

LUCIANO WERNICKE

UNFORGETTABLE

SOCCER



TALES OF THE BIZARRE, INCREDIBLE,
AND SPECTACULAR

Unforgettable Soccer

“My idea of paradise is a straight line to the goal.”

–Friedrich Nietzsche

“All that I know most surely about morality and obligations I owe to football.” –Albert Camus

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 PREFACE 

On October 26, 2013, soccer, the most popular and exciting sport in the world, celebrated 150 years. It was on that day in 1863 when a group of visionaries met in a London pub called *Freemason's* to create *The Football Association* and write the first “official” regulation for a new game, thereby setting it on its prestigious path. Since then, the ball has rolled along a vast and profuse road—and through stadiums—all over the world, and in millions of professional and amateur matches.

In popular memory, the great champions, the stars, and the gigantic feats are remembered. But these moments are not the focus of *Most Incredible Soccer Matches*. To write this book, I've dug into the sands of time in search of the most unusual matches, not the most transcendental ones. This book does not intend to recreate facts that have an important place in the history of soccer, but rather to recollect spectacular events that also deserve a place—though modest perhaps—for their unforgettable and unique characteristics. Many great clubs and players will be mentioned, as well as anonymous soccer players or unknown teams, because unexpected, curious, funny, and memorable episodes happened to them.

I'll give you a few examples: a soccer player who scored all four goals of a game that ended 2-2. One referee who stopped the game to find the false teeth he had lost, another who sent

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off a coach when he learned that he was a “friend” of his wife, and a third who was about to be run over by the car of a player furious by the punishment he received. A goal scored by a dog and another by a seagull. A team thrashed after using a one-armed goalkeeper and another because their players had arrived having imbibed several more drinks than they should have during a player’s marriage ceremony. A midfielder who ate the referee’s red card and a defender who was suspended for a match even though, at the time of the ruling, he had been dead for more than a week. A match that had to be canceled due to the appearance of an iceberg and one striker who was sent off twice...in the same game!

These are just some of the extraordinary stories found in *Most Incredible Soccer Matches*. One note: In this book you will find very few references to the World Cups, the Champions League, or the Olympic Games, since these competitions have their privileged space in my other books. Some circumstances that occurred in those contests were cited to serve as a context for other curiosities; however, it’s not the renown of the tournaments that make up the soul of this book, but the magical rebounds of the ball, regardless of field, rivalry, or country. I invite you to continue reading and enter an amazing but real world. Welcome to the most incredible soccer matches!

–*Luciano Wernicke*



THE WEDDING



The return leg against AFC Comprest GIM meant a double commitment for the players of CS Viitorul Chirnogi. On the one hand, they had a sporting commitment to face the second division of Romania in the second match of the promotion league after a shameful 0-10 in their first match. On the other hand, they had the human commitment: One of the starting players was getting married the night before the defining match. Another player proposed to assume both responsibilities, so they all approved, even knowing that a wedding was not the best place to concentrate before the match. On the morning of June 20, 1993, all of Viitorul Chirnogi's players showed up for the match drunk after so many toasts to the health of the new couple. Their performance, funnily, provoked a "double" result, much like their blurred vision: 21 to 0 for the fresh and sober athletes of Comprest. And it was only 21 because the referee ended the match in the 70th minute when only six of the drunken players were still standing.



GOLDEN GOAL



When a match is defined in an “all-or-nothing duel,” it tends to run longer than it should. And while the teams change sides, there is no time for anything. In April of 2000, Surnadal Idrettslag (of the Third Division) and Sunndal Fotball (of Second Division) did not put a dent on the scoreboard at the Syltøran stadium where they faced each other in a match for the Norwegian Football Cup. After 90 minutes and the first 15 minutes of extra time, the score remained 0-0. In this nerve-wracking atmosphere, the goalkeeper for the host team, Olav Fiske, unable to run all the way to the locker room, proceeded to relieve some of that “tension” behind his goal. But the ref did not notice this and blew the whistle to have the play resume, with Sunndal playing the ball from the middle of the pitch. The seasoned midfielder Oddvar Torve noticed that Fiske was still behind the goal and took advantage of it: He kicked the ball directly from the center circle, and it went meekly into the goal. “This situation caused me great shame,” said the humble goalkeeper to the press after the match. Sunndal advanced to the next round, and the Surnadal officials demanded the match be cancelled and then rescheduled, not because of the goalkeeper’s mistake, but because they believed that the referee authorized the restart without realizing that Fiske was not prepared. Their complaint was dismissed by the Scandinavian Federation, which took as legitimate a goal that was truly “golden.”

