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THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

Its history, drama and passion are unmatchable. It dwarfs the Super Bowl, World Series and Olympics combined. It's the only tournament to have started a war, and the only tournament to have stopped a war.* It is, of course, the World Cup.

In 2014, 32 of the planet's best international teams came together in Brazil to create a festival of football. Some aimed to lift the trophy. Others were given no hope. But all 736 players were there to live that same childhood dream of running out onto the pitch at the game's number one event.

And then there's us: the fans. The last World Cup final, between Germany and Argentina in 2014, was watched by over one billion people. That's 14 per cent of the planet's entire population, stopping what they're doing to watch a small patch of grass in Rio de Janeiro for 90 minutes (plus extra-time!). From villages in Togo to skyscrapers in Tokyo, our love of the beautiful game brought the globe shuddering to a standstill.

That concluding, showpiece match was just the tip of the iceberg. The total number of viewers for the 2014 tournament came to a jaw-dropping 25 billion.

Away from TV, the tournament brought Brazil more than a million visitors, tripling the country's tourism average for that time of year. And a combined total of nearly three and a half million lucky fans somehow squeezed into 12 stadiums to watch the games in person.

Now, in 2018, as the world's focus shifts to Russia, the competition's popularity remains the same. The World Cup stands alone, unrivalled, as the only tournament truly deserving of the title 'The Greatest Show on Earth'.

*To find out all about this, head to page 68.

THREE TIMES THE WORLD CUP WENT BEYOND THE PITCH

1 Thousands took to the streets of the Senegalese capital, Dakar, after Senegal's surprise victory over France in the opening match of Japan/Korea 2002. Amid the celebrations, President Abdoulaye Wade held a football aloft and declared the day a national holiday.

2 There were even bigger parties in Seoul, South Korea's capital, when the Reds made it to the semi-finals on home turf in 2002. Three million people went outside to celebrate, but the real shock was that even the chairman of North Korea's FA wrote to his South Korean counterpart to offer his congratulations. Why is that such a big deal? The two nations are long-standing enemies and the letter came just a day after a conflict between the two.

3 In Argentina, the *Iglesia Maradoniana* – which translates as the 'Church of Maradona' – is a real-life thing. Created in honour of the man whose breath-taking (but controversial) performances at Mexico 1986 brought the nation its second World Cup triumph, it's an officially recognized religion with over 150,000 members.





▲ Germany's Mario Götze scores the on goal of the 2014 World Cup final – and is instantly immortalized in football history.

HOW THE WORLD CUP TAUGHT US TO PLAY

Before leagues across the world could be watched from the comfort of your own home, the World Cup was the one true chance for countries to showcase their distinct footballing philosophies. Here are four styles that were popularized at the World Cup.

Italian football has been characterized by *Il Catenaccio* ('The Chain'), a defensive style seeking to take advantage of opponents on the counter. On home soil in 1990, coach Azeglio Vicini used it to lead Italy all the way to the semi-finals, incredibly conceding just one goal along the way.

England has traditionally used physicality to make the most of 50/50 challenges against defenders – sometimes with success (1966) and sometimes not (most other World Cups since!).

The **Dutch** were major advocates of Total Football, in which players switch quickly into other positions. For a masterclass, look no further than the Johan Cruyff-inspired side of the 1974 World Cup.

Brazilian sides have often used highly technical players to break down defences and widen play through a superior midfield. With players like Pelé, Jairzinho and Rivellino at their disposal, Brazil's class of 1970 used this style to become arguably the most devastating football team there ever was.

Today, many of the game's biggest stars play their club football away from their own national leagues, and once-distinctive styles of play have merged into one. However, you can always expect a few surprises at the World Cup.



A SHORT HISTORY

1930

In 1930, nearly 80 years after the rules of football were officially written, the first football World Cup was both hosted and won by Uruguay. Thirteen teams from three continents took part.



▲ Uruguay's class of 1930, hosts and winners of the first-ever World Cup.

