Cosmopolitan Competition:  
*The International Migration of Professional Footballers*

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ABSTRACT

Cosmopolitan Competition: The International Migration of Professional Footballers

A thesis presented to the Global Studies Department

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Since the birth of the game in 1863, soccer has been considered the sport of migrants. The sport spread throughout the world along trade routes that emanated from Britain, and it was introduced into every new culture that it encountered often by labor migrants. During the twentieth century, the worldwide movement of footballers reached a crescendo, and by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the largest and most competitive leagues in the world (in England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain) were comprised of some of the most cosmopolitan workforces found on the planet. Why were so many of the world’s elite players plying their trade outside of their home countries, and specifically in Europe? This paper answers that question by examining the migrations of footballers throughout history, focusing on the South American, African, and European continents. It then analyzes the migrations of those populations through the
perspectives of multiple theories on international migration. Finding each of them lacking in some respects, the paper then introduces the analysis of footballers as commodities on a global value chain, which proves to be an integral part of a soccer-systems framework that is necessary to comprehensively understand what motivates and guides players from their home countries to Europe.
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Introduction

Edwin van der Sar, the goalkeeper for Manchester United, punted the ball downfield. His team had controlled the game rather thoroughly to this point, even though barely nine minutes had passed since the opening whistle. The team’s star player, Cristiano Ronaldo, had already come close to scoring on two separate occasions, and confidence was high. The momentum of a soccer game, though, can change in an instant.

Van der Sar’s punt found the head of FC Barcelona midfielder Sergio Busquets, who directed the ball back up field. Manchester United midfielder Michael Carrick attempted to clear the ball with a header of his own, but Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernandez soon possessed the ball. He passed to teammate Andres Iniesta, who deftly touched it on to Lionel Messi. Messi, now being defended by Carrick, passed it back to Iniesta, who immediately took off downfield. After dribbling past Carrick and Manchester United midfielder Anderson, Iniesta found Barcelona striker Samuel Eto’o open on the right wing and passed the ball forward to him. Eto’o, one of the team’s leading goal scorers, cut past Manchester United defender Nemanja Vidić and skillfully slotted the ball into the Manchester United goal, avoiding a sliding challenge by Carrick and the attempted diving save by van der Sar. Eto’o’s teammates surrounded him in a rather short-lived celebration – after all, another eighty minutes of the game remained.

FC Barcelona would go on to win the game 2-0, claiming the 2009 UEFA Champion’s League Cup – an award given to the winning club of an international
tournament between professional teams in Europe, each of which are based in many different countries. The game described above serves as a microcosm of the new "globalized" world – a Spanish team versus an English team, playing a game in Rome that was broadcast via satellite television to millions of viewers around the world. Perhaps more indicative of the global nature of the game are the brief vignette’s protagonists. Of the players mentioned above on Manchester United, Edwin van der Sar is Dutch; Cristiano Ronaldo, Portuguese; Michael Carrick, English; Anderson, Brazilian; and Nemanja Vidić, Serbian. On FC Barcelona, Sergio Busquets, Xavi Hernandez, and Andres Iniesta are Spanish; Lionel Messi, Argentinean; and Samuel Eto’o, Cameroonian. In fact, of the twenty-two players that started the game that day (each team fields eleven players), a total of thirteen were playing for a professional team based outside of their home countries. Increasingly, such cosmopolitanism is becoming the norm in the highly competitive, elite stage of international professional soccer.

This trend poses a set of interesting questions to both fans and academics alike: why are there so many foreign players in the major European soccer leagues? What about Europe has made the continent (or at least its largest national leagues) a region marked by this cosmopolitan concentration of players? Is this trend new, or is it the result of a long-brewing evolution in the movement of people? Does the migration of footballers differ from the migration of other populations?

This paper will attempt to address each of these questions by investigating the international migration of professional footballers. Because I will not be discussing other ball games, such as American football or Australian Rules football, the terms ‘football’ and ‘soccer’ will be used interchangeably, as will ‘footballers’ and ‘soccer players.’ The
paper is divided into two parts. Part I is structured as follows: Chapter 1: The Game Goes Global will review the global history of soccer, including both the spread of the game itself and the international migrations that accompanied this diffusion. It will also discuss some of the contemporary motivations as to why professional teams might want to recruit foreign players to their squads. Chapter 2: Latin American Migrations will focus on the football migrations of South Americans, paying particular attention to the historical ties that have developed since the adoption of football on the continent. Likewise, Chapter 3: African Migrations will investigate the growth of the game in Africa and the subsequent migrations of African footballers. Finally, Chapter 4: European Migrations will concentrate on the migration of footballers within Europe. This chapter will also discuss the Bosman Ruling (1995) by the European Court of Justice and its implications for the international movement of European soccer players.

Part II of the paper is designed to approach the migration of footballers from a theoretical and conceptual point of view. Chapter 5: Theories and Models of International Migration will review many of the contemporary academic theories as to why people move around the globe. Chapter 6: Towards a Soccer-Systems Framework will then apply these theories to the movement of professional footballers from South America, Africa, and Europe and will attempt to explain these movements by proposing a comprehensive framework through which such migrations can be analyzed. Finally, Chapter 7: Conclusion will summarize and conclude the paper, including recommendations for further research.

My hope in writing this paper is that it will provide a greater understanding of how and why professional footballers migrate throughout the world. Soccer, what many
consider “the world’s game” (Murray 1996, v), provides a multitude of avenues through which the topic of globalization can be studied. As we will see, the migration of footballers affects cultures, identities, national economies, politics, and international business in ways that few other sports can claim to. With the 2010 World Cup only months away, the global attention that is afforded to the quadrennial international tournament featuring countries’ national teams makes the time ripe to study how the sport affects the world in which we live. With that in mind, we turn now to why the game of soccer provides such a unique perspective on how people move around the globe.
Part I:  
Chapter One: The Game Goes Global

The Birth and Spread of the Game in Europe

Perhaps the biggest clue as to why Europe, and specifically England, is at the center of the world soccer economy is because that is where the game was born. Various types of ball games existed throughout Europe and for much of human history, but soccer as the modern world recognizes it began humbly in the mid-nineteenth century. At this point in time, a number of British schools began to compete against one another in a series of different ball games – though similarities in the rules of each did exist (Bale 2003, 43). Codifying these rules to reduce variability between venues was only the next logical step. As Bill Murray writes,

The first serious attempt to create a uniform set of rules... came at Cambridge in 1848. These rules were never officially recorded, but according to H.C. Malden, who organized the meeting, representatives from the various public schools were sat down in a room at Trinity College, provided with pens, ink, and paper, and told to write down their schools' rules. Out of this meeting, which lasted until nearly midnight, emerged the 'Cambridge Rules.' No copy of them has survived, but they continued to be revised and reappeared in published form in 1863. These rules provided the basis of the laws of association football, which were agreed on at a meeting of alumni from various public schools at the historic meeting in London's Freemason's Tavern on 26 October 1863 and at five subsequent meetings (Murray 1996, 3-4).

The Freemason’s Tavern, host to the ‘historic meeting’ in 1863, is recognized as the birthplace of soccer – a term that later arose directly from the sport’s official name,
association football (Murray 1996, 1). ‘Association football’ referred to the organization of the league – all league decisions and the rules of the game were subject to supervision by an association that maintained central control and governing authority over the clubs. While each club needed to register its players with the association, clubs retained control over their individual rosters. In England, this association was known simply as the Football Association, or the FA. The game quickly grew in popularity among the English, and unsurprisingly soon spread to the rest of the United Kingdom. As the authors Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor point out, “associations and competitions modeled on the English examples were soon founded in Scotland, Ireland and Wales and, with the partial exception of the latter, football in the British Isles had become firmly established on national lines by the 1890s” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 39). The growth of the game in different nations was soon to be mirrored by its growth in different states.

Nearing the turn of the century, Great Britain stood atop the world economy. Its rapid industrial and technological expansion during the course of the 1800s led many onlookers to envy the ‘modernity’ of the British, and, when they could, copy it. As Brits began to embrace football more and more, the sport gained symbolic status – to play football was to be a part of the modern world:

The Britain that invented modern football was also the Britain of the industrial and urban revolution. Above all, Britain represented modernity. The distinctions which emerged here - between work and leisure time, skilled and unskilled workers, urban and rural communities - became the key boundaries which defined modernity. So it was not football’s Englishness alone which fascinated various sections of the continental urban middle class, but its obvious association with elements of modernity (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 19).

As it turns out, it was modern, economic ties that brought the game across the English Channel. Among the first continental states to adopt the game was Switzerland, due to the
bevy of elite, private schools that were attended by the children of British businessmen and capitalists. This younger generation brought the game of football with them, and by 1890 these private schools prominently featured their football fields as key recruiting tools on their premises (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 19). As the first generation of British footballers grew up and inherited their position among the world’s business elite, they spread across Europe – and football did as well.

The spread of technology across Europe carried the game along with it, too: “football was in fact closely linked with a range of technical innovations – from electrification to the development of railway networks – all of which required a massive migration of skilled and highly qualified workers” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 15-16). Noting this connection between labor migration and the extension of the game into new areas, Lanfranchi and Taylor write

There is therefore little doubt that the first football players and club founders in continental Europe were migrants. Clearly they were not migrants in the sense of professionals travelling abroad to earn their money with a ball, but football was nonetheless part of their cultural baggage. Their migration traced the movement of capital. The first three countries in continental Europe to develop a football culture - Switzerland, Belgium and Denmark - were also the three with the highest GNPs. Thus an awareness of economic history may provide some explanation of the initial export of football outside the British Isles. These footballers followed the movement of capital from north to south rather than the mass flow of economic migrants from poor to rich areas of Europe. In this sense, the formation of the first clubs on the continent was an expression of elite, as opposed to popular, migratory patterns. Many of the bankers, qualified engineers and technicians retained links with home, were easily integrated, and so used football to display their status and impress the local elite (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 31).

Football’s status as the game of choice of the economic elite, coupled with its tight relationship with progress, made the game more than just a leisure activity – instead, playing football granted mainland Europeans access to the imagined community of
modernity. This fascination with the game helps to explain the sport’s rapid rise in international popularity. What also becomes clear from the game’s initial and gradual continental spread is the influence of migrants on the growth of the sport. While these players were not professional footballers, they nonetheless served as ambassadors of the game into these ‘new’ territories. Given the strength and diversity in Britain’s economic ties, it is no wonder that most of the European continent soon followed suit. Close on Switzerland, Belgium, and Denmark’s heels in forming national associations were the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, Germany, France, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia (Murray 1996, 22-23).

Though not as quick to develop official national associations, Spain, Italy, and Portugal soon joined the international frenzy that marked the early stages of soccer. In these southern European countries, the British migrant legacy could be felt as well:

The game came early to Britain's oldest ally, Portugal, where it was played by university students as early as 1866. The first team, Lisbon FC, was founded in 1875, and in the 1890s the Portuguese themselves, particularly students who had been to Britain, formed their own teams. Soccer was played in Spain in the 1890s, encouraged by British mining engineers in the Basque provinces, where the first team, Athletic Bilbao, was founded in 1898. British military personnel fostered the game in Madrid and Valencia, but in Barcelona… it was the Swiss Hans (or Juan, or Joan) Gamper who founded the first major team in the Catalonian capital in 1899. FC Barcelona was at first made up of foreigners, mainly British, but they were in turn challenged by Català, a team of locals who merged with Español a few years later (Murray 1996, 30).

Even in the case of FC Barcelona, a club that was founded by a Swiss, the British connection is evident – as we have seen, Switzerland was among the first continental countries to adopt the game due to its close educational ties with England. The fact that the first players for the club were of non-Spanish descent foreshadows the impact that the international migration of soccer players would have on the development of the sport
during the twentieth century. Three developments that occurred around the turn of the century would eventually foster an even greater movement of people for the specific purpose of football: the adoption of professionalism; the creation of a world governing body, FIFA; and the creation of the ‘transfer market.’

**Soccer as a Profession**

That professional teams in today’s competitions are called “clubs” is no accident. Originally, the game was strictly an amateur undertaking that outlawed the payment of players, regardless of skill level. However, the appreciation of success soon outweighed the appreciation of the rules, and particularly good players began to be compensated under the table (Murray 1996, 13). In this aspect of the game, the British were once again the innovators. Bill Murray explains,

Thus in 1885, after a series of complaints about athletes accepting money and the creation of committees to deal with them, followed by threats of serious punishments, the FA legalized professionalism under a welter of constraints, most of which they soon had to abandon (Murray 1996, 10).

Professionalizing the game had several immediate impacts: it necessitated a functioning labor market in which players were valued according to skill level and according to team needs; it legitimized the playing of the sport as a job, motivating leisure players to practice and increase their skill set; it mandated that contracts exist between players and clubs; and it incentivized the movement of highly-skilled players to the environments in which they could receive the highest compensation. Within the United Kingdom, this final point caused the relocation of many Scots, Irish, and Welsh. However, as the European continent quickly adopted the game, the pool of potential players grew exponentially. It wasn’t long before leagues throughout Europe began looking abroad for players, both in terms of cheap, role-player imports and expensive, experienced signings.
Even though many leagues didn’t officially professionalize until the mid-1910’s (or even later, as did the Dutch and German leagues), many players that were nominally “amateur” still sought out markets or were recruited for leagues in which high sums of money were beginning to be paid (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 34). While national associations had developed to supervise the movement of players within leagues, movements between leagues were anarchic – no national association had jurisdiction over another, and so the enforcement of contracts became nearly impossible when a player abandoned a club in one country in favor of a club in another country. Some type of greater oversight was needed.

**The Creation of FIFA**

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was created on May 21, 1904 in Paris, France for the purpose of overseeing international competition at both the club and country levels. Its seven original signatory countries included France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland (FIFA 2010). Conspicuously absent from this group is the United Kingdom, which originally abstained from membership – a decision that expressed the “self-obsession and introversion” that marked the British game: “for many of those involved in the game in its birthplace, football outside Britain was not really considered to be real football at all but simply a distorted ‘foreign’ version of the British game” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 37). For forty years, the British football bureaucracy would oscillate between membership in and isolation from FIFA, citing various tensions between the two authorities as its motivation for doing so. However, in 1946, the four football associations in the United Kingdom
finally re-entered the now global institution, legitimizing FIFA’s position as the preeminent trans-national governing body of soccer (FIFA 2010).

The FIFA that the British re-entered in 1946 was quite larger than the one it neglected to join in 1904, and it has continued to grow to this day (see Table 1.1 below).

<table>
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<th>Table 1-1 Number of Member Countries in FIFA, 1904-2007</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Country</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>South America</td>
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<tr>
<td>North/Central America</td>
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<td>Oceania</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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(Source: http://www.fifa.com/mm/document/fifafacts/organisation/52/00/16/fs-100_03a_growth.pdf)

Today, the governing structure of FIFA is divided into six regional confederations: the Asian Football Confederation (AFC; the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF), covering Africa; the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF); the Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (CONMEBOL), covering South America; the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC); and the Union des Associations Européennes de Football (UEFA), covering Europe (FIFA 2010). This global reach has allowed the organization to homogenize the rules of the game around the world, and it extended its influence among its member countries even in its earliest stages. As part of the signatory process, the leaders of the seven participating national associations determined the first statutes of the game:

- the reciprocal and exclusive recognition of the national associations represented and attending; clubs and players were forbidden to play simultaneously for different national associations; recognition by the other associations of a player's suspension announced by an association; and the
One of the biggest implications of FIFA’s creation was the organization’s oversight concerning the movement of players between countries. Summarizing FIFA’s early role in this issue, Lanfranchi and Taylor write

As well as its role in the organization of international competition, FIFA has been central in regulating the registration and contractual rights to football players across national and continental borders. The international transfer market which developed from the early part of the twentieth century under the auspices of FIFA ensured that, unlike most migrant workers, a professional football player could not move from one part of the world to another without the agreement of both his former and prospective employers (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 11).

Thus, within FIFA-affiliated leagues, the movement of players began to be highly regulated. At the heart of this regulatory system lay what came to be known as the ‘transfer market.’

The Transfer Market

In order to create an effective oversight mechanism for the transfer of players from one national association to another, FIFA statutes required that “each national association [was] obliged to provide a system for transfers effected within its own association and for them to be governed by appropriate regulations which should be approved by FIFA” (Blanpain and Inston 1996, 39). The transfer system that resulted from these regulations depended upon each player’s registration with his club, regardless of whether he was an amateur or professional. Explaining how a transfer market works, Roger Blanpain and Rita Inston summarize:

The essence of the transfer system lies in the fact that a player cannot change clubs unless both clubs concerned are in agreement and, as a general rule, a transfer fee is paid, even when the contractual tie between, for example, a professional player and his club has come to an end
because his contract of employment has expired. The result is that players are bought and sold on a market, a world market (Blanpain and Inston 1996, ix).

