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Author: Mark Orton

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MARK ORTON

Argentina play football with a lot of imagination and elegance but technical superiority cannot compensate for the abandonment of tactics. Between the two *rioplatense* national teams, the ants are the Uruguayans, the cicadas are the Argentinians. [Italian journalist, Gianni Brera.]¹

Introduction

Despite having spent centuries together as part of the Spanish colonial Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, the independence wars of the nineteenth century and their aftermath saw Argentina and Uruguay separate, with the creation of the latter as an independent buffer state guaranteed by the UK in 1827 to ward off Brazilian territorial pretensions (Brazil having occupied the country from 1817).² With no discernible Uruguayan national feeling, there was little or nothing to differentiate it from its larger neighbour. Certainly, they shared the same dialect of the Spanish language as well as culinary tastes for beef, mate and *dulce de leche*, and culturally they would share the later development of the tango and reverence for the myth of the *gaucho*. Indeed, Campomar argues that Argentina considers Uruguay, ‘as a proto-province rather than a separate nation-state.’³ The largescale immigration that came later in the century did much to produce a subtle variation between the two nations. In Argentina, large numbers of Italians immigrants brought their own cultural norms to the societal mix, whilst in Uruguay, Spanish immigrants were more prevalent.⁴

One key cultural signifier in which Uruguay could express both its existence internationally and difference from Argentina has been through the playing of football. Indeed, from the Argentine perspective, Levinsky has argued that, ‘football constitutes a cultural space of the utmost importance, if not the most significant in its different dimensions. Constructor of individual, neighbourhood, regional and national identities, football is a totally social thing.’⁵

¹ E. Archetti, ‘In Search of National Identity: Argentinian Football and Europe’ in J. A. Mangan (Ed.), *Tribal Identities, Nationalism, Europe, Sport* (London, 1996).

² R. Harvey, *Liberators* (London, 2000), p. 493.

³ A. Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, (London, 2014), pp. 100-1.

⁴ C. Taylor, *The Beautiful Game* (London, 1998), p. 31.

⁵ S. Levinsky, *AFA* (Buenos Aires, 2016), p. 15.

This difference would be diffused and explained to the wider population through the pages of the mass print media on both sides of the Río de Plata. In analysing these newspapers and magazines, this paper will seek to go beyond existing academic literature in the field which has focused on the development of football as a signifier of national identity in Argentina and Uruguay individually, particularly that by Archetti and Alabarces in the case of Argentina, and Giulianotti and Osaba in Uruguay, by looking at how the juxtaposition of the footballing rivalry between them has contributed to notions of exceptionalism between the two republics.⁶

Shared Origins

The Rio de la Plata estuary which separates the Argentine and Uruguayan capitals of Buenos Aires and Montevideo was the cradle of football in Latin America. The introduction and diffusion of football followed similar patterns in both countries, from within the small but economically important British communities. The British settled in the River Plate region in support of British capital invested in the nascent countries' new infrastructure, most notably its railway network. The British also founded their own schools and colleges and social clubs.⁷ Cricket clubs were at the vanguard of the game's development, with Thomas Hogg of Buenos Aires Cricket Club organising the first football match in South America, which took place in 1867, whilst on the other side of the Río de la Plata, Albion Cricket Club established a football section in 1893.⁸ In the respective English High Schools of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, two Scottish teachers, Alexander Watson Hutton and William Leslie Poole acted as catalysts for the propagating the game. Hutton and Poole employed specialist physical education teachers who taught football to the sons of the British community and the local *criollo* elites, thus beginning a process of diffusion amongst the native population.⁹ This process was further consolidated by the formation of works teams by employees of those companies constructing the infrastructure, particularly the railways. The newly-introduced game drew in popular sectors of *criollo* society and those from other immigrant communities, principally Italian and Spanish who were working alongside the British.¹⁰

⁶ For Argentina, see E. Archetti, *Masculinities, Football, Polo and the Tango in Argentina*, (Oxford, 1999); For Uruguay, R. Giulianotti, 'Built by the two Varelas: The rise and fall of football culture and national Identity in Uruguay', *Sport in Society*, pp. 134-154; J. Osaba, 'Mas allá de la garra. El estilo del fútbol uruguayo a través de *El Gráfico* y Nilo J Suburú' in P. Arrighi et al (Eds.), *Cuaderno de Historia 8, A romper la red. Aboradajes en torno al fútbol uruguayo* (Montevideo, 2012), pp. 57-69.

⁷ D. Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round* (London, 2007), p. 128.

⁸ Goldblatt, *Round*, p. 128.

⁹ Goldblatt, *Round*, p. 128.

¹⁰ Goldblatt, *Round*, p. 128. Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 44-6.

In Argentina, a league competition operated in 1891 but lasted just one season. A second attempt in 1893 led by Alexander Watson Hutton proved more durable and survives to this day having gone through a series of splits and mergers. In Uruguay, a league was inaugurated in 1901, which included the two teams which continue to dominate Uruguayan football, Nacional and Central Uruguayan Railways Cricket Club (CURCC). Nacional, formed by nationalist *criollo* students of the University of Montevideo in 1899, were seen as elitist and nativist, founded in counterpoint to the perceived neo-colonial influence of Britain. Nacional adopted the colours of Uruguay's independence hero, José Gervasio Artigas. CURCC, who took the name Peñarol in 1913, from the Montevidean district in which they were located, attracted a support-base among working-class and immigrant sectors of society.¹¹ It was through this popular diffusion amongst the *criollo* and immigrant populations that different styles of play came to be perceived (if not located in the popular narrative until much later as we shall see), particularly in Argentina.

