

A National Game

**FUTEBOL MADE POPULAR, PROFESSIONAL,
AND AFRO-BRAZILIAN**

May the Leônidas and the Domingoses
Fix on the stranger's retina
The miraculous reality
That is Brazilian man

GILKA MACHADO, 1934

On 13 June 1950, choruses of the joyously silly song “Touradas de Madri” (Bullfights of Madrid) reverberated around the concrete bowl of Rio’s Maracanã Stadium. With the beat—“pá-rá-rá-tim-bum-bum-bum”—seeming to match the rhythm of the home side’s passing, more than 150,000 spectators gloried in the Seleção’s 6–1 demolition of the Spanish national team.¹ Three days later, a crowd approaching 200,000 people—proudly but exaggeratedly trumpeted as 10 percent of the city’s population—gathered with every expectation that the celebration would continue on in the final game against Uruguay. The climate of anticipation extended onto nearby streets, where samba schools stood ready to burst into a special Carnival of victory.² This time, though, the match ended in the host’s defeat and a stifling silence. While FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) officials quickly ushered the victorious Uruguayans through the presentation of the Jules Rimet Trophy, Brazilians sat stunned, some crying, many just staring, and one allegedly dying of shock-induced heart failure.³ Fans in the stands and others hearing the news elsewhere shared the feeling that Brazil’s star midfielder Zinho expressed with one of his characteristically pithy phrases: “The world collapsed on me.”⁴ Pelé, then a nine-year-old who idolized “Mestre Ziza” (Master Ziza, as Zinho was often called), later recalled that he, too, had “participated in that immense sadness.” Sitting in front of the family’s large box radio with his father in Bauru, São Paulo, he had the impression that the defeat was “the end of a war, with Brazil the loser and many people killed.”⁵

The event known as the Maracanazo—the word is often left in Spanish, a linguistic concession to Uruguay’s triumph—came as devastating shock. Hosting the World Cup had promised a home-field advantage as well as the opportunity to demonstrate the country’s ascent to the realm of modern nations. Planners intended the site of the final, Maracanã, to be the world’s largest stadium and thus a monument to Brazilian progress. In fact, the construction of Maracanã had not been complete when the tournament began. Over the course of the Cup, though, both the stadium and the nationalism focused inside it took their final forms. The Seleção bulldozed its way through the competition, with a 2–2 tie against Switzerland the only cause of consternation. This worry gave way to an overwhelming patriotic euphoria that made it inconceivable, as Brazil coach Flávio Costa put it, that this team, containing the greatest players in the world, might lose in “Maracanã, our field, our land.”⁶ As soon as Alcides Ghiggia scored Uruguay’s second and winning goal, however, all of the ecstasy simply evaporated. In its place came not only disappointment but also real trauma. The defeat was an injury, a São Paulo newspaper predicted at the time, certain to leave “permanent scars.”⁷

What was worse, the wound festered before it could close. Fans, journalists, and officials all cast about for a satisfactory explanation of the “tragedy of 1950” and the blow to national prestige that it had dealt. Many Brazilians, after all, considered their country an emerging power after its participation in the Allied cause during World War II and its subsequent return to democracy. Descriptions of the World Cup final as a mere footballing accident—one of the illogical events that can always happen in sports—provided no solace.⁸ Too much had been riding on the country’s success in this tournament; more serious explanations were necessary. In the end, the prevailing argument placed the blame on three Afro-Brazilian members of the national team—Bigode, Juvenal, and particularly Barbosa—and the qualities they supposedly embodied. Superficially, the singling out of these players was natural; Bigode and Juvenal were defenders who lost track of Ghiggia, while Barbosa was the goalkeeper who lunged the wrong way and let in the fateful goal. It was, however, unclear that they had in fact erred; the debate over whether Barbosa had committed a *frango* (“chicken,” slang for a goalkeeping blunder) rages to this day. For his part, the goalie complained in 2000 that in a country where the maximum jail sentence is thirty years, he had suffered a half-century of punishment for a crime he had not committed.⁹ The rest of the Seleção—including Danilo, who lost the ball before both of Uruguay’s scores—got off more easily, though they were all tainted by the loss.¹⁰ For

many of their compatriots, though, what mattered was that the team—and particularly Barbosa, Bigode and Juvenal—had revealed an immaturity, an unmanliness that marked the mixed-race *povo* (people, or common folk) from which they had come. Apparently without irony, the editors of a 1950 sports almanac opined that “when things got black [*pretas*, here meaning ‘tough’]” in the final match, Brazil lacked the “virile game” to win.¹¹

Losing this World Cup thus offered proof to many observers that Brazil and its people still had a long way to go before joining the ranks of global powers. The nation remained “the country of the future” (*o país do futuro*), a tag that reminded Brazilians that they had not yet made good on their nation’s promise. The “tragedy of 1950” brought forth the more pessimistic element in Brazilian nationalism—in particular, the disdain that many in the upper classes felt toward the poor majority. This efflorescence of negativity highlighted two defining features of *futebol* in first half of the twentieth century. First off, soccer had not only become the national sport, but a key part of national culture. As the condemnations of the vanquished 1950 squad suggest, the Seleção had come to serve, in Nelson Rodrigues’s famous phrase, as “the fatherland in cleats.” Based on this symbolism, the performance of Brazilian teams in international soccer competitions provided a ready measure of the nation’s standing vis-à-vis other countries. Regional rivalries—with Uruguay and especially Argentina—piqued Brazilian interest, but contests with European sides held special significance. From the very start of soccer’s history in the country, Europe—not just specific teams or countries but an imagined, united Europe—represented an ideal of modern civilization that Brazil should strive to attain or, if somehow possible, overcome. Even those who rejected this goal found themselves having to frame their projects for the nation in reaction to it, so hegemonic was the appeal of European modernity.

Discussions of the Seleção’s defeat in 1950 also reflected the transformations soccer had undergone since its introduction to Brazil in the late nineteenth century. The sport had risen from modest beginnings as a novel diversion to become one of the most common leisure activities of people of all classes. This popularization culminated in its acceptance as a reflection of the national spirit, but this status came only through decades of conflict. By the time that sociologist Gilberto Freyre offered his description of a distinctively Brazilian “mulatto foot-ball” in 1938, much of the revolution had passed: battles had been fought along lines of race and class, gender and region, and if a clear victory was hard to discern, a general compromise had emerged.¹²

Soccer had experienced its democratization—meaning the inclusion of men from outside the white elite in the organized game. This did not, however, eliminate social hierarchies; racial tensions in particular roiled under the surface, bursting out in circumstances more mundane than the Maracanazo. Still, the struggles of members of the *povo* and the reactions they elicited from those in power helped forge a redefinition of who could properly participate not only in *futebol* but also the nation. Soccer's expansion, in other words, formed part of the consolidation of a modern Brazil that brought a greater swath of the population together in an uneasily integrated national identity.

This revamped Brazilianness welcomed the contributions of Afro-Brazilians to the national style of soccer and, more generally, to the country's history and culture. From Arthur Friedenreich in the 1910s and '20s to Domingos da Guia and Leônidas da Silva in the 1930s and '40s, Afro-Brazilians became icons of their country's manner of playing soccer and heroes in its efforts to triumph in the global arena. The lionization of such stars was part of the creation of a tropical modern Brazil, a process underway by the 1920s and in full bloom by the 1940s. In politics and the arts, as in sports, leading figures put forward ideas for the revitalization of the country, plans designed to make Brazil as modern as old Europe but in its own way. Most often, such initiatives sought to identify the real Brazil and proposed the best means of building on the strengths—and correcting the weaknesses—thus uncovered. The criticism of three Afrodescendant footballers (Barbosa, Bigode, and Juvenal) in 1950 serves as a vital reminder of the internal fault lines in the nation's dominant myths about itself. Tropical modernism, for all its recognition of the Afro-Brazilianness of Brazil, was never free of racism and other ignoble judgments.

"VOILÀ, LE FRIEDENREICH": KINGS AND PAUPERS IN THE NEW GAME

Arthur Friedenreich is not a name redolent of a tropical Brazil or the *jogo bonito* (beautiful game), at least not to the uninitiated. One of his nicknames—El Tigre—comes a bit closer, though of course it is in Spanish and not Portuguese and thus misses the mark as well. In fact, though, Friedenreich (also known simply as "Fried") was an Afro-Brazilian forward whose performance over a long career on the field, as a player from 1910 to 1935 and as a

referee for many years thereafter, made him one of the first great stars of Brazilian soccer. Indeed, when the Club Atlético Paulistano made the first European excursion by a Brazilian club in 1925, it was Fried whom fans recognized at the port in Cherbourg. As the Brazilian players passed from their ship toward the train that would carry them to Paris, one fashionably dressed young man with a sports magazine tucked under his arm pointed excitedly toward the lanky striker and exclaimed simply, “Voilà, le Friedenreich.”¹³

The 1925 journey of Paulistano created excitement and curiosity in France and turned into a tremendous success for the prestige of Brazilian soccer.¹⁴ On a stopover in Rio, Fried declared that he and his teammates would do “all that we can on behalf of Brazil.” The Europeans might, he added slyly, not only witness Brazilians’ ball handling skills but also perhaps even pick up a few tricks.¹⁵ Paulistano lived up to Fried’s bold words. Powered by his eleven goals, the club won eight of its ten matches in Portugal, France, and Switzerland and generated great interest in Europe and pride at home.¹⁶ Their two losses came at the hands of small clubs, but their victories included two defeats of the French national side—the first a 7–2 pasting—and one of the Swiss national team. When news of the first great win over the French team reached Rio, crowds took the streets in celebration.¹⁷ In Paris, the triumphs over France were enough to inspire the newspaper *Le Journal* to dub the Paulistano team “les rois du football” (the kings of soccer). The “clean” and “efficient” game of the Paulistanos earned plaudits even in more measured newspaper accounts, with the “dribblings” of Fried and his attacking companion Araken standing out.¹⁸ Such displays of skill on the trip foreshadowed the glorification of a fluid, specifically Brazilian style that European as well as Brazilian observers would note in the 1938 World Cup. That Cup came too late for Fried; he had retired in 1933. Nevertheless, the trajectory of his career, with the Paulistano excursion coming in his peak, captured many of the stresses that accompanied the expansion of soccer in Brazil, from the early domination of elite white men to the increasing participation of men of color and of the lower classes and on to the full professionalization of the sport. El Tigre, a mulatto with an ambivalent attitude toward his race, a dapper sportsman who exhibited the manners of an elite gentleman but played for pay in the years of false amateurism, lived out many of the conflicts and contradictions of this transitional period.

