BolivianExpress
Gratis

Magazine

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EDITORIAL

'*Si no lo sientes, no lo entiendes*' -'If you can't feel it, you don't understand it'-, goes the saying used by local football fans to explain why some people simply aren't able to join in the passion for the world's most popular sport. What makes Bolivian football fans stand out from the rest? Quite simply, their ability to swallow every bitter defeat throughout our history to enjoy and celebrate those few victories (and even draws) we have as if we were world fucking champions.

When you try to think back at Bolivia's triumphs in football at either the national or club level, there are only a handful to remember. The 1963 Copa America Championship, the glorious qualification to the 1994 World Cup, and the most recent 6-1 defeat of Argentina stand out, without a doubt, as the golden moments of our National Team.

Yet in recent years Bolivian football has entered a dark age. Today, Bolivian football is as volatile as a three-headed dragon. It's customary for local fans to lament *'jugamos como nunca perdimos como siempre'* - 'we played like never before but we lost just as we always do'.

National football is simultaneously run by the Bolivian Football Federation, The Bolivian League and The Bolivian Football Association. Instead of working together, each body fails to organize competitive teams, and train talented youngsters into dedicated professionals, further deepening this national crisis.

The result of such disorganization? Bolivia ended up second to last in the 2014 World Cup qualifiers. All three entities may have sworn to ensure the and progress and well-being of Bolivian football, but instead, all they appear to do is fight for their own economic gain. While we still cherish and celebrate the glorious moments of yesteryear and believe that better and brighter days will come, our present situation shows no indication of changing any time soon.

Despite all this, fans and their passion remain strong. At the beginning of every World Cup qualifier or international tournament, fans get their **cábalas** ready and hopes begin to soar. We start chanting those songs we learned when we were kids. And even when we don't get anywhere near the world's centre-stage, we are still content to open a **Paceña**, sit back, and enjoy the World Cup from afar.

From national football icons to amateur leagues playing in dirt pitches, this issue takes you on a journey through the history, passion and nostalgia in Bolivian football. No matter how difficult and complicated a game may be, a true fan will cheer their team on til' the game's last minute. And trust us, Bolivians know all there is to know about 'difficult' and 'complicated'. Like true love, passion for football is unconditional. ×

N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary

By Michael Dunn Caceres

HUARIKASAYA KALATAKAYA

TEXT : VALERIA WILDE
TRANSLATED BY ALEX WALKER

PHOTO: JUAN MANUEL LOBATON - COLECTIVO SINMOTIVO

Sitting in the living room of the Bolivian Express house, I am surrounded by Bolivaristas. Worried that this issue will be disproportionately contaminated by white and light blue, I feel a certain responsibility to somehow bring to life the name, the colours and the feelings that have been with me for as long as I can remember. So now that the magazine is only one day away from going to print, in the dying moments of extra time, it is left to me to defend my Tigre as we Stronguistas do best: with courage, with emotion, with passion.

To be a Tigre isn't easy: it's not for everyone. It is a privilege reserved for the most dogged, most valiant, for those who aren't guided by reason but by sentiment: in a word, it is a privilege for the strongest. I, my friends, feel lucky to be striped: my blood is not blue, but yellow and black.

Thank you, daddy, for passing on the stripes to me. Thank you, Chupa Riveros, for that great warcry that still makes my hair stand on end. Thank you, Tri-Campeón, for being the only, the first. Thank you, yellow and black, for being the colours that brighten my view and warm my heart. Thank you, Curva Sur, for your unyielding support. Thank you, Pájaro Escóbar for being the most die-hard Paraguayan Stronguista ever to live. Thank you, Chumita for your loyalty and persistence. Thank you to football for your mere existence.

However, above all, I would like to say thank you to all the other Stronguistas for sharing so many victories, and more so for sharing the defeats, because it is here that we differentiate ourselves from others: when the heart refuses to go cold or stop beating, when we unite and feel more than the opponent because we cheer the best of warriors — warriors who know what it is to play with courage and die on the battlefield having given everything.

Past the midnight hour I can go to sleep happy after reliving –like a victorious final– the feelings and pride that define a Stronguista. I go to bed with a clear conscience and a happy heart in the knowledge that in this issue, BX's 40th, I will be able to see my colours, my shirt, my team represented. With a smile and a lump in my throat, I join my team with that immortal warcry that moves mountains:

Huarikasaya Kalatakaya… Hurra Hurra!