International Confrontation

The British community was also at the vanguard of cross-border competition with games between Buenos Aires and Montevideo XIs held on annual basis from August 1889 until 1894.¹² As with the England and Scotland football teams, their close physical proximity facilitated their accelerated development in comparison with other South American countries. The Uruguayan club side Albion travelled to Buenos Aires in August 1896, beating Retiro Athletic and Belgrano Athletic. Two years later Lobos Athletic became the first Argentine club to visit Montevideo, playing Albion and CURCC. Within four years these football clubs were being considered as national representatives, and their games viewed as full-blown international matches.¹³ From the Uruguayan point of view these were an important representation of the nation in a climate of civil war, in which its society was struggling to agree over its own self-representation. Selection for the Uruguay team was deemed a sacred honour, particularly amongst the gentleman amateurs of the Nacional club who formed the great part of the 'national' side. On the eve of the 1903 encounter in which the Uruguayans recorded their first ever victory over their neighbours, the father of the famous Céspedes brothers; Amílcar, Bolívar and Carlos, who formed the backbone of the team, claimed, 'we know that we cannot win; we come as brothers to do our duty.'¹⁴ In terms of the

¹¹ Goldblatt, *Round*, p. 128.

¹² L. Prats, *La Crónica Celeste. Historia de la Selección Uruguaya de Fútbol: triunfos, derrotas, mitos y polémicas* (Montevideo, 2014), pp. 18-20.

¹³ J. C. Luzuriaga, *Albion Football Club. Profetas y maestros* (Montevideo, 2012), p. 44-8.

¹⁴ A. Giménez Rodríguez, *La pasión laica: una breve historia del fútbol uruguayo*, (Montevideo, 2007), p. 52.

racial make-up of the respective teams, from the outset Uruguay embraced the black players who took to the game with greater enthusiasm than Argentina, fielding Isabelino Gradín and Juan Delgado at the 1916 South American Championship. By contrast, Argentina's national team has remained almost exclusively white throughout its history.¹⁵ This is despite there being very little difference in the racial make-up of the two countries. Recent estimates for Uruguay's racial profile suggest the country is 88% white, 8% mestizo and 4% black.¹⁶ As regards Uruguay, Campomar states that, 'racist though the diminutive republic was, her small size demanded a certain amount of expediency.'¹⁷

One area in which the development of football diverged between Argentina and Uruguay was in the role of the State. Football fought for space in the rapidly expanding city of Buenos Aires, where land was at a premium, and was confined in the main to inner-city wasteland or spaces in the suburbs. The situation in Uruguay was somewhat different. The Uruguayan government of President Batlle y Ordóñez which emerged victorious after the civil strife of 1897-1904, pursued a progressive social agenda including significant investment in public education.¹⁸ The provision of public playing fields by the government under the auspices of the Comisión Nacional de Educación Física, founded in 1911 'to promote athletic activity', rose exponentially from just two in 1913 to 118 in 1929. This facilitated the development of players of all classes on grass pitches in a way that was not seen on the other side of the Río de la Plata, acting as a precursor to Uruguay's later success.¹⁹

1924 And All That

Some way ahead of other South American footballing nations, including their larger neighbour Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay dominated the South American Championship which began on annual basis in 1916, and soon began to look for a wider stage to project themselves. This opportunity would come with the Olympic Games, at this point the only global football tournament, albeit expressly for amateurs and precluding the participation of professionals from the British Isles. The Olympics were thus denied the status of a genuine world championship.²⁰ However, both were invited to compete at the 1924 Games in Paris, an invitation that in the event was only taken up by Uruguay, whose government saw the

¹⁵ E. Galeano, *Football in Sun and Shadow* (London, 1997), p.35; Prats, *La Crónica Celeste*, pp. 33-4.

¹⁶ Giulanotti, *Built*, p. 135.

¹⁷ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, p. 86.

¹⁸ Goldblatt, *Round*, p. 128.

¹⁹ R.Giulianotti, *Built*, pp. 138-9; Prats, *La Crónica Celeste*, pp. 38-40.

²⁰ Goldblatt, *Round*, p. 246.

potential benefits of a strong performance cementing the country's place in a globalised world. As its Foreign Minister, Enrique Buero wrote, 'a victory for the Uruguayan team in the 1924 Olympics would have great repercussions in the sporting world, which nowadays links all the politicians and leaders of these old societies.'²¹ Argentina was not able to overcome the administrative gridlock of two rival governing bodies unable to reach consensus on selecting a single team. Despite never having previously played outside of South America, the Uruguayans defeated Yugoslavia, USA and France with consummate ease, before dispatching Switzerland 3-0 in the final. Initially seen as an exotic folly, not least because of the presence of the black player, José Andrade, Uruguay demonstrated a unique playing style. Differentiating Uruguay from the European 'other', Galeano described the team as 'the second discovery of America.'²² Meanwhile Gabriel Hanot reported in *Le Miroir des Sports*:

The Uruguayans are supple disciples of the spirit of fitness rather than geometry ...they created a beautiful football, elegant but at the same time varied, rapid, powerful, effective. Before these fine athletes, who are to the English professionals like Arab thoroughbreds next to farm horses, the Swiss were disconcerted.²³

The short-passing style of the Uruguayans, so admired by the Europeans, was largely the legacy of the influence of Joe Harley, a former Scottish professional. Harley arrived in Argentina to work on the railways and played for Ferrocarril Oeste, before moving to Montevideo and joining Peñarol.²⁴ It was Harley who introduced the short-passing game that came to be known as *a la escocesa*, in celebration of its Scottish roots and in contrast to the disavowal of football's British origins that was taking place in Argentina. Giulianotti contends that *a la escocesa* was in contrast to the English-taught 'kick and rush' game of earlier times, and facilitated the switch between the two modes of play 'according to the individual demands of a particular game.'²⁵

Response to the victory back in Montevideo was understandably jubilant, as was the press, who conflated the team with the nation as a whole. In *El Día*, Lorenzo Batlles Berres wrote, 'you are Uruguay. You are now the motherland boys ... the symbol of that little dot, nearly invisible on the map ... which has been getting larger, larger, larger.'²⁶ The Uruguayan press was also magnanimous towards its Argentine neighbours, with this editorial by *El*

²¹ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 102-5.