The distinction that must be drawn is that between a player’s registration and a player’s contract – while contracts between club and player could end, the club still maintained ownership of the player’s registration with the national association. The transfer market gave clubs an almost monopolistic hold over the movement of players – a fact that was a constant cause of tension between the two stakeholders for much of the twentieth century. Once under contract, a player was at the whim of his club – his only exit options being to refuse a new contract (and thus be unemployed) or to ignore his contract and sign with a club in a non-FIFA-affiliated league (but then face stiff penalties at both the club and national level upon his return). The transfer system’s legality was finally challenged in 1995 in the Bosman Ruling, which will be covered comprehensively in Chapter 4.

However, this system dominated the movement of players for nearly one hundred years.

Within just forty years of its inception, football had become a truly continental phenomenon: “[by] the first decade of the twentieth century soccer teams and controlling bodies were to be found in every country in Europe, from Iceland and the Scandinavian countries in the north to Malta and Greece in the south” (Murray 1996, 31). Together, the dawn of the era of professionalism, the creation of FIFA, and the adoption of the transfer market solidified the organizational infrastructure that was needed for the game to mature at an international level. Now, the sport’s only areas for growth lay across the seas.
The Trans-Continental Spread of Football

Part of the international lure of soccer was the game’s flexibility in terms of how it was played:

From its beginnings, football was a universal game. As well as being simple to learn and play, it did not require the use of a specific national language, a recognized diploma or acquired qualification, and its rules became standardized across the globe. Moreover, for many of its overseas promoters, football was a product of transnational connections and the ideology of free trade (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 2).

The translatability of the game made it easily consumed in every culture to which it was introduced. This universality, combined with the sport’s connection with ‘the ideology of free trade,’ made sure that football’s spread around the world mirrored its growth in Europe. The game’s association with modernity continued to be a driving force in the local adoption of the sport, regardless of which continent the encounter occurred in. Though populations within all six peopled continents played the sport, the two that would end up producing the most successful players in the modern game are South America and Africa.

South America

Once again, England’s economic and cultural ties with the ‘recipient’ countries proved to be the catalyst for the adoption of soccer: “it was the countries closest to Britain in commercial, economic, educational or moral terms that first took to soccer, [including] Argentina and Uruguay in South America” (Murray 1996, 22). Author Rory Miller echoes Murray’s assertion:

[Nearing the turn of the twentieth century] British trade and investment in Latin America were growing rapidly, in particular in Brazil and the countries of the southern cone (Argentina, Uruguay and Chile). As a consequence, thousands of young British men emigrated to South
American cities to take up employment opportunities in the new railway and tramway companies and banks, the British communities grew in size and influence, and the newcomers founded their own networks of schools, clubs and other institutions... Football thus spread quickly in the South American countries most subject to British economic and cultural influence (Miller 2007, 4-5).

Similar to the growth of the game in Europe, the nascent clubs of South America were connected to British educational institutions and leisure clubs. Soon, though, these countries had institutional infrastructures that supported the growth of the game just as well as in Europe. Though spectators had their own local clubs to root for, their exposure to European clubs travelling on organized tours through South America broadened their perspectives beyond their borders. Lanfranchi and Taylor describe some of the earliest of these tours:

Various English, Italian and Portuguese clubs visited Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay before the First World War, often making a considerable impact. The amateur Corinthians of London in 1910, along with Southampton in 1904, Nottingham Forest in 1905, Everton and Tottenham Hotspur in 1909 and even Exeter City in 1914 all had highly successful results on the other side of the Atlantic. In the same years as Exeter, Pozzo's Torino and Pro Vercelli also undertook the long journey to the River Plate. The influence of these touring sides, particularly the British, was such that many local clubs adopted their names hoping, by analogy, to equal their performances and results. A club called Corinthians was established in Sao Paulo after the 1910 tour, Everton were formed in Viña del Mar (Chile), and Barcelona in Guayaquil (Ecuador) (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 70-71).

Thus the ‘European-ness’ of the sport became engrained in South American culture. These tours would eventually serve as a watershed moment in the movement of footballers, as European clubs were exposed to the South American style of play and an interest in foreign players began to foment. Beyond acting as ambassador programs, though, these club tours were also designed to raise revenues for the touring clubs themselves. These teams set a precedent that many future teams would follow, and also
foreshadowed the growing impact that business and revenue-generating activity would have on the game progressively during the mid- to late-twentieth century.

The first two South American countries to join FIFA were Argentina and Chile in 1912 and 1913, respectively; Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay all joined by 1926, and Colombia and Venezuela by 1952 (FIFA 2010). Because the game spread so quickly to South America, and because national associations were designed following the European models, domestic leagues were able to nurture their own talent throughout the course of the twentieth century. However, this pattern of development was vastly different from how the game spread in Africa.

**Africa**

As with so many other phenomena in Africa, the spread of football has been heavily influenced by the continent’s colonial legacy. To understand how soccer spread throughout the continent, then, it is important to understand the relationships that different European countries had with different regions of Africa:

Colonization proceeded at different speeds, and mapped out a geopolitical mosaic of diverse European influence and control across the continent. Many trading stations on the east and west coasts had been established by Europeans since the sixteenth century; the Portuguese had held a fortified post in Ghana since the late fifteenth century. British and Dutch colonization of the south began in the seventeenth century, and was subsequently dominated by the British who advanced north into the former Rhodesia…

In the north, colonization was somewhat slower: the French took control of what is now Algeria in the 1830s, settling on the best land, and subsequently annexed neighboring Morocco and Tunisia, as well as the vast territory of ‘French West Africa’ that spanned much of the northwestern interior. Further east, the British established important strategic control over the Suez Canal, and retained major ruling influence over Egypt and the Sudan in the late nineteenth century. In more central
African locations, notably current-day Cameroon and Tanzania, Germany held control, while in neighboring Congo the Belgians had gained a particularly brutal dominance (Giulianotti and Armstrong 2004, 2-3).

Europe’s influence was felt throughout the whole of Africa, and the historical relationships are often defined by the mostly exploitative, extractive roles played by the continent’s neighbors to the north. However, among the cultural exports of Europe to Africa was the game of football. Similarly to the progression in Europe and South America, European immigrants, educators, and soldiers were among the groups that fostered the growth of the game in Africa:

Certainly, the British influence was most prevalent at the outset. Football was introduced first into South Africa in the 1860s, and then into territories controlled in the south, east and west, as well as Egypt in the north. The French played the next most important role, bringing the game to the Maghreb [northeastern Africa] and beyond, stretching from Algeria south through modern-day Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, and then into Benin, the Ivory Coast, and the Central African Republic, and as far down as Congo in the west, plus the island of Madagascar in the east. Portuguese influence was prominent along the Atlantic seaboard, from the Cape Verde islands, through Guinea-Bissau and Angola, as well as Mozambique on the east. Germany promoted football in the central regions, in what are now Cameroon, Rwanda and Tanzania. The Spanish played an important pioneer role in two small Atlantic loci that are today Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea. Belgian colonizers played football in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) while Italians developed the game in Libya and Eritrea (Giulianotti and Armstrong 2004, 8).

While the game was adopted just as quickly and as fervently in Africa as it was elsewhere, the general lack of developmental efforts at the national level – marked by political unrest, little internal investment in infrastructure, and slow to zero economic progress – caused the development of domestic football talent in African countries to lag behind the improvement witnessed in other soccer playing countries. In stark contrast to the South American continent, where all ten of its independent countries were
represented in FIFA by 1952, only four African national associations (Egypt, Sudan, South Africa, and Ethiopia) were recognized by FIFA in 1957 (Giulianotti and Armstrong 2004, 9).

However, the football situation in Africa did improve during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Much of this development was due to the election of João Havelange as president of FIFA. The Brazilian, elected on a platform that emphasized the growth and support of the game in developing countries, introduced a number of sweeping reforms to the game and its governing structure that allowed for greater financial support to the fledgling soccer countries of the world (Murray 1996, 131). Unsurprisingly, much of this aid found its way to Africa, where national associations have been able to increase the cultivation of domestic talent and have found increasing amounts of success in several age-restricted tournaments such as the World Youth Cup and the FIFA Under-17 World Championships – also innovations during the Havelange administration (Murray 1996, 131). Controversy surrounded many of Havelange’s reforms, but one in particular would have a lasting, transformative effect on the game: the introduction of corporate sponsorship.

**Soccer: From Sport to Product**

Ever since the professionalization of soccer, teams had seen themselves as economic entities or businesses that needed revenues to sustain themselves and, on occasion, turn a profit. Multiple factors pulled the game through the transformation from traditional, leisurely pastime to modern, economic powerhouse. They included the
technology revolution, the changing business environment, and the increased emphasis on international football stars.

The Technological Revolution

Throughout the twentieth century, as the transfer market grew in both scale and scope, the transfer fees demanded by clubs increased proportionately. Part of this increase was due to the technological revolution that enveloped the world during this period in time – lowered transportation costs meant players and teams could move around the world cheaper and faster than ever before, so exotic foreign stars could potentially become local heroes; broadcasting, first on radio and then through television, brought the game from the stadium into the living room and vastly increased the size of fan-bases of local teams (which increased the ability to collect revenue from advertisements, which could be used to buy the best players). Of course, teams and players weren’t the only ones on the move during this time – fans could now carry their club allegiances with them as they moved both within their home country and abroad. This constant shifting demographic trend meant that clubs had potential, loyal markets throughout the world.

This vast increase in popular migration and the diffusion of media technology would provide an ever-increasing influence on the game. As Bill Murray writes,

Before the 1960s international matches were the highlight of the soccer calendar, but from the mid-1950s, with the spread of floodlights, improvements in air travel, and advances in television, new European club competitions were inaugurated and thereafter continued to grow in popularity (Murray 1996, 101).

The UEFA Champions League, which was mentioned in the Introduction, is an example of one of the pan-European competitions that Murray mentions. Playing abroad meant increased exposure to an even greater number of foreign players, which in turn spawned
demand for the services of these new styles. As professional teams became more cosmopolitan, their fan bases grew to be multinational as well. With the immense popularity of the sport driving demand for more media coverage, it wasn’t long until advertisers recognized the opportunity to reach potential markets. As Barry Smart points out, “as the century progressed, the commercial world drew increasingly on sport's cultural capital value to raise the global profile and appeal of corporate brands and to expand the global market for their products” (Smart 2007, 6). Although the conservatives within the FIFA bureaucracy opposed such moves, Havelange embraced a number of revenue-generating initiatives that changed how the game was delivered to fans and viewers: “The changes that occurred during his Presidency are things we now take for granted, such as official sponsors and commercial partners, signage on the field, [and] the placement of company logos on shirts,” among others (Martin 2005, 6). The commercialization of the sport had begun.

A Changing Environment

The intricate relationships that have developed between media, soccer, and marketers have grown only more complex and interdependent as time has worn on. Joseph Maguire notes that

Media sport is also big business in terms of television advertising, merchandising and the sale of exclusive rights to specific events, leagues or tournaments. Given this, two points are clear: the development of the global sport 'system' is closely connected to the emergence of global media communications and the contemporary experience of sport is intertwined with global media concerns (Maguire 1999, 145).

These ever-thickening networks have changed the financial practices of professional clubs: “Traditional sources of revenue, for example spectator receipts and patronage, have declined in importance. [Teams] have to ensure that they gain sufficient exposure
and are visible in the sponsorship and endorsement marketplace” (Maguire 1999, 150). Revenues from television broadcast contracts and corporate sponsorships of leagues and teams dwarfed those that were collected through the more historical paths like ticket sales. Media, marketing, and football itself were now inextricably linked.

Of course, the world of soccer was not the only “stakeholder” going through a massive change – international business was as well. The changing business environment included the new recognition of “the distinctive qualities [that] sport and its participants possessed, notably its popular cultural appeal and unrivalled aura of authenticity” and how these qualities could be leveraged in “the increasingly competitive process of capital accumulation in a fully-fledged consumer society” (Smart 2007, 7). Sport’s, and specifically soccer’s, value was no longer tied simply to the enjoyment felt by the players and the fans: “it was about its unique value in enhancing corporate brands, global marketing, and the promotion and sale of products associated with popular sport events and iconic celebrity sporting figures” (Smart 2007, 7). Business began to leverage this recognition of the cultural capital of sport through multiple avenues. The espousal of “iconic celebrity sporting figures” and international marketing, though, would prove to be a monumental evolution for the global structure of the game.

**The Emphasis on International Football Stars**

More and more, having these “iconic celebrity sporting figures” on one’s soccer team was becoming a mandatory piece to the ‘success puzzle’ in the elite football leagues. As teams acted more and more like international businesses, though, two types of success seemed to pull the team in different directions: success on the pitch, leading to wins; and success off the pitch, leading to a fatter bottom line. Some researchers even
feared that ‘off the field’ success was beginning to outweigh teams’ concerns for ‘on the field’ success:

[Before the 1990s] the structure and daily operation of clubs were geared not to commercial considerations, but to generate success on the pitch. This attitude has been progressively discarded over the course of the 1990s, with all clubs, not just the top ones, much more concerned to maximize revenue and profits, regardless of success on the pitch. The most common strategy adopted to achieve this new goal has been massive diversification based on a new proactive approach towards commercial opportunities (Dolles and Söderman 2005, 8).

Though many elite teams would argue against this assertion, there is some evidence to the claim. For example, in 2003 the Spanish club Real Madrid bought the midfielder David Beckham from Manchester United for an exorbitant fee. However, as Tony Karon of *Time Magazine* reported,

Marketing concerns also explain the reason a club like Real Madrid chooses David Beckham over the Brazilian midfielder Ronaldinho, a [sic] infinitely superior player. A Real official explained the decision thus: ‘(Ronaldinho)’s so ugly that he’d sink you as a brand. Between Ronaldinho and Beckham, I’d go for Beckham a hundred times. Just look at how handsome Beckham is, the class he has, the image. The whole of Asia has fallen in love with us because of Beckham (Karon 2004).

The Beckham case, at least according to Karon’s source, clearly indicates a shift in values from ‘on the pitch’ to ‘off the pitch’ factors when building a team of elite footballers. That a Spanish team concerned itself with exposure in the Asian market is perhaps the most telling substantiation to the change in the business practices of teams. Dolles and Söderman’s insights concerning the diversification of teams’ commercial activities merit further discussion as well. The researchers continue,

football clubs began to exploit all possible commercial alternatives: they developed strategic alliances with partners in supporting industries such as sports equipment, they started to quote themselves on the stock market, they established cross border alliances among top clubs, they increased international player transactions, and they pushed harder to enter into new
and lucrative markets abroad… The clubs had changed from simple sports teams to international entertainment companies, all displaying the typical behavior of highly competitive enterprises pursuing the most successful business strategies. 9

If clubs were becoming “international entertainment companies,” then soccer players were the stars of this new Hollywood. International stars were of particular importance on this new stage because their signings gained greater notoriety and they opened up new markets in which to extend the club brand. Part of this strategy included the continuation of the decades-old practice of international club tours, although their purpose had evolved in this new business setting:

The tradition of international tours has continued, although now for a new reason: branding. The goal of touring clubs is not only to make money through appearance fees, but also to establish the club's brand in a specific market outside of their home country or region, in order to create and build new revenue streams, such as merchandising or shirt sales in particular. For example, top European clubs such as Spain's Real Madrid and Barcelona; England's Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool, and Newcastle; Italy's Inter Milan; and Holland's PSV Eindhoven; just to name a few, have all commanded substantial appearance fees in Asia over the past several years (Martin 2005, 7).

An integral factor to the success of these tours was the name recognition that came with the elite footballers on the best teams. After all, the new media climate allowed local viewers to watch international stars regardless of where the games were played, so fans became familiar with and even avid supporters of unique players from all over the world. By the end of the twentieth century, football had not only become commercialized – it had become cosmopolitanized.

The global spread of the game, coupled with its intense commercialization towards the end of the twentieth century, has made the elite professional teams of the
world increasingly more reliant on signing international footballers in order to ensure success both on and off the pitch. Clearly, the economic incentives exist to spur these movements between markets, states, and even continents. But do players move only for economic reasons? And why do some players choose to play in Italy rather than in Germany, or in Britain instead of in Spain? Or for that matter, why play in Europe instead of in Africa? Now that we have a greater understanding of the worldwide development of the game and its evolution from a leisure activity to an international economic and cultural force, we can begin to try and answer these questions.
Chapter Two: Latin American Migrations

Migrations of people occur at three levels: within states, between states, and between continents. In the history of South American football, all three types have occurred to various degrees at different points in time. However, the first category (within states) will only be referred to tangentially – emphasis in this chapter will be placed more on the emigration of footballers from Latin America to other continents and the migrations of soccer players within South America. Also, the consequences of inter-continental migration on intra-continental migration will be discussed as well.