Fried was born just two years before the mythical introduction of soccer to Brazil by Charles Miller, who also bore a European name that belied his Brazilian nationality. The son of a Scottish engineer and a Brazilian mother,

Miller had gone to study in England, where he gained proficiency in “Association Football,” as it was properly known. Turning out for school, county, and club sides—most notably, St. Mary’s, which later became Southampton FC—he had performed well enough to attract praise in newspapers, one of which described him as a “sharp left winger.”¹⁹ More impressively, his play garnered an invitation to fill in for the short-handed Corinthians when the famed English side visited Southampton. In both cricket and soccer, Corinthians held to the highest standards of a pure, gentlemanly, and amateur ethic; they rejected the notion of material gains through sports. The aim, in the sporting ethos they epitomized, was to play in a fair and rugged style that reflected the values of the old English aristocracy. They traveled widely, including trips to Brazil and other South American countries, serving as white-uniformed ambassadors of high amateurism.²⁰ Miller only briefly appeared for Corinthians, but he carried with him their spirit—along with an English soccer ball, some boots, and a book of official rules—on his journey home. Soon, other men followed similar paths. Oscar Cox, for instance, finished his studies in his father’s home country, Switzerland, and brought his experience with soccer, along with proper equipment, back to his home in Rio. Cox’s schoolmate in Switzerland and fellow Carioca (Rio native), Antônio Casemiro da Costa, joined Miller as one of the major figures in the organization of the sport in São Paulo.²¹

In truth, when men like Miller, Cox, and Costa unloaded their bags, the game had a small but scattered presence in Brazil. Foreign sailors and railroad workers had mounted casual matches before onlookers bemused by the odd, foreign kicking game. Various secondary schools, including the noble Colégio D. Pedro II, had been instructing their students in ball games, including soccer as well as the cruder *bate bolão* (“hit the big ball”), which involved smashing a ball against a wall, since about the time of the regularization of Association Football in England in 1863.²² Young, cosmopolitan men like Miller and Cox proved energetic promoters of the game among their peers, however; they may not have delivered the game to Brazil, but they certainly worked hard to solidify its place as an acceptable leisure activity for the country’s upper class.²³ In this sense, the legends that grew up around them—Miller has long been designated the father of Brazilian soccer—had some basis in fact. They were, after all, pioneering figures who pushed the game in São Paulo, Rio, and other cities; they also represented a set of values—particularly fair play and amateur spirit—that many in the local elite found appealing.²⁴

By the first decade of the twentieth century, young and moneyed men had founded soccer clubs or set up soccer teams within existing social organizations in cities across Brazil. Miller presented the game to fellow members of the São Paulo Athletic Club, which consisted overwhelmingly of high-ranking British functionaries of English companies. Although the club showed greater enthusiasm for cricket than soccer, Miller managed to put together football matches in early 1895. Within seven years, São Paulo gained more elite clubs, including a team assembled by the students of the Colégio Mackenzie in 1898. German immigrant Hans Nobiling goaded Mackenzie into a game against a side—the Hans Nobiling Team—that he assembled out of acquaintances. Soon after that March 1899 game Nobiling invited these and other players to form a new club, which he wanted to name Germania, after the side he had played for before moving to Brazil. Coming from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, however, the players opted to call themselves Sport Club Internacional, to reflect “the internationalism of the young men present at the meeting.”²⁵ Nobiling left and, with fellow Germans and German-Brazilians, created SC Germânia a month later.²⁶ By the time that the Club Atlético Paulistano—Friedenreich’s future side—took the field in 1901, a handful of clubs had been formed, all dominated by resident foreigners or European immigrants. Together, these elite societies made up the Liga Paulista de Futebol (Paulista Soccer League) and initiated regular competition in 1902.

Rio did not lag behind São Paulo for long. As a major port, the largest city in Brazil, and the national capital, Rio was a center of trade and political life. Its native elites eagerly affected European tastes in many realms, from literature to fashion to architecture.²⁷ Together with men from the city’s relatively well-established colonies of European residents, the Carioca upper class experimented with soccer. Oscar Cox had introduced the game to the Payssandu Cricket Club and the Rio Cricket and Athletic Association but departed to organize a more soccer-oriented club, the famously elitist Fluminense, in 1902.²⁸ After losing an informal match that pitted Brazilians against Englishmen on the grounds of Payssandu, several students, sons of some of the city’s most distinguished families, established Botafogo as a “foot-ball club of purely Brazilian origin.”²⁹ More major clubs appeared by 1905, when the city received its own local league, the Liga Metropolitana de Football (LMF, Metropolitan Soccer League). Although the formation of the Rio league followed similar events in São Paulo (as well as Salvador), the Cariocas proved formidable rivals for their Paulista peers. Indeed, it was the

advent of competition between Rio and São Paulo that gave added impetus to Rio's consolidation of league soccer.³⁰

Parallel processes were occurring across the country. The northeastern city of Recife had its own version of Miller in Guilherme de Aquino Fonseca, who had picked up the game while studying at Cambridge University. Still farther north, São Luís do Maranhão benefited from the return of Joaquim Moreira Alves dos Santos, called "Nhôzinho," from Liverpool.³¹ Elsewhere, though, clubs emerged through the efforts of enterprising Europeans and their Brazilian acquaintances.³² In 1897, for instance, two businessmen, one German and the other English, put together a club in the southern port city of Rio Grande. Like other pioneering entities, Sport Club Rio Grande lacked rivals, so its members mostly scrimmaged among themselves or took on sides they assembled out of visiting sailors. They also traveled to nearby cities, not only looking for a game but also trying to spark the formation of competitors in the region. Their efforts paid off in the 1903 creation of two clubs dominated early on by German immigrants—Grêmio Foot Ball Porto Alegrense and Fuss-ball Porto Alegre—and others, like Sport Club Internacional, started by Brazilian and Italian-Brazilian men soon thereafter.³³

Although soccer benefited from a large-scale rise of sports, which invaded the leisure time of Brazilian elites as never before, it also suffered the criticisms that this frenzy of activity provoked. Physical exertion had not been part of upper-class ideals in the country until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such sports as existed among the elite tended to provide opportunities for socializing rather than demand participation. Horse racing (*o turfê*) was chief among these, moving from irregular events on beaches or in other open spaces to dedicated and closed tracks by the 1860s. The principal allure of the sport lay in its reputation as "the predominant taste of all civilized societies," in poet Olavo Bilac's phrase. Although the first Jockey Club in Rio failed in the 1850s, a second was inaugurated by Brazil's Emperor Dom Pedro in 1869. Together with Rio's three other tracks, the Jockey drew large publics by the close of the century and even inspired fans—male and female—to incorporate images of horses and racing equipment into their attire and sporting slang into everyday conversation.³⁴

By the first decades of the twentieth century, however, horse racing lost some of its audience to other pastimes that were attracting attention. Cricket had its adherents in the English colonies of major cities. Miller's own São Paulo Athletic Club had been established as a cricket association; the names

of other societies in Rio, the Payssandu Cricket Club and the Rio Cricket and Athletic Club, make clear their shared interest in the game. Newspaper advertising in the 1890s and early 1900s suggests, however, that Brazil's refined youth were experimenting with a wide range of sports; stores offered equipment for soccer, tennis, golf, baseball, roller-skating, gymnastics, fencing, and bicycling, among other activities.³⁵ All of these represented the new and the cosmopolitan; their rising popularity in Europe and the United States was central to this allure. Some of them, moreover, had an extra appeal in the use of technology and the physical velocity that they entailed. Bicycling and roller-skating stood out in this regard, though automobile driving (and racing) would soon overtake both in Brazil.³⁶

It was rowing, however, that reigned as the "king of sports." Not only in coastal cities like Rio, but in inland cities like São Paulo as well, rowing emerged by the end of the nineteenth century as the dominant sport of the well-off. Its advantages were many. Modern because of its association with European elites, it was also accepted as the epitome of vigorous exercise. Rowers developed muscles and exhibited them in their uniforms. At the same time, the sport remained socially exclusive—in spite of the large crowds that watched regattas from shore—and seemed to bolster both individual discipline and social order. The ideal rower showed both vigor and politesse, as is clear in the description of the national champion of 1903 in the pages of *A Canoagem*. Arthur Amendoa, the magazine attested, was of "fine stature, [with the] fine complexion of an athlete, well-muscled, endowed with a very good spirit and courteous in his manners."³⁷ If rowing was "the sport for men," it thus produced a particular sort of man, one unafraid of showing off his modern physique. As a chronicler of the day noted, "Throughout the city, young men, . . . flaunt large pectorals and thin waists and sinewy legs and a Herculean musculature in their arms."³⁸

There was in fact a great deal of overlap between practitioners of soccer and other sports. Charles Miller, to take one example, won renown not only on the soccer pitch but also on the cricket field and cycling track. Even those who organized different sports often cooperated with each other, as when the governing bodies of rowing and soccer tried to avoid scheduling conflicts between the two sports in Rio in 1911.³⁹ Moreover, the same areas of the city were often used for multiple sporting events. Many of the early soccer matches in São Paulo, for instance, took place at the Velodrome, which the patriarch of one of the city's most prominent families had built at the behest of his cycling-mad son.⁴⁰ Finally, even those clubs that had specialized in one sport came to spon-

sor many more. Some of the largest soccer clubs in Rio, for instance, maintained a commitment to rowing, not to mention including the word “regatta” in their full names, reflecting their initial interest in the sport or, in the case of Botafogo (de Futebol e Regatas), their later merger with rowing groups.⁴¹

The simplicity of soccer and its particular pleasures, however, soon gave it a leg up. Rowing remained an activity “for the privileged, for higher beings,” who could gain acceptance into the sport’s social circles and afford the equipment needed to compete in regattas. In soccer, by contrast, anyone could play with just a ball and a bit of open space; official, leather balls and measured and lined fields with fixed goals were highly appreciated luxuries, but not strictly necessary, for those wanting to practice “the English game.” With its running and tackling, soccer offered robust exercise, along with opportunities to display the ability to pass, dribble, and shoot.⁴² The application of these skills could impel a team to victory, while also affording individuals a chance to stand out. Not only matches between elite clubs but also pick-up games (*peladas*) proliferated in cities and towns from north to south. Brazil had succumbed to a footballing fever by the 1910s.

The rapid expansion of the game put in doubt the social exclusivity that had been a hallmark of the so-called big soccer (*futebol grande*) of the elite clubs. Most of the famous clubs served as redoubts of masculine elitism, their members hewing as close to possible to their ideal of English gentlemen. They referred to themselves as “sportsmen,” using the English; indeed, they preferred English terms for all elements of the game.⁴³ Luso-English mutations popped up; a ball could be “shootado” (close to the Portuguese *chutado*) instead of “shot,” but the linguistic evolution proceeded slowly and unevenly.⁴⁴ More marked were the wealth and social status of the leaders of clubs like Fluminense. To become a member of Fluminense, Mário Filho reported, “a player had to live the same life” as Oscar Cox and his peers, “all established men, heads of firms, high ranking employees of the great [business] houses, sons of rich fathers, educated in Europe, accustomed to spending.”⁴⁵ In this regard, Fluminense was no different from other clubs such as CA Paulistano or São Paulo AC; only men of “good family” and ample resources could enter.⁴⁶ For those able to become members, these clubs became another venue for their exclusive socializing. When they traveled to take part in São Paulo–Rio matches or when they fêted visiting teams from England or South Africa, for instance, they wore formal clothes—“smokings,” or dinner jackets, were required. This pattern held throughout the country; regional elites enjoyed their class standing at sporting as well as more conventional social events.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, social diversity was present from the very advent of organized soccer in Brazil. After all, featured among the clubs of the well-off were several tied to specific ethnic communities and identities. Englishness was at the heart of São Paulo AC, the Rio Cricket and Athletic Club, and many others around the country, but German, Portuguese, Spanish, Syrian, and Italian residents and immigrants set up their own clubs as well in the first decade and a half of official soccer. São Paulo, for instance, had AC Germânia among its earliest clubs, while Portuguesa de Desportos, Hespanha Foot Ball Club, Sport Club Sirio, and Palestra Itália joined it by the second half of the 1910s. Many such ethnic clubs used relatively relaxed criteria in evaluating prospective members, which only made sense in light of the small numbers that made up ethnic communities in some Brazilian cities. Palestra Itália, for example, counted small business owners, artisans, and workers among its *sócios* (members). In addition, ethnic categories like “German” and “Italian” brought together immigrants of different regional, linguistic, and religious identities.⁴⁸ Clubs like Rio Grande in the south and Internacional in São Paulo drew on various immigrant communities, while other clubs strove to be distinctly “national”—that is, made up of the Brazilian-born, as reaction against the early dominance of “foreign” organizers.⁴⁹

