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Claire and Keith Brewster,

“He hath not done this for any other nation”: Mexico’s 1970 and 1986 World

Cups

Had the views of the many dissenters been taken into consideration, it is unlikely that Mexico would have made FIFA history by becoming the first nation to host the World Cup finals twice. Despite widespread euphoria at being selected to host the 1968 Olympic Games (itself unique with Mexico being the first developing country to stage it) many Mexicans questioned the inevitable huge government expenditure in a country with extensive poverty. For them, to take on a similar international responsibility only two years later was excessive, if not foolhardy. Similarly, when in 1982 a drop in oil prices provoked a major crisis for the Mexican economy, few believed it wise to host a second World Cup tournament in 1986. Moreover the destructive earthquake in September 1985, which killed and injured thousands of people and left parts of Mexico City in ruins, persuaded many that preparing for a football tournament was not a priority. Yet projects of such a grand, visionary scale are the domain of economic and/or political elites; only when decisions have been finalised are these visions sold to the public.¹

Mexicans have long been the recipients of nuanced top-down messages.

Patriotic rhetoric and state patronage have helped to sustain a political system

that, in 1990, the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa described as a “perfect dictatorship”:² a single-party state that, through co-option, coercion and rigged elections, had maintained control since 1929. This political stability was assisted by unprecedented economic growth in the 1950s, which was fuelled by Mexico’s lucrative oil industry and import substitution policies that protected Mexican businesses and sustained welfare provision. Yet Mexico’s so-called “economic miracle” left the majority of the population cut adrift. Rural poverty stimulated migration to cities in which inadequate opportunities left many living in shanty towns and forced into the informal economy to sustain their families. This is not to say that football played no part in their lives. Quite the contrary, domestic football was well-established, strongly supported, and performed at amateur and professional levels throughout the Republic. As such there is little doubt that hosting a World Cup tournament would bring pleasure to many and offer opportunities for some to benefit from the expected influx of visitors.³ Yet the >bread and circus< rationale should not be taken too far; it seriously underestimates the ability of ordinary Mexicans to look beyond the temporary sense of well-being that hosting such a tournament might produce. Thus, as with political elections, decisions regarding international sport were taken by those accustomed to working in lofty circles and beyond the reach of ordinary Mexicans.

This chapter examines the processes by which Mexico hosted the 1970 and 1986 World Cup finals. It identifies the key figures behind the bids and explores how their domestic and international networks helped to secure the finals for Mexico. At one level, the longevity and pervasive influence of the Mexican economic elite connects our analysis: more specifically, certain individuals within the media sector. Yet to rehearse the ways in which Mexican media magnates were able to >win< these World Cups for Mexico would only give one perspective; one that we believe has been accurately portrayed in existing studies.⁴ As such, we provide only a brief contextual outline of this aspect of the Mexican World Cups in order more fully to understand the debate within the host nation. Of greater interest is the interaction between the promoters of Mexico's World Cups, the country's politicians, and those who purported to reflect public opinion: for example, how political capital was made from hosting the events and how, in presenting them to the public, politicians negotiated a path between patriotic jingoism and the need for economic prudence. We explore the nature of the popular reactions, the extent to which objections could be voiced, and how this varied between the 1970 and 1986 tournaments. In effect, while we scrutinise the laughter of the audience to discern the ways in which the circus was enjoyed, we also consider the views of the disgruntled onlookers who displayed

cynicism towards the ringmaster and were apprehensive about their forthcoming daily bread. We argue that, unlike other countries, hosting the World Cup did not change Mexican attitudes towards football. The game was popular before 1970 and remained so after 1986. Nor did the events foster a change in the socio/political dynamics of the country. Instead, we attempt to understand how underlying changes in Mexican politics and society were reflected in the hosting of its World Cups.

The men with vision

In any study that analyses the reasons why Mexico won bids to host the 1970 and 1986 World Cups, two names loom large: the Mexican media tycoon, Emilio Azcárraga, and Guillermo Cañedo, the “emperor” of Mexican football.⁵ Initially in radio, and later in television, the Azcárraga media empire Telesistema Mexicana SA (TSM, later renamed Televisa) grew to become the world’s biggest Spanish-speaking broadcaster. By the 1960s the company controlled Mexican football broadcasting rights, owned a major domestic football team (América), and provided the private finance for the newly-constructed Estadio Azteca, a prestigious, state-of-the-art football stadium with a 100,000 spectator capacity.⁶ Businessman Guillermo Cañedo was vice-president of the América and Zacatepec football clubs.⁷ As president of the

Mexican Football Federation (FMF) he worked to strengthen Mexico's regional presence within FIFA through the Football Confederation of North and Central America and the Caribbean (CONCACAF). When Azcárraga placed Cañedo at the head of Televisa's football broadcasting, it cemented a business relationship characterised by overlapping mutual interests.

If one encapsulates the reasons why these individuals pursued and delivered two World Cups for Mexico they can be reduced to three themes: technology, networking, and business acumen; the importance of each varying between the two tournaments. In obtaining the 1970 finals, Cañedo's close connections with the incumbent FIFA president, Stanley Rous, were essential. These ties of loyalty date back to September 1961 when Cañedo successfully lobbied for the creation of CONCACAF. An influential Mexican sports journalist, Jorge Ventura, claims that CONCACAF votes subsequently helped Rous to become president of FIFA and that in return Rous told Cañedo: "If the recently created confederation helps me win the presidency of FIFA, you will be able to count on my total support for the Mexican candidature for 1970."⁸

More substantially, perhaps, advanced technology gave Mexican broadcasters a decisive edge over their competitors. Mexico was the first country to use the "early bird" satellite system, and successfully transmitted images of the 1966 World Cup from the United Kingdom into Mexican homes via New York.⁹ In

addition, the 1968 Olympics underlined the capacity of Mexican organisers who delivered live satellite images of a global sporting event in colour for the first time. In 1967 Cañedo and Ernesto Barrientos of TSM had assured FIFA that not only would viewers receive high-quality images for the 1970 World Cup, but they would also benefit from replays and slow-motion for the first time.¹⁰ Cañedo's pitch was all the more compelling as Mexico's main bidding rival, Argentina, was still labouring with a black-and-white television system.¹¹