Inter-Continental Migration From South America

Historical Movements, 1930s-1960s

As we learned in Chapter 1, the game of football was introduced to the South American continent by European immigrants that settled in many different countries around the turn of the nineteenth century. Though estimates vary, Stephen Castles and Mark Miller report that Latin America and the Caribbean received about 21 million immigrants from 1800 to 1970. The single largest migration was the estimated 3 million Italians who went to Argentina. The bulk of immigrants came from Spain, Italy and Portugal, and most of them went to the Southern Cone (Castles and Miller 1998, 131).
The close familial ties between South America and southern Europe would prove to have lasting influences on the future emigration of South American footballers. If the first generation of European immigrants brought the game of soccer with them to their new homes, the second generation grew concurrently with the development of the sport. Although officially citizens of the South American countries in which they were born, many members of this second generation were also eligible for citizenship in their parents’ countries of origin – a ‘loophole’ in the law that many European football countries took advantage of (Miller 2007, 12). These patrilineal bonds eased the way for many South Americans interested in playing in Europe: for example,

The arrival of South American players in Italy at the beginning of the 1930s has assumed many of the ambiguities attached to the concept of national identity. From the Italian perspective, it was seen less as a migratory fashion than a natural and inevitable repatriation of Italian citizens who happened to be born in South America (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 73).

Most of these “repatriated” players in Italy came from Argentina, and were either recruited during an Italian team’s tour through South America or were lured to the Italian league by the promise of high wages in return for success on the field. Increased competition at the national level also piqued the interest of many European clubs, which began to use international tournaments as recruiting grounds for players. Though the game was born in Europe, the South American countries dominated the early stages of international play:

If one of the attractions of football was that the poor could compete with the rich and win, this was also true at the international level. South American teams dominated the Olympic games in 1924 and 1928, with Uruguay winning on both occasions, enjoying victories over Switzerland and Argentina respectively. Uruguay defeated Argentina again in 1930 in the inaugural World Cup in Montevideo… Tactically, as well as in terms
of individual skills, the South American countries had advanced faster than the Europeans (Miller 2007, 7-8).

European clubs would have been irresponsible had they not recognized the success and skill of the South American players, and the results earned by the Latin American national sides during this era proved to be a catalyst to establishing the pattern of emigration from South America to Europe.

Among the first true inter-continental stars of the game were Julio Libonatti and Raimundo Orsi, both Argentines of Italian descent that moved to Italy in 1925 and 1928, respectively (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 74-75). Classified by the Italian government as rimpatriati, meaning that they were by birth dual citizens of Argentina and Italy, these two players enjoyed fantastic success at both the professional and national levels, starring for the Italian national side throughout the 1930s. Their success proved to be a recruiting tool for their clubs – witnessing their wealth and fame from abroad, other Argentines (and for that matter, other South Americans) felt like they could thrive in the European leagues as well. Meanwhile, other forces conspired to make the European leagues even more attractive. Write Lanfranchi and Taylor,

If the success of Orsi and Libonatti accelerated the process of the reintegration of footballers from South America, Italian clubs were also aided by the world economic crash, the political instability in Buenos Aires in 1930 and 1931, and the slow process of professionalization in South American football, all of which made potential emigrants more willing to board a Europe-bound steamer (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 77).

The lure of European riches was so great that it actually spawned the movement towards professionalization in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay in between 1931 and 1933 (Miller 2007, 13). However, the incentives to remain in domestic leagues were simply outweighed by those to move abroad. It was not until European and international
regulations concerning the use of foreign players that the wave of South Americans coming to southern Europe finally began to ebb.

Though South American footballers had remained popular throughout the 1930s-1950s, conservative, nationalist movements began to gain an increasing voice as the 1960s approached. Two developments, described by Lanfranchi and Taylor, served to abruptly transform the river of foreign imports into little more than a brook:

The closure of the French and Spanish borders in 1962 and the Italian in 1966 largely explain the reduction in transatlantic migration during the 1960s. In each of the three cases, the presence of foreign players was made responsible for the poor results of the national team. In Spain, the South Americans in general, and the Argentineans particularly, were stigmatized… More importantly, FIFA’s 1964 decision to prevent footballers representing more than one national side was a crucial factor in the reevaluation of importation policies. A new conception of sporting nationality was enacted. Dual citizens and players who had changed citizenship were no longer eligible for their second nation (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 96-97).

Here we can see that the migration of footballers did not happen in a vacuum – the political decision to close a country’s borders certainly had an immediate impact on the game. Likewise, the FIFA decision to limit a player’s eligibility to represent only one country in international competition during his career reduced the incentive for national associations to welcome foreign players. Players like Orsi and Libonatti, whom had represented Argentina before emigrating to Italy, were no longer eligible to represent the Italian national side (though of course Orsi and Libonatti themselves had long since retired before 1964). Though individual clubs could still prosper from having the most talented players regardless of their origin, the national associations were more apt to protect their own domestic talent.
European regulations regarding the trans-Atlantic movements of players were not the only laws to change, though. In South America, the 1960s were turbulent times. Explains Rory Miller,

Although the individual trajectory of each differed, the countries where football had developed most became marked by unstable populist regimes, military coups and, increasingly in the 1960s and 1970s, authoritarian governments and political repression. Economically, policies of import substitution industrialization – which also involved a rapid expansion of the public sector – resulted in bouts of ever-worsening inflation, sharp recessions as governments attempted to curb it by limiting fiscal deficits and consumption, and business instability, from which football clubs were not immune (Miller 2007, 8-9).

Just as these regimes meddled with all sectors of their countries’ economies, so did they begin to insert themselves into the football world. Recognizing the popularity of the sport and the pride and admiration that the citizens held for their elite footballer compatriots, governments and national associations conspired to restrict the emigration of their best players in order to placate the masses (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 94). Perhaps paradoxically, it was these regimes and the economic instability that they engendered that would lead to an even greater mass exodus of Latin American footballers to Europe during the final third of the twentieth century.

ModernMovements, 1970s-Present

Though South American teams have continued to excel on the international stage (Argentina won the World Cup in 1978 and 1986, and Brazil won in 1994 and 2002), the state of professional soccer on the continent has been marked by disarray. Rory Miller highlights some of the game’s biggest problems:

Most professional clubs flirt persistently with insolvency, staving it off by delaying the payment of taxes to the state, and salaries and bonuses to
their players, or by transferring their young stars to clubs overseas; matches at many grounds are marked by violence among the fans, deterring families from attending; and allegations of corruption, on and off the pitch, frequently hit the news. The best, and particularly the most creative, footballers have reacted by emigrating to Western Europe or, in the case of lesser players, to Eastern Europe and Asia (Miller 2007, 1-2).

As the author points out, the game in South America has been defined in recent decades by the emigration of its best players overseas. Clearly, there is no dearth of justifications for a Latin American footballer to look abroad rather than domestically to play professionally: poor playing and living conditions, coupled with the fragile economic state of many of the clubs, makes playing abroad seem like the more stable and safer choice. In many cases, players are even sold abroad on the transfer market in order to finance the debts of the team.

Author Gideon Rachman notes that in 2002, only four Latin American teams qualified for the list of the top forty richest clubs in the world – and “they were all being run at a loss – sometimes at a frightening loss. [The report] estimated that in 2001 River Plate [an Argentinean club] had a turnover of just over $40 million, and an operating loss of $28 million” (Rachman 2007, 164-165). For teams faced with almost insurmountable debts, “the obvious solution is to sell players… for many of the clubs, this has become their main commercial strategy” (Rachman 2007, 165). Hence, players not only sought out Europe themselves, but teams propelled their best talent abroad: a trend that has made popular the lament that “the great clubs of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay have been turned into football nurseries” (Gilbert 2007, 70).

Exacerbating the desertion of South American leagues by South American players is a more recent trend. More and more often, European clubs are scouting the youth levels of South America looking for the next potential elite player. For example,
[The Brazilian player] Ronaldo played only a dozen matches in the Brazilian league before his transfer to PSV Eindhoven at the age of seventeen. His experience conveys more than that of anyone else the hegemonic position of the Western European leagues in world football. The recruitment of South American talent today is highly speculative. Because there are no longer restrictions on the number of contracted foreigners, the clubs in southern Europe are able to increase their South American quota annually, with fewer and fewer returning (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 110).

Though Ronaldo was considered to be the best player on the planet for many years and is thus somewhat of an exception, his experience has become more and more mainstream as others have followed similar trajectories. Noting this pattern, Lanfranchi and Taylor point out:

The career paths of South American players have changed fundamentally in the last fifteen years. Moving to Europe when still young, they now have a dual existence as employees of European clubs and representatives of their national teams. This change has undoubtedly been associated with the emergence of the player's agent, who has been extremely important in transforming the relationship between players, their initial employer and national associations (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 107).

The impact of the intermediary in the equation, the agent, cannot be understated. Agents (and there are thousands of them) scour the developmental leagues of South America, hoping to “[negotiate] transfers and contracts on behalf of poorly educated footballers from socially deprived backgrounds” with the aim of earning profit for themselves as well (Miller 2007, 14-15). Familiar with the success stories of other South Americans who have earned a fortune abroad, these young footballers often eagerly accept the offers and promises made to them by agents - forming yet another factor that drives talent from South America across the Atlantic.

The exodus of elite talent from the continent can be easily identified by examining the rosters of the Argentinean and Brazilian World Cup squads during the last
half century. As Table 2.1 (below) illustrates, the rosters of the two most successful South American teams between 1978 and 2006 became progressively less dependent on their domestic leagues as sources of playing talent. The 1978 rosters and the 2006 rosters are almost complete inverses of one another for each team:

Table 2-1: Members of World Cup Squads from Argentina and Brazil Playing Abroad, 1978-2006

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(Source: Gilbert 2007, 69)

Clearly, via transfers or recruitment initiatives, talent has been leaving South America in droves. But how has this emigration affected football within South America?

**Intra-Continental Migration in South America**

From the inception of football on the continent, South Americans have moved from country to country to play soccer. The earliest examples of this movement come from the factory-sponsored teams that began to organize at the end of the nineteenth century: “as workplace-based teams developed, the owners – interested in the prestige they could bring as well as the potential of football as a means of controlling workers – might offer valuable employment opportunities to talented players” (Miller 2007, 5). Similar to the developmental path that the sport took in Europe, professionalization eventually followed and players began to move around the continent as opportunities suited them. Movements tended to be sporadic and coincided with economic booms:
large contingents of foreigners have been recruited only at times of economic, or at least footballing, prosperity. The Golden Age of football in Colombia (1949-1954) attracted major stars from Argentina, Uruguay and even England, and the drug-fueled prosperity of the 1980s and early 1990s also attracted many players from Argentina and Uruguay (Gilbert 2007, 68).

The “Golden Age of football in Colombia” was actually driven by a confluence of events: in addition to the soaring revenues generated from coffee sales, the Argentine professional league went on strike – creating a large population of footballers willing to migrate to Colombia for a temporary period of time. For the most part, though, competition in domestic leagues has centered on the participation of domestic talent. Alan Gilbert highlights this point: “Most Peruvian and Chilean teams are formed from local players. Argentine teams still recruit most of their players from within the country, although the number of Colombians, Chileans, Paraguayans and Uruguayans seems to be increasing” (Gilbert 2007, 67-68). This focus on local competition is indeed heavily influenced by the strong forces that pull the best (and thus most expensive) players abroad:

The football business in South America is fragile. Even the most famous clubs operate at a much lower level of income than their European counterparts, many of them carry large historic debts, and their ability to remain solvent is handicapped by the difficulties of generating revenue streams of the same type and on the same scale as the major clubs in Europe (Miller 2007, 25).

As more and more talent leaves South America for the greener pastures of Europe, a vacuum has been created in the continent’s biggest leagues – a fact that provides an impetus for greater intra-continental migration: “vacant positions in Buenos Aires were filled in turn by players imported from weaker South American economies (for example, Peru, Bolivia and, as before, Paraguay), intensifying a process which in a sense still
continues” (Arbena 1994, 106). This process helps explain the increasing numbers of Colombians, Chileans, Paraguayans and Uruguayans in the Argentinean premier league.

The open roster spots found in the top leagues are not the only driving factor in the recent upsurge in Latin American migrations, though. National leagues across the continent are also being viewed as stepping stones on the path to Europe: “many players start with a team in their national league, and then quickly move to a leading club in Argentina, Brazil or Mexico before moving on to a larger club, nearly always in Europe” (Gilbert 2007, 67). Thus, increased migration within Latin America can be considered a ‘ripple effect’ of emigration out of the continent.

The extreme increase in Latin American footballer emigration has many of the sport’s followers concerned about the future of the game in the continent. With the best talent playing overseas, teams find it harder and harder to get fans to attend local games, compounding the economic woes that compel the teams to sell the talent abroad in the first place (Arbena 1994, 104). Indeed, with the availability of satellite television, the South American teams find themselves competing not only with each other, but with the premier European teams for the attention of the viewer: “in terms of the quality of the football on offer, watching South American players in televised matches in the major European leagues makes much more sense than going to matches locally” (Miller 2007, 27). The irony of selling talent abroad creates a vicious circle for Latin American teams – not only do they lose their current stars, but the stars of tomorrow jet off for Europe at the first chance they get, bypassing the South American leagues entirely at an increasing rate. In the words of one author, “certainly, there is no doubt that the overseas migration of
thousands of South American players has damaged the standard of domestic football’’
(Giulianotti 2007, 45).

A final note to take away from the case of the migrations of Latin American
footballers is the continuity evident in the patterns of emigration to Europe. Writes Rory
Miller, “historically, South American footballers have tended to migrate to the leading
footballing nations of Southern Europe – Italy, Spain, and Portugal – where the problems
of adaptation to language, culture and climate have not been so great” (Miller 2007, 27).
Lanfranchi and Taylor echo Miller’s statement when they remind their readers that

In all the talk about Europe's position at the center of football's global
economy, it should not be forgotten that players tend to move to particular
countries - for economic, legal, historical and cultural reasons - rather than
to 'Europe' as a single, unstructured entity (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001,
110).

Clearly, Latin American footballers factor in much more than economic considerations as
they debate whether or not to pursue a career abroad. Can the same be said about their
African counterparts?
Chapter Three: African Migrations

Chapter 1 explained how football came to Africa through Europe’s colonial ties with different regions within the continent. The imprint left behind from colonialism has obviously affected all of the facets of life for Africans regardless of nationality, and it has likewise impacted the development and migration of footballers as well. This chapter will focus on the history of the migration of African soccer players, and will then examine some of the modern day practices that govern footballers’ movements. Similarly to what was covered in the South American case, a discussion of the ‘muscle drain’ caused by the emigration of elite soccer talent and its consequences for African football will be discussed as well.

A History of African Footballer Migration

Colonial Period, 1930s-1950s

The migration of African footballers began almost immediately after the adoption of the sport throughout the continent. As we learned in Chapter 1, England, Germany, Spain, and Italy all helped to develop the game in the regions that were under their supervision, respectively. Though many of these African countries would later produce some of the world’s best footballers, the early stages of migration were based out of the
areas under French and Portuguese control. Lanfranchi and Taylor explain why these two countries were particularly receptive to the influx of foreign talent:

The British situation, where professional football was socially exclusive and confined to members of the white working class, differed from that in France and Portugal. Here footballers from the colonies were allowed, even encouraged, to play in the national team of the colonial power. What better than the best indigenous colonials representing the national team to demonstrate the stability of colonial links? (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 168)

The early emphasis on the talent of a country’s national team was one of the first catalysts to impel Africans to move abroad to play football. In France that trend has continued to this day: perhaps the most successful player for the French team in the 1990s and 2000s was Zinedine Zidane, an Algerian national (Eriksen 2007). For France and Portugal, each of whom had adopted soccer, the inclusion of players from the African territories they controlled was viewed merely as the result of an ‘internal’ movement rather than an international migration. Britain, despite having a vast colonial network from which potential talent could be culled, rarely featured any international players in its leagues – never mind on its national squad. Football in England maintained a highly nationalist quality, and thus stood apart from the world game for many years – a tendency that helps clarify the country’s self-imposed isolation from FIFA for much of the first half of the twentieth century.

