

Football in the Ice Age

Alexander Seger, 31 January 2026

It is early morning on a Saturday in Bucharest; freezing cold, some snow. Shortly, I will be playing football on a small pitch with the “Saturday boys”; guys in their 40s, 50s and a few – like me – in their 60s. The weather doesn’t matter.



I have enjoyed playing for over 55 years by now; starting as a boy in my home village in the Black Forest in Germany, obviously dreaming of becoming a professional. That never worked out, but football helped me settle in, become accepted and make friends or better understand and communicate with communities as I kept moving around the world:

- For a few weeks in 1977, I joined a team of Hungarian emigrants in Newark, Ohio, when visiting relatives. But then declined a proposal for a football (soccer) scholarship at Ohio State University in Columbus (I didn’t understand what they were talking about. Also found it strange that Franz Beckenbauer joining Pele and Cosmos New York that summer didn’t make the headlines in Ohio).
- In 1983, playing for a team in Bordeaux (France) helped me find friends – from fishermen to medical doctors – and an affordable flat during my studies at Bordeaux University.
- In 1985, I was chasing a football (and a frisbee) with a hundred or so children on an island on the Ubangi River that forms the border between the Central Africa Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- In 1988, I wrote some stories for German newspapers about football in Africa: how football provides social security for players of FC Primus in Brazzaville (Republic of Congo), or how relations between ethnic communities in Cameroon can be explained via football on the example of Oryx Douala (one of the oldest teams there). I also had breakfast in Yaoundé with Roger Milla (who was about to retire from football to set up a bar in La Réunion, but then returned to play a spectacular World Cup for Cameroon in 1990).

- While working in Vienna in 1989/1990 for what now is UNODC, our United Nations team – playing in an Austrian corporate league – consisted mostly of talented Palestinians from UNWRA; something that Austrian referees definitely had an issue with (it was the only time in my “career” that I was sent off).
- In the early 1990s (while in Laos for UNODC), I turned an abandoned baseball field that was part of the residence of the US Ambassador into a football pitch to convene UN staff for Saturday afternoon practice (apparently that kept going for years after my departure: sustainability). In the province of Xieng Khouang (Plain of Jars), a match that I organized met with so much enthusiasm among children that in the end both teams fielded about 100 players each; that certainly helped us get started with the Xieng Khouang Highland Development Programme in opium-poppy growing areas. In Laos I also played the one and only “first division” match in my life as a player for the Ministry of Agriculture against the Ministry of Sports (we lost 1:5 but I scored that goal!).
- In 1994 (while in Pakistan for UNODC), another German player, one French and I were integrated into the team of the British High Commission to play an international tournament at the Jinnah Sports Stadium in Islamabad where we made it to the final (live on TV) that we lost 0:1 against Afghanistan (they deserved it).
- And at the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, France) I kept playing in and organizing the multi-national and multi-gender “Commando Cyber” football team for over 25 years.

All of this to underline that yes, football is a fantastic sport to bring people together whatever their background, social strata, cultures, countries or religions.

Neither broken bones nor torn ligaments ever stopped me. I have been attached to this sport for over half a century.

BUT I CANNOT AND WILL NOT FOLLOW GAMES OF THE WORLD CUP 2026 THAT ARE PLAYED IN THE USA.

Gianni Infantino handing Donald Trump a “peace price” specifically created to flatter him was so infantile and humiliating, not only for FIFA but for anyone loving this sport.

More than 30% of people identifying as “soccer fans” in the USA reportedly have a Latino/Hispanic background. The prospects of ICE agents using football matches in stadiums, bars or public viewings as honey traps to round up fans, arrest or shoot them is sickening.

Football has a long history. Precursors were already played over 2000 years ago in China, Greece or Rome. And I am sure, those 40+ games that will be played in Canada or Mexico this summer will be fun.

But football is not made for the ICE Age.

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