This same entrepreneurial edge may have played a significant role in gaining Mexico its second World Cup. When, on 11 November 1982, Colombia notified FIFA that it could no longer host the 1986 finals, Mexico was quick to step in. Officially, Colombia's renunciation was due to economic and security issues that made it impossible to satisfy the stringent requirements that FIFA had retrospectively placed upon host countries. Colombia's withdrawal triggered what several commentators believe to be a phoney bidding process between Mexico, Canada, the United States and, fleetingly, Brazil (whose subsequent withdrawal is largely attributed to FIFA president João Havelange's determination to thwart the re-election of the incumbent Brazilian Football Federation's president).¹²

Suspicion that from an early stage FIFA preferred Mexico are hard to confirm, but the almost cursory final presentation that the Mexican

delegation made to FIFA suggests prior knowledge. As in 1970, the validity of Mexico's case was helped immeasurably by Cañedo's continuing influence within FIFA: he had become vice-president of the organisation in 1968. Cañedo maintained that any host nation needed a broadcasting network that was sufficiently large to reach every corner of the world with an interest in football. He underlined, "Colombia does not have this. I can also say with certainty that Brazil, although it has a television service that is in some ways better than Mexico's, does not have a structure capable of broadcasting a World Cup."¹³ Rafael del Castillo, then president of FMF, claims that the Mexican delegation had tried to obtain the 1986 World Cup *before* Colombia withdrew.¹⁴ According to Ventura, Cañedo perceived an opportunity, "when FIFA's Executive Committee began to realise that Colombia's problems were not just financial but also because its television structure was neither publically nor privately owned". He explained that the Colombian government "controlled the signal, and different companies had to bid every year for specific viewing slots".¹⁵ Whereas other countries might have struggled to create the necessary infrastructure and installations, Mexico had already constructed most of these for its 1968 Olympics and 1970 World Cup. The two major domestic television networks, Televisa and Canal 13, had become part of a consortium headed

by Cañedo's Organización de Televisión Iberoamericana (Organisation of Ibero-American Television). Together they would share the responsibility of transmitting Mexico 86 to a growing global audience. The most costly investment to satisfy the demands of a global audience would be a new satellite, but the national government had already undertaken to underwrite this cost before there was a possibility of Mexico hosting the 1986 World Cup.¹⁶

Cañedo's rationale regarding Mexico's superior broadcasting facilities may have seen off its Latin American competitors but could not hold the same weight against Canada and the United States, especially as the latter's bid enjoyed US\$10 million backing from Warner Bros. What Cañedo did possess, however, was a close relationship with Havelange, the foundation of which lay in Cañedo's backing for Havelange's presidential campaign against Rous in 1974. Following FIFA's selection of Mexico, the president of the US football confederation expressed his disappointment, while Henry Kissinger lamented "Mexico had better diplomacy than us".¹⁷ This was praise indeed from the world's then most influential diplomat who had belatedly been recruited to swing the vote in favour of the United States. Certainly Cañedo's incessant lobbying, which included a meeting between

Havelange and the Mexican president-elect Miguel de la Madrid, left FIFA in no doubt regarding the Mexican government's commitment to the bid.¹⁸

While Cañedo's devotion to football is unquestionable, what bound Azcárraga, Cañedo and Havelange together was the huge potential of media coverage to reach new audiences and, importantly, new markets. In this respect, we agree with John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson that the world's most influential sports bodies had been slow to realise such potential.¹⁹ The IOC had somewhat naively allowed the Mexican Olympic Organising Committee to take the lion's share of revenues from broadcasting rights in 1968, and FIFA appeared equally unaware of the commercial potential of Mexico 70. Helmut Kasser, then secretary-general of FIFA, expressed surprise regarding the commercialisation of Mexico's coverage of the 1970 finals, which included broadcasting advertisements during play, something that was then unusual in Europe.²⁰ As Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman point out, Emilio Azcárraga was so convinced of the potential gains to be made that he paid an unprecedented US \$1.6 million to FIFA to give TSM exclusive television rights for the 1970 World Cup. TSM then re-sold the European broadcasting rights to the UK company, Worldwide Sport, for US \$2.1 million.²¹ Other business interests were also at stake: Modelo beer and Banco de Comercio had sponsored the 1966 World Cup "to serve the

public and strengthen sport in Mexico” and both companies pledged to do the same for the 1968 Olympics and 1970 World Cup.²² By 1986, FIFA was fully aware of the commercial power of media and extensively used Cañedo’s considerable connections “[to embrace] the world of marketing and sponsorship”.²³

Their years of media experience no doubt convinced Azcárraga and his associates that they could sell two Mexican World Cups to the world. Selling two Mexican World Cups to fellow Mexicans, however, called for a different approach that recognised the multiple political, social and economic dynamics involved. While Modelo beer might claim to support the tournament for the benefit of Mexicans, such glossy rhetoric was unlikely to repel the cynicism of its critics. It is to this task that we now turn.

For the Good of the Nation

Burbank *et al* summarise the usual public reaction in countries that host mega-sports events. Excitement and criticism accompany the bid, followed by euphoria when it is successful; the preparations are characterised by concern regarding an ability to deliver coupled with a sense of national obligation, while almost total support and goodwill is shown during delivery.²⁴ In the case of Mexico, several variables impinge upon this

pattern of behaviour. The first is a restricted opportunity of expressing true emotions and criticism. In 1970 the printed media and broadcasters largely operated in an atmosphere of self-censorship or blatant partisanship for the ruling political party. Not until 1976 did editors begin resolutely to contest government control.²⁵ The plethora of more critical publications that emerged in this period significantly altered the printed media's reception of the 1986 World Cup and, as such, forms one of our analytical perspectives. A second factor is Mexico's status as a developing nation, which tended to deepen concerns over expenditure while heightening sensitivity to foreign criticism. The third factor is that of precedent. The 1970 World Cup followed an Olympic Games before which the Mexicans' ability to deliver had been constantly and savagely attacked by the foreign press. The consequent entrenched mentality and indignation meant that when Mexico did produce a successful Games, the taste of success was considerably sweeter. By 1986, Mexico had a strong track record of staging global sports events and hence protecting national pride proved to be less of a rallying cry.