In France and Portugal, though, the game did not carry such nationalist impulses and so teams were much more open to fielding foreigners – and especially Africans: “more than any other country, France was prepared to give Africans access to professional football… [partly because] football never became an important element of
the national character, an activity which helped to define the French and Frenchness” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 171). In France, this trend started early on:

The recruitment of African players by professional European clubs extends back to the colonial era… This was particularly the case in France and players from the motherland’s North African territories were visible in the French professional game from its inception in 1932. Indeed, by 1938 there were more than 140 Africans playing in the French first and second divisions and between 1945 and 1962, almost 120 North Africans played in the French professional game (Darby 2007, 444).

Only six years after professionalism was introduced in France, over 140 Africans were being paid to play football in the country. In more recent times, the league has still employed a large number of Francophone Africans: in the 1999-2000 season, of the 163 Africans playing in the French professional leagues, 59 percent were expatriates from Senegal, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Algeria, and Mali – all former French territories (Darby 2007, 446).

Portugal, meanwhile, had adopted similar policies towards the importation of Africans: “no country more than Portugal has built its football reputation upon sons of its colonies and former colonies” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 178). The Portuguese began to show an earnest interest in African talent beginning in the 1950s:

the influx of Africans into domestic Portuguese football can be traced back to the late colonial era. In this period, a number of prominent clubs such as Sporting Lisbon, Benfica and Porto established links with clubs in Portugal’s African territories and established scouting networks designed to source, refine, and ultimately export talented players to Portuguese football (Darby 2007, 444).

As we will see later on, the formation of these “scouting networks” would prove to be extremely influential in the ‘globalization’ of today’s game. In Portugal, though, they simply acted to strengthen the connection between colony/former colony and colonizer. Just as in France, the colonial links remain correlated to the geographic origins of
contemporary professional soccer players in Portugal: of the 118 Africans playing in the 1999-2000 season, “69 percent hailed from former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau” (Darby 2007, 446).

Post-Colonial Period, 1950s-1980s

As African nations slowly emerged out of their colonial shells and hatched into independent countries, football was once again adopted as a symbol of both modernity and national pride. What happened in Africa mimicked what was happening in South America during the same period of time: “in the aftermath of independence, newly constituted African governments provided financial subsidies for the game and thus argued that they were entitled to play a central role in its running” (Darby 2007, 449). As we learned in Chapter 2, governmental interference in the game would prove to be one of the leading causes for the future mass emigrations of footballers to Europe – and in Africa, the situation would eventually confirm this pattern. The African governments would demonstrate a remarkable similarity as to the regulation of the movement of footballers, as well:

After the first phase of international migration of African footballers from 1930 until 1960, which was characterized by a policy of assimilation, a second period began when the African states set up national squads and adopted protectionist policies to hold on to the best players. Football thus became for African states a privileged means to affirm their newly acquired sovereignty in the eyes of the rest of the world (Poli 2006, 396).

Two important assertions can be taken from Poli’s writing. First, in the wake of independence, African nations sought to assert their newly gained sovereignty by fielding their own, competitive national football squads – and to make them competitive, enforcement policies needed to be in place to ensure that domestic talent did not escape
abroad. During this era professional teams were not required to release their players for international matches, so every African that signed with a foreign team was most likely ineligible to represent his country. Of course, these policies led to great tensions between the national associations and their players. Raffaele Poli provides an example:

   Everywhere in Africa states reinforced obstacles in order to prevent the departure of the best players. This was the case of the Malian Salif Keita, who, in 1967, was forbidden to leave his country, and had to flee via Liberia to France, where he won many trophies at AS Saint-Etienne (Poli 2006, 396).

Salif Keita’s experience provides a template that describes the foreign sojourns of African footballers during this time. Second, playing football was once again viewed by the recipient country as a proxy for membership in the ‘modern’ world. International opinion mattered to these new leaders, and one of the most effective ways of participating in world events had become involvement in the worldwide soccer sphere.

   However, this period of introversion was soon abandoned as the international soccer climate changed once again. In response to the growing number of expatriate footballers around the world, FIFA decided in 1981 that it was in the best interest of the sport to announce a new rule that “obliged clubs to release players for all World Cup qualifying and finals matches,” meaning that European-based professional players could now be included on African national team rosters (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 184). The draconian measures put in place that attempted to corral local talent like Salif Keita were no longer necessary, and the policies of African governments and national associations changed quickly: “within the new regulatory context, the fact of having players abroad suddenly became more of an advantage than a hindrance for the African federations. Very rapidly we can notice a change from an ‘endogenous’ strategy to an ‘exogenous’
one” (Poli 2006, 397). But why was sending players abroad more of an advantage to the African associations, rather than trying to cultivate and retain talent themselves?

Modern Migratory Movements and Patterns

The 1981 FIFA ruling has acted like a double edged sword for the development of African football. Paul Darby explains the conflict:

The normative view of African player migration, at least in European football circles, is that exposure to Europe's elite leagues contributes to the development of the African game and its footballers and as such should be allowed to continue unfettered. Others though vehemently disagree and compare the loss of Africa's football resources to Europe to broader colonial and neocolonial exploitation of the third world by the first (Darby 2007, 443).

Both of these arguments – that migration helps to develop African talent and, conversely, that it erodes any African ability to become self-sufficient in player production – each merit separate discussions.

The Pros of Africans Playing in Europe

The decision by newly independent governments to help fund their national associations would grow to have terrible consequences for the structure of the game in Africa. From the 1960s to the 1980s, clubs grew dependent upon the government funding – making the stability of the game likewise dependent on the economic health of each country. Football, unfortunately, has not proven to be immune from turbulence in the world market:

Since the economic crises of the 1980s and subsequent structural adjustment programs, the levels of funding provided for the game by African governments has diminished dramatically… The fact that most
pitches and stadia are owned by the government and are managed either by the Ministry of Sport or by local government administrators and therefore cannot be used by clubs to generate revenue presents further difficulties for the development of professional infrastructure for African football (Darby 2007, 449).

Obviously, the clubs in African countries have faced precarious financial situations, to say the least. Why would the emigration of footballers to Europe be considered an advantage to the growth of the sport, given this information? Quite simply, it is because it is cheaper for the African national associations and their clubs to not have to pay elite talent. The commercialization of the game has shown us that European teams have the capacity to buy almost any player they wish:

Largely on the back of revenue generated by the UEFA Champions League and the sale of media rights, clubs in Europe’s top-level leagues, particularly in England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and France, have been in a position to offer the type of salaries that simply do not exist elsewhere in the football world, and least of all in Africa (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 146).

By ‘outsourcing’ the professional elite but retaining their services for the national team, African football associations are able to gain notoriety throughout the world at the expense of providing highly talented, competitive leagues back home for local citizens to watch. As Bill Murray summarizes,

Africa… offers neither the perks nor the stability to keep talented soccer players in the domestic game. As a result, they have flocked to Europe and now star in nearly every team in the best European leagues. They have taken much of this expertise with them when they have returned to play for their national teams, with the result that African players and African soccer have recently distinguished themselves at the highest level (Murray 1996, 137).

Because the domestic leagues pale in comparison to their overseas counterparts in terms of competition, and the only way for a good player to get better is to raise the stakes and play with equally elite or even better teammates against quality opponents, the African
associations have embraced the chances afforded to them to send their talent abroad. The technological and communications revolution has eased this blow for African citizens, many of whom can follow their favorite compatriots even as they play overseas.

A few statistics help to emphasize the flow of talent from Africa to Europe: in the 2002-2003 season, “in 78 professional and semi-professional leagues of the 52 UEFA countries, we can note that [the total number of African players] was 1,156. They represented 19.6% of the total amount of foreign players” (Poli 2006, 398). UEFA, as we learned in Chapter 1, is the European regional confederation under the direct auspices of FIFA. That Africans accounted for nearly one out of every five foreign players in leagues throughout fifty-two separate associations is truly astounding, especially when taking into account that Europeans would be considered foreigners if they are not playing in their country of birth. Also, the reliance on domestic talent for international competition is quite low relative to the ratio of foreign to domestic players in other confederations:

The strong presence of African players abroad is reflected in national squads, where the number of players playing in local clubs is very small. Thus, during the final phase of the 2006 World Cup, only 19.1% of players selected by African teams were playing for clubs in their respective countries. This percentage was higher for the selections belonging to the four other confederations that had more than one team at the World Cup. In decreasing order, it was situated at 81.5% for countries of the Asian confederation, at 63.7% for countries of the North and Central American confederation, at 51.2% for the countries of the European confederation and at 33.7% for the countries of the South American confederation (Poli 2006, 404).

More than any other confederation, the African countries are dependent upon their talent abroad, which of course begs the question: are they too dependent on this source of talent?
The Cons of Africans Playing in Europe

While some within the African footballing world extol the virtues of exporting professional soccer players, others have been much more pessimistic. Instead of justifying the precarious nature of domestic leagues as an opportunity to send players abroad to gain experience, others blame the lack of professional support for the exodus of African talent: “there is little in the way of infrastructure, professionalism, or the possibility of a good salary to encourage them to remain in their home nations and eschew the potential of earning the almost unimaginable riches, by African standards at least, that the European game offers” (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 147). Moreover, fueled by the success stories of Africans abroad, football is increasingly being viewed by many Africans as a symbol of liberation from the poverty and low living standards that surround them:

In most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, in a context where there is less and less of a correlation between successful schooling and a facilitated entry into the professional world, the presence in Europe of players having grown up locally stimulates surrounding societies to consider football as a profession in its own right… As the practice of the profession of football players for a Sub-Saharan African often involves a departure abroad, football is considered more and more as a means to achieve the migratory dream, which is very widespread among the African population (Poli 2006, 405).

A new generation of young footballers grew up with this dream in mind, creating a large and highly-skilled pool from which European teams could begin to recruit potential talent. To facilitate these recruitment activities, a system of transfer institutions began to form. As in South America, agents would once again play a large role in exacerbating the exodus of young talent abroad. However, due to Africa’s lack of structured leagues and youth development, a new system had to be introduced: football academies.
The Impact of Football Academies in Africa

As European associations began to deregulate the signing of expatriate footballers – a process that began in the late 1980s and has continued through the present – clubs began to look abroad more and more as the sources of young talent. The trend is driven by economic theory, and specifically comparative advantage:

[The deregulation] immediately resulted in the seeking for greater comparative advantages through the outsourcing of training, especially in Latin America and Africa, where the ratio between the quality and the cost of the players is particularly favorable. The outsourcing of player training goes hand in hand with the setting up of centers in the countries of the above-mentioned continents, the conclusion of partnership agreements with local clubs aiming at transferring young players to Europe for a lesser cost, and by the creation of global observation networks (Poli 2006, 397).

In Africa, the “setting up of [training] centers” and “the creation of global observation networks” would prove to have lasting ramifications for the development of youth talent in the continent. As we learned above, football began to be seen by young Africans as an escape route from poverty, both in the financial and physical sense. “Apart from the ‘pure’ passion for the game,” writes Raffaele Poli, “these two elements constitute essential factors if we are to understand the underlying reasons for the proliferation of training centers for young football players” (Poli 2006, 406-407). Football academies, as these training centers are known, are soccer facilities located in Africa that are often directly affiliated with European club teams, with the aim and purpose of identifying and grooming young talent. They have undoubtedly played a part in increasing the trans-Mediterranean flow of footballers:

Since the early 1990s football academies involving a partnership between an African facility and a European club have emerged to play a major role in the migration of African players to Europe. This partnership has typically taken two forms. In the first, European clubs set up academies or training centers or invest in existing ones and in return they have first
claim on the best players that are produced... [The second] involves European clubs purchasing controlling stakes in African clubs (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 150-151).

Due to the proliferation of such academies, African talent is leaving the continent at an unprecedented rate, and at younger and younger ages. Two major concerns have arisen from these developments.

The first concern refers to what African football officials and academics alike have coined ‘the muscle drain.’ The ‘brain drain’ has been a well-documented phenomenon among other high-skilled professions in developing countries, and such inclinations to move abroad have impacted the soccer profession as well. Issa Hayatou, president of the CAF (the African regional body of FIFA) voiced his dismay with the practice:

‗After the flight of brains Africa is confronted with the muscle exodus. The rich countries import the raw material – talent – and they often send to the continent their less valuable technicians. The inequality of the exchange terms is indisputable. It creates a situation of dependence... hence the pauperization of some clubs and... the net decrease of the game quality and of the level of most of the national championships. Prestigious clubs are regularly deprived of their best elements and even the juniors cannot escape the recruiting agents, who profit from the venality of their leaders‘ (Issa Hayatou, quoted in Akindes, et al. 157).

While the effects of the ‘muscle drain’ are mitigated slightly by the ability of elite footballers to represent their national sides, it has resulted in “the net decrease of the game quality” in domestic African leagues. Hayatou also alludes to the second major concern: the exploitation of African footballers by representatives of the developed world.

Not all football academies are sponsored by affluent European club teams. Instead, an informal sector has developed, one that is “established in an ad hoc,
improvised manner by both African and European speculators whose primary interest is not football development but rather personal financial gain from the sale of young players to European clubs” (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 153). In many cases, the contracts negotiated from these academies are highly exploitative of the footballer himself, as the agent rarely has his ‘client’s’ best interests at heart. In the direst of circumstances, such contracts can lead to actions that amount to human rights abuses:

Beyond those players who were successful in procuring contracts, albeit often highly exploitative ones, with European clubs there was another strata of migrant linked to the trade in African players that was causing concern not only within the confines of the governance of the game but also among human rights activists with a particular interest in child trafficking. For example, Paul Carlier, found of a pressure group called Sport and Freedom in the early 1990s, began campaigning on behalf of young African players who had been brought to Belgium by clubs and agents for trials and simply abandoned if unsuccessful. This group highlighted the fact that many of those who were not successful in securing contracts were not returned home by those who had organized the trials and were left as illegal immigrants on the streets of Belgium (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 147-148).

Though the European clubs involved in such practices certainly cannot claim innocence, the institutions that govern the development of footballers in Africa certainly hold a great share of the blame. Even in less dramatic situations, there seems to be a solid case for the argument that European football has been and is exploiting the soccer resources of Africa. Summing up the costs of football-related migration out of Africa to both the athletes and the countries, Bill Murray criticizes that “the most scandalous aspect of the African soccer drain… is the practice of selling young teenage players to European teams for a pittance, with no benefits to the game in Africa” (Murray 1996, 143).
As we have seen in this chapter, the development of elite talent in Africa has been characterized by the migration of footballers to Europe. The colonial links that brought the game to the continent have persisted to this day, often drawing the best African players in the opposite direction to professional careers in Europe. That is not to say, though, that African players do not have a choice as to where they want to play:

A shared colonial history was clearly significant in determining the countries where French, Belgian, and Portuguese clubs sought to recruit African football talent in [the 1960s and 1970s], but it has also been central in the decisions of African migrant players regarding the leagues that they aspired to play in. Indeed, the opportunity of playing in a country where there were likely to be fewer linguistic and cultural barriers and where players had more opportunities to mix with compatriots in broader social settings was paramount in this regard (Darby 2007, 446).

In the African case, just as in the South American one, cultural and linguistic connections seem to facilitate the international movement of players. The importance of established networks – what Darby describes as “opportunities to mix with compatriots in broader social settings” – is also paramount to the decision-making process. However, colonial connections do not explain all of the movements of African footballers:

Running parallel to the neocolonial pattern of migration has been a much more diffuse and seemingly random movement of African players to a range of leagues throughout Europe and beyond… this highlights the fact that the range of countries over which African players are distributed includes many that did not have colonial links with the continent (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 145).

The authors’ assertion suggests one thing – that there seems to be something else besides economic, cultural, and historic factors that governs how African footballers move around the world.
Chapter Four: European Migrations

As Chapter 1 suggests, European footballers have migrated from country to country since the sport’s inception. The last fifteen years have witnessed an unprecedented acceleration of this trend, making the major European leagues among the most cosmopolitan of employers – regardless of industry. Europe has become “soccer’s core economy. It has the strongest professional league structures and is the center of the world trade in players” (Maguire and Stead 1998, 61). To understand how the European leagues gained this status, this chapter will begin by outlining the history of the migratory patterns developed by Europeans within Europe (and, briefly, of such patterns outside of Europe as well). It will then discuss the historic Bosman Ruling and its ramifications on the movement of players within Europe. Finally, it concludes with a review of the contemporary migrations of European players.