The mainstream press generally ignored the unofficial, “small soccer” (*futebol pequeno*) practiced by poor white and Afro-Brazilian men. When the big newspapers took notice, they often associated working-class soccer with criminality. This was especially true of informal games in open lots (*várzeas*) in and around cities.⁵⁰ Groups of working-class players appeared in newspapers as *malts* (mobs), a term that had been used derogatorily to refer to gangs using the Brazilian martial art capoeira in late nineteenth-century street battles.⁵¹ More commonly, those who played outside elite clubs came to be called *varzeanos*; and *varzeanos*, in the minds of elite observers, amounted to nothing more than vagrants.⁵² Labeling players vagrants did not mean that they were literally without employment or domicile; rather, it implied that they acted in a disorderly manner and failed to show proper respect for their social betters. These alleged qualities made small soccer seem “loose and insupportable,” as one Bahian newspaper wrote, more a matter for police attention than a serious sporting practice.⁵³

However offensive their efforts may have been to their social betters, workers and Afro-Brazilians threw themselves into the game, setting up their own clubs and leagues.⁵⁴ To a great extent, soccer became part of the lively associative life of the lower classes in cities at this time. Religious and lay

societies of varying types had always been present in the country; now, with the end of slavery, rising immigration, and urbanization, the number and variety of such organizations multiplied. Members of the *povo* found not only entertainment in these groups, but also communal belonging and, often, positive political identities. Some leaders initially doubted the value of soccer; anarchists and anarcho-syndicalist organizers, for instance, argued that soccer wasted time, money, and energy that would be better spent confronting employers.⁵⁵ Over time, anarchists joined with communists and socialists in supporting this “bourgeois” sport as a tool for promoting “proletarian solidarity.” Less ideologically driven organizations, moreover, adopted soccer as a useful leisure activity.⁵⁶

The sport of soccer, it is important to emphasize, did not naturally trickle down from elites to members of the *povo*. Rather, men and women turned it into a means for the assertion of identities—of class, ethnicity, race, neighborhood. Looking back from the late 1940s, Mário Filho wrote, a player went “where his people were. And when his people had no club, the thing to do was to found one.”⁵⁷ Clubs sprang up in working-class neighborhoods, often in the suburbs that surrounded the more upper-class city centers. The overwhelming sense was that urban Brazil was becoming “one vast soccer field.”⁵⁸ Some of these new teams took on names that signaled their self-conscious class orientations, like Operários (Workers) FC of Campinas and Primeiro de Maio (May First) FC of Rio.⁵⁹ More commonly, though, clubs resulted from the initiative of men living and working in a particular part of the city. Sport Club Corinthians Paulista, for instance, may have adopted the title of the elegant British amateur club, but it started as just one of many *bairro* (neighborhood) teams. Meetings in the barbershop of Salvador Bataglia, in the largely Italian *bairro* of Bom Retiro, produced plans for the new sporting club; its first headquarters were located in Afonso Desidério’s bar and bakery nearby. It took a few years, however, for the club to establish itself as a distinct entity; it shared many members with another Bom Retiro team called Botafogo. Among the players who took the field for Corinthians and Botafogo were a tailor, a factory worker, a house painter, a taxi driver, and a carpenter. Later one of the great teams of the masses, Corinthians slowly separated from Botafogo and climbed into the upper division of elite-controlled big soccer in the city. It did not do so, however, as an explicit political gesture; its members simply wanted to compete with the best teams.⁶⁰

Afro-Brazilian proponents of soccer shared these desires. Nuclei of Afro-Brazilians in working-class neighborhoods produced their own teams. In

Porto Alegre, for instance, ex-slaves and other Afrodescendants had congregated in small residential areas in the Navegantes *bairro* and in the Colônia Africana (African colony) on the fringes of the downtown. From their homes, men made their way to the Campo do Bom Fim and other spaces to play soccer. When the city government granted SC Internacional a new lot on which to build a stadium, Afro-Brazilians took over the team's old field. By 1920 they had also organized their own clubs in the Liga das Canelas Pretas (Black Shins League), very much outside the jurisdiction of Porto Alegre's first and second divisions.⁶¹ Afro-Brazilian clubs in São Paulo—such as Diamantino FC, Perdizes FC, and Aliança FC—suffered a similar fate.⁶² The governing bodies of big soccer in Porto Alegre and São Paulo, like their counterparts elsewhere, shunned Afro-Brazilian teams and players.

In response to this exclusion, Afro-Brazilian sportsmen treated soccer as one more area in which to assert their value and their rights; soccer became part of alternative “black worlds” within cities like São Paulo and Salvador.⁶³ Forming clubs thus became a way of demonstrating pride in Afro-Brazilian culture and a strategy for “improving the race.” Both Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul, and Campinas, São Paulo, had Afro-Brazilian clubs named after the mulatto hero of abolitionism, José do Patrocínio.⁶⁴ The black press in São Paulo hailed the performance of Afro-Brazilian clubs, particularly the Associação Atlética São Geraldo (founded in 1910) and the Club Cravos Vermelhos (Red Cloves Club, founded 1916, which later became the Club Atlético Brasil). Journalists at Afro-Brazilian papers praised the on-field success of these clubs but expressed even greater satisfaction in the dedication and discipline that Afro-Brazilian players demonstrated. Much like their counterparts in the white elite, Afro-Brazilians believed sports to be ennobling and healthy; as members of a subordinate group, they simply demanded the opportunity to get the full benefits of rowing, swimming, and soccer. Players from São Geraldo and other clubs, in this sense, were offered up as proof that Afro-Brazilians had both sporting ability and social respectability—that they, and the communities from which they came, deserved full membership in the nation.⁶⁵

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the elite clubs, however, came from factory teams—teams organized by the owners and managers of the growing number of manufacturing firms. Such clubs were concentrated, unavoidably, where industrialization first took off: Rio, São Paulo, and to a lesser extent, smaller cities like Sorocaba in the interior of São Paulo state. The most influential factory team by far was Bangu AC, or, as it was formally known, the

Bangu Athletic Club.⁶⁶ Soon enough, the club was known simply as Bangu, after its location in the hinterlands of Rio de Janeiro. In 1892 Companhia Progresso Industrial do Brasil, a Brazilian firm, had built a textile factory in the town of Bangu, bringing in English and Scottish technicians and administrators to help oversee production.⁶⁷ In 1903 these British functionaries, together with Brazilian colleagues, proposed the creation of a sports club, which would field a soccer team the following year. Perhaps encouraged by their relative isolation—Bangu felt distant from Rio, though a rail line provided a handy link—the club directors soon included regular workers in the team. The squad that took the field in 1904 against Rio Cricket counted five Englishmen, three Italians, one Portuguese, and a single Brazilian. It was this last member, Francisco Carregal, who stood out, less because of his being Brazilian and more because he was “one hundred percent *preto* [black].”⁶⁸ Bangu was not the only factory team in the Rio area with players “of color”; the textile center at Andaraí, in the city of Rio itself, had Afro-Brazilians in its factory and on its squad as well.⁶⁹ Bangu’s case was more provocative, however, since the status of its directors allowed for its entrance into the rarefied heights of elite football in Rio.

The prospect of facing Carregal and other Afro-Brazilians who later joined Bangu caused distress among those who strove to preserve the sport’s exclusivity. Indeed, shortly after the League reorganized itself in 1907 (as the Liga Metropolitana de Sports Athléticos, Metropolitan League of Athletic Sports), it issued a bold decree: “the directorship of the league . . . resolved by unanimous vote that persons of color will not be registered as amateurs in this league.”⁷⁰ Bangu officials immediately withdrew from the league’s competition, with the club’s secretary declaring that he was “very happy to have left such an association.”⁷¹ This rejection of a race bar found mixed support outside Bangu. One official from Botafogo offered a particularly interesting justification for the exclusion of Afro-Brazilians. Given that political parties had broadly accepted “the principle of equality, without distinction of color or belief,” he said, social and sports clubs needed to maintain the right to social and racial distinctions.⁷²

Indeed, democracy was a troublesome matter for the distinguished members of elite clubs. Most of them at least tacitly accepted the formal democracy of the First Republic (1889–1930), but this was a highly restricted system that reflected the hierarchies of the age. In keeping with this orientation, they conceived of official soccer as a haven of upper-class privilege and aristocratic values. In the face of pressures from the rapid diffusion of soccer throughout

society, this position made them conservative, perhaps even reactionary. At the same time, they were defending a version of modernity; their big soccer was modern in its cosmopolitanism and its links to new understandings of the body.

The spread of popular soccer, though, threatened two defining traits of the elite game: whiteness and amateurism. The paladins of official soccer often derided the illegal payment of players as “brown professionalism” (*profissionalismo marrom*); players willing to stoop to such practices, it was implied, could not be proper sportsmen and thus were not fully “white.” Some champions of the old ideals continued to long for the “purity” of the amateur game even after the federal government approved professionalism in 1933 and clung to their doubts about the value of Afro-Brazilians in competitive soccer even after large clubs and the national team had come to depend on Afro-Brazilian stars.

It was in the early years of conflicts over race and professionalism that Arthur Friedenreich entered the scene in São Paulo. His father, Oscar, had moved to the Paulista capital in the late 1880s after a business failure in his hometown, the German-Brazilian city of Blumenau in the southern state of Santa Catarina. Although he set himself up nicely in São Paulo, buying a respectable home and making himself an active member of the tightly knit German and German-Brazilian community, he made a highly unconventional choice in his marriage. He fell in love with and then wed Matilde, a beautiful dark-skinned Afro-Brazilian woman who had been born into slavery.⁷³ As uncommon as such formal unions were among the elite, the marriage did not result in the exclusion of either Oscar or his mulatto son from decent society. Oscar entered the Club Germânia and soon brought Arthur along with him. Arthur played soccer voraciously as a child on the streets of his neighborhood, the Bairro da Luz, as so many *craques* (stars, from the English “crack” players) would do in subsequent decades. When he began to play at Germânia in 1909, he took the style of the *pelada* with him, showing improvisation and quickness with the ball. An older player, the German immigrant Hermann Friese, helped the frail-looking boy refine his shot and other skills—although Friese was known for his more brutish style of play. The result was that Fried became an exceptionally savvy as well as technical player.⁷⁴ Noted theater critic Décio Almeida remembered the “elegance” with which Fried sent “low shots into the corner of the goal,” and his ability to keep dribbling forward, “almost without pausing the ball.”⁷⁵ In part because Germânia favored more robust attackers—the young Arthur was lanky—he followed his footballing ambitions to another club, Ypiranga, which had just