Beckham for Bolívar

TEXT: ALEX WALKER

It was rumoured in May that David Beckham might emerge from his footballing retirement for Bolívar's Copa Libertadores semi-final. With the club's reigning oligarch Marcelo Claure later dismissing this idea as just 'an illusion', the club was left with a lingering sense of déjà-vu: in 1994, Bolívar offered Maradona US$1 million for a six-match contract — a deal that was widely criticised before eventually falling through. While the temporary signing of 'Golden Balls' remains an improbable dream, Alex Walker nonetheless takes a step into the subjunctive and imagines what might happen if the Beckham brand emigrated to Bolivia.

Having signed a one-month contract and twisted the squad registration rules, David is cleared to play. However, after sitting out the first leg with dodgy bunions, he collapses from altitude exhaustion just 17 minutes into the return match at Estadio Hernando Siles and spends much of the half on his hands and knees, routinely ferried across the pitch by the medical buggy to take Bolívar's set pieces. After half-time, however, David emerges from the dugout with a suspiciously bleeding eyebrow due to an incident later dubbed 'hair-straightener-gate'.

It seems, though, that the anger rubbed off on 'Golden Balls' and, in a moment reminiscent of his notorious dismissal for kicking-out at Diego Simeone in the '98 World Cup, the red mist descends once more: Beckham charges manically around the pitch searching for the nearest Argentinian to kick — someone who, unfortunately and ironically, turns out to be the referee. As suspicions are raised about David's sudden burst of energy, however, FIFA discover that his recovery was not all above board –an emergency supply of coca leaves down his right shin pad providing the vital dose– and he incurs a post-match lifetime ban for supplement abuse.

Soon after, the family fall on hard times with their only source of income being decennial Spice Girls reunions at occasional jubilee celebrations back in Britain. After an auto-tune failure during a rare Victoria solo causes the deaths of no fewer than four much-loved family pets, the Beckhams –disgraced and excommunicated from mainstream culture– find themselves in dire straits. Unable to return to a crumbling Beckingham Palace, David lands a weekend job as a personal lustrabota to Bolívar's goalkeeping legend Quiñones — a role that finally earns him a knighthood under the banner of 'charitable work'. Victoria, meanwhile sets up a small stall in El Alto market that specialises in knock-off or stolen items from *Victoria Beckham* ©; a brand name whose rights she surrendered after a long, drawn-out and unsuccessful legal battle with Jean-Paul Gautier.×

Futsal

The Miniature Version of Football

TEXT AND PHOTO : OLLIE VARGAS

Bolivia is known for not qualifying for the FIFA World Cup since 1994, when it was eliminated in the group stage. The country is far better known in the world of futsal, or indoor football, coming third in the 2003 AMF Futsal World Cup. In fact, in La Paz, the sport is more popular than conventional football. Part of this lies in the geographical layout of the city, which has left La Paz with few open or flat green spaces. Indoor futsal arenas can fit neatly into this city's unique urban sprawl. With a cheap entry fee and vibrant women's league, it makes for a dynamic complement to Bolivian football.

However, unlike Bolivia's ***Siete Ligas***, Futsal is not a standalone sport with its own culture and professionals. Most players aspire to play in the upper echelons of conventional football. For example, Marcelo, a 16-year-old who plays for the AGF team, says, 'I play futsal to improve my skills and control of the ball for when I play on the 11-a-side pitches, because on a five-a-side pitch there's no room to run around, and you develop skills.' It's certainly true that like all five-a-side football, strength and speed count for little and it's the tricksters that are king. Though you'd be mistaken in thinking this is conventional five-a-side. Most of the rules observed in the UK are thrown out of the window: players can enter the goal circle, goalies can exit it—indeed, the goalkeeper from the Illimani team often ventures out with the intention of scoring—and the goalie isn't allowed to take the ball from the net with his feet.

But more than the rules, the real point of departure is the money involved. In the UK, teenage football, Sunday league football or five-a-side leagues normally consist of groups of friends. Bolivian futsal, on the other hand, has an entry fee for spectators (most of whom aren't related to the players), the league is sponsored by international brands like Coca-Cola and Powerade, and there are digital scoreboards—a relative rarity in Bolivia.