THE BAG'S GOAL

On May 27, 1934, during the derby between CA Peñarol and Nacional Football Club played in the Centenario stadium of Montevideo, one of the most unprecedented cases in Uruguayan soccer took place. Amid an attack by the Peñarol team, Brazilian striker Bahia took a violent shot to the goal of the tricolored Nacional team, which ended up going out by end line. But the ball bounced against the bag of one of the physical trainers, who was watching the play from behind the end line, and returned to the field. Another Peñarol striker, Braulio Castro, took advantage of Nacional's relaxed defense and sent the ball into the back of the net. The referee Telésforo Rodríguez, who hadn't noticed the strange situation, validated the goal. Angered by ref's decision, the eleven National players rushed him and gave him a ferocious beating. Because of this, the derby had to be suspended.

THE PENALTY SPOT

The talented Scottish leftie Archie Gemmill was having a lovely afternoon in the Baseball Ground, the former stadium of Derby County FC. That rainy afternoon of April 30, 1977, the club from the heart of England was beating Manchester City FC 3-0, and none of the visiting players could stop the skilled Gemmill. At least legally because, with four minutes left, midfielder Gary Owen fouled him inside the penalty area right after a corner kick, resulting in a penalty kick. Gerry Daly, midfielder for the host team, took the ball and looked for the spot to place it, but the penalty mark had disappeared in the mud. The witty Manchester City goalie Joe Corrigan tried to convince the ref to place the ball almost on the edge of the penalty area, to which he received a yellow card for his efforts. As the search proved unsuccessful, the referee called the stadium steward, Bob Smith, who came armed with a tape measure, a paintbrush, and a bucket of white paint. After stretching the tape 12 yards, Smith took the brush and drew a circle on the wet ground. Daly put the ball on the wet paint, took a running approach, and kicked a right cross shot Corrigan was unable to stop. A goal “tailored” to close the victory 4-0.

 THE URN 

The strong security guard at the Benito Villamarín stadium in Seville stood firm: “He cannot enter with that.” “But,” replied the young green-and-white fan, “I have his annual pass here!” The guard took a few seconds to recover from his surprise, but stood firm: “Even if he has a pass, it’s dangerous, it’s forbidden to enter with a blunt object, if you or anyone throws it to the field or to another section of the grandstand, it can cause serious damage.” “How am I going to throw a funeral urn into the field?” the boy asked himself, disappointed and anguished by the refusal. But, immediately, a brilliant idea occurred to him. He went to a nearby supermarket, bought a carton of milk, emptied it in the lane of the sidewalk and, with borrowed scissors, improvised a container for his father, or rather, the ashes of his father, that would be allowed. On his deathbed, the man had asked his son to continue attending matches so he could “see” his beloved Real Betis Balompié after dying from a serious illness. Thus, in a container of harmless cardboard and with his ticket for the 1995/96 season, the deceased entered the Andalusian stadium with his obedient son to enjoy the first home game of the season, a 3-1 victory over Real Zaragoza SAD.



THREE FOR THE PRICE OF ONE



Can three different players miss the same penalty? Of course! There seems to be no limit to the list of soccer curiosities. On September 22, 1973, Portsmouth FC received Notts County FC in Fratton Park for the English Second Division Championship. The visiting club had the opportunity to open the scoring by a penalty shot, but the scoreboard remained blank since the shot was missed by Kevin Randall, Don Masson, and Brian Stubbs. How was this possible? Randall's shot was saved by local goalkeeper John Milkins, but the referee ordered it to be retaken because the goalkeeper had stepped ahead of the line. Randall did not want to face the situation again and left his place to Masson, who scored, although the goal was invalidated because the referee had not given the order to kick. Upset, Masson gave his chance to Stubbs, who waited for the whistle, took a run, kicked...and missed the goal. The unsuccessful trio was immortalized by this show of lack of skill, but, at least that afternoon, they went home to Nottingham victorious, with a 1-2 score, thanks to the goals scored by two of their more talented companions, Arthur Mann and Les Bradd.



