

An Overview of the 2022 World Cup

Reflecting on the recent FIFA World Cup brings a mixed sense of awe and confusion to the biggest spectacle on the world stage. The relatively smooth way in which the event played out once Qatar lost that opening game was a surprise to many given the chaos surrounding the nation before the tournament, and with it possibly producing the greatest final in history, with the GOAT, Messi (sorry Piers Morgan), bringing us all back to our childhoods, the world cup showed the success of sports washing in modern geopolitics.

On the positives of this World Cup, if England didn't win, I imagine I speak for most football fans when I say we wanted Messi to finally complete his foretold destiny and lift the one trophy he was still left to win. I even had the Netherlands in a sweepstake and actively routed for Argentina, that was £5 I didn't mind losing. The drama couldn't have been written in a Hollywood studio, no one could reliably say who would win, from start to finish it was any nations to win. On the day of the final, I sat in a local pub back home with some school friends, our eyes fixated on the many screens. We screamed in delight when Argentina went ahead, with Messi's contribution following a tournament where he proved his legendary status. The final was not only between nations but could be viewed as a changing of the guards, with Mbappe rising to take the superstar crown from Messi, and my lord did he give it a good go, carrying France, almost singlehandedly to the penalty shootout. Watching the final brought me back to the MSN Barcelona days, when you'd play football on concrete at school with a ball that either had a lump due to the stitching coming loose, or no design left because of its excessive use. As much as Salt Bae tried to make it about himself, the trophy ceremony was a thing of beauty, almost bringing me to tears, and was the greatest sporting moment in recent years, in my humble, and clearly biased, opinion. Inspired by the head of FIFA, Gianni Infantino, I want to declare that I felt Argentinian.

Africa was proudly represented by Morocco, who outplayed the established elite of world football. They weren't there just to make up the numbers, making it further than any African nation had before, proving that the people's sport is exactly that, and everyone should have access to the beautiful game. With a questionable human rights record, it's fitting for the beloved underdog to come into the football conscious at this particular World Cup, another example of how sports washing can change how a nation is viewed. For such a young nation, with old men on the field, Croatia surely must be considered a powerhouse of football, almost making back-to-back finals and proving modern football still has a fight on its hands when up against gritty, hardnosed tactics.

The politics surrounding Qatar 2022; the corruption, human rights abuses, migrant worker deaths, LGBTQ+ criminality, mean these moments shouldn't have occurred. Part of me thinks that everything bad with the World Cup will be forgotten about, FIFA created perfection with random chance events, and by no means should be credited for this mess. The handling of criticism, to deflect, pointing to historic crimes of the west or making such jumps in logic the Olympics will be threatened. Infantino was placed in that position by the events of Qatar being awarded the World Cup to begin with, but should be ashamed of his behaviour, the 'Today, I feel' speech neglecting all crimes committed and the deaths of thousands of migrant workers who were practically enslaved by corporations under the

Kafala system of 'sponsorship', where passports are confiscated and it is impossible to leave the country or even change jobs without your employers permission.

Sports washing can work, we can't let it. FIFA needs to learn from the controversy they caused and overhaul their internal workings. The system for choosing hosts must be reformed, and transparency is key to building trust in those that control the game we love.

By James Lawrence