URGENT

To: Dr. Henry Kissinger  860-927-1198
From: Fareed Zakaria

Dear Henry,

This is superb, not just more than I had hoped for but a fascinating meditation that abstracts out the essential elements of soccer. I would not dare to say this is your real expertise but clearly a real passion.

My tweaks are all suggestions. It is brilliant as is. Just have your office email me a final before you leave for Europe.

All best,

[Signature]
On June 9, host country Germany will open the competition for the [2006] soccer World Cup by playing Costa Rica, inaugurating a month of football frenzy. For the first two weeks, there will be three matches a day as the thirty-two survivors of a global competition that started three years ago are whittled down to sixteen by playing in eight groups of four. The top two teams [of] each group advance to a sudden-death round, culminating, after some 62 matches, in the final on July 9 in Berlin. Thus each team is guaranteed a minimum of three games, and the ultimate winner must prevail in seven games over the course of a month. Billions around the world will be glued to their television sets when the games are being played; this means early morning hours in Asia for the evening games. Millions will find ways to
interrupt their work schedules. The national morale in winners and losers will be affected particularly by the sudden-death elimination games.

I will be one of those viewers and have arranged my schedule to accommodate its necessities. Most viewers would find it difficult to describe what it is about the game that so enthralls the world. They would probably identify it with their passionate adherence to their favorite team — a passion that, in America, is shared only [by] the fanatical adherence of major college football teams.

I grew up in Fuerth, a little town in southern Germany, where soccer had the status of football in Green Bay. Soccer in the 1920s and 1930s was played by amateurs, and it happened that Fuerth won the German championship there [for the first] time in a decade. I have not lived in Germany for many more decades than I care to admit, [but] I still follow the fortunes of that club, which has fallen on
hard times in the age of high salaries and has been relegated to the
second division. It makes periodic efforts to emerge from this
condition but always manages to fall just short of the third place in the
standings, which would enable it to advance – thereby guaranteeing
the continuation of misery and hope that sustains the typical football
fan. (This is true even of Brazilian fans, whose national team wins
every third World Cup – a higher number than any other nation – but
not satisfactory to its irrepressible and buoyant fans.)

But those fans who go beyond the frenzy evoked by eleven men
on each side maneuvering a ball along a 100-meter long field into an
opposing goal [see] additional mysteries of the game reveal
themselves. For one thing, manipulating a ball by foot for prolonged
distances requires an activity analogous to ballet. Especially teams
that concentrate on this aspect of the game – like the Brazilians and
many South American teams – astonish one with their versatility and
abandon. On the other hand, they sometimes are so infatuated by their artistry that they forget that the purpose of the game is to score goals, and they are sometimes overcome by more elementary and single-minded teams. The former—dribbling & passing but not scoring—are surely all tactics & no strategy. This is because only the rarest players—Pelé for Brazil, Maradona for Argentina, Platini for France—can score goals by essentially solitary efforts. For almost all other circumstances, it is teams, not players, which win games. The reductive quality of soccer resides in the almost intellectual penetration with which the best teams move the ball down the field to solve the challenge, which seems so simple but is prone to turn into a riddle: how to get a ball past eleven opponents, with each side moving at high speed, one of whom—the goalie—is permitted to use his hands to intercept the ball. This turns the game into an exercise like a mathematical equation, an ability to find uncovered open space, leading to a position from which
to launch an unimpeded shot on the goal. The great field generals like Zidane or Beckenbauer had the uncanny skill of distributing the ball among their teammates in a manner that seemed inconceivable in the abstract and self-evident in execution. Soccer at its highest level is thus a game of complicated simplicity.

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of which, for illustrative purposes, the 4:4:2 system is among the most widely used. As a practical matter one of the midfielders is usually assigned the role of libero that is to act as a "sweeper" in defense, charged with reinforcing the most threatened position on the field. Beckenbauer gave this role an additional significance by acting as a sweater on defense and like an American football quarterback in directing the attack with his subtle passing. Whatever the formation, the speed of modern soccer and the conditioning of the players lead to a kind of total football, which means that, whatever the assigned position of the player, his task is to reinforce the center of gravity, attack or defense, depending on the situation.

The practical consequence is that goals are much harder to come by and that defense tends to dominate over offense, at least compared to the situation when I first became acquainted with the game. Teams therefore play first of all not to lose and rarely launch all-out attacks.