The political and public debates accompanying Mexico's World Cups reflect some of these variables. Having acted as the ultimate financial guarantor for the Olympic Games, incumbent president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-70)

was adamant that the 1970 World Cup would be privately financed and that he would not redirect public funds from more pressing needs. A successfully run event would nonetheless, the president confirmed, spotlight the nation's supreme self-assuredness on the world stage.²⁶ On gaining the 1986 finals similarly cost-conscious but upbeat proclamations were made. President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88) emphasised that Mexico's sporting infrastructure, its organisation, and the place of football in Mexican hearts were already in place. As such, he added, budgets would be minimised because existing installations would be used.²⁷ A jubilant Cañedo confirmed that preparations would begin immediately to ensure that Mexico 86 would surpass Mexico 70.²⁸ The Regent of Mexico City, Ramón Aguirre, underlined that the participants and spectators would witness and enjoy traditional Mexican hospitality in an atmosphere of peace and stability; the secretary of the Mexican Olympic Committee emphasised the consequent increase in tourism and that Mexico was already prepared for such an occasion.²⁹ The veteran goalkeeper of Mexico's 1970 team, Ignacio Calderón, proclaimed that the 1986 World Cup would be a "fabulous" inspiration for Mexican youths who would again have the opportunity to learn from foreign players.³⁰ The daily newspaper, *El Universal*, published enthusiastic comments from other sporting figures and a supportive discussion on the

economic benefits of hosting the World Cup, especially in terms of increased tourism.³¹

These positive reactions to the Mexico 86 finals were similar to those seen in the years preceding both the 1968 Olympics and 1970 World Cup. What had changed by the 1980s, however, was the prevalence of increasingly critical comments voiced in a printed media that was enjoying greater freedom of expression than in the past. Importantly, disapproval of hosting the World Cup extended to political, economic and social matters; a natural reaction, perhaps, given the recent devaluation of the Mexican peso and the subsequent economic turmoil. An article in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*, for example, conceded that after having stepped in to stage the competition Mexico could not make an honourable retraction, but warned that the 1970 World Cup had left Mexico with many debts that exacerbated, “that other great madness, the Olympiad of two years earlier”.³² Writing in the weekly magazine *Proceso*, Francisco Ponce lamented, “I hope there’s been a big mistake and that the United States, not Mexico, has been selected as host”. He drew attention to Mexico’s current social and economic problems, underlining the huge cost of staging the competition.³³ He later reflected that Mexico needed to be united by good social policies not a football tournament.³⁴ María Luisa Mendoza also stated her opposition: “I am

opposed to having the 1986 World Cup in Mexico because of the poor. [...] I may be a pessimist, but we have other things to worry about such as inflation and de-politicisation.”³⁵ Jorge Aviles claimed that hosting the competition was “a tactic to take attention away from Mexico’s economic and political problems” and warned it would “add to Mexico’s inflation”.³⁶ Jorge Roldán followed the same line stating that it would bring “inflation to the majority and benefit a minority”.³⁷ *El Universal* maintained that most Mexican athletes were indifferent to or unaware of Mexico’s bid and quoted one baseball manager’s reaction: “they should bring us food, not world cups”.³⁸

In an interesting departure from coverage of previous events, several journalists identified the powers behind the bid. Jorge Aymani underlined Mexico’s current economic difficulties and that both Colombia and Brazil had declined to stage the competition. He proclaimed, “Mexico hasn’t been the winner here – it’s Televisa”.³⁹ In the same vein Francisco Ponce pointed out that Mexican companies were responsible for Mexico’s “success”.⁴⁰ With an obvious irreverent reference to Mexico’s most religious icon, the Virgin of Guadalupe, cartoonist Rogelio Naranjo depicted Guillermo Cañedo >revealing< the Televisa World Cup with the words “He hath not done this for any other nation” [figure 1 here filename 01Naranjo].⁴¹ A letter to *Proceso* decried the

decision to award the World Cup to Mexico as “scandalous”. It stated that this was a private initiative conducted by Televisa, adding that football itself had become a business run by the company.⁴² Certainly Televisa became a convenient scapegoat for any criticism of the organisation. Even complaints from European teams about having to play during the heat of the day could be ascribed to the demands of television for peak viewing slots overseas.⁴³ This harsh focus on Televisa must be taken within the political context that the commercial television channel was seen as the semi-official voice of the single-party state whose political legitimacy was under unprecedented scrutiny at a time of economic crisis.

The nature of this criticism changed perceptibly following the earthquake in Mexico City on 19 September 1985.⁴⁴ The insensitivity of Televisa’s swift assurance that the World Cup would not be affected as none of the stadia had been damaged was only surpassed by Havelange’s reported comment that “the earthquake respected football”.⁴⁵ Politicians debated the wisdom of staging the competition in the national congress. Some pointed out that a great deal had already been invested and Mexico deserved to enjoy the benefits of the World Cup. With Mexico already suffering economic difficulties, politicians on the Left called for a full analysis of the burden of staging it and voiced concern that reconstruction resources would be diverted

to ensure the smooth running of the competition. Others called on the government to take over the organisation so that the “multi-million income” it would generate could be given to reconstruction projects rather than private businesses.⁴⁶ In the aftermath of the economic crisis and earthquake, the government’s emphasis that the 1986 World Cup was a private project which would not need public funds paradoxically became a catalyst for a new target of criticism: the recipients of the profits.