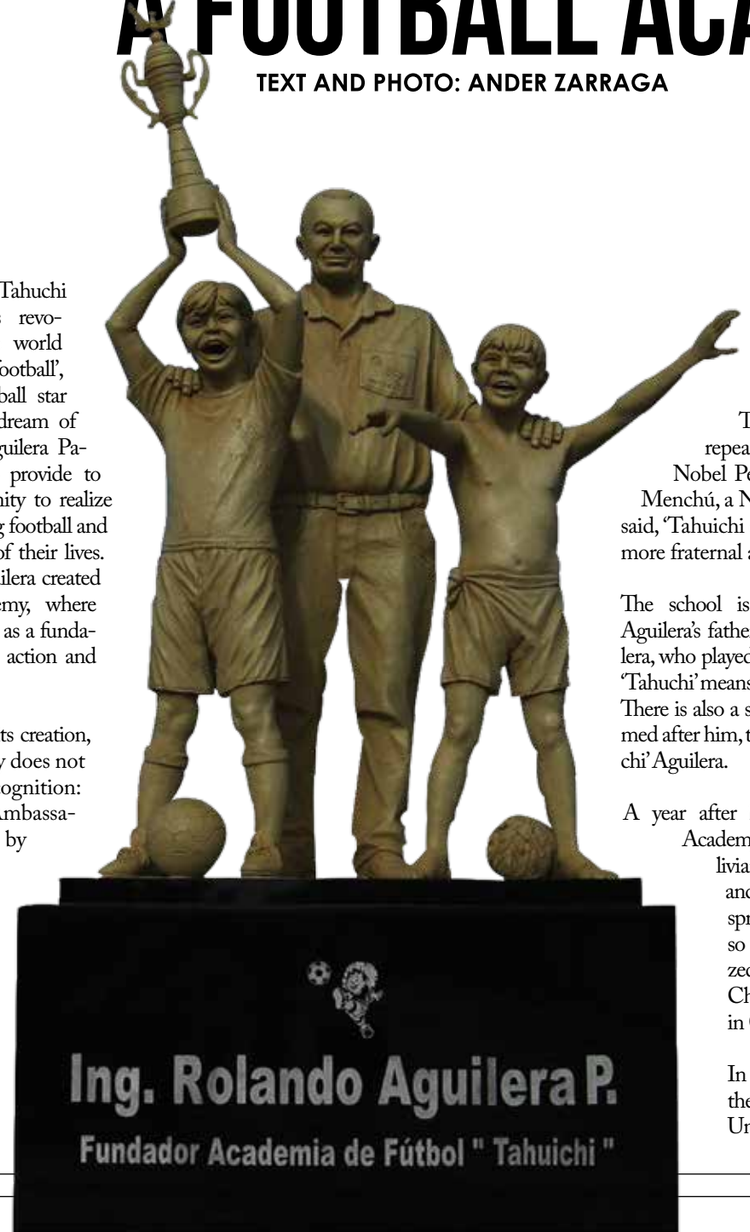
The fan demographic is a point of interest too. Jaime, a regular at futsal matches, says that 'it starts at six, so many come after work to wind down before going home'. He goes on to describe the working-class character of futsal: 'The entrance fee is cheap and it fits in with work hours, unlike conventional football, which is much more expensive.' Indeed, in the stands was a group of six taxi drivers in their uniform and, across from them, were two construction workers in overalls. Furthermore, the futsal arena of La Paz is situated near Plaza San Pedro and directly opposite the queue for the buses going to Ciudad Satélite (a district of El Alto), which by night stretches across two blocks and can take over an hour to negotiate. Jaime explained that many **alteños** pop in to watch a few matches after work until the queue dies down.

It's an enjoyable evening, watching teenagers playing fast-paced five-a-side while their younger siblings play their own matches in the stands—and run onto the pitch at half-time to live the futsal dream for five minutes before the players come back. It certainly felt like community sports at its best, with local kids playing and spectators from all walks of life turning out to cheer them on. ×

TAHUICHI

MUCH MORE THAN A FOOTBALL ACADEMY

TEXT AND PHOTO: ANDER ZARRAGA



'Roly, with the Tahuichi Academy, has revolutionized the world of children's football', famed Brazilian football star Pelé said about the dream of engineer Rolando Aguilera Pareja, who wanted to provide to children the opportunity to realize their dreams of playing football and thrive in other areas of their lives. So in May 1978, Aguilera created the Tauhichi Academy, where children learn football as a fundamental tool for social action and education.