THREE RED CARDS IN FOUR DAYS



Can anyone match the record of the clumsy Albanian defender Agim Shabani? This defender for the Norwegian club Fredrikstad FK was sent off for repeated fouls on June 24, 2007, the day on which his club fell as visitors 2-1 against Strømsgodset IF for the Norwegian Premier League. The next day, Shabani—just 19 years old—was summoned to play a reserve game. The man could not help himself and again saw the red card for lashing out a few kicks to the opposing players. On the 27th, 48 hours later, the young defender returned to wear the white shirt of Fredrikstad FK against Nybergsund IL-Trysil for the Norwegian Cup. That day, the whole stadium was paying attention to the performance of the Albanian, and he did not disappoint: Shabani was red carded again, and his team fell 1-2. If this man does not appear in the *Guinness Book of World Records*, it is because nobody thought to report this fantastic “feat” of three red cards in four days.



THE TRICK



In 1978, the Cali Sports Association of Colombia achieved an unprecedented milestone for their country: reaching the final of the Copa Libertadores. Led by Argentine Carlos Bilardo, the squad—which had already surprised everyone by reaching the semifinal in 1977—forged an excellent campaign after prevailing in their group stage against their compatriots Club Deportivo Junior of Barranquilla and the Uruguayans Peñarol and Danubio Fútbol clubs.

In the round-robin semifinals, Deportivo Cali was undefeated after playing Alianza Lima of Peru and Cerro Porteño of Paraguay, two very good clubs. But, in the 180 minutes of the two-legged final, “the Greens” could not do much before the greater experience and remarkable efficiency of the Argentine team Boca Juniors. First was a goalless draw in Cali. This was followed by an unquestionable 4-0 in Buenos Aires which gave the “Xeneixe” (“Genoese,” as Boca fans and players are called), coached by Juan Carlos Lorenzo, their second consecutive continental title.

In his autobiography *Doctor and Champion*, Bilardo narrated a curious situation that occurred during the second leg in La Bombonera, home of the back-to-back champion: “From that second leg of the final of the Copa Libertadores I was left with something that shows that ‘Toto’ Lorenzo was a genius, an

incredible guy. When we played against Boca at La Bombonera, Diego Umaña, from our team, a specialist in corner kicks, did not make any of them reach the penalty box. When the first half was over, I asked him: 'Diego, what's wrong with you? Why aren't you sending the corner kicks to the penalty box?' 'Mister,' he answered, 'there's a dog that will not let me kick.' 'A police dog?' I inquired. 'Yes. Every time I went to the corner flag, I had him on top, he stuck to me. He wanted to eat my leg! So I couldn't kick well,' he said. A few days later, when I watched the video replay of that game very carefully, I noticed that Umaña had not lied: Every time we had a corner kick in our favor, the policeman who controlled the dog would let go a bit of rope. There was no place to take a run to the ball! Above all, the dog was very fierce, he barked and threatened to bite poor Umaña. Then, I understood why Diego, with good sense, would have chosen to throw bad corner kicks before leaving the field with one leg less. The 'Toto' was very crafty. A genius!"



A STRANGE CHOICE



Shortly before the start of the 1906 first division championship in Argentina, the legendary goalkeeper José Laforia went to Alumni Athletic Club, leaving his former squad, Barracas Athletic Club, without a substitute starter. (Both clubs are now defunct in the soccer universe.) Faced with this emergency situation, Barracas, who did not have another goalkeeper, was forced to try different field players at the goal, but since none of them excelled in that role, the search continued for a new candidate continued daily.

On August 26 of that year, the men from Barracas had to travel to the town of Campana in Buenos Aires—which is located about 32 miles (60 km) north of the City of Buenos Aires—to face the Reformer Athletic Club, a modest group made up of employees from a refrigerator factory. That cold morning, only eight players showed up at the Retiro train station to make the trip to the rival's field. On the way to Campana, the players decided on a revolutionary strategy to counteract the numerical disadvantage: They entrusted the difficult task of guarding the goal to Winston Coe, one of the founding partners of the team, who usually served as defender on the right. But their strategy did not serve them well against the Reformer squad, who won by a resounding victory of 11-0 against the disadvantaged team from Buenos Aires. However, the chronicles of the time—including the newspaper *La Nación*—praised the work of Coe, who was mainly responsible for Barracas not suffering an even more humiliating rout despite one important physical disadvantage...Coe did not have a left arm!

THE MATCH WITH NO OPPONENT

Hampden Park was overflowing. Newspapers from Glasgow assure us that on April 19, 1879, a day in which the final match of the Scottish Cup between Rangers FC (local institution that had already begun to have a popular fan base though they still had not obtained a title) and Vale of Leven Football & Athletic Club (squad from the city of Alexandria) was played, there was a “never before seen” crowd “inside and outside the stadium.”