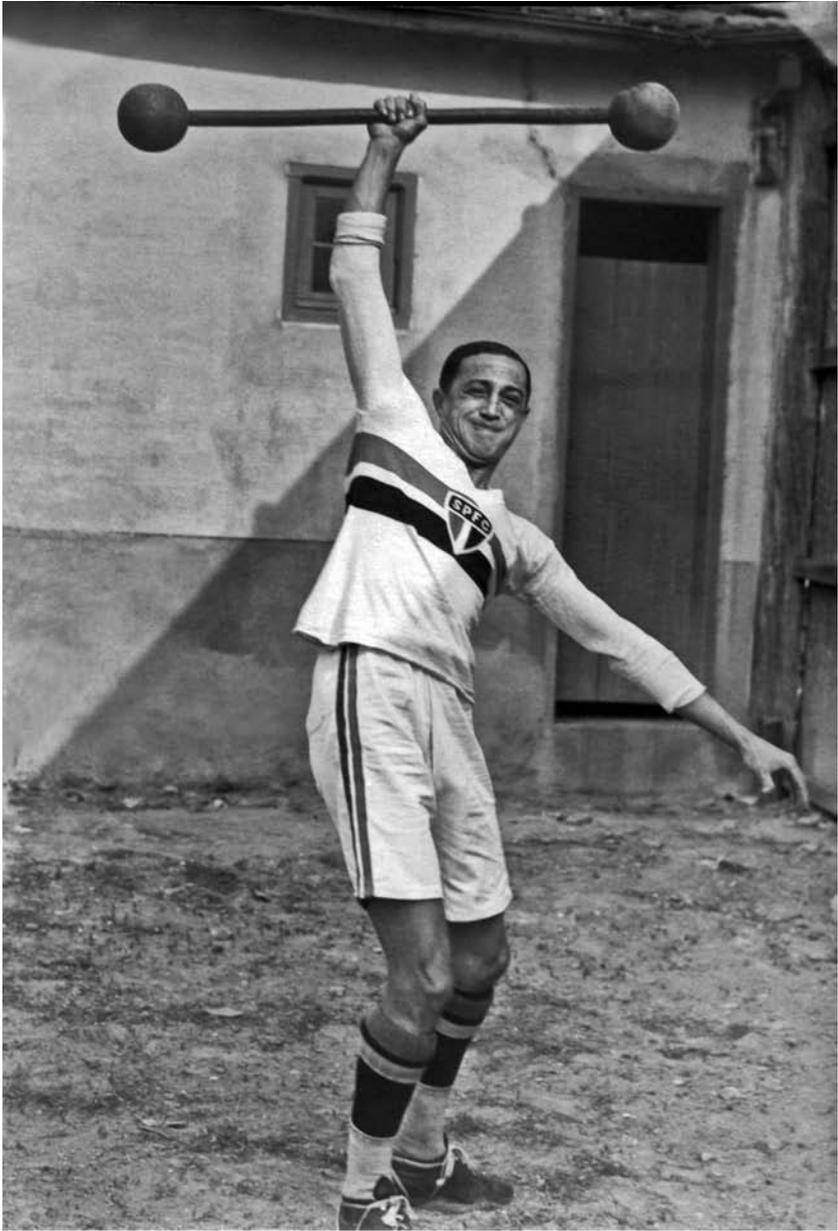


FIGURE 1. Arthur Friedenreich in a playful moment. Collection of Cesar Oliveira/LivrosdeFutebol.com, Rio de Janeiro.

won qualification for the São Paulo first division.⁷⁶ He went on to star at other clubs, from the short-lived Mackenzie and Payssandu sides to CA Paulistano, which enjoyed great notoriety before also passing out of existence, to São Paulo AC and Flamengo.

As his club career was just taking off, Fried was also integrated into the new national team. In 1914 he made his mark on the first Brazil squad, which took on the visiting English club Exeter City. Soon thereafter, he played for his country in the inaugural game of the Copa Roca, a regular competition between Brazil and Argentina that former Argentine president Julio Roca had proposed the previous year.⁷⁷ On both occasions, Fried distinguished himself by his skilled play and his valor, especially in the Exeter game, when he continued on after an adversary knocked out two of his teeth with a malicious high kick.⁷⁸ It was the 1919 victory, however, that proved a sea change. Coming into the tournament, many Brazilians considered their soccer inferior not only to the European game but also to that of Argentina and Uruguay. With Fried leading the forward line, though, the Seleção achieved a “relatively easy victory over a powerful Argentine team.”⁷⁹ The final was a more torturous affair, involving numerous brutal fouls. Ultimately, though, a sharp shot in extra time by Fried produced the winning goal, setting off thunderous applause in the crowd.⁸⁰ Journalists matched the spectators’ enthusiasm; an editorial in *Vida Sportiva*, for instance, framed the victory as a sign of Brazil’s ascent: “The new Brazilian generation that is developing on the field of play, that is acquiring the combative qualities necessary for the great collisions of life, must inevitably transmit to their descendants the same qualities of resistance, the same attributes of energy, the same strength of will, the same desire to fight and to win that they have acquired in sporting tournaments.”⁸¹ Moreover, the nickname El Tigre, bestowed formally by the Uruguayan captain with a certificate that hailed him as “the most perfect center forward of the South American championship,” fell into common usage. In a final salute, a jewelry shop, Casa Oscar Machado, exhibited Fried’s boots in its front window in Rio’s downtown.⁸²

It was not only Fried’s technique but also his *raça*—literally, “race,” but figuratively, fighting spirit—that had so impressed the Uruguayans. Race in the more common sense, however, was an increasingly tricky issue for Fried. He carefully groomed his public image, “whitening” himself as best he could.⁸³ He never went as far as the player Carlos Alberto, who in 1914 felt compelled to apply rice powder to his face when appearing for Fluminense. The ploy fooled no one, making Carlos Alberto the butt of

jokes and providing a nickname—Pó-de-arroz (rice powder)—that rivals still use to refer to Fluminense and its supporters.⁸⁴ Fried focused on the clothes he wore and the manners he used, which reflected his efforts to look and act like the white elites around him. His biggest challenge was hiding the marks of his racial identity, his curly hair and the mother who had presumably passed it on to him. Throughout his life, he took care of the latter concern by appearing in public with his father but not with his mother. Matilde was a notable absence even in the detailed personal records he kept, while Oscar avidly attended their son's games.⁸⁵ The problem of his "bad" hair, meanwhile, arose in every match; the frenetic energy of the sport always threatened to mess up his slicked-down styling, which he intended to be "non-black" but which others found as artificial-looking as a wig.⁸⁶ Fried stuck with his efforts, though, never embracing his position as the first great Afro-Brazilian star; he seemed content with his place as a *moreno* (a vague term meaning dark, but which could apply to olive-skinned whites as well as light-skinned people of mixed race) member of noble clubs and the national side. In his 1947 book *O negro no futebol brasileiro* (The Black Man in Brazilian Soccer) journalist Mário Filho traced the conquest of the sport by Afro-Brazilians but counted Fried as a "mulatto who wanted to pass for white."⁸⁷

However conflicted he may have been about his racial identity, Fried was a strong and at times provocative figure. He had no problem playing alongside men who identified as Afro-Brazilians or putting himself in positions of prominence on clubs and the national team. His role as a leader of the Seleção of 1919 transformed him into a positive symbol of racial integration.⁸⁸ When, for instance, directors of Rio's big clubs opted not to play a goalkeeper because of his dark skin—because he was "not a little bit lighter"—the newspaper *O Imparcial* jibed at them by asking, ". . . and who knows if that player is not going to be another Friedenreich?"⁸⁹ Moreover, El Tigre became one of the more notorious beneficiaries of the "false amateurism" that came to dominate the game in the 1910s and '20s. As tournaments grew in size and competitiveness, clubs began to pay players, in direct defiance of laws that continued to mandate amateurism. Fried, though never making himself a public spokesman for professionalization, clearly believed that players should be paid for their services, and he accepted under-the-table bonuses (*bichos*) throughout his career. When the 1919 Sul Americano had to be postponed because of the influenza epidemic, the Brazilian Sports Confederation asked players to return the expense money that had been disbursed. Along with

two of his colleagues, Fried responded in letters that were published in the press, offering the straightforward explanation that he could not send the advance back, since he had “employed the money in the way he found necessary.”⁹⁰ This mild, if curt, message was one of the most aggressive stands Fried took in public. Keeping to himself, however, he made clear by his actions that he supported professionalism and opposed amateur ideals as “duplicities of our football.”⁹¹

Fried, then, presented a complex sort of pioneering spirit. To see him as truly innovative, we must view him against the backdrop of the resistance by individual players and elite clubs to the inclusion of Afro-Brazilians and professionals. Fried’s teammate in the 1919 Sul Americano, goalkeeper Marcos Carneiro de Mendonça, provides an instructive comparison here. Mendonça was the other great Brazilian hero in 1919 and had been the main star of the 1914 Copa Roca; after Brazil’s victory in 1914, fans had carried him off the field on their shoulders, in a spontaneous exhibition of joy.⁹² Despite these and the other glories he won on the field, he retired from the game shortly after the 1919 Sul Americano, making only a few club appearances afterward. The first goalkeeper of note in Brazil, he embodied the ethos of big football.⁹³ An “aristocrat in everything,” as one contemporary noted, Marcos came from a wealthy family that moved from Minas Gerais to Rio 1901. Childhood illnesses weakened him but did not dull his interest in soccer. At only fifteen years old, he was drafted into his older brother’s team to fill in for a missing player. Soon he established himself as a promising goalie, “with an excellent, quick eye, positioning himself perfectly and with secure and firm hands.”⁹⁴

Marcos always played for the love of the game, the competition it provided, and the fine skills it encouraged him to develop.⁹⁵ He stopped playing out of principle; the game he had so enjoyed was transforming into a sport of which he disapproved. Rather than playing for pay, he had in fact “paid to play”—since he paid monthly dues to his clubs, which provided only a ball and a soccer field. That changed, he argued, sometime after World War I, when clubs felt pressured to attract a large, ticket-buying public.⁹⁶ The “other interests” that came into soccer in this period ruined things for Mendonça. Neither the players who sought illegal salaries nor the massive and at times ill-behaved crowds attending matches shared Mendonça’s background, manners, and expectations. The game had, in a sense, moved away from amateurs like him.⁹⁷ At the height of his glory—after his “impeccable” performance in the 1919 final, which included what he himself deemed “the most important

and most incredible defense” of his life—Mendonça chose to quit the game he loved but could no longer respect.⁹⁸

**NATIONALIZING THE DIVINE AND THE BRILLIANT:
DOMINGOS DA GUIA, LEÔNIDAS DA SILVA, AND THE
BRAZILIAN STYLE**

Despite the ragged state of its administration, Brazilian soccer gained acceptance as part of the “national vocation” in the 1930s.⁹⁹ Key to this development was the emergence of a national style by the end of the decade. The creation of a Brazilian *futebol* involved the identification of supposedly distinctive and inherent traits; these qualities added up to a peculiar Brazilian “gift” (*dom*) for playing skillful soccer. Those who shaped this notion of a Brazilian style highlighted the central role that Afro-Brazilians had played in its development. In other words, the 1930s and ’40s saw *futebol* become not only national but Afro-Brazilian. This tendency only intensified as the increasingly dictatorial government of Getúlio Vargas adopted soccer, along with the Afro-Brazilian identified practices of samba and Carnival, as material for its nationalist propaganda.¹⁰⁰ The consolidation of this style certainly did not resolve the conflicts that marked Brazilian society or even soccer itself—the reactions to the Maracanazo, after all, demonstrated the unresolved nature of racial tensions in 1950. Through conflictive and selective processes, a style was invented that provided a framework for a fragile but lasting sense of *brasilidade* (Brazilianess) that could appeal to much of the national population and, in its mature forms, earn the admiration of foreign observers as well.