Thirty-six years after its creation, the Tahuichi Academy does not lack international recognition: it was named an 'Ambassador of the Youth' by the Organization of American States in 1984. When it received the Condor of the Andes, the highest distinction from the Bolivian government, then–head of state Gen. Hugo Banzer praised Aguilera, saying, 'He is a man quintessential in sports education.' The academy has also been repeatedly nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and Rigoberta Menchú, a Nobel Prize winner herself, said, 'Tahuichi children are the hope of a more fraternal and humane world.'

The school is named in memory of Aguilera's father, Ramón 'Tahuichi' Aguilera, who played for Bolivia's Florida team. 'Tahuchi' means 'big bird' in Tupi-Guarani. There is also a stadium in Santa Cruz, named after him, the Estadio Ramón 'Tahuichi' Aguilera.

A year after its creation, the Tahuchi Academy's team won its first Bolivian children's championship, and since then its fame has spread worldwide, so much so that in 1985 FIFA organized the first under-16 World Championship in honor of it in China.

In 1996, Aguilera organised the the Tahuchi 'Peace and Unity' Little World Cup, a yearly under-15 tournament held in Bolivia. It celebrated its 19th anniversary this past January, with participating teams from around the world. Other countries have followed suit, according to the academy's press officer, Jalqui Gutierrez: 'Even the South American Football Confederation has formalized its own sub-15 championships, inspired by the achievements of the Tahuchi 'Peace and Unity' Little World Cup.' (And, underscoring the importance of Tahuchi, some former competitors from the 'Peace and Unity' tournament will play in the this year's World Cup in Brazil.)

Some of the academy's famous alumni include Romel Quiñoñez and Rudy Cardozo, both current Club Bolívar players, and retired footballers Marco Antonio '***El Diablo***' Etcheverry, Erwin 'Platini' Sáanchez, Juan Manuel Peña, Luis Héctor Cristaldo and José Carlos 'El Gato' Fernandez (who is now the director of Club Bolívar).

But the trophies and international recognition would be nothing without the academy's overriding mission: 'The purpose of this is to give young people the opportunity to play sports in a healthy way, teaching useful skills for life, against social risks, such as drugs and crime', says Mabel Añez, the social responsibility coordinator for the school. 'Social action has become the basis of the academy in the last 10 years.' To date, over 300,000 children between the ages of 3 and 15 have attended the academy; 85 percent attended free of change, thanks to scholarships for homeless and low-income Bolivian children. Tahuichi also provides medical and nutritional services to about 3,000 children both on and off the pitch in addition to its soccer clinics. Girls also participate in the academy's programs and have found great success in international matches.

> 'The players that manage to turn professional are exceptions, but Tauhichi gives children the chance to thrive.'
>
> —Eddy Hurtado

Various partnerships with schools and colleges throughout Bolivia and abroad provide scholarships to Tauhichi grads, with 625 scholarships having been distributed, 133 of them to study abroad. Eddy Hurtado, a former student at the academy and now the head of its human resources department, says that 'the players that manage to turn professional are exceptions, but Tauhichi gives children the chance to thrive' in any area of life. Hurtado arrived at the academy from the Chapare region when he was 16 years old. 'It was a great opportunity to change my life. It gave me the opportunity to play football, travel a lot, and now it gave me work.' Through the academy, he won a scholarship to study in the United States, and now he's active in helping out new students. 'Tahuichi changed my life', he says, 'and now I can pass that on to future generations.'

THE DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: TOMMY WALTERS
PHOTOS: ARCHIVE

Today, South America produces some of the best football players in the world. Such is its footballing success that Joseph 'Sepp' Blatter, FIFA's president, pointed to South America as the 'Old Continent' of football. In Bolivia, however, professional football finds itself at a significantly lower level than in many other South American countries. Is there any particular reason for this? Given that Bolivians play as much football as their neighbours, where have they gone wrong?

British expansion in South America during the 19th century brought football to the continent alongside the railways. From the 1870s onwards, British railway construction employees would play football after work. Historically, railways have been a failure in Bolivia; today most trains are out of service. Nonetheless, the tracks themselves remain anchored to the ground. Football, similarly, has become rooted in Bolivian tradition and, although it cannot be dismissed as a failure, its development has been plagued with difficulties.