The control of income from the World Cup was not restricted to broadcasting rights. Jorge Aviles Randolph identified the winners and losers involved in this strategy. Maintaining that “for years football has been *reduced to a business* in our country”, he underlined that the World Cup presented an opportunity to amass “*thousands of millions of pesos* for those who have commercialised it”. “Credulous Mexicans” who loved football, he continued, were being exploited by the television consortium organising the competition in an operation that had “*the unprecedented support of the federal government*”. He explained that such support was unprecedented because unlike in 1970 the organisers had “*important sectors of governmental apparatus at their disposal*”.

Furthermore, authorised vendors inside the stadia would pay a percentage of their profits to the tournament organisers. The main losers, he added, would be the 5,000 people who had for many years been selling items outside the

Aztec and University stadia and who were being prevented from doing this during the World Cup under the pretext of “*protecting security*”.⁴⁷

Such criticisms forced Cañedo onto the defensive. After the 1986 finals he proclaimed, “[the World Cup] achieved its objectives: above all to present a new image of Mexico to the world, a world in which there is confidence, order, peace and organisation”. He underlined that the private sector had shouldered all the associated risks in staging the competition and that this accounted for its success: “We firmly believe in private initiative and that this World Cup shows that private initiative is the solution for Mexico.”⁴⁸ Yet Cañedo was guarded when specifically questioned about the cost and income generated from the World Cup. Eduardo Galeano maintains that when a Mexican journalist tried to discuss the matter Cañedo replied, “This is a private company that does not have to answer to anyone.”⁴⁹ Was such sensitivity justified? On 16 June 1986, referring to its foreign debt, José Luis Mejías predicted that Mexico would emerge from the World Cup with “a monumental headache”.⁵⁰ Certainly fewer tourists visited Mexico than had been hoped and those who came spent less money and stayed for a shorter time. The World Cup and the devaluation of the Mexican peso did see an 11.7 per-cent increase in foreign visitors over the previous year, but this was far short of the anticipated 4,600,000 tourists spending \$2,000 million.⁵¹

Further reports claimed that hotel and restaurant owners, travel agents and other associated businesses gained just 4 per-cent of their expected profits.⁵² Conversely, Televisa obtained 75 per-cent of the gross profits from its radio and television transmissions, a sum of 5,272,160,000 pesos, while the public sector (via the state television company Imevisión) received just 25 per-cent.⁵³ All of these details were published in the critical Mexican press.

As Cañedo's guarded comments reveal, both the political and economic elites publically wanted to measure the World Cup tournaments in terms of the benefits they could bring; both for Mexico's reputation on the world stage and the consequent boost generated to the national economy. It is clear, however, that the democratic process had sufficiently progressed to allow the printed media to exercise increased freedom both to reflect on and to inform public opinion regarding the financial aspects of the 1986 World Cup. The targets of their criticism can only be fully understood when placed within a context in which Mexico's "economic miracle" had spectacularly collapsed, confidence in Mexican business was under severe pressure, and rumours were circulating concerning corruption among politicians and construction companies that many believed had exacerbated the death toll and damage caused by Mexico City's earthquake.

>Us against them<: Mexican identity through the media of football

Beyond the commercial aspects of staging mega-sports events, there comes a time when any organising committee is forced to address the issue of how the event will portray the host nation's identity, values, and character. It offers an opportunity to rebrand a nation and its people on the world stage. Even the creation of something as seemingly innocuous as an official logo can be loaded with social and political significance. In the logo for the 1968 Olympics, for example, the Mexican Organising Committee was determined to present a proud combination of history and modernity, and of its ethnic diversity within national unity.⁵⁴ Although the design for Mexico 70, chosen in June 1969 retained the concentric lines design of the Olympics, it was very different. The head of the Olympic Organising Committee, Pedro Ramírez Vazquez, dismissed the World Cup mascot as the product of "uneducated men for an entirely different, much more limited audience".⁵⁵ While he might have been referring to the tacky commercialisation that a sombrero-wearing Mexican might represent, the true significance of the logo may lie beneath the hat. The inoffensive, congenial smiling figure, Juanito, (little Johnny) [figure 2 here] was hardly representative of most Mexicans. He

might have sold well as a cute, cuddly mascot but his skin was far too pale to be one of their own.

Reflecting on this issue at the time, Froylán López Narváez noted the difficulties in trying to portray the multi-layered, complex nature of Mexican national identity in one single image. If it were to represent the majority of Mexicans, he argued, the mascot should emphasise poverty and subsistence. If it were to symbolise the middle classes, then a symbol depicting ambiguity, mimicry and accommodation would be more accurate. If it were to embody the elite, he continued with a liberal dose of irony, the emblem ought not to be Mexican at all but North American or European. If it were to characterise the present, he concluded, the most appropriate image would be confusion: a world in which pre-Columbian and colonial splendours coexisted with the impoverished conditions of working-class neighbourhoods.⁵⁶ While López Narváez might never have made an astute marketing manager, his satirical

slant at Juanito does expose the degree of discomfort in selling a truly authentic image of Mexicans to the world.

The mascot chosen for the 1986 World Cup displayed a more confident depiction of Mexico and its people. Gone were the almost apologetic cultural references to Mexico and in their stead Pique: an unashamedly ebullient interpretation of the national stereotype - a hot, spicy chilli sporting a huge sombrero and a big moustache [figure 3 here].

Not without its critics, Eva Velázquez pointed out that Mexico had better examples of flora from which to choose and warned “[this tacky image] will haunt us forever”.⁵⁷ Defending the choice, FMF president Rafael del Castillo implied that the figure may have been a compromise. Introducing Pique as an educational and artistic character of cultural interest, he explained there had been a risk that FIFA would sell the mascot concessions and the result could have been a light-skinned figure with curly blonde hair which would not be representative of Mexico.⁵⁸ We suggest, however, that these two World Cup

masculots were products of their time and were reflective of the ways in which Mexicans saw themselves on the world stage. In 1970 Juanito depicted ambiguity and ambivalence; a country that was unsure of its place. In 1986, we see a more confident Mexico displaying a degree of defiance in taking ownership of the resilient stereotypes that foreigners inflicted upon the country. Such an interpretation does, of course, involve a degree of subjectivity, but gains credence when placed within the contemporary background of Mexican and Latin American images abroad.