A History of European Footballer Migrations

The Beginnings of Migration, 1880s-1940s

Perhaps the earliest examples of people migrating for the specific purpose of playing football occurred within the United Kingdom soon after the game was professionalized. Explain Lanfranchi and Taylor,

In Britain, of course, players could cross national boundaries without moving to another state. There was nothing stopping Irish, Welsh or
Scottish footballers, for instance, from working for English clubs... Indeed, many of the first professionals in the 1880s were Scottish players who travelled south to sign contracts with prominent clubs in the north and midlands of England (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 2).

The unique nature of the relationship between the four nations in the UK makes it difficult to compare these early migrations with later transnational ones. As we have learned so far, the British football community was wary of the ‘legitimacy’ of the game abroad for many years. However, although the lines between nationalities were strongly defined, the players from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland were never viewed as foreigners:

At no point, however, was the market for football talent constrained on national lines. Indeed the pattern of football migration within Britain closely followed broader trends, becoming characterized by a steady flow of talent from the poorer, peripheral nations to the richer English ‘center’. Scottish, Irish and Welsh professional footballers were no different from other workers in gravitating towards the better employment and financial opportunities available in England (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 39).

The movement of players from resource-poor to resource-rich areas would become a constant trend as the game of soccer evolved. Despite the large amount of movement within the United Kingdom, though, its clubs would remain among the least diversified for the majority of the twentieth century.

As other leagues around Europe began to professionalize during the 1920s and 1930s, they tended to adopt less stringent regulations on the use of foreign players. The introduction of international tournaments in this era, including the beginning of Olympic competition and the newly established World Cup, exposed countries to unique talents from abroad. Quick to recognize the scouting opportunities that these events afforded them, professional clubs began to use international tournaments as recruiting grounds (Murray 1996, 64). Even despite the generally isolationist policies adopted by many
countries in the wake of World War I and the strict immigration laws that accompanied them, expatriate soccer players began to make their presence felt throughout Europe:

This emerging football nationalization did not prevent the movement of players from one country to another, even if national governments and football associations retained jurisdiction over the inward flow of labor. National peculiarities abound. While the English Football League remained staunchly protectionist in the interwar period, the newly formed French league allowed its clubs to field up to five foreign players in every match. The Italian league, meanwhile, banned non-nationals but exploited the possibilities offered by the dual citizenship of players from South America (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 3).

The policies adopted by the French and Italian leagues make sense given the geopolitical climate of the time. France, due to the horrific casualties in World War I, turned to outside sources of labor for all of its industries – and football was no exception. In Italy, the fascist dictatorship engendered highly nationalistic feelings throughout the country – but as Chapter 2 indicated, the use of South Americans was often viewed as a ‘repatriation’ of true Italians, rather than the importation of foreigners.

If the first half of the twentieth century saw the beginnings of the migration of footballers within Europe, then the second half witnessed an explosion.

**The Explosion of Migration, 1940s-Present**

The post-World War II era in Europe has been marked by an increasing rate of integration between states in Europe. The economic and physical destruction that followed the war created the impetus for intensified interdependence, as a series of treaties between the countries indicates:

Six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) therefore came together and signed a treaty in 1951 to establish the European Coal and Steel Community and another treaty in 1957 [the Treaty of Rome] to establish the European Economic
Community. The Coal and Steel Community had a narrow economic focus but an ambitious political goal: to achieve a peace settlement primarily between France and Germany. The treaty establishing the European Economic Community was more ambitious in its economic objectives but no less significant politically. It sought to establish a common or single market in which goods, capital, services, and people could move freely within the European Community (as the European Economic Community came to be called). It also envisioned an ‘ever closer union’ among the states and peoples of the European Community (Dinan 2005, 2).

Conspicuously absent once again from these treaties was the United Kingdom, continuing their tradition of isolation from continental affairs. However, just like the country finally relented and joined FIFA in 1946 (as we learned in Chapter 1), Britain did eventually join the EC in 1973 (Dinan 2005, 4).

In Britain, a surge in popularity for football followed the end of the war – a ‘boom’ period that, while profitable for the clubs, left many British footballers discontented with their salaries. Lanfranchi and Taylor highlight the discrepancies at the time:

The immediate post-war years was a 'boom' period for British football with attendances at an all-time high, more money being generated by clubs yet players still under tight earning and mobility restrictions and perceived, according to some accounts, as little more than 'soccer slaves'. The best footballers were increasingly coming to see themselves as highly skilled entertainers comparable with movie stars but without the same financial rewards or prestige... and by the late 1940s and 1950s there seemed to be increasing opportunities for the best players to earn considerable sums abroad. The wealthiest Italian clubs were prepared to pay large transfer fees and substantial contracts for foreign talent and began to broaden their gaze to northern Europe, including Britain (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 60).

As we learned in Chapter 1, this period marked the infancy of the commercialization of soccer and the sport’s acceptance of its role as an entertainment industry. The disparities in wages between countries grew to be one of the major drivers of footballer migration.

Notes Jimmy Greaves, one of the Englishmen that played in Italy at the time: “I’d only
got wrapped up with Milan for mercenary reasons. Money was the only motive, don’t let's kid ourselves about that” (Jimmy Greaves, quoted in Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 64). Greaves wasn’t the only player to play abroad for “mercenary reasons.” In fact, such were the causes of one of the most controversial migrations of footballers ever, known as the Colombian Affair.

**The Colombian Affair, 1950-1951**

As we learned in Chapter 2, the owners of Colombian football clubs, riding the immense profits from international sales of coffee, began to import players from all over South America. Hoping to gain even greater notoriety, the owners of Santa Fé, a club located in Bogotá, even reached out to Neil Franklin - a British midfielder that had represented the English national team in its last 38 games (Mason 1994, 39-42). Because the Colombian league was not affiliated with FIFA (though the Colombian national association was), the laws of the transfer system did not apply when Colombian clubs tried to sign players from other leagues. Offering exorbitant contracts that dwarfed those offered in England, Franklin and three other English footballers chose to break their contracts with their English clubs and to make the journey to Colombia (Mason 1994, 40).

Tony Mason writes that “the professional footballers who went to Bogotá were part of a long tradition of mainly skilled workers taking their trade overseas in the hope of better prospects and better pay” (Mason 1994, 39). For the most part, this statement is true – representatives of different industries and professions had long criss-crossed the globe for job-related purposes. However, the Colombian Affair exists as one of the few examples of European footballers migrating outside of the continent in the search of
better playing conditions. What was clear from their choice was that they shared a deeply held dissatisfaction with how the English (and by extension, European) transfer system functioned. Differences in culture and the style of play eventually led all four players to return to England, though upon their arrival each was suspended by the English FA for varying amounts of time (Mason 1994, 44-46). Though the Colombian Affair would prove to be a short-lived experiment, its underlying causes would continue to ferment throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Despite objections to the mechanism raised during the Colombian Affair, the transfer system continued to facilitate the movement of players in the proceeding decades. The geopolitical context in which football was played continued to impact the game: the membership of UEFA, the European regional confederation under FIFA, grew constantly as more countries gained independence – and the drizzle turned into a deluge as the former Soviet bloc entered the liberalized world at the beginning of the 1990s. By 1993,

The level of movement was considerable. The... data available for 32 European countries in 1992/3 reveals that 1295 'foreign' nationals (EU, other UEFA and non-European) were playing at the highest level. This amounts to some 11.4 percent of the workforce playing in these premier divisions. Of this movement, 54 percent involved non-EU nationals from UEFA-affiliated countries. The equivalent percentages for EU nationals and non-Europeans were 19 and 27 respectively (Maguire and Stead 1998, 62).

While the magnitude of foreign players represented in professional leagues across Europe had vastly increased in the post-war period, the actions of one Belgian footballer were about to transform the European game in an unprecedented fashion.
The Bosman Ruling

Jean-Marc Bosman was born in 1964 in Liège, Belgium. He played football his whole life, and after showing promise early on, eventually made a profession out of it playing locally in Belgium. Until the events of 1990, his career path, despite his modest success, eventually would have relegated him to anonymity.

The end of his career, though, brought him not anonymity but infamy. Lanfranchi and Taylor succinctly summarize the events that brought Bosman’s name to the forefront of international soccer:

In 1990, [Bosman] came to the end of his contract with RFC Liège. The club offered him a further one-year contract on minimum terms, equivalent to one-quarter of his previous salary, which he rejected. But he seemed to have found new employment at US Dunkerque-Littoral, a French second-division club situated a few miles from the Belgian border and less than 200 miles from his home. Under the terms of his contract with Dunkerque, Bosman was responsible for organizing his release from Liège before the beginning of the season. Yet having received no request from RFC Liège, who had come to doubt Dunkerque's ability to pay the agreed transfer fee, the Belgian federation refused to release his clearance certificate on time, and thus Bosman's contract with his new club was automatically cancelled. Finding himself expelled from the Liège squad and without work, Bosman took his Belgian employer to the local court of appeal on the grounds that they had impeded his engagement (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 213).

As we learned in Chapter 1, the transfer of a player from one club to another required to authorization of the national association. When the transfer occurred across national associations, FIFA required that the sending association issue an “International Transfer Certificate” (ITC) that signified that the player in question was cleared to play for the new national association (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 217). Bosman’s complaint stemmed from the Belgian association’s failure to issue this ITC in time for his new contract to be completed.
Bosman brought his case to court on the basis of two separate provisions that members of the European Community had accepted as part of the Treaty of Rome. The first, Article 48 of the Treaty, begins

1. Freedom of movement for workers shall be secured within the Community by the end of the transitional period at the latest.

2. Such freedom of movement shall entail the abolition of any discrimination based on nationality between workers of the Member States as regards employment, remuneration and other conditions of work and employment (Treaty of Rome 1957, 21).

Under Article 48, workers – regardless of profession – were legally entitled to find employment in any Member State. This law was the basis for challenging the ‘quota’ system that many football associations employed to limit the amount of foreigners (either from the EU or not) that were allowed to participate in the league. The second provision under which Bosman challenged the actions of the Belgian football association was Article 85, which reads in part:

1. The following shall be prohibited as incompatible with the common market: all agreements between undertakings, decision by associations of undertakings and concerted practices which may affect trade between Member States and which have as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the common market, and in particular those which:
   a. Directly or indirectly fix purchase or selling prices or any other trading conditions… (Treaty of Rome 1957, 31).

By challenging the football association’s actions under Article 85, Bosman’s legal team was effectively challenging the transfer system as a whole by claiming that its use distorted competition and that it unfairly set prices that restricted the movement of players between markets.
The Belgian football association, UEFA, and FIFA joined forces to defend the status quo version of the transfer system. The three organizations based their defense on three arguments:

first of all, [they contended that] footballers were considered to be workers *sui generis* - not comparable with other workers; second, it was argued that domestic football needed to be preserved as the basic resource for national teams; third, it was suggested that UEFA regulations applied to an area beyond jurisdiction of the fifteen EU members and therefore the application of EU law would create an unfair advantage for non-EU UEFA countries (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 214).

However, these arguments proved fruitless as first the Belgian Court of First Instance and then the Liège Court of Appeal sided with Bosman (Blanpain and Inston 1996, ix). In particular, the arguments concerning Article 85 of the Treaty of Rome were convincing:

With regard to Article 85 of the Treaty, [the Liège Court of Appeal] considered that the FIFA, UEFA and Belgian Football Association rules might constitute decisions of associations of undertakings by which the clubs restricted competition between themselves for acquiring players. Transfer fees were dissuasive and tended to depress the level of professional sportsmen's pay. In addition, nationality clauses prohibited foreign players' services from being obtained over a certain quota. Lastly, trade between Member States was affected, in particular by the restriction of players' mobility (Blanpain and Inston 1996, 14).

The end result of the Bosman litigation was a ruling issued by the European Court of Justice on December 15, 1995. Among its specific consequences were: the prohibition of transfer fees following the expiration of a contract between a club and a citizen of the EU; the abolishment of ‘quota’ systems that regulated how many foreigners could be signed by an EU club team; and that the Belgian transfer system was pronounced null and void (Blanpain and Inston 1996, 32). By declaring the Belgian transfer system illegal, the court inferred that the identical systems employed by other EU Member States were
likewise illegal as well – effectively opening the floodgates and beginning a period of extremely high volumes of players moving from country to country within Europe.

**Contemporary Migrations of European Footballers**

Looking at data collected during the 1994/1995 season (before the *Bosman Ruling*) and in the 2007/2008 season, it is clearly evident that the major European football leagues have cosmopolitanized to an unprecedented degree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>England</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1994/1995</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Migrants</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Players</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2008/2009</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Migrants</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Players</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Maguire and Stead 1998, 66 and Professional Football Players Observatory, eurofootplayers.org)

But where were these new foreign migrants from? Some of them can be attributed to the implications of the *Bosman Ruling*, but certainly not all of them. It is important to remember that the *Bosman Ruling* only applied to the movements of EU citizens within EU countries. Therefore, while it does explain why the number of French players in the English Premiership increased from only four in the 1994/1995 season to sixty in the 1998/1999 season, it does not explain the recent swell in numbers by representatives of Africa or South America (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 223).

A closer look at data from the 2005/2006 – 2007/2008 seasons help to illustrate that European migration specifically has increased in recent years (see Table 4-2 below). Although many of the players might not originate from EU countries, they nonetheless
come from UEFA-affiliated countries. The numbers are particularly striking in England, which has completely abandoned its isolationist history:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Domestic Players</th>
<th>Western Europeans, Non-Domestic</th>
<th>Eastern Europeans</th>
<th>Total European, Non-Domestic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Professional Football Players Observatory, eurofootplayers.com)

Nearly as many Premiership players come from different European countries as they do from England itself. Though other leagues have not embraced cosmopolitanism nearly as fully as England has, there has clearly been an upswing in the movement of European footballers throughout the continent.

Just as the implications of the Bosman Ruling were beginning to be understood, a confluence of events served to vastly increase the pool of potential footballers from which European teams could create their rosters. Again, factors exogenous to football would prove to be influential:
At the time of this debate over freedom of movement within the EU, the geopolitics of Europe were changing dramatically. Eastern Europe in particular was in the process of liberalizing its football. Skilled and experienced players were no longer bound by age restrictions and their clubs were in desperate need of cash. In addition, social unrest in Albania and the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia saw the arrival to the West of a wave of talented and relatively inexpensive footballers. On top of this, the nations of South America, especially Brazil and Argentina, experienced massive currency devaluation, so weakening the negotiating power of clubs and increasing the opportunity for players to find contracts in Europe (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 221).

For European footballers, the potential for increased economic well-being due to the increased mobility afforded them by the *Bosman Ruling* was effectively neutralized by the wave of foreign, cheap talent that began to invade the continent. But why did these foreign footballers want to come to Europe? What were the processes that brought them there? And why did some players go to certain countries instead of others? It is with these questions in mind that we now turn to Part II.
Part II:  
Chapter Five: Theories and Models of International Migration

Part II of this essay is devoted to analyzing the international migration of professional footballers from a theoretical and conceptual point of view. To that end, this chapter will refrain from discussing football and will instead focus on reviewing many of the accepted academic theories that could explain why and how people (and for our purposes, footballers) move around the globe. After all, as John Bale and Joseph Maguire lay out, “a socially and geographically mobile workforce is a feature of most modern industrial societies. The movement of athletes from their home town to their place of initial recruitment to elite or professional sports clubs can be seen as part of this same process” (Bale and Maguire 1994, 1). Though they might enjoy their jobs more than the majority of migrant workers, professional soccer players are nevertheless laborers in a workforce. How these theories and models relate specifically to the movement of footballers will be covered in Chapter 6.

Because the overall aim of this essay is to explain the movements of professional footballers, the theories that are reviewed focus mainly on international labor migration. Lanfranchi and Taylor offer a justification for this decision:

It is important to locate the position of football professionals within migratory groups more generally. While most migratory movements have both political and economic causes, the former are of little significance in this case. The international football market has rarely been inflated by political refugees although there are, of course, exceptions…
Notwithstanding these instances, the motives of football migrants have mainly been economic (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 4).

This chapter covers the following models: the neoclassical equilibrium perspective; the Push-Pull Model; the ‘new economics of migration;’ and world-systems theory. Though footballers have migrated internationally due to political or safety reasons in the past, such models will not be investigated as thoroughly as those related to labor migration.

