mirada al Perú a través del fútbol.** Edited by Aldo Panfichi. Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2008.

Peruvian soccer has seen better days. Peru ended up in last place in the South American qualifying group for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, and its club teams have floundered in the major cups in recent years. While a few players star in Europe, more make headlines in Lima for their late-night antics before games. Peruvians look back to the 1970s, when Peru had a remarkable showing in the 1970 Mexico City World Cup and its club teams did well in international tournaments, and wonder what happened.

Interest in fútbol, however, has not waned. The major teams still attract large crowds and young players dream of making it big, that is, playing in Europe. This book not only seeks to confirm soccer as a relevant topic of study but also to demonstrate the strong state of such studies. In the introduction, Aldo Panfichi challenges the once pervasive belief that soccer was the opium of the masses, part of a regime's bread and circus provided to distract. To show how these views have been overcome, he keenly links studies in Peru with international trends in the understanding of sports and society. Some readers might still question the role of soccer in society and even express their disdain for the sport, but few if any upon reading this book will question its importance in Peru or the quality of these studies.

The first four essays deal with the game's emergence in Peru in the early twentieth century, particularly the creation of the two major teams, Alianza Lima and Universitario (or la U). Collectively, these essays provide a more sophisticated picture of what had been a simplified dichotomy that served to mark each team's mystique and fan base.

Alianza was and is seen as the working-class and black team, while Universitario was linked to middle-class university students. These

foundational myths mark both teams today, as Alianza has its stadium in working-class La Victoria, while la U has built a large new stadium to the east of Lima where the upper classes have relocated. Alianza is seen as playing prettier soccer while la U is more efficient. I've heard dozens of times that Alianza is Brazil while Universitario is Germany, just not as good. The excellent essays by Gerardo Álvarez, Martín Benavides, and Jaime Pulgar-Vidal Otálora on the early years of both teams complicate but in no way debunk this contrast. Some non-fans might consider these texts too detailed, but most readers will find them fascinating reading, as well as an older article by José Deustua, Steve Stein, and Susan Stokes. Aldo Panfichi and Jorge Thieroldt Llanos delve into the differing fan base of these two teams, exploring their symbolism and their most fanatical followers, the Comando Sur (Alianza) and Trinchera Norte (la U). Moving the analysis away from famous teams and their stadiums, Carlos Aguirre examines soccer in Lima's prisons in the first four decades of the twentieth century.

Luis Carlos Arias Schreiber punctures another myth: that Adolf Hitler single-handedly prevented Peru's 1936 Olympic team from advancing after it humiliated Austria, by forcing a new match, which Peru refused. He shows that while Peru had a strong showing, fans did enter the field at the end of the game, the Austrian team was actually amateur, and Hitler had nothing to do with the decision to force a rematch. Arias Schreiber has done wonderful research, although I was sorry to have that myth punctured; I loved the Jesse Owens-like story of a multiracial team whomping the fascists.

The remaining articles explore different aspects of Peruvian soccer in recent decades. Aldo Panfichi and Víctor Vich examine the mourning and anger after the tragic loss of almost the entire Alianza squad in a November 1987 plane accident. Family members continue to believe that their children will return, while fans question why the Peruvian state was so slow to send help when the Fokker crashed in the ocean just outside of Lima. The authors do a magisterial job of exploring pain and memory, incorporating different

theoretical debates while never losing focus on the players and their thousands of loved ones. Jorge Thieroldt Llanos examines the barras bravas (Ultras in Europe) and gangs, essentially the lumpen poor kids who live and fight for their teams. David Wood provides an overview of soccer and identity in modern Peru, while two essays capture the lives and careers of major figures in the sport press. Finally, Richard Witzig discusses Peru's lone success story in the last decade or so, Cienciano of Cuzco, which won the Copa Sudamericana in 2003, eliminating Santos and defeating River Plate in the finals, and then beating Boca Juniors in the Recopa. Witzig argues that altitude (Cienciano's stadium stands at 3,300 meters above sea level) is not the key to Cienciano's success—their victories against the two Argentine teams did not come in Cuzco. Nonetheless, anyone who has witnessed a game in Cuzco —and I've been to dozens—must recognize the advantage that the altitude offers. Of course, it's not the key reason for their great run, Peru's last moment of soccer glory.

In what was clearly a labor of love, *Ese gol existe* is carefully edited and includes lovely photographs. Aldo Panfichi and his collaborators succeed via goleada in demonstrating the richness and relevance of studies on Peruvian soccer. The texts on origins and myths, youth violence, and prisoners contribute greatly to the social sciences and soccer fans and non-fans have much to enjoy in this fine edited volume.

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