Football first gained popularity in South America in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, where British presence was most significant. The early-20th-century Argentinian journalist Juan José Soiza Reilly remembered observing a group of fair-skinned men kicking a ball around in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. He asked his father who they were, to which he answered, 'Crazy English people'.

Bolivia's Claustrophobia:

Bolivia, a landlocked country surrounded by mountains, took longer to adopt this sport. The country's geography has been a setback for the development of many activities, and football is no exception. The British presence in Bolivia was far more limited than in other countries, mainly centred around the country's mining regions, which affected the development of Bolivian football.

The iconic Latin American chronicler Eduardo Galeano talks about the English influence in Argentinean football in Futbol a Sol y Sombra. He notes that a football player could be forgiven for committing a foul only if he was able to excuse himself in 'proper English and with sincere feelings'. Argentines knew and played football according to the professional rules of the time, but this was not the case in Bolivia. The absence of British presence meant that rules were improvised in many circumstances and, in most cases, Bolivians would opt to invent their own. Even today, Bolivian professional football has some variables that aren't always consistent with standards around the rest of the world. For example, a few years ago, Bolivia had the youngest player in the National League, making his debut at the age of 12. Today, Bolivia is about to possess the oldest player and the first head of state to play in a professional league. President Evo Morales, 54, will play for 'Sport Boys', a Santa Cruz–based club in the Bolivian Primera División starting from next season.

> Geography has been a setback for the development of many activities in Bolivia, and football is no exception.

Professionalisation

The professionalisation of football came late to Bolivia. Compared to its neighbouring countries, Bolivia often struggled to keep pace. Argentina founded the Argentine Football Association League (in which the members would communicate exclusively in English) in 1893, while Bolivia established its own league in 1925, more than 30 years later. And while Brazil had already witnessed official football matches between the British Gas Company and the São Paulo Railway, in 1895, Bolivia did not even have a team — its first, *Oruro Royal*, was founded in 1896. Indeed, Bolivian football remained at an amateur level until the mid-20th century. Today, there is an underground football league, whose members, known as los , are very skillful players but are unable to break into professional football.

Bolivian Society:

Mario Murillo, a sociologist specialising in Bolivian football, argues that a white elite has always run the game. This social class, according to Murillo, would discriminate against players for their surname and skin colour. Even though there were excellent players of Aymara and Quechua ethnicities, they were not even considered by the professional league. This colonial racism is no longer so prevalent today (although it remains entrenched, to a certain extent), but it has stunted the development of professional football.

> Bolivian football is caught between its fans' intense emotional involvement and the distinct lack of appropriate infrastructure.

Back in 1904, a club was founded in La Paz—The Thunders—composed of young men from the upper classes of the city. All of its members had the opportunity to study in Europe, where football was widely played. The Thunders were the pioneers of football in La Paz, and, due to their social background, it was seen as an upper-class sport. The Strongest, another paceño club, was also founded on similar grounds that allowed for no social integration; it consisted of a group of middle-class friends who had recently finished military service. This tended to hinder the spread of football to other social classes and small communities throughout Bolivia.

Is There a Future for Bolivian Football?

The future of Bolivian football relies on a crucial combination of advanced infrastructure and a passion for the game. In Bolivia, a significant lack of the former means that football is not taken as seriously as it could be. For Bolivia to transform into a successful footballing nation, both elements must coexist.

Watching a ***Siete Ligas*** match, one is struck by the paradox between the intense emotional involvement and the distinct lack of appropriate infrastructure. In **El Tejar**, a region in the north of La Paz, a match was played on a cramped, uneven surface with holes in the nets—almost comparable to a children's playground. However, with a scoreboard, shirt sponsors, a pedantic referee who gave out yellow cards for incorrect shoes, halftime team talks from gesticulating coaches, and a crowd of at least 150 spectators perched on crumbled-down walls, passion for grassroots football is alive and well. Rather, it is the absence of professional funding that is holding Bolivian football back. Similar to how certain clubs are paralysed in Liga Nacional B for not meeting stadium requirements, Bolivia cannot progress into the top league because its infrastructure is unable to match the levels of involvement and interest.

The ex–Brazilian manager Carlos Alberto Parreira noted: 'Today's football demands magic and dreams, but it will only be effective when combined with technique and efficiency'. Solutions could start with a greater distribution of football academies covering the more remote areas of the country that would teach the tactical basics of the game. A structured network of scouts could be employed to recognise and nurture talent from a young age. Moreover, gym training and nutritional advice have become increasingly vital to a player's physical development, and must be valued. These factors helped lead Argentina to excel in the sport, so why shouldn't this be the case with Bolivia?