Identified early on as “the British game,” soccer nevertheless spawned a sense of Brazilian distinctiveness at the start of the twentieth century. Games against foreign opponents fostered the sense that Brazilians—even European residents of Brazil—were beginning to play in their own fashion. Brazilian teams strove to prove themselves against clubs from England, South Africa, Portugal, Argentina, and Uruguay.¹⁰¹

The tours of these visitors tended to be ragtag affairs. Before Exeter City played the Brazilian national team in 1914, it first took on a squad of Englishmen who lived in Rio and then a Carioca side that drew from a wider range of the local upper classes. It was only through a last-minute compromise between the São Paulo and Rio leagues that the first-ever “Brazil”

team—really just a Paulista-Carioca selection—came together to confront (and defeat) the English club.¹⁰² The victory over Exeter, however hastily organized, brought forth expressions of national pride. “Brazil defeated England on the field of play,” proclaimed one newspaper, while others gloried not only in the performance of individual players but also in the “instinct of patriotism” that had inspired team members and spectators alike.¹⁰³ The downside of this connection between the nation and national team appeared when the Seleção failed to deliver victory. In the first Campeonato Sul Americano (South American Championship), held in 1916, for example, the national team drew against Chile and Argentina and lost to Uruguay. In spite of such results, soccer officials and journalists continued to praise the country’s participation in international competitions. Columnist Paulo Barreto went so far as to call soccer “the shaper of American unity,” a force that would simultaneously encourage friendly relations between countries and raise the level of civilization in each.¹⁰⁴ Afrânio Peixoto went even further, praising not only the potential but also the existing benefits of the game for the nation; by teaching “discipline and order,” he wrote, soccer “was reforming, if not remaking the character of Brazil.”¹⁰⁵ Not all agreed with Peixoto’s highly favorable view, of course; many well-known writers worried that the game might actually weaken the national spirit.¹⁰⁶ The most tenacious critics continued their attacks into the 1930s, but many more toned down their rhetoric as soccer’s potential to integrate social sectors under the banner of nationalism became apparent.

Brazil’s victory in the 1919 Sul Americano was crucial in this regard, especially given the dramatic circumstances of the final game. Friedenreich’s late goal—well after the point at which the second overtime should have ended—sent observers into rapture about the country’s development of its soccer. Journalist Américo R. Netto praised not only the victory but also the “innovation” that Seleção players had shown, asserting that “Brazilians have in this way earned the honor and the glory of having created . . . a new system of playing ‘Association [football]’ and thanks to which we have already conquered the title of South American champions and can, without vanity, attempt that of world champions.”¹⁰⁷ Accounts of the time describe jubilation on the street as proof of “the conquest that soccer had definitively made over the popular heart.”¹⁰⁸ In the glow of victory, officials from the Brazilian Sports Confederation (CBD, Confederação Brasileira de Desportos) and the government cemented an agreement to bring the Sul Americano back to Rio in 1922 and insert soccer into the celebrations of the centennial of the coun-

try's independence.¹⁰⁹ Although Brazil repeated as champion, circumstances undercut the propagandistic value of the accomplishment. The tournament was marred by controversies over refereeing, with two games abandoned by teams who refused to put up with what they saw as incompetence and bias. After Uruguay traveled home, only two teams remained; Brazil, with three ties and only one victory to its credit, defeated Paraguay easily. The chaos of the soccer competition proved a blight on the centenary celebrations, suggesting to some disenchanted observers that "sympathy and relations are not made though kicks."¹¹⁰

Broader problems hampered the performance of the national team in other instances during the 1920s and '30s. Racism, in often blatant form, had a profound impact. A series of incidents in the early 1920s showed that Brazilian authorities harbored serious reservations about including Afro-Brazilian players in any team representing the nation. When the city of Rio prepared to receive an official visit of King Alberto of Belgium in 1920, officials tried to present the most modern and civilized image of Brazil they could. This meant not only clearing prostitutes and other indecorous poor folk from areas the king was to visit, but also excluding Afro-Brazilians from the team that put on an exhibition of the Brazilian style of soccer for this "Sporting King."¹¹¹ Very soon, however, such exclusion became a heated topic in the Carioca press. On its way back from the 1920 Sul Americano, the Brazilian squad stopped for a few days in Buenos Aires. There, they agreed to a friendly match with their hosts, who had just beaten them in the final in Chile. To the dismay of the players and especially Seleção officials, the local press and public launched a series of racist critiques of Brazilian players and of Brazil itself. Brazilian journalists and politicians met the racist vitriol with disgust but also with some embarrassment.¹¹²

When the time came to assemble the Seleção for the next Sul Americano, to be held in Argentina, authorities balked at the idea of sending mulattoes and *pretos* as part of the Seleção. They did not want to give their rivals any more reason to call Brazilians *macaquitos* (little monkeys).¹¹³ Two congressmen proposed that Afro-Brazilian players be banned outright, a position that set off furious debates. In the end, a rumor appeared that the country's president, Epitácio Pessoa, had intervened personally, ordering the CBD to enlist only white players, "the best of our footballing elite—that is, young men from the best families, with the lightest skin, with straight hair." He also supposedly argued that this would reduce racial friction within Brazil, since the defeat of a team of Afro-Brazilians might provoke the resentment of their

white compatriots.¹¹⁴ Assuming this report to be true, players and union leaders protested, but to no avail. It was an all-white Seleção that lost in that year's Sul Americano, 1–0, to Argentina.¹¹⁵

Another internal tension, the highly charged rivalry between São Paulo and Rio, hurt Brazil's chances at the 1930 and 1934 World Cups. The two cities had vied for soccer supremacy in regular matches since 1901. Political antagonisms increased through the 1920s, boiling over in São Paulo's 1932 revolt against the centralizing Vargas regime. Arthur Friedenreich, El Tigre, took an active role as a sergeant in the Paulista rebel army with hundreds of "sportsmen" under his command.¹¹⁶ More often, soccer players were pawns in officials' struggles to dominate the Seleção.¹¹⁷ This infighting kept some of the country's best talents off the national team simply because they played in the wrong city. Given that the 1930 World Cup was the first ever held and that it took place in Uruguay, already two-time Olympic soccer champion, officials wanted to assemble a powerful Seleção. The Rio-based CBD called up fifteen players from São Paulo; the CBD refused, however, to include any Paulistas on the coaching staff. In retaliation, the governing body of Paulista soccer barred its players from taking part. In the end, only one Paulista, Araken Patusca, defied his regional authorities and played in Uruguay; the rest of the team consisted of Rio players, many of them mulatto and *preto*. Although at least one of these Afro-Brazilians, Fausto, emerged as a star, the Seleção put in a poor performance, losing in the opener to Italy. A victory against Bolivia in the second game was not enough to get Brazil through the first stage.¹¹⁸

The Seleção made an even more fleeting appearance at the 1934 World Cup, being eliminated in the very first match by a strong Spain. This time, the dispute over professionalism reinforced the regionalist antagonism. The Rio-based CBD, clinging to amateurism, decided to build the national team around players from Botafogo, one of the few clubs still paying lip service to the antiprofessional position. The CBD also managed to convince a few players, most notably Leônidas da Silva, to switch sides. To do so, though, the CBD had to abandon its ethical stance and pay players to join the Seleção. Still, most of those who seemed willing to accept CBD money backed out under pressure from club directors.¹¹⁹ In the end, the Seleção traveled to the Cup in Italy on the cheap and took part in nine exhibitions after falling short in the main competition. All in all, as Leônidas recalled three decades later, "It was a disastrous campaign, in spite of a few victories. Like gypsies, we traveled by train and bus, due to a shortage of funds, uncomfortable and

badly fed We seemed a band of exiles running from one side to another. In this climate there could be no discipline either, for everything was done using that in which we Brazilians are masters: improvisation.”¹²⁰

However demoralizing the 1934 experience had been, it contained the key elements that paved the way for the construction of the national style in the years that followed. Two of these factors—government guidance and the performance of stars like Leônidas—are evident, if in early and relatively ineffective manifestations, in the 1934 World Cup delegation. The third shows up only in Leônidas’s description of Brazilian improvisation. The 1930s would witness the celebration of Afro-Brazilian “contributions” to the nation’s history and identity. Expressions of this reevaluation of “the Afro-Brazilian” included the identification of traits, such as the ability to improvise in difficult circumstances, that came to be defined as inherently Afro-Brazilian. The growth of state support for soccer, together with the examples that Afro-Brazilian icons supposedly provided, fed into this redefinition of Brazil and its *futebol* as not just the site but also the product of a tropical modern civilization.

It is easy to understand the motives for the embrace of soccer by Getúlio Vargas and his allies, who had come into power in 1930. *Futebol* had become the most widely practiced and discussed sport in the country, after all, and these men hoped to bring unity in a turbulent period. Moreover, the nationalism that had permeated soccer culture only grew with the expansion of international tournaments; particularly with the advent of the World Cup, footballing competition between countries presented a tempting opportunity for propagandists of any stripe. As the Vargas regime hardened from its early status as a “provisional government” to the heavy-handed, centralizing, and nationalistic dictatorship of the Estado Novo (1937–45), its leaders became increasingly convinced of soccer’s value as an instrument of national integration. “The sporting passion,” Vargas told a confidant, “has the miraculous power” to unite even the far right and the far left wing in politics, “or at least to dampen their ideological incompatibilities.” What was necessary—what he intended to do—was “to coordinate and discipline those forces that invigorate the unity of national consciousness.”¹²¹

Unlike presidents before and after him, Vargas did not care for soccer. In the end, though, his appreciation of the potential influence of soccer and other sports made his lack of sporting passion irrelevant. He and his fellow “revolutionaries” of 1930 saw themselves as remaking the national body, which they understood as in part reshaping the actual bodies of Brazilians.

Like the European fascists whom Vargas and many of his advisors admired, the government promoted physical education to stimulate vigor. To this end, they mounted carefully choreographed demonstrations of exercise. Often, these displays were part of grand civic celebrations such as Labor Day and were eventually held in great soccer stadiums, especially São Januário in Rio and Pacaembu in São Paulo. These instructive, mass rituals were accompanied by the creation of administrative structures.¹²² In 1933, for instance, the government founded the Army Physical Education School (Escola de Educação Física do Exército) in Rio, which supplanted a Provisional Course in Physical Education that the School of Infantry Sergeants (Escola de Sargentos de Infantaria) had offered since 1929.¹²³

Vargas also carefully chose those who would oversee the state-led development of sports and soccer in particular. He appointed his daughter Alzira Vargas to serve as the symbolic position of *madrinha* (godmother) for the Seleção of 1938.¹²⁴ Luiz Aranha, the president of the CBD who brokered compromises between Rio and São Paulo on professionalism, was the brother of one of his closest allies.¹²⁵ Another of the original “revolutionaries” of 1930, the journalist Lourival Fontes, took over the central propaganda department of the government in 1934, increasing his power with the reorganization of his agency under the Estado Novo.¹²⁶ It was Fontes who made perhaps the clearest statement of the government’s stance on sports. On his way to the 1934 World Cup, he proclaimed, “Only the supreme authority of the State, considering that sports are the discipline that forms citizens . . . will be able to intervene in the coordination, discipline, structuring, and the technical orientation of Brazilian sports, in all their aspects.”¹²⁷

After the fiasco of the 1934 World Cup, the government set about trying to instill greater patriotism and to provide better funding for the country’s next try. A campaign to sell stamps bearing the motto “Supporting the *scratch* [national team] is the duty of all Brazilians” raised money to support the team. Vargas provided significant backing, and some of the governors he had appointed to administer the states contributed additional funds.¹²⁸ Finally, in 1941, the regime effected an across-the-board restructuring of Brazilian sports. Decree-law 3,199 created confederations for six branches of sports, with corresponding federations in each state; together, these entities fell under the control of the National Sports Council (CND, Conselho Nacional de Desportos), which was in turn part of the Ministry of Education and Health. The function of the CND was to rationalize and centralize sports, while also promulgating their practice throughout the country.¹²⁹