[You might note this is an interesting contrast to most other sports than have become more high-scoring over time.]
unless, of course, they find themselves behind. Since the number of points on the field from which a shot on goal has a prospect of leading to a goal is finite, a disciplined defense can occasionally thwart a technically superior team. Thus a superbly coached Greek team defeated a Portuguese team of probably superior individual players in the 2004 European Cup, and a very disciplined German team overcame a marvelous team from the Netherlands in the World Cup of 1974. Similarly, almost every Italian national team over the decades has relied on its tenacious defense to wear down the opponent. These theoretical aspects can be illustrated by looking at the finals of the World Cup over the last twenty-five years. I have attended seven of the last nine and never cease to be mesmerized by their different character[s].

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all-star cast of irrepressible virtuosos, the Brazilians overwhelmed a very good Italian team by a score of 4:1. The Italian team scored first, which usually in continental football gives it the opportunity to apply its Machiavellian skill in frustrating the opponent into rash errors by a give-no-quarter defense. But Brazil did not play by the book. It abandoned whatever theoretical formation it entered the game with and threw every player into a wild offense, literally running the Italian team into the ground. Panache was aided no little by [the] high altitude of Mexico City, which wore down the defenders [in] the brutal semifinal between Italy and Germany. [It] was won by the Agguris 3:2 in overtime and [was] so rough that Beckenbauer, having dislocated his shoulder, completed the game with his arm in a sling.

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In 1978, the Netherlands found itself once more in a final before a rabid hometown crowd. In an extraordinary game, the Dutch tied an Argentine team playing with Brazilian flair and European killer instinct in the last minute. But as four years earlier, they could not stay the course and lost in overtime to the home team, providing a demonstration of the healing power of soccer. Argentina was wracked
by near-civil war conditions and brutal repression so that official
guests had to move with armed escorts. But for forty-eight hours
after the Argentine victory, Buenos Aires celebrated with such
tumultuous abandon as to observe for a brief moment the bitterness of
the national style. [I don't quite understand this. Why
bitterness?]  

In the remaining final, I saw Italy beat Germany in Madrid in 1982. An Italian team that had been lethargic in the early group
matches emerged as dominant in the finals. In 1990, in an uninspired
game a systematic German team overcame a hard-boiled and
uninspired Argentine side. In 1998, an elegant French team overcame
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The most disappointing match for me was the final of the 1994
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might do for American soccer what the Giants-Colts football game of 1957 did [by inspiring] the public interest in professional football.

Unfortunately, the game was decided in a penalty shootout after 120 minutes of scoreless tactical maneuvering.

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Will this elite be broadened in the World Cup about to begin? Not having seen the national teams, I dare not make a prediction. I expect England to reclaim major role, though the recent injury of its star player Rooney reduces its prospects. This may be the year for an African team to emerge; their technical brilliance has so far been thwarted by lack of experience. The United States plays in a very difficult initial group. It would have to overcome Italy and [the] Czech Republic, both established soccer powers, to reach the elimination
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activity
their state that they forget that the purpose of this game...
is to score goals and they are sometimes overcome by more elementary and tactically oriented teams. This is because only the recent players can achieve - like for Brazil, Taradaira for Japan, Pelé for Brazil, or for France - can score goals by essentially arbitrary efforts. For almost all the circumstances it is team and not players which win games. The deductive quality of score resides in the intellectual penetration with the ball which stems from the will of the field to solve the challenge which seems so simple but is prone to turn with a mistake. How to get a ball past a defense of players with each side moving at high speed, one of whom is free - the passer - is permitted to use his hands to intercept the ball. This turns the game into an exercise like a mathematical equation, an ability to find and uncover open space, a boot to a position from which to launch an unimagined shot.
the goal. The great field generals like Blomqvist or Beckenbauer had the uncanny skill of distributing the ball among their teammates in a manner that seemed inevitable in its abstract and irresistibly self-evident in execution. Soccer at its highest level is thus a game of implicit and implicit simplicity.

And look back over the decades in

strategy.

Robert organized the game with increasing complexity.

When first

not strategy to become a fan of the great field players

were distributed with five attackers, three midfield players

and two defenders. As a result, the attackers usually

outnumbered the defenders, especially as the players

more often stayed

more and as well conditioned as to stay so they kept

on the field

in their assigned positions. Thus, there was a radical change in

deployment has taken place. It started with the

midfielder becoming in effect a third defender,

and one of the forwards taking his place at midfield.