²² P. Lanfranchi & M. Taylor, *Moving with the Ball* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 69-70; Galeano, *Football*, pp. 42-3.

²³ *Miroir des Sports*, 12 June 1924.

²⁴ Taylor, *Beautiful Game*, p. 29.

²⁵ R. Giulianotti, *Built*, pp. 138-9.

²⁶ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 102-5.

Día reprinted by *La Nación* in Buenos Aires:

The Argentine soul and the Uruguayan soul have vibrated in unison in these times of clamorous jubilation. The hearts of these two peoples have had palpitations that have made it seem, at times, that only one heart was beating. Before now, it often upset us [Uruguayans] ... that we were referred to as an Argentine province. But this time we have happily embraced that misunderstanding: with pleasure we have wanted to show the world that the two countries on the shores of *La Plata* are brothers, not in a trivialised externalization of a merely courteous formula, but in the profound and cordial fullness of unmatched affection.²⁷

The reaction in Argentina was one of missed opportunity and not a little jealousy. The natural order of things had been overturned by 'little' Uruguay having the temerity to go to Europe and emerge victorious. Argentina had greater resources both economically and in terms of footballing talent. As Campomar notes, 'the 1920s should have belonged to Argentina'.²⁸ Argentinian goalkeeper, Américo Tesorieri, bitterly reflected,

the campaign carried out by the Uruguayans is magnificent and it rejoices me. I would have liked to be in Paris with the Argentine team to play the Olympic tournament's final match ... It is essential that our officials learn once and for all. They have to choose a team in due time without thinking of useless factions in order to reach the unity of action.²⁹

It only remained to try and claim partial victory as part of a shared *rioplatense* enterprise, with *La Nación* editorialising, 'victory in the Olympic Games has been primarily a *rioplatense* victory, linked to football of the two countries in all manifestations of its active life.'³⁰ To satisfy their pride, the Argentines challenged their neighbours to a two-match home-and-away decider. After a tight 1-1 draw in Montevideo, the initial attempt to play the return match in the stadium of Sportivo Barracas had to be abandoned in the face of a hopelessly over-capacity crowd encroaching onto the pitch. When the game was played on the following Tuesday, a 3.5 metre-high wire fence had been erected to keep spectators off the field of play. Argentina won 2-1, thanks in no small part to a goal scored direct from a

²⁷ *La Nación*, 12 June 1924, p. 2, cited in J. W. Richey, 'White Mestizaje: Soccer and the Construction of Argentine Racial Identity, 1924-1930', 2007.

²⁸ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, p. 131.

²⁹ *La Nación*, 10 June 1924, p. 3, cited in C. R. Torres, "'If We Had Our Argentine Here!': Football and the 1924 Argentine Olympic Team', *Journal of Sport History*, 2003, pp. 15-16.

³⁰ *La Nación*, 10 June 1924, p. 8.

corner by Cesáreo Onzari, something only recently allowed following a recent rule change, and which came to be known as the 'Olympic Goal'. The game would end in acrimony as Uruguay's players responded to the hostile atmosphere, the target of stones and other missiles thrown at them, by walking off the field with minutes left to play.³¹ Thus the match was something of an 'own-goal' for the Uruguayans. As Quique Aramburu says:

Politically, Uruguay handled that badly because they didn't need to go. They should have said: "Excuse me, we're world champions. What are you?" But they went and the Argentinians won 1-0 ... It was a political error to go there. They claimed they were the moral champions.³²

The result assumed a far greater significance that it warranted and Argentina would claim the psychological upper-hand until the Olympic title was up for grabs again in 1928. Indeed, the Argentine press was swift to take the moral high ground concerning the unsavoury incidents at the conclusion of the match. *La Prensa* reported, 'the loss of a football match does not inflict any injury on the sovereignty of the country of the losing team or imperil the safety of the nation.'³³ Meanwhile, *El Gráfico* complained that 'the scenes of guerrilla combats between Olympic champions and the public, Scarone against police officers, have no precedent in *rioplatense* matches. How can this happen? How did both sides and fans manage to create this?'³⁴

A New World Order

In 1925 two *rioplatense* clubs, Nacional from Uruguay and Boca Juniors from Argentina, capitalised on the region's newfound prominence to undertake successful European tours. However, the apparent misbehaviour of the Uruguayan players in fighting amongst themselves gave sectors of the Argentine press leverage to distance themselves from their neighbours, using derogatory racial language to differentiate them from the civilised, 'European' Argentines. In an editorial entitled 'The Savage South Americans,' *Crítica* wrote of the Nacional players, 'quarrels and resentments should be aired at home, not on foreign soil ... [Europeans] might wrongly suppose that beneath the polite and cultured appearance of a South American lies a wild and savage Indian.'³⁵

³¹ Goldblatt, *Round*, pp. 244-6.

³² Taylor, *Beautiful game*, p. 33.

³³ *La Prensa*, 13 October 1924, cited in T. Mason, *Passion of the People?* (London, 1995), p. 35.

³⁴ J. Wilson, *Angels With Dirty Faces* (London, 2016), p. 43.