FERMIN ZABALA

(1963-ASAP)

BIO: The subject of numerous hate groups on Facebook on the back of his less than stellar commentary: here are just a few examples... 'If Brazil don't win, they will either draw or lose'; 'if the ball goes in, it's a goal'; 'she's the girlfriend of a Peruvian player from Peru'; 'on the pitch there are 22 players: 11 on one team and 11 on the other'; 'this Sunday, in the final, two teams will play' — Enfermin ©

SPECIAL POWER: N/A

WEAKNESS: Dominatrices

WHERE IS HE NOW? Providing a moronic background commentary to the World Cup

XAVIER AZCARGORTA

(1953-)

BIO: Bolivar's iconic manager who retired from playing aged 23, entering the world of management just a year later. Before his current stint in La Paz came a string of less successful spells in Spain and a two-year term in charge of Bolivia's national side. His moustache, lip foliage to match Tom Selleck's, is rumoured to be the brains behind the operation and has attracted attention from all the major European clubs for its penalty-taking ability.

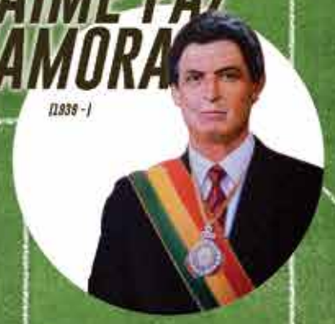
SPECIAL POWER: Seductive moustache

WEAKNESS: Moustachioed women

WHERE IS HE NOW? Managing Spain under the pseudonym of Vicente Del Bosque
ng while someone else runs the country.

JAIME PAZ ZAMORA

(1939 -)



BIO: A goalkeeper-turned-priest-turned-politician, in 1980, Zamora's plane was brought down in an unsuccessful assassination attempt, leaving him facially scarred. He recently told Bolivian Express that he moved away from public politics in order to 'have more children', one of which swims for Tarija.

SPECIAL POWER: Producing good swimmers

WEAKNESS: Partial to the odd ball game

WHERE IS HE NOW? Reproducing prolifically

FAMILIA VALDIVIA

BIO: Creators of Bolivia's World Cup '94 anthem, 'Bolivia gana y se va al Mundial', the family sung Bolivia on to a heroic group stage exit from their only World Cup twenty years ago and have been living off the royalties ever since. Both effective as a free-kick wall and a wall of sound, the family would surely improve any side.

SPECIAL POWER: Volume

WEAKNESS: Singing

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? In Miraflores, running a family funeral business continuing to write Bolivian World Cup anthems that don't make it into the public domain.

ICONS XI

With Bolivia failing to qualify for the World Cup, extending their 20-year drought, Alex Stuart Donald Walker and Leo Rishi Nelson-Jones name an Icons XI that would surely triumph in any era...

CHUPA RIVEROS

(1925-2013)

BIO: A legendary fan of The Strongest, 'Chupa' Riveros, had been a stalwart of the Ultra Sur until his recent passing after which the fans sung his name for 90 minutes. Infamous for his wide-brimmed hat, scarf and yellow and black underwear, the Ultra Sur will struggle to replace their hero.

SPECIAL POWER: Eyesight

WEAKNESS: The icy cold hand of death

WHERE IS HE NOW? Despite Riveros' insistence that when he died he would 'scream from beyond', he is, in fact, in a soundproof coffin.

EVO MORALES

(1959-)

BIO: A left-sided player liable to drift into the centre, Morales is most famous for his exploits on the football field while less known for dabbling in occasional politics. His most notorious footballing moment came in 2010 when he lashed out at Daniel Cartagena with the president's knee colliding inexplicably with his opponent's groin.

SPECIAL POWER: Cutting in on right foot

WEAKNESS: Politics

WHERE IS HE NOW? Having recently signed a contract to play professionally for Sport Boys, aged 54, we can only assume that Morales is in intensive training while someone else runs the country.

JULIO BALDIVIESO

(1971 -)

BIO: Nicknamed 'El Chuflay' due to his alcohol problem, Baldivieso played 85 times for Bolivia before moving into management – he is currently in charge of Cochabamba-based Wilstermann. In 2009, his 12-year-old son, Mauricio, became the youngest ever professional footballer, representing Club Aurora, a side 'el chuflay' conveniently managed at the time. After the game, Baldivieso criticised the referee and an opponent who made his son cry and left his managerial post just five days later.