1934–38

The 1934 and 1938 World Cups were held in Italy and France respectively. The former introduced the 16-team format (which remained fixed until 1982). Both were won by Italy who, due to the outbreak of the Second World War (1939–45), would remain unchallenged holders for the next 12 years.

1950–54

The World Cup eventually returned with the Brazil tournament in 1950. Uruguay won, dramatically defeating the hosts in front of 200,000 home fans in the Maracanã stadium. Four years later, West Germany were the winners in Switzerland.

1986

Mexico hosted for a second time in 1986. Diego Maradona lit up the tournament and scored two iconic quarter-final goals against England, before Argentina marched on to a victorious final.

1990

Italy 1990 was the first 'modern tournament' with broadcasters from all over the world, TV studios in every host city, and nightly chat shows revolving around every match. Cameroon stole people's hearts on their way to becoming the first African side to reach the quarter-finals, but it was West Germany who lifted the trophy.



▲ Salvatore 'Toto' Schillaci was one of the surprise stars of 1990, scoring six goals and winning the Golden Boot.

1994

The tournament went Stateside for USA 1994, and ended with the first World Cup final to be decided on penalties. Roberto Baggio skied his effort and there was heartbreak for Italy as Brazil won its fourth World Cup.

1998

France 1998 saw the tournament expanded again, this time to 32 teams. The dominant hosts won the prize, with Zinedine Zidane pulling the strings throughout.

2002

The 2002 World Cup was the first to be held in Asia, and also the first to be co-hosted by two nations, Korea and Japan. However, it was Brazil who took the trophy.

2006

Germany hosted a wonderful tournament in 2006. However, it was Italy and France who went all the way to the final, where the Italians won on penalties.

OF THE WORLD CUP

1958–62

In 1958, the world first laid its eyes on Pelé. The 17-year-old's two goals in the final helped Brazil to a 5–2 win over hosts Sweden. It was Brazil's first World Cup triumph, and the first time a nation had won the tournament outside its own continent. The Brazilians would go on to lift the trophy again at Chile 1962.

1966

In 1966 football 'came home'. The English, who stake a claim to having invented the game, were awarded their first World Cup, and with it came a mascot, an anthem, and much of the fanfare that we know and love about the tournament today.

1970

Mexico 1970 saw the end of an era, as Brazil won the Jules Rimet Trophy (the original trophy awarded at the World Cup) for a third time and were permitted to keep it. This was the first tournament to be televised in colour, and also featured the famous 'Game of the Century' in which Italy beat West Germany 4–3 to reach the final.

1974

The 1974 World Cup in West Germany saw the hosts see off a classy Netherlands side in a memorable final. Many still consider that Dutch side to be the best team to lose a World Cup.

1978

The 1978 tournament in Argentina was perhaps the most controversial in history. Argentina's rule under military dictatorship caused many, including Johan Cruyff, to boycott the competition. Despite the absence of their star man and captain, the Dutch made it to the final again, but lost 3–1 to the hosts.

1982

At Spain 1982, the tournament was expanded from 16 to 24 teams. Italy keeper Dino Zoff, aged 40, became the oldest person to lift a World Cup.