These broad initiatives would support “the perfection of the race” and thus solidify Brazil’s place as a rising world power.¹³⁰

All of these strenuous attempts to turn sports into an instrument of national administration depended on much more than a new organization for their success. The regime needed to reach citizens through publicity. In part it fostered the diffusion of news about the sport by making print and radio journalists part of official delegations to major tournaments. Thus, newspaper and radio reporters traveled with the team to the 1938 World Cup. The effusive narration of Gagliano Neto made him almost as famous as the players; his voice seemed to be everywhere, as a reporter back in Rio noted. “Thanks to the radio,” wrote Alberto Byington Júnior, “the Brazilian public follows play by play, minute by minute, all of the unfolding of the anticipated combat, described with confidence and enthusiasm in the voice of the Brazilian commentator.”¹³¹ Working under the gaze of regime censors, reporters stressed the unity that devotion to the Seleção forged: “Not a single discordant voice was raised,” claimed one paper on the eve of the competition.¹³² Differences between immigrant groups vanished while the national team played. “For the first time,” Rio’s *Gazeta* declared, “soccer, which has been the reason for international grudges, united in one bloc the [foreign] colonies living here and Brazilians.”¹³³ Similar processes of unification were reported in São Paulo, where those generally seen as foreigners now became Brazilian through the game.¹³⁴ Both newspapers and government officials, moreover, expressed certainty that the Seleção presented a positive image of the nation to the world. The squad’s display, one reporter gushed, moved not only Brazilian fans but also the “millions of Europeans who followed the team.” Soccer showed itself, he concluded, a tremendous “element of propaganda in the exterior.”¹³⁵ The powerful Minister of Education, Gustavo Capanema, drove home the government’s message in a telegram to the national coach: “The victory today has one meaning: everything for Brazil.”¹³⁶

To be effective, calls for uniting behind the nation must give some sense of what this entity represents. Government propaganda about the Seleção remained, however, rather short on details. With regard to soccer, Monica Pimenta Velloso’s general observation held true: “The State showed itself more interested in converting culture into an instrument of indoctrination than properly speaking of research and reflection.”¹³⁷ Official messages about soccer tended to emphasize the “courage, discipline, joy, and patriotism” that members of the national team allegedly exhibited.¹³⁸ Still, from 1938 on, the Seleção’s performance took on tremendous symbolic weight, as a sense of

Brazilianness grew and became linked not only to *futebol* in general but to the national team in particular. Government officials were savvy enough to pick up on this vision of *brasilidade*, but it did not originate with them; they concentrated, as ever, on messages encouraging bravery and decorum.¹³⁹ Rather, this idea of Brazil emerged from the efforts of scholars and journalists as they reproduced for audiences at home the magnificent feats of Brazilian *craques*.

Of the many stars of the 1930s and '40s, perhaps the two who acquired the most iconic status were Domingos da Guia and Leônidas da Silva. Born within two years of each other, one in a suburb of Rio and the other in the city proper, these men confronted similar obstacles as dark-skinned Afro-Brazilians who wanted to making a living in soccer. Both, though, persevered not only to shine on club and national sides but also to become central symbols of the new *brasilidade*.

Despite all they shared, the two were as different as the positions they played. Domingos da Guia was a central defender, a *beque*, but one who displayed more intelligence and grace than force when shutting down opponents.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, observers often commented on how “serene” he looked.¹⁴¹ He watched the patterns of a match develop, stepping in to intercept a pass or tackle an attacker at precisely timed moments. This high-risk style left spectators anxious, uncertain if he would manage to get a foot in just when he needed to; he seemed to play “in slow motion,” while all around him whirled in a frenzy.¹⁴² Domingos, though, remained calm even when an adversary got past him; he tracked back and recovered the ball, as Zizinho recalled.¹⁴³ Once in possession of the ball, he did not just clear it, but brought it up the field himself. One subtle move in the 1931 Copa Rio Branco, when he faked as if to head back to his own goal but then cut back sharply, inspired a spectator to gasp, “Divine mulatto!”¹⁴⁴

His command of the game made him a star, but the structures of soccer set up barriers even to so impressive a player. He was born in 1911 to a poor family not long removed from slavery; his paternal grandfather had been a captive in the interior of the state of Rio. Domingos grew up in a large family in Bangu, where he followed his brothers into the factory and, eventually, into soccer. He played from an early age on the street that ran next to the church and, by happy coincidence, continued past the Bangu soccer field.¹⁴⁵ Because the factory team was literally the only club in town, it took a while for Domingos to make it onto the first squad. His brother Luiz Antônio had been revered as a skilled and disciplined player—their father later said that

Domingos was “small coffee” (*café pequeno*, not much) compared to Luiz Antônio—and in 1929, when the full team needed a replacement for an injured defender, he recommended Domingos.¹⁴⁶ The teenager had been a center midfielder on the junior squad, a position he liked because it gave him a full view of the field. He brought that vision—and what he had learned from using it—to defense.¹⁴⁷

Quickly establishing himself as a talented starter, he felt the frustrations of the amateur regime of the era. He knew soccer was, as he said after retiring, “his path in life,” but at first he had to follow it through the paternalistic system of bonuses or, as he liked to call them, “tips” (*gorjetas*). While other players were content to receive their money back in the factory, he sought his directly from Bangu’s owner. Although the amount was not bad, he later said, it depended on the results, so that a loss or tie paid little or nothing.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, he felt frustration at the limits that racism imposed; he knew that at the time he could not go to Fluminense or Botafogo, since they would not hire players as dark as him. These norms hampered not only his freedom of movement but also his ability to seek the best tips. Still, he transferred to Vasco, which had begun to sign mulattoes and *pretos*, and managed to earn a decent wage, even when regulations kept him on the second team.¹⁴⁹ Later, he joined a handful of other Brazilians who moved to Uruguay’s professionalized soccer. The thought of leaving his homeland made him hesitate, but in the end a steady, legal salary swayed him, and he joined the club Nacional. His career zigzagged geographically from that point on. After a year at Nacional, he received an offer to return to Vasco. His Uruguayan club tried to hold him to the contract that he had just extended, but he pushed through his move to Rio.¹⁵⁰ There, as at Nacional, his team was champion. The following year, at Boca Juniors of Buenos Aires, he won still another competition, making him—to his great pride—champion in three countries, something that not even Pelé could match.¹⁵¹

He played out his career in Brazil, a key piece of one of the great Flamengo sides of all time. The formerly all-white and amateur club had resolved to achieve not only victories but also a mass following; signing Afro-Brazilians like Domingos, along with his brothers Otto and Ladislau, was part of this double strategy.¹⁵² Domingos had, as these developments suggested, survived the racist amateur era and, in a moderate way, even prospered as he did so. That achievement notwithstanding, in the waning years of his playing career, he experienced precisely the lack of autonomy that he had always resisted. Abruptly, and without seeking his approval, Flamengo sent him to Corinthians

of São Paulo. He felt, he later said, that he had been sold “like cattle.”¹⁵³ At this late point in his career, however, he could do little but go, although as he told an interviewer in 1945, he remained “as Carioca as the best samba.”¹⁵⁴ Three years later, after agreeing to lower his wage demands, he moved back to Bangu and soon retired.

Despite his stoic appearance on the soccer pitch, he had always been a strong and outspoken player, and these traits carried on after his playing days. He fearlessly shared his strong opinions about sensitive issues in interviews and in a series of articles in the paper *Última Hora* in 1957. With the provocative title “The Tragedy of Brazilian Soccer,” these latter pieces carried his denunciations of racism by coaches, referees, and *cartolas* (“top hats,” slang for club and confederation directors) not only against players but also against the only prominent Afro-Brazilian coach of the day, Gentil Cardoso, whom he considered deserving of a chance to manage the Seleção.¹⁵⁵ He also lashed out at the pass system, by which clubs kept the rights to players even after their contracts expired; Domingos labeled this little more than “slavery.”¹⁵⁶ The practice of maintaining a closed camp before games and during tournaments—called *concentração*—he found to be a “prison.”¹⁵⁷ After his triumphs on and off the field as a player, then, he continued to battle the structures of the national game that had hurt him and, as he said emphatically, remained threats to the autonomy of players into the 1950s.¹⁵⁸

If Domingos impressed fans and rivals, Leônidas da Silva dazzled them. Dubbed the Black Diamond (*Diamante Negro*) and Rubber Man (*Homem-Borracha*) for his fluid and highly athletic game, Leônidas was as much an icon as Domingos but more of a celebrity than the defender ever was. So great was his fame that news of his move from Flamengo to São Paulo in 1942 momentarily displaced reports of World War II as the lead story in many Brazilian newspapers.¹⁵⁹ Advertisers used his name and image to sell all sorts of products, from toothpaste to cigarettes and refrigerators to hair pomade; Black Diamond chocolate candy is still sold today. Recognizing the value of his fame, especially his reputation as the inventor of the overhead or bicycle kick, he hired a journalist to handle his marketing deals.¹⁶⁰ Most impressively, though, this unmistakably Afro-Brazilian man—even Domingos said that Leônidas was “*preto-preto*,” doubly black—achieved not only fame but also great symbolic value.¹⁶¹ It was Leônidas as much as anyone who inspired the formulations of Brazilian soccer as essentially Afro-Brazilian; he served as a foundational image of tropical modern *futebol* and provided a standard against which future stars were measured.¹⁶²

Leônidas grew up in the city of Rio, playing on the streets and beaches just as Domingos was doing out in the open spaces of Bangu. Like his colleague, Leônidas dreamed of turning soccer into his profession. “The ball,” he later said, “was one of my passions and the great ideal that inspired me was converting myself into a complete *craque*.”¹⁶³ Living in the city, he had more varied chances than did Domingos; the two shared, however, the will to move in search of higher and more reliable wages. This meant that Leônidas engineered his own transfer to Uruguay in the years before professionalism in Brazil, as well as between clubs in Rio and São Paulo. Indeed, Carioca though he was, he was as great a star in São Paulo as in his home city.

His stardom grew out of his fantastically technical and improvisational style of play. It did not hurt, of course, that he played as a center forward, the most consistently glorious position in the game. It was the brilliance he displayed there, though, that led others to label him “the Black Diamond.” He began to develop his skills as a soccer-mad kid in a suburb near Praia Formosa, where his parents had moved when they could no longer afford to live in the São Cristóvão neighborhood. After the death of his father deepened the family’s poverty, a stroke of good fortune befell his mother. Friendly neighbors took them in, employing his mother as maid but also helping to raise little Léo. He was, from the start, a handful, infamous for breaking windows in the neighborhood, despite his mother’s attempts to rein him in. Playing against the older and bigger kids from the next street over, Léo and his friends learned to pass quickly and to read the ball’s caroms off walls.¹⁶⁴ By the age of twelve or so, he was determined to become a proper footballer. His *pai de criação*—informal adoptive father—decided, however, that he needed to learn to work hard, no matter what he ended up doing, so he arranged a job for the boy at the Canadian-owned electric utility, known as Light. He was not interested in the work, as his boss later said: “Leônidas never did anything except think about soccer. He was a fanatic!”¹⁶⁵ He did excel on the company’s soccer team, though, and soon on another local squad, Havanesa Futebol Clube, which was also technically amateur but paid bonuses to keep hold of its better players. Leônidas proved himself worthy of the *bichos* he received, but his ambition drove him on, eventually taking him to the Sírío e Libanês club and then, after this club shut down, to the club Bonsucesso.