³⁵ *Crítica*, 17 March 1925, p.14, cited in M. B. Karush, 'National Identity in the Sports Pages: Football and the Mass Media in 1920s Buenos Aires', 2003, p. 26.

Indeed, bad blood became a feature of Argentine/Uruguayan encounters at both international and club level, as Keblaitis records in his description of a 'friendly' between Independiente and Wanderers de Montevideo in March 1929:

The old brotherhood that united these old institutions cracked this evening and it was the fault of the exaggerated violence that the Uruguayans came to play. It would seem that the recent international matches between the national teams elevated the rivalry to that of hatred.³⁶

When Uruguay came to defend their Olympic title four years later in Amsterdam, Argentina made sure they would be there too. The pair showed once more that they were head and shoulders above the amateurs of continental Europe and the rest of the world as they both progressed to the final. Appetite for news of the Olympic campaigns in the respective capitals was enormous. Newspapers set up loudspeakers outside their offices and in public plazas to relay commentaries of the games as telegrams were received from Holland with updates.³⁷ Uruguay eventually prevailed 2-1 in a replay after the first game was drawn, with their captain, José Nasazzi leading a tremendous rear-guard action. The Uruguayan victory served to cement their place as a global nation, with the team's rich benefactor, Atilio Narancio proclaiming, 'we are no longer just a spot on the map of the world.'³⁸ As professionalism becoming more widespread in Europe, FIFA moved to create a world championship that was open to all players and not restricted to Olympic amateurs. On the back of its healthy economic situation from the export of beef and wool, and its status as double Olympic champions, Uruguay suggested themselves as hosts of the inaugural World Cup in 1930, and were subsequently accepted as such by FIFA. The construction of a new stadium, the Centenario (in celebration of 100 years of independence), was the centrepiece of the bid.³⁹ With few European teams prepared to travel across the Atlantic for this novice competition, despite the Uruguayan organizers offering to pay their passage, Argentina and Uruguay once more dominated and met again in the Final. The hyperbole surrounding the game was intense with hundreds of newspaper column inches devoted to it, whilst upwards of 15,000 Argentines made their way across the Río de la Plata in the hope of watching the game. Many were in fact stranded on boats in the middle of the estuary stuck in fog and missed the match. As in 1928, thousands gathered outside newspaper offices for updates or were glued to the radio.⁴⁰ The final also reinforced perceived cultural differences between the two nations that had started to build since 1924, as ideas of a uniform *fútbol*

³⁶ C. G. Keblaitis, *Alma Roja. Independiente ejemplo de amateurismo*, (Buenos Aires, 2007), p. 521.

³⁷ T. Mason, *Passion of the People?* (London, 1995), pp. 36-7.

³⁸ Galeano, *Football*, pp. 42-3.

³⁹ Goldblatt, *Round*, pp. 247-252.

⁴⁰ Goldblatt, *Round*, pp. 247-252.

rioplatense broke down. Central to this deconstruction was the notion that the Uruguayans were inherently mentally tougher than their Argentine counterparts. As the academic Andrés Morales claims, the Uruguayans

started to forge a style that felt itself superior to the Europeans and different to the Argentines. The skill based on the break of the waist, the hair ribbon, the nutmeg, the *sombrero*, the *gambeta*, combines itself with a profound 'courage' in the face of difficult moments ... It is in the 1920s, then, that it started to generate a self-image that would as principal disturb Argentina.⁴¹

This was demonstrated in the performance of Argentina's Luis Monti, a key player noted for bullying opponents on the pitch and his team's 'strong man'. In the biggest game of the competition he was a shadow of his former self, cowed by death threats received at the Argentina's Santa Lucia hotel on the eve of the match. This appeared to transmit fear to his team-mates, who lost 4-2 after holding a 2-1 lead at half-time.⁴² Ironically, Monti was considered in essence a more Uruguayan style of player, 'the Argentinian as pugilist' as Campomar labels him. Monti played instead of the more archetypal exponent of *La Nuestra*, Adolfo Zumelzú, described by *El Gráfico* as being, 'noble ... neat sidestep, a short passer ... complete intelligence.'⁴³ Scapegoated by the Argentine press and public, Monti would later complain, 'the Argentinians had made me feel like rubbish, a maggot, branding me a coward and blaming me exclusively for the loss against the Uruguayans.'⁴⁴ The episode would strike to the core of the Argentine psyche. The narrative was very much couched in gender terms, in the loss of masculinity and virility at the hands of the Uruguayans. In the contemporary media, *La Prensa* complained that

Argentine teams sent abroad to represent the prestige of the country in any form of sport should not be composed of men who fall at the first blow, who are in danger of fainting at the first onslaught even if they are clever in their footwork ... These 'lady players' should be eliminated.'⁴⁵

⁴¹ Cited in J. Osaba, 'Mas allá de la garra. El estilo del fútbol uruguayo a través de *El Gráfico* y Nilo J Suburú' in P. Arrighi et al (Eds.), *Cuaderno de Historia 8, A romper la red. Aboradajes en torno al fútbol uruguayo* (Montevideo, 2012), pp. 59-60.

⁴² Goldblatt, *Round*, pp. 247-252.

⁴³ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 139-46.

⁴⁴ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 139-46.

⁴⁵ Mason, *Passion*, pp. 40-3.