The Neoclassical Equilibrium Perspective

The neoclassical equilibrium perspective is an offshoot of one of the oldest attempts to study international migration. It stems from the contribution made by Ernst Georg Ravenstein, a German geographer who articulated his arguments in a set of two articles titled “The Laws of Migration” in 1885 and 1889 (Kivisto and Faist 2010, 33). Ravenstein was prompted to express his views in response to a contemporary named William Farr, who had posited that migrations occurred in an indiscriminate and random manner. Instead, Ravenstein believed that he could create a model that would help explain and predict such population movements. Although most critics claim that he fell short of this goal, one of Ravenstein’s ‘laws’ concerned ‘the centrality of economic factors:’

While levels of migration can be influenced by state actions (e.g., laws, tax policies), climate, and geographic factors, they are not only not nearly as consequential as economic considerations, but are often actually intervening obstacles that can sometimes be eliminated, thus permitting economic forces to operate in an essentially unimpeded way (Kivisto and Faist 2010, 34).

It is from this ‘centrality of economic factors’ that the neoclassical equilibrium perspective is derived. Explain Stephen Castles and Mark Miller,
This theory is essentially individualistic and ahistorical. It emphasizes the individual decision to migrate, based on rational comparison of the relative costs and benefits of remaining in the area of origin or moving to various alternative destinations. Constraining factors, such as government restrictions on emigration or immigration, are mainly dealt with as distortions of the rational market, which should be removed (Castles and Miller 1998, 20-21).

What Castles and Miller refer to as “constraining factors” are what Ravenstein referred to as “intervening obstacles.” In economic terms, these factors or obstacles prevent markets from acting efficiently. According to the theory, migration occurs as the result of arbitrage between labor markets that are differentiated by the supply of labor and the wage paid to workers. Douglas Massey and his colleagues describe how the theory works:

According to this theory and its extensions, international migration, like its internal counterpart, is caused by geographic differences in the supply of and demand for labor. Countries with a large endowment of labor relative to capital have a low equilibrium market wage, while countries with a limited endowment of labor relative to capital are characterized by a high market wage… the resulting differential in wages causes workers from the low-wage country to move to the high-wage country. As a result of this movement, the supply of labor decreases and wages rise in the capital-poor country, while the supply of labor increases and wages fall in the capital-rich country, leading, at equilibrium, to an international wage differential that reflects only the costs of international movement, pecuniary and psychic (Massey, et al. 1993, 433).

Thus, once enough workers move from the low-wage market to the high-wage market, the wages in the two countries will eventually reach equilibrium and migration between the two countries will cease. The resulting wage differential “that reflects only the costs of international movement, pecuniary and psychic” can be attributed to the distorting effects of “constraining factors.”

Of course, the model has its fair share of critics. For one, it posits that income differentials are the only motivation for people to move abroad to work. Also, the theory
predicts that it is the wage-deficient members of the population that will be the ones to migrate – an assertion that has found little support in real-life situations: “empirical study shows that it is rarely the poorest people from the least-developed countries who move to the richest countries; more frequently the migrants are people of intermediate social status from areas which are undergoing economic and social change” (Castles and Miller 1998, 21).

The Push-Pull Model

The Push-Pull Model builds off of the cost-benefit analysis that each potential migrant calculates as part of the neoclassical equilibrium perspective. Stephen Castles and Mark Miller explain that such models perceive the causes of migration to lie in a combination of ‘push factors,’ impelling people to leave the areas of origin, and ‘pull factors,’ attracting them to certain receiving countries. ‘Push factors’ include demographic growth, low living standards, lack of economic opportunities, and political repression, while ‘pull factors’ are demand for labor, availability of good land, good economic opportunities and political freedoms (Castles and Miller 1998, 20).

Hence, people migrate when either the ‘push factors’ or the ‘pull factors’ outweigh the benefits of the status quo. Outlining the assumptions of the model, Kivisto and Faist contend that two other forces must be factored into the equation: ‘natural inertia’ and, once again, ‘intervening obstacles.’ ‘Natural inertia’ assumes that people are by nature stayers rather than movers. Migrations are thus not persistent features of the modern world, being triggered only in extraordinary rather than ordinary times. The second factor shaping migrations are the ‘intervening obstacles.’ Distance is one such obstacle, one that is linked to the state of existing transportation systems. Physical barriers… represent another obstacle, as do legal barriers (Kivisto and Faist 2010, 36).
The *Push-Pull Model* addresses many weaknesses inherent in the *neoclassical equilibrium perspective*. It accounts for myriad reasons as to why a person may choose to leave his country, without relying solely on wage differentials. It also does not rule out the perpetuity of migration, as does the *neoclassical* model. However, the *Push-Pull Model* still has its own set of drawbacks:

the push-pull model predicts movements from densely populated areas to more sparsely peopled regions, yet in fact countries of immigration like the Netherlands and Germany are amongst the world's more densely populated. Finally the push-pull model cannot explain why a certain group of migrants goes to one country rather than another: for example, why have most Algerians migrated to France and not Germany, while the opposite applies to Turks? (Castles and Miller 1998, 21-22)

**The ‘New Economics of Migration’**

The ‘*new economics of migration*’ contends that the *neoclassical equilibrium perspective* and the *Push-Pull Model* inadequately explain migratory movements because they rely on the functioning of perfect markets. Instead, the ‘*new economics of migration*’ posit that

markets rarely function in the ideal way suggested by the neo-classicists. Migration cannot simply be explained by income differences between two countries, but also by factors such as chances of secure employment, availability of capital for entrepreneurial activity, and the need to manage risk over long periods (Castles and Miller 1998, 22).

Instead of taking the individual as the unit of analysis, the *new economics* focuses on groups: “the new economics calls into question the assumption that migration is a phenomenon pursued by individuals. Ignored from the neoclassical perspective is the fact that immigrants are embedded in… ‘webs of group-affiliations’” (Kivisto and Faist 2010, 38). Massey and associates elucidate this distinction’s importance by examining one of these “group-affiliations” – the household. They write,
Unlike individuals, households are in a position to control risks to their economic well-being by diversifying the allocation of household resources, such as family labor. While some family members can be assigned economic activities in the local economy, others may be sent to work in foreign labor markets where wages and employment conditions are negatively correlated or weakly correlated with those in the local area. In the event that local economic conditions deteriorate and activities there fail to bring in sufficient income, the household can rely on migrant remittances for support (Massey, et al. 1993, 436).

A key factor in the efficacy of the ‘new economics of migration’ is the role that risk control takes in its analysis of migratory decisions. For the majority of workers considering migration, a major input into the decision-making process is the well-being of the migrant’s family. Sending a family member abroad into a high-wage country can create a level of economic stability for the family that stays behind, as the migrant worker is likely to earn enough to support himself or herself and be able to remit money back to the family. Sometimes, these types of migrations are facilitated through social networks.

Network Theory

*Network theory* is sometimes referred to as a separate model for explaining international migration, but it is actually a function of the ‘new economics of migration.’ As Douglas Massey defines it,

Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin. The existence of these ties is hypothesized to increase the likelihood of emigration by lowering the costs, raising the benefits, and mitigating the risks of international movement. Network connections constitute a valuable form of social capital that people draw upon to gain access to foreign employment and high wages (Douglas Massey, quoted in Kivisto and Faist 2010, 38).

These networks can lower the costs of migrating in both the economic and social senses, by providing information regarding safe passage, where to live, where to try and find a
job, and by providing a surrogate ‘local’ community in which the new migrant can still feel connected to his or her home. Historically, these effects have been known as “‘the friends and relatives effect’ or, alternatively, ‘chain migration’ in creating and sustaining immigration streams” (Kivisto and Faist 2010, 38).

Due to the complexity of the social networks that develop and the increasing regulations that govern countries’ immigration policies, some people have helped to develop an industry that tackles the problems both formally and informally. Castles and Miller expound:

Some people (both migrants and non-migrants) become facilitators of migration. A ‘migration industry’ emerges, consisting of recruitment organizations, lawyers, agents, smugglers and other middle-people. Such people can be both helpers and exploiters of migrants. Especially in situations of illegal migration or of oversupply of potential migrants, the exploitative role may predominate: many migrants have been swindled out of their savings and found themselves marooned without work or resources in a strange country (Castles and Miller 1998, 26).

Thus, these networks have not always served in the best interests of the migrants themselves. However, this development is not necessarily a drawback of the model – it is merely an unfortunate byproduct of the negative side of human nature.

By changing the unit of analysis from the individual to the group, the ‘new economics of migration’ tries to incorporate more explanatory factors into the migratory equation than those based simply on economic or wage differentials. Its offshoot, network theory, even helps to explain why some migratory streams continue even when economic differences are neutralized. However, it does not help to explain migrations to areas in which migrant networks have not yet developed. Also, its reliance on social networks as
the reason for the perpetuation of migration to a certain area may over-emphasize what could be a spurious relationship that instead has much more historically-based roots.

**World-Systems Theory**

*World-systems theory* was articulated by Immanuel Wallerstein in his book *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* in 1974. Kivisto and Faist summarize Wallerstein’s vision of the structure of economic relationships that have developed through the gradual adoption of capitalism:

> [World-systems theory] treats the capitalist world order as dating to the 16th century, but becoming 'global only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and it has only been in the second half of the twentieth century that the inner corners and remote regions of the globe have been effectively integrated.' Rooted in Marxist tradition, Wallerstein depicts the world-system as a single powerful economic entity supported and sustained by a shifting group of strong nation-states that constitute the wealthy core. The remainder of the world is divided into the periphery and the semiperiphery, both of which are exploited as sources of cheap labor and raw materials by the core (Kivisto and Faist 2010, 44-45).

In the new “global” era, the major industrialized, capitalist democracies of Western Europe and North America have generally been identified as the ‘core’ of the world-system. The developing nations, many of which have colonial backgrounds, have been considered as the ‘periphery.’ The movement of labor from periphery to core has long characterized this relationship. Douglas Massey and his colleagues identify a number of hypotheses that stem from the application of *world-systems theory* to international immigration. Among the hypotheses are
1. International migration is a natural consequence of capitalist market formation in the developing world; the penetration of the global economy into peripheral regions is the catalyst for international movement.

2. The international flow of labor follows the international flow of goods and capital, but in the opposite direction. Capitalist investment foments changes that create an uprooted, mobile population in peripheral countries while simultaneously forging strong material and cultural links with core countries, leading to transnational movement.

3. International migration is especially likely between past colonial powers and their former colonies, because cultural, linguistic, administrative, investment, transportation, and communication links were established early and were allowed to develop free from outside competition during the colonial era, leading to the formation of specific transnational markets and cultural systems (Massey, et al. 1993, 447-448).

One of the greatest strengths of world-systems theory is its inclusion of institutional and historical factors like politics and international relations. However, unlike the preceding three models, world-systems does not provide a factor that compels the individual to move from one country to another, but rather characterizes general population movements. It also falters when individuals or groups migrate to areas ‘off the path’ that is prescribed by the theory.

The neoclassical equilibrium perspective, the Push-Pull Model, the ‘new economics of migration,’ and world-systems theory are all helpful in explaining the international patterns of labor migration, as long as such moves are voluntary and include a high degree of freedom as to where the recipient country should be. Such movements generally describe those taken by international footballers, but that is not to say that soccer players have not been forced to migrate as refugees or asylum seekers: for example, the Vienna team Hakoah – which was comprised entirely of Jewish players –
was forced to flee Austria in 1938 due to the German *Anschluss* (Foer 2004, 75). However, such migrations have thankfully proven to be the exception rather than the rule.

Given this theoretical background as to why and how people move around the world and the understanding developed in Part I concerning the migrations of different footballing populations, we now have the context from which we can analyze the movement of professional soccer players.
Chapter Six: Towards a Soccer-Systems Framework

In football, as in computer science, the concentration of highly specialized human resources is increasing: Serie A, the Premier Liga, and the Premiership have become the football equivalents of Silicon Valley (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 5).

As we have seen thus far, the period of football emanating out of Europe to all regions of the world has been followed by a period marked by those regions sending footballers back to Europe. It has also been established that elite professional footballers are not just athletes, but can be described as migrant workers as well. Combining these two conclusions, we can confront many of the questions that were raised in the introduction: why is the concentration of elite foreign footballers higher in Europe than anywhere else in the world? Why have the major leagues in Europe become, as the Lanfranchi and Taylor quote suggests, the “football equivalents of Silicon Valley?” How ‘new’ is this trend? And does the migration of footballers differ from the migration of other populations?

This chapter will argue that the international migration of soccer players is indeed different from the movements of other populations. In doing so, it will also address why Europe has become the ‘center’ of the world soccer economy and whether or not the migrations of footballers can be considered ‘new.’ To make these assertions, the chapter will first discuss why the movements of footballers do not fit well with any one particular theory of international migration that is discussed in Chapter 5. To address these
shortcomings, I will then posit that the movements of professional soccer players are not
governed solely by such theories, but must be accompanied by an analysis of footballers
as commodities existing on a global value chain as well. Once this relationship has been
established, I will put forth a comprehensive Soccer-systems framework that takes into
account all of the factors that serve to move footballers around the world.

The Uniquity of Professional Football Migrations

Chapter 5 reviewed several theoretical models of international migration,
specifically as they relate to labor migration. They included the neoclassical equilibrium
perspective, the Push-Pull Model, the ‘new economics of migration,’ and world-systems
theory. A brief discussion of the merits of each, as to their applicability to the movements
of professional footballers, follows.

The Neoclassical Equilibrium Perspective

The strongest case for the application of the neoclassical equilibrium perspective
to the international movements of professional footballers is the model’s emphasis on
wage differentials. The theory predicts that movements will occur from wage-deficient
areas to high-wage areas, and that pattern clearly correlates to the majority of migrations
undertaken by elite footballers. As John Bale notes,

The intensification of professionalism (either implicit or explicit) and
commercialism in sport, together with improved national and international
modes of communication and a relaxation in restrictions in the
international movement of sportsmen and women, has meant that in
several sports the spatial margins of recruitment embrace almost the entire
world (Bale 2003, 104).
Though Bale characterizes multiple sports as expanding globally, this is surely the case of international football. Globalization has worked to remove (or at least lower the impacts of) the “constraining factors” that hold back the efficient functioning of the markets that govern how the *neoclassical equilibrium perspective* works to relocate people. “The intensification of professionalism… and commercialism” also supports the efficacy of the theory to soccer-specific movements: as Chapter 1 indicated, these initiatives (and especially the commercialization of the game) have colluded to propel the wages of the players in the highest-profile leagues to unprecedented heights. The ability of elite teams in the major western European leagues to leverage their brands worldwide, augmented by the added income from participation in premier competitions like the UEFA Champions League (which distributes over €530 million between the thirty-two participating clubs annually) allows these clubs to pay players salaries that are astronomical compared to those in less competitive or high-profile leagues (UEFA 2010). The attraction of these salaries is magnified in the eyes of African and South American footballers who come from much poorer conditions. Finally, the demand fostered by fans and owners alike to succeed in such competitions, not only for the sake of winning but to raise the revenues for the club by increasing brand awareness and collecting the financial rewards of participation, have caused clubs to change their recruitment strategies. Maguire and Stead highlight this adapted approach: “although some elite clubs have retained youth development programs, the pressure for instant success appears to be leading other top clubs to abandon such schemes and buy extensively from abroad” (Maguire and Stead 1998, 62). Wages, then, serve as a particularly strong factor in compelling elite footballers to migrate.
However, the neoclassical equilibrium perspective fails to account for many other patterns in the migration of professional footballers. Cultural and historical reasons that could help describe or explain these movements are ignored. Ultimately, as many researchers have concluded, “to assume that the financial nexus is all-powerful would be too simplistic” (Maguire and Stead 1998, 69). Other theories must be taken into account.

**The Push-Pull Model**

The decision by an elite footballer to migrate is driven by a number of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. The high salaries offered abroad, of course, constitute one of the largest ‘pull factors.’ Not all ‘pull factors’ are generalizable across industries, though. One of the soccer-specific ‘pull factors’ is the special connotation that is afforded to playing in one of the major European leagues, especially in the English Premiership. As part of their study on football migrations within Europe, Joseph Maguire and David Stead interviewed a number of Scandinavian footballers. The response of one Norwegian as to why he chose to play in England underlines the ‘pull factor’ in question: “Everyone [in Norway] knows about English football. We have seen the atmosphere every Saturday afternoon. You have the dream to play in that league” (Maguire and Stead 1998, 69). The influence of the globalization of media is immediately evident in this claim, as the Norwegians (and practically everyone in the world) are exposed to the British league without leaving their living rooms. Continuing with their analysis, Maguire and Stead compare the ‘pull factors’ of wages and prestige:

However, the players were also pulled by a strong desire to test themselves at a high level on a regular and consistent basis. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Nordic/Scandinavian players rated the development of soccer skills and knowledge as another important motive for migrating. This ranked about the same as the desire for a high salary (Maguire and Stead 1998, 69).
According to Maguire and Stead’s ethnographic research, there are clearly more factors involved in the decision to migrate than simply economic ones. Indeed, the prestige factor extends to playing in all major European leagues, not just the English one. Notes Thomas Eriksen, “being a star footballer in a small national league means, to players and spectators alike, that one didn’t succeed in securing a contract with a team of real importance – one has by definition remained in the margins of the ecosystem” (Eriksen 2007, 51). Lanfranchi and Taylor suggest that this ‘pull factor’ is a relatively new phenomenon: “whereas for a long time emigration was frowned upon at home and often meant exclusion, it had by then [the 1990s] become almost a requirement, a vital professional experience to put on one’s curriculum vitae” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 235). Playing abroad has become mandatory, in some respects, for a player to be considered successful.