SPECIAL POWER: Iron liver

WEAKNESS: Parenting

WHERE IS HE NOW? Alcoholics not-so-Anonymous

MARCO 'EL DIABLO' ETCHEVERRY

(1978-)

BIO: Nicknamed 'El Diablo', Etcheverry was Bolivia's star player of the World Cup qualifying campaign of '93 only to live up to his namesake when sent off just four minutes into the tournament's opening match against Germany for kicking out at Lothar Matthäus.

SPECIAL POWER: Mullet

WEAKNESS: Irrational hatred of Lothar Matthäus

WHERE IS HE NOW? After a four-month unsuccessful foray into management with Sociedad Deportiva Aucas, he was unceremoniously dismissed and after pulling out of negotiations with Oriente Petrolero, he hasn't been seen since.

MILTON MELGAR

(1959-)

BIO: Bolivia's third most capped player, appearing 89 times in an 18-year national career, Melgar was a vital cog in Bolivia's '94 World Cup campaign. Playing for both Bolivar and The Strongest after representing Boca Juniors and River Plate, it can be concluded that club rivalry isn't an issue for him. In 2006, he was appointed Minister of Sports by the Morales government only to resign a year later.

SPECIAL POWER: Powerful friends

WEAKNESS: Loyalty

WHERE IS HE NOW? He currently runs his own youth football academy in Santa Cruz.

VICTOR AGUSTIN UGARTE

(1926- 1995)

BIO: Bolivia's all-time second top goalscorer behind Joaquin Botero, Ugarte enjoyed a national career spanning 17 years, despite only making 45 appearances. Part of the victorious '63 Copa América campaign, where he scored a brace in the final against Brazil, Ugarte retired from football to live out his days in poverty and poor health; passing away on March 20, 1995.

SPECIAL POWER: The alphabet

WEAKNESS: Fortune's wheel

WHERE IS HE NOW? Dead. The Victor Agustin Ugarte stadium in Potosí is named in his honour.

GHOST AT HERNANDO SILES

(1471-1540)

BIO: Although some outrageous and tenuous conspiracy theories have suggested that this ghost was a stadium vendedor, the reality is, in fact, quite different. A conquistador and die-hard fan of The Strongest, Francisco Pizarro has returned to haunt the liberator Simon Bolivar under the assumption that Simon still makes Club Bolivar's first XI.

SPECIAL POWER: Elusivity

WEAKNESS: Tends to go missing in the big matches

WHERE IS IT NOW? While Pizarro's body resides in a glass coffin, he is allegedly granted parole for a few hours each time Bolivar take to the field.

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

The importance of football in Bolivia is in no way proportional to the country's achievements in the sport throughout history. Despite being a country that only holds a single Copa América title and has only once qualified for the FIFA World Cup, the game is still able to stir the deepest of sentiments among the Bolivian people. To understand why, BX speaks to a former president, a sports commentator, the former head of the national football federation, and an iconic musical family.

TEXT: INSKE GROENEN
PHOTO: http://historiadelfutbolboliviano.com/

GUAYAQUIL, 19 SEPTEMBER 1993

A historical moment for Bolivian football. For the first time in its history, Bolivia's national team qualifies for a FIFA World Cup by achieving a 1-1 away draw against Ecuador in their final match. The few Bolivians who were lucky enough to be at Monumental Isidro stadium in Guayaquil rise up as one in ecstatic celebration. Back at home, people are pouring into the streets, showing their red, yellow and green striped flags which flutter proudly in the wind. Others bear these stripes on their bare skin. People incredulously cram the streets partying. No matter their place in society, Bolivians stand united behind the same team.

'It was a fantastic explosion. People embraced the flag as a symbol of our nation's achievement beyond racial or social distinctions', says Toto Arévalo, who has been a sports commentator for almost four decades and has attended 9 World Cups. Arévalo was at the stadium in Ecuador that day and remembers the moment as a highlight in his career.

When I ask him whether any other event has caused similar sentiments among Bolivians, his answer is no. 'It was the biggest event,' he replies, 'larger than any Presidential election'. After that day, Arévalo tells me, the hit single '*Bolivia gana y se va al Mundial*' became Bolivia's new national anthem.