Nearly eighty years later, Bayer would be describing the 1930 World Cup in similar terms in his history of Argentine football:

It is a true state of war. The Uruguayans want to win or win. The Argentinians, at least to show them that they have finished with the complex of paternity ... The Argentinians team starts to wobble. It is a sieve. The Uruguayans score three times ... They are crowned the first World Champions of football. We continue being their sons.⁴⁶

As Goldblatt identifies, it was at this point that, ‘the roots of both national footballing paranoia and self-loathing were born.’⁴⁷

In Montevideo meanwhile, the Uruguayans were ecstatic. Reaction in Argentina was naturally the reverse of the exaltation felt across the Río de la Plata, with very nationalist overtones. Outposts of Uruguayan presence in Buenos Aires like the Consulate and the Oriental Club were attacked, whilst youths marched through the streets with the national flag, playing *Sacarse el Sombrero*. Passers-by were expected to tip their hats to this venerable symbol.⁴⁸

Conservative press opinion reflected disappointment in the perceived lack of dignity in Argentine society’s reaction to the defeat, considering it as a seditious threat to public order. More revealingly, they failed to grasp the true extent to which football had infused the consciousness of the popular classes as an expression of their hopes and aspirations. For example, *La Nación* opined that:

We quite understand the vehement desire on the part of the people to see the Argentine side win the match and the championship; we can make allowances for the passionate enthusiasm of the crowd. But this is not the sort of conflict which calls either for acts of ruffianism, and then, on top of that, a sudden call to pseudo-patriotism, in the shape of the National Anthem, to prevent the police from taking repressive measures. Above football ... comes the grade of culture which we have achieved, and it is the business of the authorities to take whatever steps they deem necessary to maintain that culture. This is something we ought to take care never to lose.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, *El Gráfico* – with some irony as Archetti notes, given that its writers were fundamental to notions of Argentine football representing national identity – bemoaned how

⁴⁶ O. Bayer, *Fútbol Argentino* (Buenos Aires, 2016), pp. 32-3.

⁴⁷ Goldblatt, *Round*, pp. 247-252.

⁴⁸ Mason, *Passion*, pp. 40-3.

⁴⁹ Mason, *Passion*, pp. 40-3.

'the poor sporting education of the football directors has created this attitude in the fans. It looked as though these twenty-two men trying to kick the ball in the opposition goal lay the future of the nation'.⁵⁰ Throughout the competition the AFA had complained about aggression on the part of home crowds and discrimination against them by the hosts, and following the final took the decision to break off relations with their Uruguayan counterparts. Delegation member, Augusto Rouquette complained, 'I returned to Buenos Aires so disgusted by these incidents, that I consider it sufficient to think of ending international matches.'⁵¹ It was a rift that would have wider continental implications, with the South American Championship being held in abeyance until 1935 when it was contested in Peru.⁵² Meanwhile, a contemporary British observer, Forbes, noted that 'the breaking off of relations between Argentina and Uruguay in August 1932, may be traced to the bitterness on one side and the impolitic rejoicing on the other which followed the defeat of the larger republic in the stadiums of Montevideo.'⁵³ Indeed, the wounds would never fully heal, despite attempts at sporting reconciliation through a series of 'friendly' competitions. In the 1938 edition of the Torneo Internacional Nocturno, featuring clubs from Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Rosario and La Plata, Nacional played Estudiantes in front of a hostile crowd in La Plata. One of the Uruguayan delegation implored the Nacional skipper, Ricardo Faccio to let the home side win so that they could return across the Río de la Plata safely. Faccio refused, saying, 'whatever happens, happens. We will win this match for our honour, for Nacional, our country and our family.'⁵⁴ Nacional, did prevail 2-1 but not before the encounter had descended into what became known as 'the match of the bloodstained shirts.' Ultimately, what the 1930 World Cup showed was that it was no longer possible to view *fútbol rioplatense* as a uniform description for the game in South America, that individual signifiers were now routinely being deployed to describe Argentina and Uruguay separately rather than together. Brera's 'ants and cicadas' analogy seems particularly apposite in describing the Uruguayans as serious workers, with an organised mindset focused on getting the job done, with the Argentines seen as loud, showy and carefree.

Separate Identities

This dichotomy would further express itself with individual descriptors that would henceforth be used to describe their respective national styles. This was not unique to the River Plate

⁵⁰ Archetti, *Masculinities*, pp. 74-5.

⁵¹ Prats, *La Crónica Celeste*, pp. 77-82.

⁵² L. Wernicke, *Historias insólitas de la Copa América* (New York, 2016), pp. 65-6.

⁵³ R. Forbes, *Eight Republics in Search of a Future? Evolution & Revolution in South America*, (1933), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, p. 199.

and became common elsewhere in South America, with *el toque* in Peru and *futbol arte* in Brazil becoming self-representations of those nations.⁵⁵ In Argentina, *la nuestra* (literally 'ours') was essentially an extension of existing notions of *fútbol rioplatense* but incorporating elements felt to be unique to Argentinian football. This included playing in large-sided games on the *potrero*, or waste-ground, in which individual expression and spontaneity was essential as well as close control of the ball and the ability to dribble past opponents in a confined space. This would be most famously expressed in the pages of the popular weekly magazine, *El Gráfico*, and its star writer Ricardo Lorenzo (ironically a Uruguayan) who wrote under the pen-name Borocotó. He wrote in 1928, 'one of the high quality 'popular products' is dribbling, and its exponents are refined Argentinian football players. The practice of football permits the Argentinians – and the nation to be seen in the world, to be remembered, and above all to be prized.'⁵⁶ The Uruguayan written press would play its part in defining what were considered to uniquely Uruguayan national traits, distilling them into what came to be known as the *garra charrúa*. Meaning 'claw', *garra* was taken to mean the courage and fighting spirit of the indigenous Charrúa population of Uruguay, who were not subjugated by their Spanish colonial masters in the same way that the more numerous Guaraní population were.⁵⁷ Thus *El País* was able to claim after the 1930 World Cup Final:

The whistle of the referee signalled the end of a titanic fight between the two colossuses. And, with it, flourished with the success, that deserved by Uruguay, of this tiny Uruguay in territorial extension, but great, immeasurably great, through its moral values, through the proud strength, of its race of fierce blood, like good *charrúa* blood.⁵⁸

Meanwhile the full term, *garra charrúa* was first coined after Uruguay's 3-0 victory over Argentina at the 1935 South American Championship in Peru helped them claim the continental crown against the odds with an ageing team, many of whom were in their thirties.⁵⁹ However, it could also be seen as negating the more positive traits of attractive football with which Uruguay had dominated world football in the 1920s. As Campomar identifies, 'it would sit uneasily with the finesse that many of the country's players possessed.'⁶⁰ One Uruguayan commentator of the 1940s claimed that it was a 'synthesis of racial fortitude, a tangible and spiritual manifestation of Latin mental agility and physical

⁵⁵ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 100-1.