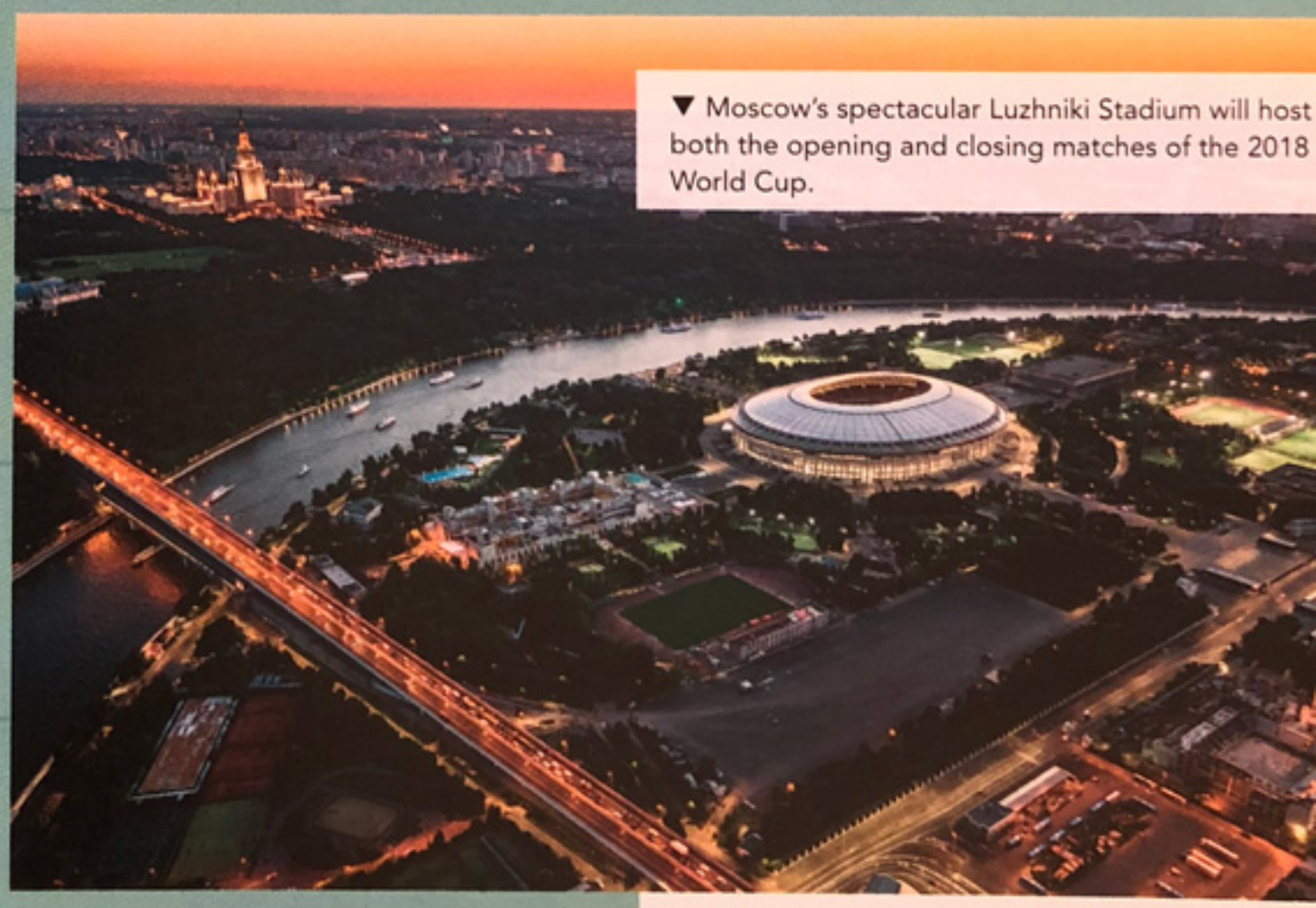
▼ Spanish players parade on an open bus in Madrid on 12 July 2010, a day after winning the World Cup for the first time.



2010

In 2010 the tournament made its first stop in Africa, with South Africa playing host. Spain won its first tournament, handing the Netherlands their third World Cup final defeat.

▼ Moscow's spectacular Luzhniki Stadium will host both the opening and closing matches of the 2018 World Cup.



2014

If football came home in 1966, it returned to its spiritual home in 2014. The World Cup in Brazil was an absolute celebration of football. Despite going out 7–1 to Germany in the semis, the hosts created an electric atmosphere and breathed a collective sigh of relief as their major rival, Argentina, lost out to Germany in the final.

2018

Now the 2018 stage belongs to Russia. It will be the first tournament to be hosted across Europe and Asia, the first to take place in 11 host cities, and will feature the longest distances between matches in World Cup history.