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 & 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 tactics-oriented teams.  

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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change in deployment has taken place. It started with the center
midfielder becoming in effect a third defender and one of the forwards
taking his place at midfield. By now it has evolved into reducing the
forwards to two and deploying the remaining players in various ways,
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 sweeper 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].

My first exposure to the exuberant all-or-nothing style of
Brazilian football [was in 1970.] Led by the incomparable Pelé and an
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
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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
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inspired by one of the all-time greats, Johan Cruyff. It had defeated Brazil in the semifinal by the complexity of its maneuver[s] rather than individual virtuosity. In the final it was awarded a penalty kick in the first minute, giving it a 1:0 lead. It proved a poisoned chalice. For it tempted the Dutch to abandon its finely tuned game in favor of an Italian-style defense. The Germans, led by Beckenbauer, thereupon threw everything into an all-out attack, reinforced by a frenzied home public. This led to a 2:1 lead, which Germany defended tenaciously through the second half.

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
a Brazilian squad which, after a brilliant semifinal victory over the
Netherlands, turned inexplicably lethargic.

The most disappointing match for me was the final of the 1994
World Cup at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. As honorary chairman of the
organizing committee, I had hoped for a high-scoring match that
might do for American soccer what the Giants-Colts football game of 1957 did [by inspiring] the public interest in professional football.

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Altogether, in the seven games I watched, I saw Brazil, Germany and Italy three times each, the Netherlands and Argentina twice. The only other start went to France.

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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On the other hand they sometimes are so infatuated by
grafts that they forget that the purpose of the fame
is to score goals and they are sometimes overcome by more elementary and tactically oriented teams. This is because only the most players can achieve - Pele for Brazil, Maradona for Argentina, Pelé for Brazil - can score goals by essentially solitary efforts. For almost all tournament circumstances, it is team and players which win games. The deductive quality of most resides in its intellectual penetration with the best, which translates more the ball down the field to solve the challenge which seems so simple but is proven to turn with a nimble. How to get a half back versus opponent [with each side running at high speed] one of whom 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 move in unmarked open space, shoot to a position from which to funnel an unimagined shot onto
the goal. The great field generals like instance or Backenheuer had the uncanny skill of distributing the ball among their teammates in a manner that seemed inevitable in the abstract and irresistibly self-evident in execution. Hence at its highest level it was a game of unanticipated simplicity.

In Backenheuer's decade in strategic, Robert developed the game to increasing complexity. When first strategy by became a far the ten field players were distributed with five attackers, three midfield players, and two defenders. As a result the attackers normally outnumbered the defenders—especially as the players more often played were not as well conditioned as to stay on the field in their assigned positions; that is, a radical change in deployment has taken place. It started with the midfield becoming in effect a third defender and one of the forwards taking his place at midfield. By now it has evolved into redesigning the attackers.
Towards this end, deploying the remaining players in various ways. While 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 intended to act as a "smasher" on defense and will reinforce the most threatened positions on its field. Bedouin gave this role an additional significance by acting as a "smasher" on defense and he is known in directing. Whether football quarterback on the attack, its function increases the speed of modern soccer and the conditioning of the players cease to a kind of total football which means that whatever the assigned position of the player he task is to reinforce the center of gravity, attack or defense depending on the situation. The practical consequence is that for all much harder to catch by the side defense tends to diminish once offense at least compared to the situation when
I first became acquainted with the game. Because the
play was of all met to lose and rarely landed all-
out attacks, unless of course they found themselves
stil behind. Since the number of goals is
added up to and less a high prospect of
leading to a goal infinite a disciplined defence
an occasionally threat a technically superior team.
Thus a reportedly weak Greek team defeated a Poland
team of the 2004 European cup and a very disciplined German team
overcame a reportedly many time the Netherlands
in the World Cup of 1974. National team over 24 clubs
to win down the office. These theoretical aspects can be
illustrated by the holding at the finals of the World
cup over the last 25 years. Here extensive teams
of the best men and never cease to be transformed
by their different character.

1970 was my first exposure to
the continent all on nothing style of Brazilian
football. Led by its incomparable Pilie, the

Italian team literally ran a very good Italian

team literally onto the ground with the

ground by a score of 4:1. The Italian team

just which usually in international football gives

it the opportunity to apply its medalistic skill in

frustrating the opponent with a quick counter

by a give-no-quarter defence. But the Dutch did not

play by its book. It abandoned relative theoretical

formation it entered the game with and there every

player with a wild offence literally running the other

Pilie's men with a solid
team with the ground. The fantastic ability presence

High altitude of Dutch city sports embracing a

little by little semifinal between Italy and Germany.

3:2 won by the Argentinians in overtime and

that Backenbarne having dislocated his shoulder completed

white team's offence triumphed in 1970

a psychological shift stunned the tables in 1974.

Game between the Netherlands and Germany, the Dutch
was elegance + offensive-minded. It joined my
of the all-time greats - Cruyff. It had defeated
Bosnia in the semi-final by the complexity of its movement
in the final.

rather than the straightforwardness. And it had
awarded a penalty kick to the Swiss when
second-timed and to be awarded a penalty
kick in the first minute gaining it a 1-0 lead. 27 years
a promised decade. For it tempted the Dutch to abandon
their finely tuned game in favor of an attacking style
offense. The Germans led by Beckenbauer, choosing
then everything into an all-out attack successfully
by a fevered home public. This led to a 2:0 lead
which Germany defended tenaciously through its entire
half. The 1978 the Netherlands found itself once
more in a final before a rabid home crowd.

In an extraordinary game the Dutch tried an Argentine
Team playing with Brazilian flair and European
kicks, virtuoso in its first minutes. But after
generations earlier they could not stay the course and
But in question to the same team, Argentina was a demonstration of the leading power of football. With the departure of 
near Argentina was marked historic milestones! It was official news for fans, fans had to press with armed 
sects. But for forty-eight hours after the Argentina victory, 
celebrations were ended 


Buenos Aires was a center of turmoil, 


New York was the birthplace of 
the national stage.


I'm already going to 
talk about 
the seven games I watched. I saw Brazil, 
Argentina, 


and Italy three times each. The Netherlands twice. The only team that 
beaten Brazil meant to France was


What's the meaning for the


What if France the United States is 
historically weak? Well this will be determined in the World Cup along with 
again. Not any 


in to the World Cup along with the 


I had not made a 
prediction. I expect England to reclaim a place 
majors in the role through the recent signing of its star
In the remaining games, Italy beat Germany in Spain in 1982. The Italian team, that had been belligerent in the Group stage, emerged as dominant. In its final, in 1990, an unimpressed French team systematically outplayed Germany to win a hard-fought and unimpressed Argentine-right. In 1998, an elderly French team overcame a Brazilian rival which after a brilliant semi-final victory met the Netherlands. France inexplicably lost.

The most disappointing match for many was the final of the 1994 World Cup with Pele's Brazil 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 wins - let's football fame of 1984 which nurtured the public interest in professional football.

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

What was
player Rooney reduces its prospects. This may he the year for an African team to emerge. Their lack of technical brilliance has so far beenattained by experience. The United States places in a very difficult

virtual group. It would have to overcome Italy, both established soccer power, and legal republics. The German team has been a mystery. A loss would mean the end of the tournament and a passionat public support. If it gets in a role it would go far. Then and this is always Brazil which will guarantee excitement and fans, missing for happiness rather than endures by July 9.

But we will learn the answers for the meantime 32 games guarantee to made the classic

for football of even the most fanatic fans. It's also below that their addition to the fame permits it.