Still a small fry in Rio soccer, Bonsucesso tried to compete with richer teams by bringing in Afro-Brazilian aces. Under the guidance of coach Gentil Cardoso, whose demanding practices caused Léo to bridle at times, the team climbed up to seventh place in the city—an accomplishment that brought

media attention to the club's young attacker. Bigger clubs wanted him, particularly América. He had, however, heard stories from his coach and others about how badly the club treated its Afro-Brazilian players, and he did not want to spend a year in the reserves (as Domingos did at Vasco). Abruptly he pulled out of an initial deal with América.¹⁶⁶ *Cartolas* from the big club retaliated by blocking Leônidas from a spot on the Rio and national teams, while fans showered him with racist epithets such as *negro sujo* (dirty black) and *preto sem vergonha* (shameless black). In one match a group invaded the field shouting, "Lynch him, lynch him."¹⁶⁷ He escaped the physical threat and the political opposition, becoming one of the first players from a suburban team to represent Rio against São Paulo. Still only 18, he was supposed to be a reserve but ended up playing and scoring. After Rio won in the third and deciding game, Arthur Friedenreich, by then near the end of his career, sought out Leônidas, giving him a handshake that seemed, in retrospect, a passing of the baton from the first great attacker to his successor.¹⁶⁸

From Bonsucesso, Leônidas moved to the professional soccer of Uruguay. Playing for Peñarol, his achievements paled in comparison to those of Domingos, at least in part because of knee problems. He was, therefore, even more eager than his compatriot to return to Brazil, staying a year at Vasco, two at Botafogo, and six at Flamengo. He ended his career in São Paulo, for São Paulo FC, becoming an idol there as he had been at Flamengo.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, although he could not match Domingos's titles in three countries, he helped Botafogo to two Rio championships and Flamengo to three more, and São Paulo to five Paulista titles. He also made his mark on the Seleção, first in the 1932 Copa Rio Branco competition against Uruguay and then in the 1934 and 1938 World Cups. The 1932 squad brought new life to the Brazil team. Given the rebellion that São Paulo was waging and the CBD's inability to marshal established stars even in Rio, this Seleção was made up mostly of young and Afro-Brazilian men, including Domingos and Leônidas. Against a veteran Uruguayan team looking to avenge a loss the previous year, the unknown Brazilians exceeded all expectations. Léo not only played brilliantly but also performed the overhead kick for which he became famous. An astounded Mário Filho described the phenomenon: "With his back to the goal Leônidas gave a leap backward, ended upside down, legs upward, pedaled in the air, reached the ball with the tip of his boot, extended a pass more than fifty meters to Valter. What was most shocking was that, without seeing where he was passing, Leônidas had delivered the ball, with mathematical precision, at Valter's feet."¹⁷⁰ The moment when he captured the



FIGURE 2. Leônidas da Silva in 1983, with photo of himself performing a bicycle kick in the 1948 São Paulo state tournament. Gil Passarelli/Folhapress.

attention of a wider sporting world, though, came in the 1938 World Cup in France. There he became the center of attention for his aggressive, skillful attacking. Brazil's loss in the final appeared in press reports as largely due to the injury that kept Leônidas out of the game; his absence underlined his value to the team.

His behavior on the Seleção's return trip to Brazil, however, reminded officials of another side of this great player. He was willful, at times rebellious, and did not shy away from using his fame to get away with behavior for which lesser players would have been punished. While still at Bonsucesso, he became "the player who most filled the sporting headlines" of the time, one Rio newspaper noted, but also involved himself in improper "facts" and "adventures." Behind these vague but suggestive terms lay late nights out dancing or frequenting elegant cafés and bars.¹⁷¹ As he rose to larger clubs, he indulged these tastes more frequently. Looking back three decades later, he confessed that his "Bohemian" nights—borne out of homesickness, he claimed—"nearly ruined" him during his year at Peñarol. Along with Fausto and Domingos, he left Flamengo's team hotel to "take advantage of their popularity" in Salvador, going to a "cabaret" and getting in a fight there.¹⁷² He had from the start shied away from what he considered excessive training and never changed this attitude. He also was not afraid of protecting himself aggressively during games, in ways that sometimes exceeded what rivals and referees would tolerate. In 1932 he found himself subject to a police fine for his "inconvenient behavior" in a Rio league match.¹⁷³

Still more serious in the eyes of the sporting administration was his behavior toward club officials. Nearly a decade after his troubles with América, for instance, he refused to make token appearances for Flamengo in exhibitions after he had injured his knee. Already in dire financial straits, the club stood to lose money if he did not take part in exhibitions, but he held his line; the club's doctors had agreed that he needed surgery.¹⁷⁴ After club directors grew so angry that they arranged for his arrest, he fought back with legal action. Despite his powerful arguments against the servitude that he was being forced into, he ultimately spent eight months in jail for failing to obey his bosses. Still he maintained his independent streak, using his prison time, spent at a military camp, to recuperate from his knee operation.¹⁷⁵

He was not the only strong-willed and gifted Afro-Brazilian forward of the day; he had formed lethal attacks with some of the others, like Fausto and Waldemar de Brito. Leônidas stood out, however, for his uncanny ability to get into positions to score. His dribbling skills were not as "voluptuous" as

those of his colleague Tim, as Décio de Almeida Prado later wrote, but he knew how to hold on to the ball and was a master of the one-touch pass. More than anything, though, he forced his opponents into mistakes through *malandragem* (roguery) and *malícia* (cunning), or simply beat them with impossible-seeming moves that led many to label him a *malabarista* (acrobat or magician).¹⁷⁶ In all of this, he exhibited an overall athletic ability that left fans rubbing their eyes in disbelief.¹⁷⁷

Although the Seleção, with Leônidas leading the forward line and Domingos securing the defense, fell short in their semifinal match at the 1938 World Cup, the praise they received in the European press was heady stuff. Indeed, the reactions to the feats of Leônidas and his teammates produced a “first epiphany,” a moment in which Brazilians, more consciously than ever before, identified with the national team and, at the same time, set out to define the features that made Brazilian soccer distinct.¹⁷⁸ The breathtaking technique that players like Domingos and Leônidas exhibited on the field became infused with meaning in daily conversations and in newspaper stories, books, and other more formal contexts. Consciously or not, the people discussing “their” players and “their” team ended up proposing new notions of who they were themselves; they recreated *brasilidade*.

The most influential formulations of this *brasilidade* appeared in the 1930s and found reinforcement in the 1940s and '50s. A simple newspaper article by a provincial scholar, Gilberto Freyre, served as a touchstone here. Scion of a traditional family in the northeastern state of Pernambuco, Freyre had studied sociology in the United States. Both his work with Franz Boas and his experiences of a different system of racial identities attuned him to the particular manifestations of race in Brazil. A prolific writer, he produced a series of canonical works on Brazilian history and society, beginning in the 1930s.¹⁷⁹ It was, however, a short piece that he published in reaction to the 1938 World Cup that proved an inspiration to many others.¹⁸⁰ Appearing under the title “Foot-ball mulato” (Mulatto Soccer) in a paper in Recife, Pernambuco’s capital, his analysis projected onto soccer his understanding of the Brazilian national character.¹⁸¹ This article turned out to be his earliest major statement on a theme he went on to develop throughout his long life.¹⁸²

Above all, Freyre gloried in the fluid brilliance of the Brazilian stars who had so impressed the world that June. He saw them as the natural emanation of the national character. This character, in turn, he defined as deriving from *mulatismo* (mulatto-ism), by which he meant not so much the miscegenation

that had taken place in the centuries since the Portuguese arrived on South American shores, but more a “psycho-social expression” that contrasted with “European Aryanism.”¹⁸³ In fact, he went so far as to assert that “psychologically, to be Brazilian is to be mulatto.” In soccer this meant playing in an exuberant, free, improvisational style; Brazilian soccer, in Freyre’s eyes, was a veritable “Dionysian dance.” Always, Europe remained an instructive Other: “Our style of playing soccer seems to contrast with that of the Europeans because of a combination of qualities of surprise, of guile, cunning, lightness, and at the same time of individual spontaneity . . .,” all of which, he claimed, expressed *mulatismo*. If Brazilians were Dionysian, then Europeans were Apollonian. Moreover, he applauded Brazilian officials for abandoning the “anti-Brazilian” policy of sending out teams of white players; by fielding a truly Brazilian team, they revealed to the world how “the Brazilian mulatto de-Europeanized soccer, giving it the curves . . . the grace of dance.” Mulatto football was, ultimately, an art, not the sterile science that Europeans had made their soccer.¹⁸⁴

As startling as Freyre’s claims were, they built on existing ideas. His use of terms like *mulatismo* and Aryanism suggests that he worked very much within the framework of scientific racism that had developed in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The key proponents of this pseudo-science warned that miscegenation would bring the superior white race down by mixing it with the inferior African race. The spin-off of this modern racism, the eugenics movement, sought to “improve the race” by selective breeding. Although some of his compatriots applied the vicious taxonomies of this racism to Brazil rather directly, denouncing the supposed psychological instability or intellectual limits of Afro-Brazilians, Freyre joined the ranks of those who saw value in what Africans and Afro-Brazilians had brought to Brazilian culture. Indeed, although he was certainly not the first to present this perspective, he was a leading voice in the depiction of racial mixing as foundational to Brazilian “civilization.”¹⁸⁵ More to the point here, he helped shape the discussion of soccer by linking it to miscegenation.

At the onset of the 1930s, Brazilians spoke about the dribbles of Domingos or the “disconcerting mobility” of Leônidas, but without putting together a full image of a Brazilian—much less a heavily Afro-Brazilian—national style.¹⁸⁶ In this regard Freyre proved an innovator. As he developed his ideas, the centrality of Leônidas to his conception of the Dionysian quality of Brazilian soccer became apparent, as did the limits that Freyre thought this

style of play should respect. In the preface he wrote for Mário Filho's *O negro no futebol brasileiro* (The Black Man in Brazilian Soccer) and in two 1955 magazine articles, he singled out Leônidas as an ideal type, the epitome of the "danced" style that Brazilians had created. Again working with some broad psychological assumptions, he wrote in 1947, "With so much of what is most primitive, most youthful, most elemental sublimated in our culture, it was natural that soccer in Brazil, as it burgeoned into a national institution, would also ennoble the Black, the descendant of Blacks, the mulatto, the *cafuzo* [a mixed Amerindian-African identity], the *mestiço* [a general mixed-race identity]."¹⁸⁷ Some might worry that the "Leônidas's" of Brazil might fall into selfish individualism in international competitions marked by the "predominance of Anglo-Saxon patterns." Fortunately, though, *mulatismo* meant not "pure anarchy" but rather a "constant interaction between the collective effort of the group and the exploits, the initiatives, the very improvisations of individuals who, acting in this way, distinguish themselves as heroes. . . ."¹⁸⁸

Freyre formed part of a web of intellectuals and artists in Rio who treated elements of popular culture—not only soccer but also musical genres like samba—as the bases of authentic Brazilian culture. In conversations at bars and bookshops as well as in more formal academic settings, his ideas found a receptive audience.¹⁸⁹ His influence appeared, for instance, in the description of the 1932 Copa Rio Branco that his fellow Pernambucan, José Lins do Rego, published in 1943. Speaking of the relative unknowns who comprised this Seleção, Lins do Rego wrote, "The young men who triumphed in Montevideo were a portrait of our racial democracy, in which Paulinho, son of an important family, united with the black Leônidas, the mulatto Oscarino, the white Martim. All done in the Brazilian way."¹⁹⁰ This formulation stops short of Freyre's; Lins do Rego celebrates the happy coexistence of men of various races on the team and in the nation, but he does not go so far as to posit a distinctive style that arises from racial mixture itself.¹⁹¹ In 1949, commenting on Leônidas late in his career, though, he takes this step. Seeing the forward sustaining his glorious talents after so many other *craques* have faded, Lins do Rego presents him as "a case for scholars of Brazilian miscegenation." Once more, he is less overt than Freyre, but he connects racial mixture to style.¹⁹²

The most influential force in the sports world, though, was Mário Rodrigues Filho, the energetic journalist who often met with Lins do Rego and Freyre at the José Olympio bookstore.¹⁹³ Although it is certainly

an exaggeration that Mário Filho (as he was and is known) invented sports journalism or the Afro-Brazilian player, as has been asserted, he was a key figure in establishing norms that later journalists followed in their depiction of *futebol*. The son of a fiery newspaperman (Mário Rodrigues) and brother of a famed playwright and sports columnist (Nelson Rodrigues), Mário produced a body of work that is still a “primordial source” for soccer and race studies.¹⁹⁴ He approached sports with deadly seriousness, writing his column on a Fla-Flu (Flamengo-Fluminense derby match) “as if he were writing a chapter of world history.”¹⁹⁵ This sense of purpose led him to run the major sports daily of the era, the *Jornal dos Sports*, and to publish passionate essays in that and other papers, magazines, and collections. He also applied himself to the creation of several soccer competitions and threw his support behind the construction of Rio’s Municipal Stadium—Maracanã—at the end of the 1940s. In recognition of his contributions to Brazilian soccer, Maracanã was renamed Journalist Mário Filho Stadium after his death.