By now it has evolved into redefining the attacker
formrward to end deploying the remaining player
in various ways. Which for illustrative purposes
the 4:4:2 system is among the most widely used.
As a practical matter one of the middlefields is
usually assigned the role of libero instead to act as
a "sneaker" on defense and with reclaiming
the most threatened positions on the field. Bedazzled
gave the role an additional significance by acting
as a quarterback on offense and like a Dewar
in directing. Whether
football quarterback on the attack, its function
with this midle positioning
the speed of modern soccer and the conditioning of
the players serves to a kind of total football which
means that whatever the assigned position of the player
his task is to reinforce the center of gravity, attack or
defense depending on the situation.
The practical consequence is that for one
much harder to lure by that defense tends to diminish
more offense at least compared to the situations when
Teams that
play fast of all meet to lose and rarely found all-
and attacks unless of course they found themselves
fast behind. Since the number of possessions is held
from which a goal can be a high prospect of
heading to a goal infinite a disciplined defence
can occasionally throw a technically superior team.
Thus a supposedly weak Greek team defeated a Polish
team of the better superior individual players in the 2004
European cup and a very disciplined German team
overcame a powerful team from the Netherlands.

In the World cup of 1974, national teams over 43 clubs,
not just 15 European teams to wear down the opposition. These theoretical aspects can be
illustrated by the bowing at the finals of the World
cup over the last 25 years. There existed never
of the last nine and never seem to be mastered
by their different character.

1970 over my first exposure to
the combination all on nothing style of Brazilian
football, led by its incomparable Pelle, and an
all-starsigle of pinpoint accuracy, the Belgians,
steadily built a very good Italian
team, literally from being good teams into the
final round by a score of 4:1. The Italian team was
just what usually in international football gives
it the opportunity to apply its technical skill
in frustrating the opponent with a tactically
adequate strategy. But the Belgians did not
play by the book. They abandoned a tactical theoretical
formation they entered the game with and their every
player went for a wild offence literally running the other
team into the ground. The Belgian style preserved
dash, a high altitude of attack, and an advantageous
defensive line. A little by little semifinal between Italy and Germany,

won by the Argentinians in overtime and the same
the same with its away
team that reached the decisive match, completed
with a triumphal offense triumphed in 1970
in the
a psychological shift from the table in 1974.

Game between the Netherlands and Germany, the Dutch
was elegant and offensive-minded to that same
ue of all-time greats - Cruyff. It had defeated
Brazal in the semifinal by the simplicity of its maneuver
in the final
rather than the individual quality. But it also involved
a penalty kick to the referee who
awarded a penalty
tick in the fiftieth minute gaining 1-0 lead. It was
a priced duel. For it tempted the Dutch to abandon
their finely tuned game in favor of an attacking style
defense. The Germans led by Beckenbauer, turning
their everything into an all-out attack - successfully
by a jumped home public. This led to a 2:1 lead
which Germany defended tenaciously through its three
half. But in the next half, the Netherlands found itself once
more in a final before a rabid home crowd.
In an extraordinary game, the Dutch tied an Argentine
team playing with Brazilian flair and European
kicks resulting in the best numerical. But that
year earlier, they would not stay this course and
Proceeding
first in preference to the home team, Argentina,
a demonstration of its leading power of soccer.

Argentina was treated with official
respect for future games, but more with armed forces.

But for forty-eight hours after the Argentina victory,
celebrated with much
eotion, more peremptorily and

Two to observe for a brief moment the bitterness of

the national stage.

In the little quarter, I met the

the seven games I watched, I saw Brazil, and

Argentina, and Italy three times and the Netherlands twice. The

only team that

better than expected were France

What to expect from the

What to expect from England is

historically small. Well this will be balanced

in the World Cup almost the left it stands to judge.

the national teams it is
to

predict, I expect England to reclaim a place

in the role through the recent injury of its star.
In the remaining games, Italy beat Germany in Lyon in 1982.

An Italian team that had been besieged in the group stage emerged as dominant. The team became dominant in its finals.

In 1990, an unimpeachable game saw a systematic German team overcome a last-hoiled and unimpeachable Argentine side. In 1998, an old French team overcame a Brazilian team which after a defeat in semi-final against Romania, the Netherlands knocked inexplicably out.

The most disappointing match for me was the final of the 1994 World Cup at Rose Bowl in Pasadena. As honorary chairman of the organizing committee, I had hoped for a lift-saving match that might do for American soccer what its friend, the youth football final of 1954, which inspired its public interest in professional football.

Unfortunately, the game was decided
in a penalty shootout after 120 minutes of scoreless tactical maneuvering.

What was
player Rooney reduces its prospects. This may be the year for an African team to emerge. Their lack of technical brilliance has so far been ignored but by finishing the United States place in a very difficult group, it would have to overcome Italy, both established soccer powers and local republics to reach the final. Elimination cannot. If it gets out of the US team, it might read the quarterfinals. The German team has been a mystery. It has not yet been involved well and a passionate public support. If it gets even a cold it could go far. Then there is always Brazil which will guarantee excitement and fans arriving for happenings rather than endurance. By July 9, Brazil will know the answer. In the meantime, 32 thirty-two games guarantee to make this thing for football of even the most passionate fans. It is to be seen that their addiction to the game grows.