⁵⁶ *El Gráfico*, Issue 467, 1928, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Taylor, *Beautiful Game*, pp. 35-6.

⁵⁸ *El País*, 31 July 1930, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Prats, *La Crónica Celeste*, pp. 9-11.

⁶⁰ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 391-5.

virility.⁶¹ But as Campomar rightly counter-claimed, 'it somehow seems disingenuous to identify ourselves with poor semi-nomadic Charrúa Indians, the last of whom were betrayed and vanquished in 1832, leaving the country without any semblance of an indigenous culture'.⁶² Perhaps the best explanation belongs to that of Bayce, who posits that it was an attempt by Uruguayan nationalists towards 'washing their hands of the blame for the genocide and reclaim the indigenous ancestry of the *charrúa* as part of the national patrimony'.⁶³

Isolation

After the 1930 tournament, Uruguay shied away from the World Cup until 1950, boycotting tournaments held in Europe due to the lack of logistical support offered by the Europeans. Argentina meanwhile sent an amateur team to the 1934 World Cup, due once more to internal administrative schisms, but were eliminated by Sweden after just one match. Argentina subsequently chose to stay away from the competition for a variety of reasons until 1958. Uruguay emerged from their self-imposed exile at the 1950 World Cup on the back of rising living standards from the high demand for its agricultural produce, from a Europe recovering from World War Two. This served the belief that the country was once more a player on the global stage as it revelled in the motto, *Como el Uruguay no hay* – 'There is nowhere like Uruguay'.⁶⁴ They met the hosts and favourites Brazil in the final, a country that for so long had designs on its national territory. Prior to the final, the president of the Asociación Uruguaya de Fútbol (AUF), Dr Jacobo, made the downbeat comment that, 'what's important is that these people don't make six goals. If they score only four goals our mission will be successful'.⁶⁵ But the team's captain Obdulio Varela would have none of it, invoking the *garra charrúa* in his team-talk before the game: 'Enter walking slowly, quietly confrontational. Don't look up at the stands but straight ahead, because the match is played on the ground and we are eleven versus eleven. They don't count out there! Let the show begin'.⁶⁶

Having played much of the game with their backs against the wall as the Brazilians outplayed them, led by Varela Uruguay prevailed through sheer will-power. The captain proved to be an obdurate opponent, entering into a dispute over a refereeing decision to

⁶¹ Giménez Rodríguez, *La pasión laica*, p. 9.

⁶² Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 2-9.

⁶³ R. Bayce, 'El sinuoso proceso de constitución de la identidad nacional y futbolística' in J. C. Luzuriaga, A. Morales & J. Osaba (Eds.), *Cuaderno de Historia 14, A romper la red Miradas sobre fútbol, cultura y sociedad* (Montevideo, 2014), p. 57.

⁶⁴ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, pp. 2-9.

⁶⁵ Goldblatt, *Round*, pp. 263-5.

⁶⁶ Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, p. 226.

disrupt the Brazilians' rhythm.⁶⁷ According to Giulanotti, 'the argument with the referee became an almost mythical moment, a metonym for the new Uruguay, and a pivotal image in the formation of a collective memory within the modernizing nation.'⁶⁸ Their victory served to maintain the illusion of global invincibility, their record being four international tournaments played, four won. Had they entered in 1934 or 1938, the likelihood is that the more powerful European sides, especially Italy, would have beaten them, but on such misappropriations of history are myths built. Football had thus again ensured the Uruguay had a far higher international profile than it would otherwise have had. As Uruguay's coach at the 1966 World Cup, Ondino Vieira, would later say, 'other countries have their history, Uruguay has its football.'⁶⁹

Arguably the apotheosis of Uruguayan football came not with victory at the 1950 World Cup but instead four years later in Switzerland (the country's European twin according to the *New York Times* in 1951) when they mixed it with the very best of European football to finish in fourth place.⁷⁰ After destroying Scotland 7-0 and defeating England in the quarter-final, they played out one of the greatest games in World Cup history against Hungary in the semi-final, bowing out after extra-time. The 'scientific football' of the 'Mighty Magyars' demonstrated that European football had not only caught up with Latin American football after recovering from the ravages of the Second World War, but was threatening to pull significantly ahead.⁷¹

Double Helix

1930 would be a watershed in *rioplatense* football, when both Uruguay and Argentina were at the summit of world football. From that point on their footballing fortunes would be like a double-helix – when one was in the ascendant the other would be descendant with occasional periods like the 1958, 1966 and 1974 World Cups where they were once more on a par; for all the talk of exceptionalism, there was as much uniting the pair as separated them. After their heroics in Switzerland, Uruguay entered a period of decline, failing even to qualify for the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. That tournament not only marked Argentina's return from the international wilderness but also its greatest footballing catastrophe, a 6-1 defeat to unheralded Czechoslovakia which eliminated them in the first round. Both teams were hampered in this period by the plundering of their best players by Italy, who skirted

⁶⁷ Campomar, *iGolazo*, pp. 2-9.