The way in which Mexico's international posture developed during its preparation and hosting of the 1968 Olympics offers valuable insight into its position for the 1970 World Cup. The Olympic project began as an opportunity to show the world that a modern, forward-looking Mexico was ready to enter the developed world. When the developed world expressed considerable doubt that Mexicans were capable of such a leap, the organising committee had to adjust its stance by portraying Mexico as a defender of the Third World and of Latin American solidarity. This new posture can be most demonstrably seen in Mexico's defiant stance against the western-dominated International Olympic Committee's (IOC) invitation for apartheid South Africa to participate in the 1968 Games. That Mexico sided with nascent African nations in their condemnation of apartheid was indicative of a shift in the balance of power

within the IOC. No longer could its western-dominated executive board take emerging world compliance for granted. (A similar process was taking place within FIFA and Cañedo's switch of allegiance from the pro-South Africa Rous to the anti-apartheid Havelange in the 1974 FIFA presidential elections should be seen within this context.) Mexican indignation at what it viewed as unfair foreign criticism of its country and continent produced a unifying effect and a gutsy determination to prove its critics wrong.⁵⁹ Nowhere were these criticisms more strongly voiced than in the home of the reigning World Cup champions.

Within Mexico, England's 1970 team is remembered for having been "arrogant", and that the manager, Alf Ramsey, described the Mexican football team as "true savages".⁶⁰ Relations had not begun well: in May 1969 the squad had arrived in Mexico City for a friendly match and ignored the awaiting crowd of photographers.⁶¹ Just before the World Cup finals, an article in the UK daily newspaper, *The Guardian*, described the Mexican political system as a "dictatorship" that had brought "ruthless stability" to Mexico.⁶² This provoked a letter of protest from the Mexican ambassador to London who expressed his disappointment and warned that it could undermine Mexican/ UK relations.⁶³ The England team's insistence on shipping its own food and drinking water to Mexico caused great offence and was interpreted by some sections of the

Mexican press as “an obvious display of superiority from a civilised country when coming to one that they believe to be underdeveloped”.⁶⁴ The flames were fanned when the imported food was unceremoniously burned at the quayside in Veracruz as much of the imported food breached Mexican quarantine regulations. A Mexican commentator, Santiago Jaime Illescas, underlined the inexplicable “antipathy shown by the English who were discourteous and hostile to the Mexican character”.⁶⁵ When England was knocked out of the competition there was jubilation in Mexico.⁶⁶ Protesting that English criticism of Mexico was unjust, Rodolfo de Larosa proclaimed: “Mexico has always respected Great Britain and its response has been the opposite. Its football team is the most disagreeable that has won the World Cup. *That is no longer our problem... And without further ado, au revoir.*”⁶⁷

Anglo-Mexican tensions took place within the background of the 1966 World Cup in which there had been much European (predominantly British) press criticism against the alleged dirty play of Latin American teams.⁶⁸ Ramsey’s injudicious description of the Argentine players as “animals” did little to ease the tension. In the event, the 1970 finals in Mexico were completely different. As the FIFA official report states, “the final tournament in Mexico not only produced some remarkably good football, but also many good football matches which were played in the best spirit of sportsmanship”.⁶⁹ Yet previous

foreign criticism of the Latin American style had placed the hosts on the defensive and led to a spirit of Latin American solidarity. “[The Mexican public] gave passionate support to Mexico while it was in the competition and then supported Brazil, but it also applauded other nationalities when they deserved it.”⁷⁰ Far from “rough play”, in 1970 Mexicans celebrated a more positive “Latino” stereotype, that of displaying individualism, ball retention and invention in the mastery of football.⁷¹

Analysing public and media comments in 1986, it is apparent that Mexico had moved on. It was less vulnerable to foreign criticism and more confident in fighting its corner, but Latin American solidarity remained strong. When it became clear, for example, that Mexico had defeated the US bid to host the tournament, the Colombian president, Belisario Betancur, congratulated the Mexican president and expressed his pride and pleasure that a Latin American country was taking Colombia’s place.⁷² More overt emphasis that Mexico had >beaten< the United States in staging the 1986 World Cup was evident: *El Universal* published a photograph of a “disconsolate” Kissinger alongside Germany’s Franz Beckenbauer, who had pledged support for the US bid.⁷³

Cartoonist Rossas depicted a drunken man who laments: “If only we’d defended ourselves against the United States with as much passion as we did for the World Cup then Texas, New Mexico and California would still be ours

today.”⁷⁴ When Mexico was eliminated from the 1986 competition, national allegiances again turned to Latin American, this time Argentina. Rafael Sola explained: “We have a brotherly tie towards this country that’s such a long way from us, at the other extreme of the continent.” The new sensation - Diego Maradona became Mexico’s adopted national hero.⁷⁵

Just how much Mexico had changed is reflected in the domestic rhetoric of Mexico 86; it emphasises the tenacity, almost phoenix-like quality of the Mexican people to triumph against the odds. Djuka Julius, for example, underlined that Mexico had the chance to present,

a true image with all its lights and shadows, its advances and setbacks. [...] Now, Mexico can show the world what it really is, a nation in crisis, a growing crisis, with serious problems and challenges, but also with great opportunities and potential progress. [...] The World Cup isn’t going to solve any problems. But by staging it, Mexico’s showing that everything is not lost.⁷⁶

Raúl Carranza y Rivas also reflected on what hosting World Cup meant to the country:

Above all it’s the opportunity to be seen. What will be seen? A country in the middle of things, comprising several rich and dissimilar elements. We have a profusion of nature, a variety of terrain and a

wonderful pre-Hispanic heritage. We're hospitable, generous and sad. [...] Mexico 86 is everything, even the memory of a terrible earthquake. It's the nation united by a tragedy, it's the debt, the oil reserves that the devil gave us long ago. It's the Suava Patria today altered and wounded. [...] The truth [...] is that football has filled a place in the conscience of the people. [...] Mexicans will suffer if our team loses or plays badly; and I don't even want to think about the disorder if we win. [...] The earthquake, the crisis, the foreign injury, the debt, inflation, absolutely everything stops during a football match.⁷⁷

Fears that such raw emotions might overspill accompanied the riotous celebrations in the streets of Mexico City after Mexico beat Belgium in the opening match. Announcing the result on Televisa, Jacobo Zabludowsky stated that football had motivated greater displays of Mexican nationalism than those of Independence celebrations. José Luis Camacho, however, questioned the origins of such emotions and blamed Televisa for fuelling the situation. There had been chaos as Mexico City was paralysed: youths prevented workers from returning home, businesses were damaged, public monuments were defaced, and passers-by threatened in >celebrations< that went on until midnight. Claiming that the nation had been "damaged" by such scenes, Camacho

underlined that reporters had not questioned the nature of this “football nationalism promoted by Televisa”. He explained that there had not been any censure of the ensuing chaos created by the thousands of fans who, moreover, had been incited by Televisa commentators.⁷⁸

There were similar scenes following Mexico’s victory over Bulgaria to qualify for the quarter-finals. After achieving its highest position to date in an international competition, *Excélsior* described how

the ensuing uncontrollable jubilation and vandalism turned a sporting victory into a civic defeat. [...] It’s lamentable that this could happen in Mexico today. Mexico doesn’t need to win a World Cup; it needs to reflect on its social problems, on its roots as a nation, and on the future it wants to achieve. There’s clearly still a long way to go before it achieves maturity.⁷⁹

Other commentators, however, preferred to focus on more positive aspects.

Defending the tournament, the Bishop of Mexico City acknowledged that although Mexicans could not ignore their problems completely, the World Cup provided “a festive spirit that had given people something to cheer about”.⁸⁰

Certainly, the scenes of jubilation notwithstanding, crime levels fell for the duration of the tournament: there were just five arrests for minor offences in the Mexico City stadia.⁸¹ *Excélsior* reported with apparent relief that the World

Cup had ended “happily, because there were no major incidents”. Moreover, it underlined, this was not merely a “triumph of private initiative”, but very much a team effort:

The World Cup was a show of Mexico’s organisational capacity, of its society working together: people and government, businesses and authorities, along with the highly important role of all citizens. The most important thing was the triumph of peace and tranquillity: not even international terrorists wanted to disturb the peace in a country that has gained so much international respect. Viva Peace! Viva this beloved Mexico with all its defects and its crisis!⁸²

Concluding remarks

Trying to encapsulate the diverse aspects of any one mega-sports event is a challenge. To attempt to make sense of two held within the same country is significantly more complex. In our comparison of Mexico 70 and Mexico 86 we have tried to identify and analyse the lines of continuity that link the two events and to consider how these continuities faced the changing international and domestic pressures of their contemporary circumstances. There is no doubt that Mexican business interests were behind both bids, that Mexican networking helped secure them, and that in both tournaments Mexican media

expertise delivered the best coverage technology could produce. At one level, then, these private enterprises secured exceptional profits for their investors and at the same time delivered intangible benefits to Mexico and its people by efficiently fulfilling Mexico's international obligations. Yet there comes a time in the organisation of any mega-sports event when ownership of the event is partially released from those who conceived the project and becomes open to public scrutiny. In the case of the Mexico World Cups, any rational response to the suggestion that Mexico should act as host in either 1970 or 1986 ought to have considered the state of the Mexican economy and the more pressing needs of its people. Indeed, such matters were raised on both occasions, and were especially evident in the more open media environment of the 1980s. Yet it is interesting to study how such criticism reflected the times in which Mexicans were living. In 1970, economic confidence of the elite within Mexico was high and rhetoric sustained that the "economic miracle" might trickle down to the poorer sectors of society. Control of the press was so firm that the role of the private sector attracted little criticism and was in any case eclipsed by the aura of optimism created by the 1968 Olympics. The 1986 World Cup, conversely, took place in an environment in which many Mexicans from all social classes had lost their jobs as a result of mistakes deemed to have been committed by politicians and the business sector. Moreover,

although the 1985 earthquake may have “respected football” it did not respect social hierarchies. It exposed the use of inferior materials by corrupt construction companies and the inadequacy of national politicians in the immediate aftermath of the emergency. It is little wonder, then, that the commercial aspect of the World Cup was exposed to severe public examination and criticism: views which, as we have shown, were strongly voiced in Mexico’s more open printed media.

Yet when moving from the internal dynamics of the World Cups to gauge public reactions to foreign attitudes towards the host nation, in both 1970 and 1986 Mexicans united to defend their country’s prestige. The spirit of triumph over adversity was apparent in both World Cups: foreign criticism represented just one more hurdle for Mexico to overcome. Mexicans took comfort from their own tenacity and in solidarity with its often maligned Latin American neighbours. The capacity to deal with whatever fate placed before them was something that sustained Mexicans either side of the four-week football festivals that visited their nation. Sports journalist and passionate football fan Fernando Marcos acknowledged that the 1986 World Cup would be run by business interests. “But in the end we’re saying, ‘that doesn’t matter. We’re going to host the Cup.’”⁸³ Two World Cups may have been >excessive<, but for

millions of Mexican football fans everything else could stop for the duration of a football match.

¹ For an analysis on public reception to hosting such events, see Matthew J. Burbank, Gregory S Andranovich & Charles H. Heyling, *Olympic Dreams: The Impact of Mega-events on Local Politics* (Boulder, CO. & London: Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp.161-65.

² Mario Vargas Llosa, "Mexico: The Perfect Dictatorship", *New Perspectives Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1991), pp.23-25.

³ Claire & Keith Brewster, *Representing the Nation: Sport and Spectacle in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp.158-65.