Yet another ‘pull factor’ is the cultural connection between a migrant footballer and his potential new home. As Rory Miller indicates, “historically, South American footballers have tended to migrate to the leading footballing nations of Southern Europe – Italy, Spain, and Portugal – where the problems of adaptation to language, culture and climate have not been so great” (Miller 2007, 26-27). In addition to “language, culture and climate,” historical ties like ancestry have proven to be influential ‘pull factors’ as well for Latin American footballers. In Africa, the same connections apply: as we learned in Chapter 3, “the opportunity of playing in a country where there were likely to be fewer linguistic and cultural barriers and where players had more opportunities to mix with compatriots in broader social settings” was integral to the choices of Africans deciding to play in France, Belgium, and Portugal (Darby 2007, 446). In this light, the colonial
relationships that connected Europe with both Africa and South America can be viewed as facilitating these cultural ‘pull factors.’

Interestingly, wages factor into the equation as ‘push factors’ as well. As we have seen, the national associations in South America and Africa – especially in the latter – have not always been able to provide the structure and stability that the major European leagues can offer. Extreme wage differentials, among other characteristics, can then be viewed as ‘push factors.’ Writing about the situations faced by many African associations, Akindes and colleagues write:

> These financial disparities and the 'push' factor that they generate are magnified in the coastal nations of the sub-Saharan west of Africa where the precarious socioeconomic and political climate has wreaked havoc on domestic football infrastructures. This has effectively negated any potential for setting up the well-organized professional clubs and leagues that might afford African players the regular, guaranteed salaries and labor protection found in Europe (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 146).

Given the political and economic turmoil that has afflicted many states in South America since the 1970s, the authors’ evaluation of ‘push factors’ from Africa can apply to the leagues in South America as well. For all of the factors that drive talent out of the continent, though, South American leagues still function well enough to employ many hundreds of players – even if the best talent leaves to go abroad. In Africa, the ‘push factors’ are more systemic:

> While broader issues such as extreme poverty, political instability, and the debilitating legacy of colonialism have undoubtedly featured among the problems afflicting football here, there are other ingredients, specific to sub-Saharan football's administrative culture and economic structure, that have prevented clubs from raising the type of funds that might allow them to retain players (Darby 2007, 448-449).

Chief among these “other ingredients” that are specific to sub-Saharan administrative problems is the ‘culture of mediocrity’ that has been engendered not just in the football
industry, but in the administrative sectors of other parts of the economy and government as well.

Of course, ‘push factors’ do not only affect footballers from outside of Europe. For the eastern European footballers that have recently swelled the ranks of western European clubs, the ‘push factors’ certainly outweighed the status quo:

One increasingly significant area of EU soccer migration is the link with eastern European countries. Over recent years, eastern European soccer has been in turmoil and the 'push' factors are all too apparent among east European players: some national sides and leagues have disappeared and new ones have emerged; finance for professional leagues is limited; political and economic instability is very much in evidence; and often bloody ethnic divisions have surfaced in the Balkans. These events have also allowed a greater degree of international mobility in sport, particularly from east to west (Maguire and Stead 1998, 63-64).

The experience of many eastern European footballers illustrates that political instability and the need to migrate to ensure personal safety can be considered a ‘push factor’ as well. Between ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, there are undoubtedly multiple forces that compel footballers to migrate.

Perhaps the strongest indicator as to the applicability of the Push-Pull Model to the movement of professional footballers is that one of the strongest ‘pull factors,’ the prestige association afforded to playing in the European leagues, helps to offset the criticisms that the model usually faces from detractors. Instead of predicting a diffusion of footballers from densely populated areas to more sparsely peopled regions, the prestige factor pulls soccer players to the leagues that are already concentrated with the highest amount of talent. Likewise, the prestige factor helps explain why footballers go to these leagues as opposed to different regions of the world. However, the Push-Pull Model cannot explain why a European club, once it has signed a talented player, would then
proceed to sell that player to a competitor. While the model helps explain the vast majority factors that affect footballer migrations, it is not exhaustive in its applicability.

**The ‘New Economics of Migration’**

The ‘new economics of migration’ and its derivative, network theory, help to explain many aspects of contemporary footballer migrations. Probably its most effective contributions to understanding how soccer players move, though, are ‘migrant networks’ and the ‘migrant industry.’

‘Migrant networks,’ or ‘chain migrations’ as they have historically been known, have influenced the movement of soccer players for generations. For example, Neil Franklin’s decision to migrate to Colombia in 1950 caused several of his contemporaries to follow him there as well (Mason 1994, 42). Likewise, Franklin Foer explains how Edward Anyamkyegh, a Nigerian footballer, came to be playing in the Ukrainian football league in 2001:

> Around the time of Edward’s arrival, Nigerians had become a Ukrainian fad. Within a few months, nine Nigerians were signed to play in Ukraine’s premier league. They were the most prestigious purchases a club could make. A roster devoid of Nigerians wasn’t considered a serious roster; an owner who didn’t buy Nigerians wasn’t an ambitious owner (Foer 2004, 142).

After the arrival of the first Nigerian in the Ukraine, many others were open to relocating there because an expatriate community would help lower the costs of adapting to a new society. Even the migrations of Argentines to Italy and Spain during the 1920s and 1930s can be partially explained due to the existence of migrant networks. Raffaele Poli clarifies the historical role that networks have played:

> The transfer networks, even if they are becoming transnationalized… still continue to give priority to the linking of areas where relations are historically the strongest. Cultural, linguistic and geographical proximities
continue to have a major importance. The international recruitment of football players carried out by European clubs follows spatial logics that tend to last over time (R. Poli 2006, 410).

The creation of a ‘migrant industry’ is also one of the consequences of the ‘new economics of migration.’ In football, this ‘migrant industry’ has been represented by the influence that player agents have had on the game. Lanfranchi and Taylor expand on this relationship:

Agents have been particularly important figures in the movement of football labor. They have taken many guises over the years: representatives of clubs eager to attract foreign talent; journalists or former players who act as middlemen in negotiations; and increasingly in recent years, independent agents from outside the football world who represent a string of clients and are often transnational in their dealings. As well as being crucial in the historical development of the international transfer market, agents are widely regarded as a key factor in the acceleration of football migration in the 1990s (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 5).

To phrase their actions in the language of another migratory theory, agents have worked to lower the ‘constraining factors’ that might impede international movements of footballers and have magnified the benefits that ‘pull’ footballers from their countries of origin.

Though the ‘new economics of migration’ helps in developing an understanding of how networks have facilitated player movements through time, it too has some drawbacks. For example, how can networks help explain why the most elite footballers tend to transfer between an equally elite set of clubs, each of which can offer the same material benefits as the other? And while the ‘new economics of migration’ excels at explaining why a footballer might want to go abroad, how can it account for the actions of the clubs themselves, which often purchase players just to sell them to another team? Once again, this theory of international migration doesn’t quite explain all of the reasons that soccer players find themselves migrating around the globe.
World-Systems Theory

*World-systems theory* applies to a wide range of economic activities, and that certainly includes international migration. Lanfranchi and Taylor place the movement of footballers within a broader context of *world-systems* movements:

The migration of footballers has been fundamentally bound up with general migratory patterns. From the mid-nineteenth century large population movements significantly altered the composition of world societies. Different regions and countries have been involved in different ways, some as senders and some as recipients… The colonization of Africa, Eastern Asia and South America by European powers provoked dense movements of population from the metropolis to the colony and, later, a reverse migration from colonial periphery to imperial center. The main routes of professional footballers have barely differed from those of mass migration, although the directional flow has not always been the same (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 3).

For reasons that have been discussed at various points in this paper, such as the region’s ability to offer astronomical salaries and its prestige factor, the major leagues of western Europe (England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain) acts as the ‘core’ part of the *world-systems* model, while the South American and African continents constitute the ‘periphery.’

Data collected for the 2009/2010 season from five major leagues in both South America and Europe illustrate this point. As Table 6-1 (below) indicates, there seems to be a strong correlation between the amount of intercontinental players present in a league and that league’s status as part of a ‘core’ or ‘periphery’ nation. Germany has the least amount of intercontinental footballers in its league, with 91. In South America, however, Venezuela has the largest intercontinental population – and there are only three such players in the league. While the *Bosman Ruling* does explain the sheer difference in the
amount of international players present in the European leagues, it does not explain the volume of intercontinental players that are present.

Table 6-1: International vs. Intercontinental Players in Selected South American and European Leagues, 2009/2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Teams in Premier Division</th>
<th>Number of International Players</th>
<th>Number of Intercontinental Players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Argentinean Fútbol Database, bdfa.com.ar)

However, because world-systems theory is based on the idea that its effects are the inevitable consequences of the extension of the global capitalist economy into peripheral regions, yet again it is a model that imperfectly describes the migrations of footballers.

Lanfranchi and Taylor articulate this shortcoming as it pertains to soccer:

A discussion about center-periphery models in football cannot afford to rest solely on economic factors at the expense of cultural differences and the variables of language, religion or colonial (and post-colonial) relations. The case of African football migrants showed that language and culture were at least as important as economic considerations. Although African players were recognized as the most cost-effective acquisitions for European club sides in the 1960s, they were exclusive to three countries - Belgium, France and Portugal - all of which had a colonial past and, unlike Britain, a tradition of assimilation (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 233).

Even when the colonial connections are taken into account, there are football-related migrations that do not fit into the model. Examining the movements through the African lens again, Paul Darby highlights an example:
At the African Cup of Nations in 2002, the sixteen qualifying teams included players from no less than twenty-six non-African leagues. This highlights the fact that the range of countries over which African players are distributed includes many that did not have colonial links with the continent. Thus, colonial and neocolonial linkages offer only a partial explanation of a complex process which has not only accelerated exponentially since the early 1990s but has also taken on features not previously seen in the history of Africa's football exodus (Darby 2007, 447).

Hence, world-systems theory helps support many of the other international migration theories that have been discussed, but it too is missing a certain factor in that it does not explain why migrations would occur to somewhere else besides the ‘core.’ Combined with parts of the ‘new economics of migration,’ though, world-systems does point us in the direction of the missing ingredient in providing a comprehensive analysis as to why and how footballers move around the world.

The Footballer as Part of a Global Value Chain

To truly understand how professional soccer players migrate, it is essential to recognize that they are not just members of an international labor market but are also, simultaneously, inputs on a global value chain (GVC). As the international transfer market evolved, teams began to identify players not just as sources of skill on the field, but as investments that could later be sold at a profit. Indeed, Chapter 2 noted that some South American teams, under financial duress, even adopted the selling of players as a business strategy to remain fiscally afloat. In recent years, that strategy has been adopted at a world-wide scale – propelling footballers around the world at an unprecedented rate,
and making soccer players “staple export products” for countries in South America and Africa (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 1).

The GVC aspect of football migrations has been heavily influenced by both world-systems theory and the ‘new economics of migration.’ The analysis of a global value chain stems from the following process:

All commodities undergo a sequence of transformation from raw materials to finished products to packaged and marketed goods: their geographic linkages and connections create a spatially bounded structure for the world-economy. Differential profit and surplus are generated at various nodes along these commodity chains. These patterns are not entirely uniform, and the highest profits and the most surplus extraction are not always located at the beginning, middle, or end of the commodity chain, but vary according to particular circumstances and commodities (Appelbaum, Smith and Christerson 1994).

The process begins in peripheral nations and treats players as “cash crops” that are “harvested by the ‘core soccer economies’” (Maguire and Stead 1998, 70). However, in between the ‘peripheral’ league and the ‘core’ leagues there are multiple steps at which value is added – in the case of footballers, they gain experience and hone their skills. What makes Appelbaum, Smith, and Christerson’s definition of the GVC so applicable to the migrations of professional footballers is that they are considered “marketed goods” by the time they reach the ‘core’ – and as we have learned so far, one of the major catalysts for signing an international football star is the revenue that the player can generate through merchandising and brand extension. On the other side of the GVC, the language of several authors captures how footballers from peripheral regions are viewed as inputs or “raw materials.” Concerning African soccer players, Paul Darby writes

The geography of African football labor migration to Europe in the colonial period clearly reveals that African colonies were recognized by Europeans as being rich in natural resources, raw materials, and cheap

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labor not just in the economic sense but also in relation to football (Darby 2007, 445).

Though Darby writes from a more historical perspective, these views have continued and have been legitimized through the use of ‘football academies,’ which were discussed in Chapter 3. Darby’s point is echoed by Richard Giulianiotti, who examines the case of South American footballers:

South America’s elite athletes are treated like its natural resources – such as coffee or bananas – by powerful Western sports corporations and their rich markets. The best South American athletes are a ‘raw material’ that is mined, refined and exported to the wealthiest markets overseas; the inferior residue, rejected by exporters, is left for domestic consumption (Giulianotti 2007, 45).

In addition to addressing the extraction of “raw materials,” Giulianiotti also alludes to the ‘de-skilling’ of domestic leagues due to the overseas travel of the best South American talent. As we saw in Chapter 2, such departures actually encourage even greater amounts of intra-continental migration as players from other South American countries are used as ‘fill-ins’ in the bigger leagues – although such migrations may even serve to extend the GVC even further: “in turn, teams from smaller Latin American countries are providing many of the players who turn out for Boca Juniors, River Plate and Palmeiras [two Argentinean clubs and one Brazilian, respectively], often before they in turn are sold on to Europe” (Gilbert 2007, 71).

The ‘new economics of migration’ helps to explain the worldwide adoption of the GVC strategy because the tactic has been made possible by the extension of agents/recruiting networks and the transformation of second-tier clubs into migration institutions within the migration industry. Akindes and his associates outline the impact of agents and recruiting networks on the development of African footballers:
European football concerns, be they clubs, scouts, or agents, have drawn on colonial and neocolonial links to source raw materials, in this case, players, which are refined in Africa through the academies or farm clubs for export and consumption on the European football market. In addition, this African 'produce' is also often sold on at a hugely inflated value primarily for the benefit of European interests, thus further exacerbating the extent of the exploitation suffered by African football (Akindes, Darby and Kirwin 2007, 157).

The authors’ sentiments and insights are mirrored by those made by Lanfranchi and Taylor concerning the South American market:

With the proliferation of players’ agents and agent networks, the movement of young players has increased. South American nations have suffered major economic crises in the last fifteen years, leading to diminishing gate receipts. Transfers, now conducted in US dollars, generally represent the major source of income for club sides… Since the devaluation of the Argentinean Austral in 1989, almost every player good enough to be exported has left the country. From this moment on, even the national teams of Argentina and Brazil have been mainly composed of players registered abroad (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 107).

Besides noting the involvement of agents in exacerbating the emigration trend, the authors also point out that the domestic clubs are purposefully signing footballers with potential in order to sell them on the transfer market to more financially-sound teams.

The importance of the economic climate in which the clubs operate needs to remain in the forefront when analyzing the movements of players through the GVC lens – for example, the devaluation of the Argentinean Austral made the foreign currency garnered from player transfers even more valuable to the selling club because of the financial stability that accrued from such reserves.

However, it is not only clubs on the periphery that have resorted to a business plan that depends on the sale (and thus migration) of players. The second-tier leagues of Europe – consisting of leagues in the eastern European former Soviet bloc, the smaller
western European countries, and even the lower divisions of the five major leagues – have become stepping stones in between the ‘periphery’ and the ‘core,’ and the clubs involved in facilitating these transactions have adopted policies that allow them to profit from this process. For example, in the early 1990s, as eastern European countries began to liberalize and their footballers began to enter western European leagues, the Yugoslavian clubs in particular realized the market potential of their cheap yet experienced labor supply: “faced with a large demand from the professional leagues in Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and Austria, the major Yugoslavian clubs began to develop systematic policies for the formation and exportation of players. Footballers had become good currency for the economy” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 119-120). As economic conditions worsened, though, such policies were adopted to an even greater degree: “to remain viable, the only solution was to acquire foreign currencies by selling as many players as possible abroad” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 131). Again, the exogenous economic climate and the ‘safety’ that foreign currency brought with it were key drivers in the adoption of a GVC strategy. Countries in western Europe would use this strategy as well:

Diversifying their recruitment, [Belgian] clubs began to contract professionals from hitherto untapped nations such as Sierra Leone and Zambia. The reasons for this were purely economic. As with the Danes in the late 1970s and the Eastern Europeans in the late 1990s, Belgian clubs have considered young foreign players as an investment, to be bought cheaply (with the help of agents whose activities were recognized much earlier here than in the rest of the continent) and sold abroad for a significant profit (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 183).