⁶⁸ R. Giulanotti, *Built*, p. 141.

⁶⁹ B. Glanville, *The Story of the World Cup* (London, 2005), p. 19.

⁷⁰ Campomar, *iGolazo*, pp. 2-9.

⁷¹ Goldblatt, *Round*, p. 295.

round their own ban on foreigners by naturalizing them as Italians due to their antecedents who had earlier migrated to the Río de la Plata. Thus Uruguayan World Cup winners, Schiaffino and Ghiggia, and Argentina's 'Trio of Death' from their 1957 South American Championship-winning team, Omar Sivori, Humberto Maschio and Antonio Angelillo would henceforth wear the *azzurri* of the Italian national team on the international stage.⁷² A quarter-final place in 1966 and fourth place at the 1970 World Cup, along with strong performances by Peñarol in the Copa Libertadores were to be but brief respites in the downhill trajectory of Uruguayan football, which became renowned for its spiteful and dirty play. When challenged about Uruguay's negative approach at the 1970 World Cup, at which they reached the semi-final, their coach, Juan Hohberg, a veteran of the 1954 side, dismissively replied that it wasn't his job 'to think like the crowd.' Indeed, this tough, physically uncompromising style of football came to be considered as the very embodiment of *garra charrúa*.⁷³ Argentine football also entered a destructive phase during the 1960s in a misguided attempt to mimic the 'scientific football' of the Europeans. The expulsion of Antonio Rattín against hosts England in the 1966 World Cup quarter final and the accompanying charge of Alf Ramsey that they 'acted like animals', was but a prelude to the violence meted out by Estudiantes de La Plata in the stadiums of South America and Europe as they dominated the Copa Libertadores with a brand of football that came to be known as *anti-fútbol*. Neither team had a response to the 'Total Football' of Johan Cruyff's Dutch side at the 1974 World Cup. For the Uruguayans this was another staging post on the road to mediocrity, which it had reached economically and politically in 1973 following the military coup and global oil price hike.⁷⁴ For Argentina, 1974 was to prove an epiphany. Coached by the idealistic César Luis Menotti, Argentina won the 1978 World Cup on home soil with an attractive, attacking team which harked back to the golden age of *la nuestra*. For Menotti it was essential that Argentine football to return to its roots if it was to recapture past glories:

An authentic national football exists, in the same way as an Argentinian way of life exists, and it was modelled since the origins of our nationality with passion, with sacrifice, with patience and with rebelliousness ... This made possible the survival of a line, of a style modelling *la nuestra*.⁷⁵

Two years later, Uruguay hosted the *Mundialito* to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the first World Cup, with all the previous winners invited. They would win the competition, beating Holland and then Italy in a fractious match before overcoming favourites Brazil in the

⁷² Giulianotti, *Built*, p. 141.

⁷³ R. Williams, *The Perfect 10* (London, 2006), pp. 123-6.

⁷⁴ Campomar, *¡Golazo*, pp. 2-9.

⁷⁵ Archetti, *Masculinities*, pp. 74-5.

final, reviving memories of the *Maracanazo* triumph of 1950. The victory was reported as the embodiment of the *garra charrúa*. The Italian magazine *Guerin Sportivo* wrote, 'the Uruguayan victory was unexpected after the beautiful performance of Brazil, which makes it even more valid. Máspoli's team was tactically perfect.'⁷⁶

However, for Argentina, eliminated by Brazil at the group stage, the competition was once more symptomatic of a perceived lack of respect by its smaller neighbour. Their young star, Diego Maradona complained:

I think we treat them [the Uruguayans] so much better than they treated us. They think we are monsters. They throw stones at us in the street ... always saying nasty things about us. We have to do something about it. We should never play in Uruguay again.⁷⁷

Indeed, Morales has argued that the antipathy shown to Argentina in 1980 was opposite to the sympathy shown to Brazil (at least until the final).⁷⁸ Uruguay's nadir came at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. In the group stage they were humiliated 6-1 by debutants Denmark, before the poverty of their approach was confirmed against Scotland when José Batista was sent off after just 30 seconds.⁷⁹ In contrast to 1928 and 1930, it would be a Maradona-inspired Argentina, the eventual winners, who would deliver the *coup de grâce* in the second round, beating them 1-0. Revelling in a sense of revenge and perhaps overcoming an Argentine inferiority complex, Maradona said afterwards, 'that wasn't just another victory, the Uruguayans' paranoia really pissed me off in those days, and also we hadn't beaten them in a World Cup for fifty-six years.'⁸⁰ Ironically, in terms of their conservative approach, the respective coaches, Argentina's Carlos Bilardo and Omar Barras of Uruguay, were not ideologically that far apart; it was the inventiveness of Maradona, the physical embodiment of *la nuestra* that triumphed over *garra charrúa* taken to its furthest extreme. Enzo Francescoli, Uruguay's playmaker and spiritual heir to the great players of the 1920s was but a peripheral figure.⁸¹

In the present decade, Uruguayan and Argentine football has re-ascended to the top of the world game, reigniting debate over differing identities. In 2010 Uruguay achieved a surprise fourth place at the World Cup before winning the Copa América (as the South American

⁷⁶ Prats, *La Crónica Celeste*, p. 165.

⁷⁷ Campomar, *¡Golazo*, pp. 364-5.

⁷⁸ A. Morales, 'La identidad rioplatense y el fútbol. Confraternidad y violencia en el clásico del Río de la Plata' in Luzuriaga, Morales & Osaba (Eds.), *Cuaderno*, p. 44.

⁷⁹ Campomar, *¡Golazo*, pp. 391-5.