⁴ Chris Taylor, *The Beautiful Game: A Journey Through Latin American Football* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p.222; John Sugden & Alan Tomlinson, *FIFA and the Contest for World Football* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp.23-28, 57.

⁵ Greco Sotelo, *El oficio de las canchas, 1950-1970*, (México DF: Editorial Clío, 1988), p.72.

⁶ Taylor, *The Beautiful Game*, pp.219-20; Sotelo, *El oficio de las canchas*, pp.70-71. The designer of the Estadio Azteca was Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, a renowned Mexican architect and chairman of the Organising Committee for the 1968 Olympic Games.

⁷ As Rory Miller points out, Mexico represents somewhat of an exception to the usual Latin American rule in that many of its domestic football teams are operated by companies or social organisations. As such, there would be nothing particularly unusual about Cañedo's control over Mexican football nor his business links with television conglomerates. See Rory Miller, "Introduction" in Rory Miller & Liz Crolley (eds.), *Football in the Americas: Fútbol, Futebal, Soccer* (London: ISA, 2007), pp.16, 26.

⁸ Rous cited in Jorge Ventura, *México 86: Como México no hay dos* (México: Ediciones Ciclo, 1983), p.33.

⁹ [n.a.], "Significativo esfuerzo en favor del deporte", *El Universal*, 16 July 1966. The "early bird" system was reported to cost 1,820,000 pesos, rising to over 4 million pesos if the amount the stations had to pay is taken into account. "But it's worth it." See [n.a.], "Hemos usado mucho el pájaro madrugador", *Excelsior*, 2 August 1966.

¹⁰ Fernández & Paxman, *El Tigre*, (México DF: Grijalbo, 2000), p.158; Jaime Durán, "Guillermo Cañedo y Ernesto Barrientos salieron a Túnez", *Excelsior*, 13 September 1967. See also <http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/about/media-centre/news/40-years-since-first-world-cup-in-colour-NEWS27/> consulted 1 August 2011.

¹¹ Taylor, *The Beautiful Game*, p.222.

¹² Ventura, *México 86*, pp. 23-32; Sugden & Tomlinson, *FIFA*, p.208.

¹³ Ventura, *México 86*, pp.38-39.

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- ¹⁴ Rafael del Castillo, quoted in Fernando Mejía Barquera, *Fútbol mexicano: glorias y tragedias, 1929-1992*, (México DF: *El Nacional*, 1993), p.333.
- ¹⁵ Ventura, *México 86*, pp.52.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp.52-53.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., pp.32.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p.134.
- ¹⁹ Sugden & Tomlinson, *FIFA*, pp.38, 80-81.
- ²⁰ Taylor, *The Beautiful Game*, p.223.
- ²¹ [n.a.], "Dos Grandes Difusores de Europa Aseguran Haber Firmado en Exclusive", *El Universal*, 18 February 1969; Fernández & Paxman, *El Tigre*, p.158.
- ²² [n.a.], "Significativo esfuerzo".
- ²³ Taylor, *The Beautiful Game*, p.223.
- ²⁴ Burbank et al., *Olympic Dreams*, pp.161-65.
- ²⁵ For a discussion of the *Excelsior* crisis that provoked this see Claire Brewster, *Responding to Crisis in Contemporary Mexico*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), pp.88-92.
- ²⁶ Brewster, *Representing the Nation*, p.164.
- ²⁷ [n.a.], 'Seremos una brillante y digna Sede', *Novedades*, 21 May 1983, p.1.
- ²⁸ Rakell Maldonado, "El Mundial del 86, un Reto para Superar lo Realizado en 1970", *Novedades*, 22 May 1983, Deportes, p.1.
- ²⁹ José Areña, "Ofrece Ramón Aguirre recibir cordialmente a los turistas", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.6; [n.a.], "Se debe sacar provecho económico con el Mundial de 86", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983 p.5.
- ³⁰ Ignacio Calderón, quoted in [n.a.], "El Mundial en México deberá proyectar jugadores jóvenes", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.5.
- ³¹ See comments in [n.a.], "Bienvenido al Campeonato Mundial", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.8; [n.a.], "Según Orvañanos es optimista y positivo hacer el torneo de 86", *El Universal*, 22 May 1983, Deportes p.3.
- ³² Manuel Montenegro, "Fútbol 86: Lucha por la sede", *Excelsior*, 20 May 1983.
- ³³ Francisco Ponce, "Despiste total", *Proceso*, 9 May 1983, p.49.
- ³⁴ Francisco Ponce, "Salario de emergencia", *Proceso*, no.344, 6 June 1983, p.63.
- ³⁵ María Luisa Mendoza, "No al Mundial de Fútbol", *Excelsior*, 16 March 1983.
- ³⁶ Jorge Aviles, "Se provocará una mayor inflación, dice la oposición", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983.
- ³⁷ Jorge Roldán, "Inflación a mayorías y ganancias a unos cuantos dejará el Mundial", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.3.