Unlike its poorer counterparts that use the GVC strategy, Belgium has no major need to collect foreign currencies to stabilize the economic functioning of its clubs. Instead, these
clubs viewed footballers (in this case, Africans from Sierra Leone and Zambia) as inputs that needed refining before being sold on at a higher profit.

The experience of one African footballer can explain how profitable being the ‘middle man’ of the process can be. Raffaele Poli writes,

The highest sum paid to date for a transfer of an African player is about 38 million Euro. It was paid out in 2005 by Chelsea to Olympique Lyonnais for the 'purchase' of Ghanaian midfielder Michael Essien. For comparison, this same player, when he arrived in Europe in 2000, was transferred from Liberty Accra to SC Bastia for free. In 2003, Bastia had sold the player to Olympique Lyonnais for 8 million Euro (R. Poli 2006, 405).

With the potential profits that could be reaped from training a potentially elite footballer for a few years, it is easy to see why so many clubs have voluntarily situated themselves in the middle of the global value chain of footballers. Though the commodification of people is usually considered inhumane, its practicality in terms of examining the migrations of footballers is hard to overlook. Poli justifies the description in a succinct manner: “with the passing of time, the football player has progressively become an ‘export’ product… so much so that it no longer seems abusive to compare him, from an economic point of view, to a commodity from which value added chains are developed” (R. Poli 2006, 405).

By analyzing footballers as commodities on a global value chain, we can explain why migrations occur to regions outside of the ‘core’ where no cultural or historical connections bind the migrant with his new home. Given these new insights, we can now put forth a comprehensive framework that describes how and why footballers move around the world – what I identify as a soccer-systems framework.
The Soccer-Systems Framework

The soccer-systems framework takes into account multiple factors that guide the movements of professional footballers as they travel from country to country. It characterizes the movement of footballers from the ‘periphery’ (South America and Africa) to the ‘semi-periphery’ (the second-tier leagues of Europe) to the ‘core’ (the five major European leagues in England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain). It involves the evaluation of five separate factors that determine how migratory patterns will develop and where these patterns lead, rather than attributing the characteristics of such movements to one single migratory theory. As Joseph Maguire writes,

The sports labor process is bound up in a complex political economy that is itself embedded in a series of cross-cultural struggles that characterize the global sport system. This process is marked by a series of political, cultural, economic and geographical issues and pressures that structure the migrants' lives. These issues and pressures vary between sports played in different continents; they interweave in a fashion where no one 'factor' dominates (Maguire 1999, 104).

The five factors crucial to understanding the migrations of footballers are History, Culture, Push-Pull, Global Networks, and World-Systems.

History

The soccer-systems framework contends that historical factors are the first inputs that need to be considered when analyzing the movements of professional footballers. Part of this reason is the influence that migration has had on the game of soccer since its inception – footballers have crossed national boundaries to play the game since it began nearly 150 years ago. As this paper has indicated multiple times, the migrations of footballers tend to follow more general migrations that have historical ties: for example,
Table 6-2: The Soccer-Systems Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>What Impacts Footballers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>• Migratory History of Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Colonial Links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>• Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expatriate Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prestige Factor of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• National Styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push-Pull</td>
<td>• Wage Differentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prestige Factor of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of Professional Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Political Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Networks</td>
<td>• Agents as Facilitators of Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Diffusion of Global Recruiting Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Football Academies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-Systems</td>
<td>• Footballers as Commodities on a Global Value Chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• European Mega-Leagues as ‘Core’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Roles of ‘Semi-Periphery’ and ‘Periphery’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the early migrations of Argentineans to Italy. Colonial legacies are also paramount in this regard: for instance, many Brazilian footballers have played for clubs in Portugal, and as we learned in Chapter 3, colonial ties explain why African footballers played in France, Belgium and Portugal rather than in other leagues during the mid-twentieth century.

History also takes into account the political context in which migrations occur. Controls on foreign workers prohibited many footballers from playing in England for the majority of the twentieth century. Recently, the *Bosman Ruling* has revolutionized how
European footballers move around the continent, resulting in a spike in migratory movements. Concurrently with the *Bosman Ruling*, political conditions in many eastern European countries compelled many footballers to find work abroad. The modern day movements of footballers cannot be divorced from the more traditional ones, so analyzing migrations with these historical concepts in mind is essential.

**Culture**

Cultural factors affect footballer migrations in two ways: through the national cultures of the migrants themselves, and through soccer-specific culture.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this paper illustrated the strength of cultural links when analyzing the international movements of soccer players. Cultural factors are therefore closely tied with historical factors, and especially with colonial heritages. Linguistic similarities between two countries often factor in to footballers’ migratory decisions, as does the existence of an expatriate community that can lower the social costs of moving abroad. Cultural differences can often dissuade footballers from remaining in new countries, and some nationalities seem more capable of assimilating in new situations than others:

The reactions of sport labor migrants to the ‘host’ culture also require consideration. The constant moving back and forth between different cultures requires that particular types of migrants develop new types of flexible personal controls, dispositions and means of orientation… In the world of European soccer, Swedes, Norwegians, Dutch and Germans appear more adept than English players at deploying flexible personal controls and often communicate with ease in several different languages (Maguire 1999, 101-102).

Soccer-specific culture affects how footballers migrate as well. The prestige factor associated with playing in one of the ‘core’ soccer leagues motivates footballers of all skill levels to attempt to reach that stage. Although many professional soccer players
never reach the rosters of one of these clubs, they have nonetheless often migrated during their attempt to achieve such a signing. Another soccer-specific cultural motivation for migration is what is known as ‘national style.’ Through the tutelage of different philosophies on how to best play the game, many countries have been stereotyped as having particular traits on the field. Franklin Foer explains how these ‘national styles’ can implement migration:

When coaches created cultural alchemies out of their rosters, they often yielded wonderful new spectacles: the cynical, defensive-minded Italian style livened by an infusion of freewheeling Dutchmen and Brazilians; the English stiff-upper-lip style (or lack of style) tempered by a bit of continental flair, brought across the Channel in the form of French strikers (Foer 2004, 3).

Cultural distinctions and tendencies, therefore, must be included in the framework as well to properly understand why players might prefer one league to another.

**Push-Pull**

As this chapter illustrated earlier, the *Push-Pull Model* provides several reasons as to why footballers would choose to migrate, and in some cases, even explain where they would choose to go. High wages or the presence of an extreme wage differential each act as ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors, respectively. The strength of the model, though, lies in its ability to evaluate non-economic factors and include their effects in the migrant’s cost-benefit analysis during his decision-making process. Political instability, the lack of professional infrastructure, or the lack of high levels of competition are all equally as likely to ‘push’ a footballer out of his home country as are more commonly analyzed income distributions. The strength of the *soccer-systems framework* is that it adopts the *Push-Pull Model*’s theory and augments it with other factors that help explain movements that the *Push-Pull Model* struggles with.
Global Networks

As this chapter’s discussion of the ‘new economics of migration’ indicated, the presence of international recruiting networks and the existence of professional agents have combined to vastly increase both the scale and scope of international footballer migrations. Not only are more players from more countries travelling the world as footballers, but they each often migrate through multiple countries during the course of their careers. Also, the migratory institutions that have developed due to the extension of global recruiting networks have fundamentally changed the demographics of the migrant footballer: through ‘football academies’ based in both the ‘periphery’ and in the ‘core’ (in the form of youth development programs that are run by clubs in the mega-leagues), the football migrant is becoming younger and is migrating for much longer periods in his life. For these soccer players, the question of national identity needs to be raised: if a player from, say, Argentina is recruited by a Spanish team and emigrates when he is fourteen years old, by the time of his twenty-eighth birthday (assuming he is still playing professionally in Europe), is he more European or is he more Argentinean? Regardless of the answer, global networks must be taken into account when analyzing the movements of footballers in the global age.

World-Systems

As the name suggests, the soccer-systems framework bases itself on the principles of the world-systems theory. The theory is particularly useful when studying how footballers migrate because, just like the migrations it studies, the theory itself is multi-faceted. World-systems theory can not only explain why migrations tend to occur from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘semi-periphery’ to the ‘core,’ but also why commodities on a
global value chain do as well. As the game becomes more commercialized, the pressures of the business world will continue to fuel the need for ‘marketable goods’ (i.e. star players) while diversifying the club’s market opportunities (i.e. international players). As global recruiting networks identify talent at younger and younger ages from all parts of the world, the pool from which the elite teams in the elite leagues can draw talent from will continue to increase. As this pool increases and the elite clubs continue to set themselves apart from the rest of the European leagues, more clubs will situate themselves in the middle of the global value chain of players, eager to find and refine the next ‘product’ that will earn the club a large profit. As long as the European mega-league – or the ‘core’ world soccer economies – continue to be able to offer such strong ‘pull’ factors, including both salaries and the prestige factor, they will be able to maintain their position at the expense of the ‘periphery’ and ‘semi-periphery.’

The soccer-systems framework attempts to explain “the striking continuity in the destinations of footballers in the last hundred years as well as football’s continued Eurocentrism, which still pulls much of the best talent in the world to the richest European leagues” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 234). Likewise, it has attempted to differentiate between European countries as well: “In all the talk about Europe’s position at the center of football’s global economy, it should not be forgotten that players tend to move to particular countries – for economic, legal, historical and cultural reasons – rather than to ‘Europe’ as a single, unstructured entity” (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001, 110). In doing so, it addresses the weaknesses of individual theories on international migration by analyzing the migrations as complex processes that are guided by historical,
cultural, economic, political, and even theoretical factors. Because no migration is undertaken as the result of only one of these factors, it is impossible to fully understand how and why footballers move around the world without taking them all into consideration. The *soccer-systems framework* allows such an evaluation to occur.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This paper began with the description of a game between two elite professional soccer teams, and from there it has attempted to elucidate and clarify the complex processes that brought those twenty-two players to a field in Rome in May 2009.

It began by reviewing the worldwide diffusion of the sport, from its humble beginnings as a village game in 1860s England to a worldwide phenomenon that captivates fans in all corners of the globe. As a British export during the height of the country’s economic prowess nearing the end of the nineteenth century, the game became a symbol of modernity that was quickly adopted in each culture that encountered it. From England it spread to Europe, and from there it travelled along the well-tread paths of international trade until it was adopted in cultures on every continent, although it grew to be especially significant in South America and Africa. Due to its global nature, eventually the business world noticed the sport’s potential in opening up new markets to the products of major transnational corporations. Now that the sport could be leveraged into profits for multiple sectors, the importance of individual star players increased exponentially – elite footballers were now the driving force behind a club’s success both on and off the pitch. Likewise, the salaries earned by such elite players grew to astronomical levels as well in the sport’s major European leagues, located in England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.
Chapter 2 assessed the history of migratory patterns involving South American footballers. It traced the movements of South American soccer players across the Atlantic dating back to the 1930s, establishing clear historical and cultural links between the sending countries and the southern European countries in which they found employment. Modern migrations were covered as well, with a particular emphasis on the emigration of the continent’s elite players to Europe. This emigration in turn encouraged an increase in intra-continental migration as the biggest leagues looked to replace the players that its clubs had sent overseas.

Chapter 3 began by tracking the history of migrations of African footballers, emphasizing the roles that both colonial heritage and the culture of the receiving nation played in such movements. A watershed moment in the migration of African professional soccer players occurred in 1981 when FIFA changed its rules to ensure that foreign nationals would be available to play for their domestic national team regardless of their professional club’s schedule. After this point, African national associations embraced the export of its best footballers – hoping that the higher levels of competition that each player faces in Europe would improve the results of the national team when they regrouped to play. The increased profile that African footballers have recently enjoyed has led to new recruitment policies throughout the continent, as professional European clubs try to identify talent as early as possible through the use of ‘football academies.’ With more and more talent leaving the continent, though, fears of a ‘muscle drain’ are certainly not without merit.

Chapter 4 reviewed the history of footballer migrations within Europe. Despite the brief excursion abroad by a few high-profile names in 1950, the vast majority of
European footballers have plied their craft without crossing an ocean or a sea. In the post-World War II period, the continent witnessed an explosion in the amount of migration between states, and footballers were no different. However, the trend accelerated to truly unprecedented heights with the 1995 *Bosman Ruling* by the European Court of Justice that effectively ended the transfer system and removed quotas on the use of EU Member State citizens, allowing the major European leagues to become the most cosmopolitan in the world.

Chapter 5 served as a departure from the rest of the paper as it did not discuss footballers but instead focused on reviewing a series of theories on international migration. The *neoclassical equilibrium perspective* argues that migration occurs due to arbitrage between two markets, one with a low supply of labor and high wages, and the other with a high supply of labor, but low wages. According to the theory, migration will occur until the flow of labor from the low-wage market to the high-wage market causes the wages to reach equilibrium between the two. The *Push-Pull Model* builds on the wage differential argument but also factors in other actors that serve to ‘push’ the migrant out of his home country or ‘pull’ him from it. The migrant chooses to move if the ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors outweigh the benefits of staying. The ‘*new economics of migration*’ takes groups of people as its unit of analysis, and evaluates the decision to migrate as one that diversifies risk over different markets. Its offshoot, *network theory*, suggests that social networks that include migrants and non-migrants lower the costs and increase the benefits of migration. Finally, *world-systems theory* alleges that the ‘core’ countries, historically the industrialized, capitalist ones, exploit the resources of the ‘periphery’ countries,
which are generally the poverty-stricken, developing countries. Labor and raw materials are among the resources that the ‘core’ exploits.

Chapter 6 applied each of the international migration theories to the migrations of professional footballers, but found each one lacking in terms of its ability to comprehensively explain the movements of soccer players. By adding the analytical perspective that equated footballers with inputs on a global value chain, the stage was set to introduce an inclusive and complete soccer-systems framework that declared that five factors needed to be taken into account when analyzing the migrations of professional footballers: History, Culture, Push-Pull, Global Networks, and World-Systems.

While the soccer-systems framework is intended to be comprehensive and applicable to the migrations of all footballers, it may have some weaknesses. This paper neglected to study the migrations of footballers from North America, Asia, and Oceania in favor of devoting greater energy into analyzing the effects of African and South American migrations. These neglected areas could be construed as ‘external areas’ in the world-systems framework, but they may be ‘peripheral’ regions as well. Also, the predictive capabilities of the soccer-systems framework remain untested – although the rise to prominence of, for example, American footballers on the European stage would surely fit into the framework. Likewise, soccer players from China or India – countries that have largely remained isolated from the footballing world but have long historical connections with Britain – could eventually emerge as forces in the English Premiership if soccer rises in popularity in those nations. Finally, this paper has not discussed the exponentially increasing role that women are playing in the international footballing
community, and so it has probably failed at accounting for some of the forces that guide the international migrations of female footballers.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the attention that the sport draws in anticipation of the World Cup makes this period in time particularly ripe for academic study. This paper has shown that the sport truly is a global phenomenon that simultaneously impacts and is impacted by political, economic, social, historical, geographical, and cultural factors. In terms of international migration, further research could focus on the ‘external areas’ of North America, Asia, and Oceania that were neglected in this paper. Furthermore, an analysis of the trends of reverse migration – of ‘core’ countries sending skilled technicians and coaches to the ‘periphery’ – could be an extremely interesting avenue of study. Due to the complex relationships that have developed between the sport and almost every country around the world, a variety of research projects could be undertaken that would help explain the globalized world in which we now all live. Finally, the applicability of the framework to other ‘global’ professional sports like baseball, basketball, and hockey could yield interesting insights into the migrations of those players, as well.

Though ambitious in its aims, the soccer-systems framework proves to be remarkably effective in identifying the underlying causes of the international migrations undertaken by professional footballers. By examining migratory patterns through multiple lenses, the framework is able to apply the strengths of individual migratory theories while addressing each one’s weaknesses. In doing so, a comprehensive
understanding of a truly complex set of processes is developed, helping to clarify what drives footballers around the world, and especially why the sport’s elite talent finds its way to the major European leagues in England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.
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