The 9,000 seats were sold out, and the match had to be delayed for half an hour while the police fought hard to restore order to the spectators in the stands as well as the almost 3,000 fans that were left out on the street. The game began, and the Rangers were very efficient, with a fast goal scored by Willie Struthers. The striker was not finished, though, and, shortly after, scored again against the rival goalkeeper, Robert Parlane, with a powerful shot. But, as goals did not yet have nets at this time, the ball bounced off a spectator in the grandstand and, as quickly as it came out, returned to the field. The play surprised the referee, who did not see how the ball crossed the finish line. He ordered the play to continue, despite protests from the Rangers.

In the second half, Vale of Leven took advantage of a mistake by rival goalkeeper George Gillespie to equalize the score, which remained tied until the end. The Rangers’ players and fans were outraged. Their officials protested the result and offered the

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testimony of the person who had been struck by the uncounted Struthers' goal—a professor of surgery at the University of Glasgow, “a gentleman whose word no Vale fan could doubt.” Despite the claim, the Scottish Association maintained the result and ordered the final match to be played again a week later on the same stage. However, on April 26, only one team showed up on the lawn of Hampden Park: Vale of Leven. The Rangers missed the appointment in retaliation against the Scottish Association's decision

At the appointed time, and in the absence of the “blue” players, the referee gave the order and started a ridiculous match of Vale against...nobody! John McDougall, the captain, moved forward and played the ball with James Baird and Peter McGregor until he buried it in the empty goal. The ref—perhaps embarrassed by the unnecessary show—ended the charade, and Alexandria's team lifted the cup for the second time. In the insert added to the base of the trophy, where all the champions are listed, it was written: “Vale of Leven, Rangers did not appear.”



FELL FROM THE SKY



A soccer match is an excellent target for advertising campaigns, both commercial and political. The massive competition and the vast variety of spectators make the stadium an important focus for marketing. This was understood perfectly by an intrepid promoter, who, on March 21, 1948, after boarding a plane, flew over the Gemeentelijk Parkstadion where the local team, Koninklijke Boom FC, and Beerschot Antwerpen Club were playing for the first division tournament of Belgium. The pilot, who had loaded the device with advertising flyers, descended, took a package, and threw it through the window to one of the bleachers. The pages dispersed, forming a colorful cloud that caught the attention of the fans, who stretched to grab one of the color papers raining down on them. A major success!

Encouraged by the excellent reception of his strategy, the skilled pilot pointed the nose of his aircraft to the other side of the stadium to repeat the maneuver. But he made an error, and this time, the package did not open and instead fell directly on the head of the referee. In that same moment, Boom FC scored a goal! While the pilot fled, aware that he had made a big mistake, the players and the line judges attended to the referee, who recovered from the knock, luckily, without any major consequences. The referee validated the goal at the request of his collaborators, since he had not seen it, and the game continued as normal. The host club finally lost by 3 to 4, a defeat that seemed to fall straight from the sky.



THE DOG THAT SCORED A GOAL



It is hard to believe this story, although several prestigious English newspapers, such as *The Independent*, swear it is true. In November 1985, the Knave of Clubs FC and Newcastle Town FC faced each other in Monks Neil Park for the Staffordshire Sunday Cup. With the score an unfavorable 0-2, one of Knave of Clubs' defenders sent a ball down the opposite field in attempt to pass to one of his teammates in white. The ball did not reach any of the players, however, because, at that moment, a naughty dog had strolled on to the field. The *dog* ran the ball and, with a nice pirouette, headed it inside the net past a dumbfounded goalkeeper. Then the daring dog fled the field as fast as he could, accompanied by the laughter of the 22 players, the referees, and a handful of spectators.

The laughter did not last long for some of the players, though, because the referee, clearly ignorant of the rules, declared the goal valid. According to the regulations, "in the event that an additional ball, object or animal enters the field of play during the game, the referee shall interrupt the game only if said ball, object or animal interferes in the game." Of little use were the protests of the Newcastle Town's players, especially the goalie, who insisted on telling the ref that he had let the animal do as he wished because such action was not explicit in the law. "Exactly," the referee said, "in the Football Association's regulations, no

reference is made to any dog.” Faced with the foolish decision of the judge, the ill-treated players of Newcastle decided to return to the game. Despite the referee and the unusual goal, the victims of the dog’s antics finally achieved an irrefutable victory, winning 3 to 2.