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- ³⁸ Rodrigo Sandoval Peña, "Deben traer comida no mundiales", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.4; Antonio Armendáriz, "Indiferencia entre los atletas respecto a nuestra designación", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.4.
- ³⁹ Jorge Aymani, "Mirador", *Excélsior*, 25 May 1983.
- ⁴⁰ Francisco Ponce, "Hasta que FIFA nos separe", *Proceso*, 16 May 1983, p.63.
- ⁴¹ Naranjo, "Repartición", *Proceso*, 23 May 1983, p.5.
- ⁴² Jesús Iturbe Posadas, "Televisa no es México", *Proceso*, 30 May 1983, p.65.
- ⁴³ Eduardo Galeano, *El futbol: a sol y sombra*, (México DF: Siglo Veintiuno: SEP, 1995), p.195.
- ⁴⁴ Although figures of the death toll inevitably vary, it is widely accepted that the earthquake, measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale, killed between 10 and 20,000 people. Many others perished in a powerful aftershock the following day. Thousands more were injured and made homeless in the natural disaster.
- ⁴⁵ Cited in Taylor, *The Beautiful Game*, 225. Carlos Monsiváis, *Entrada libre: Crónicas de la sociedad que se organiza*, (México DF: Ediciones Era, 1988), p.89.
- ⁴⁶ Juan Guzmán, "El estado debe organizar el Mundial de Fut", *Unomásuno*, 4 October 1985.
- ⁴⁷ Jorge Aviles, "Sin mordeza", *El Universal*, 21 May 1986. Emphasis as in original.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted in Ricardo del Muro, "El Mundial probó que el sector privado puede salvar a México", *Unomásuno*, 27 June 1986.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted in Galeano, *El futbol*, p.196.
- ⁵⁰ José Luis Mejías, "Los intocables dificultades", *Excélsior*, 16 June 1986.
- ⁵¹ Víctor González, "Desilusionó a la IP el número de visitantes que vino al >mundial<", *El Universal*, 30 June 1986.
- ⁵² [n.a.], "Desilusión para el sector privado de los estados sedes, las ganancias del Mundial", *El Universal*, 3 July 1986.
- ⁵³ Nadia Piemonte, "75% de los ingresos de Teleméxico, para Televisa", *Unomásuno*, 22 July 1986.
- ⁵⁴ Brewster, *Representing the Nation*, pp.38-51, 58-61.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p.161.
- ⁵⁶ Froylán López Narváez, ">Juanito< el Falso: Logotipo de México", *Excélsior*, 23 June 1969.
- ⁵⁷ Eva Velázquez, "No lo subestimo, pero... ¿Prestigiará a México tener como símbolo a un chile?", *El Herald de México*, 12 May 1984.
- ⁵⁸ Sergio Bañuelos, "Rafael del Castillo: >Ninguna discrepancia con la Subsecretaría<", *Excélsior*, 24 August 1983.
- ⁵⁹ Brewster, *Representing the Nation*, pp.47-48, 61-74.
- ⁶⁰ Sotelo, *El oficio de las canchas*, pp.56-57.
- ⁶¹ [n.a.], "¡Llegaron los campeones!", *El Universal*, 5 May 1969.

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- ⁶² Arthur Hopcraft, "The man who can't lose", *The Guardian*, 30 May 1970, p.10.
- ⁶³ Eduardo Suárez, "Ambassador complains of anti-Mexican press", *The Guardian*, 6 June 1970, p.10.
- ⁶⁴ [n.a.], "Rivales, Pero no Enemigos", *El Universal*, 9 June 1970.
- ⁶⁵ Santiago Jaime Illescas, "México 70", *El Universal*, 25 June 1970.
- ⁶⁶ See Fernando Marcos, "La FIFA Está FOFA e Inglaterra se fue...ye!...ye!", *Siempre*, 24 June 1970.
- ⁶⁷ Rodolfo de Larosa, "Las críticas inglesas a México son injustas", *El Nacional*, 9 June 1970, emphasis as in original.
- ⁶⁸ See, for example, Albert Barham, "Argentina likely to be banned from World Cup", *The Guardian*, 25 July 1966. Albert Barham, "England's victory soured by vicious play", *The Guardian*, 25 July 1966, p.10; [n.a.], "Some questions for FIFA", *The Guardian*, 25 July 1966, p.10; [n.a.], "Destructive attitude of South Americans", *The Times*, 25 July 1966, p.4. In November 1966 FIFA announced that no further action would be taken. See Albert Barham, "Have FIFA let Argentina off too lightly?", *The Guardian*, 19 November 1966, p.10.
- ⁶⁹ FIFA World Championship - Jules Rimet Cup 1970, Final Competition, Technical Study, p.20.
- ⁷⁰ Herman Beals, "El Mundial de fut fue un gran éxito", *El Nacional*, 23 June 1970.
- ⁷¹ Richard Giulianotti explores the clashing style of Latino and European football in "Football, South America and Globalisation: Conceptual Paths", in Miller & Crolley (eds.), *Football in the Americas*, p.49.
- ⁷² Belisario Betancur, "Felicitación de Betancur al Presidente de la Madrid", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.4.
- ⁷³ [n.a.], "Primero arreglarán las tribunas de prensa", *El Universal*, 21 May 1983, p.2.
- ⁷⁴ Rossas, [n.t.], *Novedades*, 21 May 1983, deporte, p.1.
- ⁷⁵ Fidel Samaniego, "Maradona hizo que se cimbrara nuevamente el estadio Azteca", *El Universal*, 26 June 1986; Rafael Solana, "Cuatro tristezas", *El Día*, 27 June 1986. Argentina's victory over England attracted particular attention. See, Marta Anaya, "¡Maradona, Maradona! Verdugo de Inglaterra", *Excelsior*, 23 June 1985.
- ⁷⁶ Djuka Julius, "Tiempo y mundo imágenes", *Excelsior*, 31 May 1986.
- ⁷⁷ Raúl Carranza y Rivas, "El agua del Molino: Pasado mañana, México '86", *El Día*, 29 May 1986.
- ⁷⁸ José Luis Camacho, "Nacionalismo futbolero, una vertiente del fascismo", *El Día*, 6 June 1986. These views should be seen within the context of a series of football-related incidents in Europe of which the Heysel Stadium disaster of 29 May 1985 was the most tragic.
- ⁷⁹ [n.a.], "Derrota civil", *Excelsior*, 16 June 1986.
- ⁸⁰ Quoted in [n.a.], "El Mundial no distrae al pueblo de los grandes problemas", *Unomásuno*, 23 June 1986.
- ⁸¹ Héctor Adorno, "Estadísticas del Mundial 86", *Excelsior*, 18 July 1986.
- ⁸² Pedro Baroja, "Ganó México: Pronósticos fallidos", *Excelsior*, 1 July 1986.
- ⁸³ Fernando Marcos, "Viva deportiva", *Siempre*, 1 June 1983, p.65.