⁸⁰ D. A. Maradona, *El Diego* (London, 2004), p. 126.

⁸¹ Campomar, *¡Golazo*, pp. 2-9.

Championship is now called) in Argentina in 2011. Meanwhile Argentina has established itself as the number one ranked country in the world, not least because of the superlative individual ability of Lionel Messi, the nation's most recent incarnation of *la nuestra* by reaching the final of the World Cup in 2014 and those of the Copa América in 2015 and 2016. Although arguably the latter two, penalty shoot-out defeats to Chile in both finals, have reinvigorated the historic stereotype of Argentines being temperamentally fragile at decisive moments, having dominated both tournaments. This was also demonstrated in arguably the defining game of the era, the quarter-final match between the two, which the Uruguayans won on penalties despite playing nearly two hours a man short, again inducing in Argentina a sense of being usurped by their upstart neighbours. As in 1930, the press accused the side of lacking the mental strength and strategic acumen, with *Olé* complaining, 'it cannot go on like this. Without heart, without defence, without a tactical idea.'⁸² As striker, Luis Suárez further elaborates in his autobiography:

For the Argentinians, the idea of Uruguay winning another Copa América in Argentina, as we had done in 1916 at the first Copa América which was held on Argentina's centenary, and in 1987, when Enzo Francescoli played up front with Rubén Sosa, was horrible for them. Worse, it took our total to fifteen – one more than theirs. That made the satisfaction even greater for us. The Argentinian media were furious; they thought they would have been favourites. They should have been. But we beat them. And here we were, taking over 'their' stadium and 'their' day ... To win the 2011 Copa América was incredible; to win it in Argentina even more so.⁸³

Conclusion

The development of a footballing national identity in the River Plate basin was originally part of a wider nationalist narrative which rejected a perceived neo-colonial Anglo-Saxon domination in the region. Thus, football as it diffused amongst the *criollo* and Italian and Spanish immigrant communities took on certain characteristics. The spontaneity and individual skill that was applied to both sides of the Río de la Plata was a contrast to the playing style practiced by the British and their descendants. However, as Uruguay and later Argentina ascended to the pinnacle of football from the mid-1920s, the 'other' became not the British but each other, and a process of differentiation more imagined than real was crystallized. As Taylor notes, 'and like those diehard antagonists, England and Scotland,

⁸² G. Balague, *Messi* (London, 2014), p. 420.

⁸³ L. Suárez, *Crossing the Line* (London, 2014), pp. 99-101.

Uruguay and Argentina are in fact very similar, or at least have more in common than divides them.⁸⁴ Indeed, as Paz further elaborates:

“National traits” ... were simply the result of the nationalistic preachments of the various governments. Even now, a century and a half later, no one can explain satisfactorily the “national” differences between Argentinians and Uruguayans, Peruvians and Ecuadorians, Guatemalans and Mexicans.⁸⁵

Evidence for this could be seen in the final qualifier between the two for the 2002 World Cup. Argentina had already qualified, whilst Uruguay needed a point to ensure a place in the repechage. With time running out and the score at 1-1, Argentine midfielder, Juan Sebastián Verón, ran down the clock on the touchline to the thankful cheers of the Uruguayan crowd shouting, ‘Hey thanks Verón.’ Whilst the Colombians who had been edged out cried foul, headlines in the Uruguayan press referred to help from *Gran Hermano* – ‘Big Brother’, a popular Argentine TV programme enjoyed in Uruguay at the time.⁸⁶

However, there is a danger in comparing the relationship between Argentina and Uruguay with that of England and Scotland. Firstly, there has never been a historical feeling of being colonised by their larger neighbour on the part of the Uruguayans. Despite being underdogs in terms of size and vastly reduced talent pool, Uruguay’s spectacular achievement in surpassing Argentina’s record in international competition – two World Cups each, two Olympic titles each, but Uruguay ahead 15-14 in South American Championships – mean that it is Argentina who I would argue carry the inferiority complex in the relationship. In terms of constructing individual identities it is noticeable that whilst the Argentines did not do so in such demonstrable racial terms, both nations harked back to the pre-immigration period to provide an essential territorial sense of self. Notions of *la nuestra*, especially in the pages of *El Gráfico*, often harked back to the legend of the *gaucho*, whilst Uruguay’s press prized the attributes of the country’s indigenous antecedents. Indeed, both formed part of the marketing campaigns for international tournaments hosted by the two nations. When Argentina held the 1978 World Cup, a gaucho dressed in football kit was used as the mascot, whilst for the 1980 Mundialito, Uruguay utilised a stylised young *charrúa*. If anything continues to demonstrate the perceived difference between the two nations, it is the supposed philosophy of mental toughness of the Uruguayans compared to the Argentinians. Indeed, the continuing myth of *garra charrúa* that is perhaps best summed up by current

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Beautiful Game*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ O.Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York, 1985), p.122.

⁸⁶ Campomar, *¡Golazo*, pp.2-9; Morales, *La identidad*, in Luzuriaga, Morales & Osaba (Eds.), *Cuaderno*, p.44.

Uruguayan star, Luis Suárez in his own inimitable style; 'how do you explain that a country with three million inhabitants won the Copa América [in 2011]? Because we don't have two balls, we have three.'⁸⁷ Whilst in Argentina, a continued tendency towards self-flagellation inhabits society's desire to see itself through its national football team.

As *Veintitres* magazine wrote in 2016, 'to lose a Copa América (or two), a World Cup final, can be a catastrophe only in the idea that Argentina has no other destiny than being "first among equals."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Wernicke, *Historias*, p.19.

⁸⁸ *Veintitres*, 30 June 2016, p.3

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