Of all his intellectual achievements, it was his 1947 book, *O negro no futebol brasileiro*, which most clearly presented his master narrative of the growth and democratization of soccer. For this author, soccer became Brazilian by virtue of its domination by Afro-Brazilian players. The very chapter titles of his classic text suggest as much. After opening with “Roots of Nostalgia,” he moves the reader through the phases of the sport’s popularization, culminating in phases he labels “The Revolt of the Black,” and “The Social Ascent of the Black.”¹⁹⁶ Having covered the sport for several newspapers since the 1920s, he included a wealth of anecdotes in this book to back up his narrative of the Afro-Brazilianization of soccer. Many of his tales have become common sense—that is, so widely accepted that their veracity is taken for granted.¹⁹⁷

At the time, though, Mário Filho was presenting a provocative argument that built on Freyre’s ideas. Freyre’s influence is obvious throughout *O negro*, but perhaps nowhere more than in the discussion of Leônidas and Domingos, which relies explicitly on the contrast between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Citing Freyre, he agrees that Afro-Brazilians had given Brazilian soccer its distinctive style, which he also likens to the *ginga* (swing) and rhythm of samba. He also sees Leônidas as the outstanding embodiment of this Dionysian element. Domingos served as an instructive comparison, his Apollonian air making him appear a teacher giving lessons during the game. Public reaction to Leônidas was so strong, he ventured, “Perhaps because what Leônidas did was more Brazilian [than what Domingos did], it was in

the blood of our whites, mulattoes, and *pretos*. Like samba. Play a samba, wherever it may be, we will be swinging our bodies.” Unlike Freyre, though, Mário Filho made room for Domingos in the realm of Brazil’s tropical soccer. Domingos seemed like an Englishman on the outside—“cold, unshakable”—but inside he had the rhythms that allowed him to dribble through opponents, leaving them holding their heads in shame. Even a Brazilian who tried to come off as Apollonian, then, could not hide the “Dionysian dance” that marked his culture and shone through in his soccer.¹⁹⁸

Soccer thus became national and Afro-Brazilian by the 1930s and ’40s not only because, as Nicolau Sevcenko notes, the sport “had been adopted with enormous enthusiasm by popular groups who, with a basis in their rhythmic and recreational traditions, related to the dexterous use of the feet and movements of the body and waist, constructed their own version of the British sport, closer to diversion and Carnival than to aggression, tactical discipline, and objectivity.”¹⁹⁹ What mattered even more were the meanings attached to the version of soccer that Brazilians created. These meanings wound together to form a sense of a peculiarly Brazilian *futebol* that reflected a national culture that, in turn, derived from the combination of African, Amerindian, and European cultures. This highly beneficial miscegenation led to a *mulatismo* that could impel not only the national soccer team but also the nation itself to glory.

At first glance this vision would seem a promising development for Afro-Brazilians and other groups wanting a place in the modern nation. After all, the *brasilidade* that emerged in the 1930s and ’40s was, in theory, highly inclusive. Not only did it count Afro-Brazilians as well as whites in the nation, but it accorded the former a place of special significance: they appear as the source of the tropical qualities that defined Brazil’s unique powers. Defined in this way—as embodiments of authentic Brazilianness—Afro-Brazilians could hardly be excluded from full membership in Brazil. Freyre, Mário Filho, and other voices of the period served up a vision of Brazil that included people from different racial identities within an overarching national identity, all represented by the men who suited up for the national team. The sense of Brazil as not only multiracial in origin but also racially democratic proved to have a wide and lasting appeal. Freyre was among its most renowned champions, but it long remained a dominant way of understanding Brazil, for many if not most Brazilians.

This way of thinking about soccer fit in with the centralizing and nationalist aims of the Vargas government. In a May Day speech in 1938, Vargas

proclaimed, “A country is not just the conglomeration of individuals in a territory; it is, principally, a unity of race, a unity of language, a unity of national thinking.”²⁰⁰ Embracing soccer served as a means of fostering this unity, as well as attempting to control it. As also occurred with samba and Carnaval, the Vargas regime championed a particular version of soccer—which turned out to be the one that Freyre, Lins do Rego, and Mário Filho had described. This choice meant that certain elements and mythic formulations received official sanction.²⁰¹ In the footballing realm, the idea of the *craque*, the star with innate gifts for dribbling, for subtle feints, for joyful and artful trickery—in short, for all of the allegedly Afro-Brazilian abilities that Freyre and Mário Filho had highlighted—became enshrined. Brazilians played with a *ginga* that other peoples did not possess; without the *ginga*, *futebol* was just the same football that Europeans clomped and bashed their way through.²⁰²

Despite its predominance and its government support, the new ideal did not, however, come close to guaranteeing fair treatment, much less full and equal citizenship, in practice. The very terms of proposed inclusion posed one problem in this regard, since they reflected paternalism as well as racial anxiety. This side of the celebration of the Brazilian style emerges when we look at the types of traits that made up *mulatismo*. Mostly, these were corporal qualities—a swing, a rhythm, a knack for improvisation and unpredictability. Others had to do with primal emotions, such as the joy that the archetypal Afro-Brazilian player derived from exhibiting his instinctive skills. All of these, though, add up to at best an impulsive, primitive, and exotic genius, not a sophisticated, higher degree of rationality. Notions like Freyre’s *mulatismo* might have served as a critique of the scientific modernization that “the European” had developed, and they certainly countered the more brutal theories of racism in the first half of the century.²⁰³ They did not, however, unconditionally embrace Afro-Brazilians—even stereotypes of Afro-Brazilians—as a sound foundation for modernization. Doubts about the true value of Afro-Brazilian traits endured for decades. If Brazilians were born with wonderfully creative but still primitive abilities, would they need cultivation and discipline to go beyond the realm of animal instinct? Anxiety over such matters should not be surprising; after all, the elevation of the mostly poor and Afro-Brazilian masses had to cause discomfort in the whiter and more powerful upper classes, even if many of these elites cheered on Domingos, Leônidas, and other great mulattoes and *pretos* who represented Brazil on the national team.

The new, more positive vision of Afro-Brazilianness had very definite limits in a more directly practical sense as well. Mário Filho might assert that “a request from Leônidas to Getúlio [Vargas] was a command.”²⁰⁴ Afro-Brazilian stars like Leônidas might receive increasing wages and endorsement deals during their playing days; they might inspire passion among millions of fans. These were, however, individual and ephemeral gains. The racial democratization of soccer did not translate into lasting social and political victories for the vast majority of Afro-Brazilians, whose lives went on much as they had been.²⁰⁵ Indeed, even in the realm of soccer itself, Afro-Brazilians suffered racist abuse in the period when Freyre and his colleagues were asserting a mulatto national culture. The episode in which supporters of the club América called for Leônidas to be lynched was a particularly grisly example. Most discrimination worked in less harrowing, but still degrading ways. Well into the 1950s, for instance, Afro-Brazilian players were expected to use the side entrance when going to practice for Fluminense and were treated dismissively off the field by officials at many clubs.²⁰⁶ During matches, too, not only referees but also white players tried to humiliate Afro-Brazilians, as Domingos da Guia recalled in 1957. The Afro-Brazilian player, he said, “comes to be seen, not as a human being, equal to the rest, but as ‘the Black,’ ‘the *preto*,’ or, even, ‘the boy.’” This abuse, as Domingos insisted, “injured” but at the same time inspired players to “magnetize the multitude with . . . virtuosity”—to fight back as best you could in the game. He agreed with Mário Filho about Afro-Brazilians’ special abilities, saying of the midfielder Didi, “If he had been white he wouldn’t have been so perfect and so precise a stylist.” Domingos, however, attributed the “characteristically racial” virtues of *craques* like Didi or Leônidas to the difficulties that they had confronted because of their race, not to inborn qualities they possessed. They had to learn to play better than whites just to have a place on the team, and even then endured injustice.²⁰⁷

CONCLUSION: TROPICALISM PAST TRAUMA

To any soccer fan today, the image of Brazilian soccer that took shape by the 1940s will seem familiar. The language that Freyre, Mário Filho, and less renowned observers adopted remains common in descriptions of Brazilian soccer and players.²⁰⁸ The skills and instincts that Brazilians are said to display—qualities, the stereotypes tell us, that just cannot be taught—remain central to ideas about the country’s distinctive style of play.

In the 1940s and into the '50s, however, these notions were still fresh creations. Experience had taught Afro-Brazilians and their compatriots that reality did not match the racial inclusion and equality that the vision of an inherently mixed-race or mulatto Brazilian soccer—and by extension, Brazilian culture and nation—seemed to promise. Still, the idea of this soccer was a cruelly captivating dream, and the heroic status that a *preto-preto* like Leônidas gained through it was something that delivered vicarious pleasure, perhaps even hope of more than merely symbolic citizenship.²⁰⁹ Soccer had recently become part of the basis of the powerful, state-driven nationalism that the Vargas government fostered, and this added to the sense that, whatever daily life was like, change might somehow be on the way.²¹⁰

The appeal of the newly minted national style was such that it survived the trauma of the Maracanazo in 1950, as well as the rough defeat to a famous Hungary side in the “Battle of Bern” at the 1954 World Cup. Indeed, the ideal of this style not only persisted but flourished from the late 1950s to 1970, the period in which Brazil became the first nation to accumulate three World Cup titles. Proponents such as Nelson Rodrigues and João Saldanha refined the prevailing notion of the Brazilian game, turning it into the concept of *futebol-arte* (art soccer). New iconic players, most notably Garrincha and Pelé, offered up glorious and triumphant performances of this art that seemed to prove the superiority and the authenticity of their Brazil. Even during the affirmation of this tropical, mulatto national style, though, tensions and doubt lingered. Not nearly as visible or as vociferously defended as *futebol-arte*, worries about basing the nation’s modernization on people and traits that still read (to some) as exotic and primitive surfaced at times. The golden age of Brazilian *futebol* was thus marked not only by extravagant displays of artistic soccer but also by increased and invasive vigilance of the men who embodied the nation. If, as Mário Filho argued, mulattoes and *pretos* had conquered the national sport, they came under increased scrutiny in the wake of their victory.