> The World Cup of '94 was Bolivia's moment to show itself to the world. The team had at last stepped into football's biggest spotlight

Written by Familia Valdivia, the song played a critical and symbolic role in unifying the country. They wrote the song out of love for the team, even before Bolivia qualified. According to Noemí Valdivia, who is the mother of the musical family, they were convinced Bolivia would qualify that year. What they did not expect was the song to become a national hit.

So, why was the song so successful? 'People identified with it', is Noemí's answer. What seems to have made the song so appealing, though, was its message of joy, collective victory and celebration. Also, after listening to the song a couple of times, the tune really catches on.

Bolivians have looked back at the 1993 qualifying season with nostalgia ever since. Books have been written and documentaries have been put together, all dedicated to that golden period in the country's footballing history.

The World Cup of '94 was Bolivia's moment to show itself to the world. The team had at last stepped into football's biggest spotlight. Although Bolivia did not get past the first round of the Cup, the experience was, in Arévalo's words; '*una gran fiesta*'. Bolivian people were proud of their footballing heroes. They were proud of being Bolivian.

In preparation for the event, coach Xabier Azkargorta played an important role as the team's psychologist to instill, in the players' minds, the sense of equality with their opponents. The aforementioned Valdivia anthem goes '*y ju-gará de igual a igual*' - an allusion to the until-then unthinkable idea that Bolivia would play as equals against teams that had always seemed their superiors.

Tragedy, though, would define the experience. Only minutes into the opening game against Germany, Bolivia would lose its star player Marco Antonio Etcheverry. Etcheverry, who was known as '***El Diablo***', received a red card for a misjudged tackle on Germany's star player, Lothar Matthäus. As a consequence, he was forced to sit out of Bolivia's remaining two games against Spain and South Korea.

Losing Etcheverry may have reduced the team's chances of qualifying to the next round, but participating in the tournament was what mattered most at the time. Simply reaching the highest stage in world football was significant enough for Bolivia.

The question that puzzles me, though, is why football is so important in a country that holds very few victories in the sport. Bolivia doesn't show up in FIFA's world ranking until the 68th spot, yet football is played and enjoyed everywhere — from windy dirt pitches in the Altiplano, to humid fields in the eastern tropics.

Could it be international recognition? Two of Bolivia's neighbours, Argentina and Brazil, have certainly succeeded in establishing an international reputation through football. This year, Brazil will get the ultimate chance to showcase itself as host of the World Cup. All the big channels from around the world will tune in and many foreigners will travel across the globe to see this sporting event live in action. Yet, Bolivia hasn't come close to enjoying this level of international attention so the unwavering passion for the sport remains puzzling.

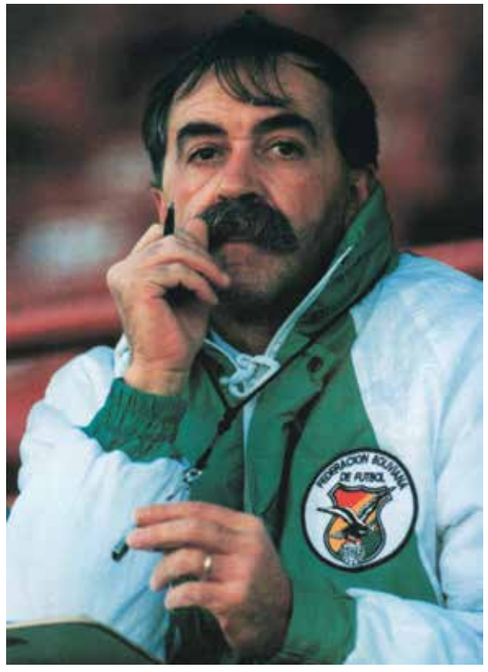
Perhaps the passion for football in Bolivia is rooted in the need for national unification rather than international recognition. As Guido Loayza, a former president of the Federación Boliviana de Fútbol (FBF), explains; 'football emerged as a surprising meeting point for the country. The Cup of '94 showed us that we can stand behind a common objective and forget the things that separate us as a nation. It showed us that we can come together in a kind of catharsis'.

> Bolivia doesn't show up in FIFA's world ranking until the 68th spot, yet football is played and enjoyed everywhere — from windy dirt pitches in the Altiplano, to humid fields in the eastern tropics.'

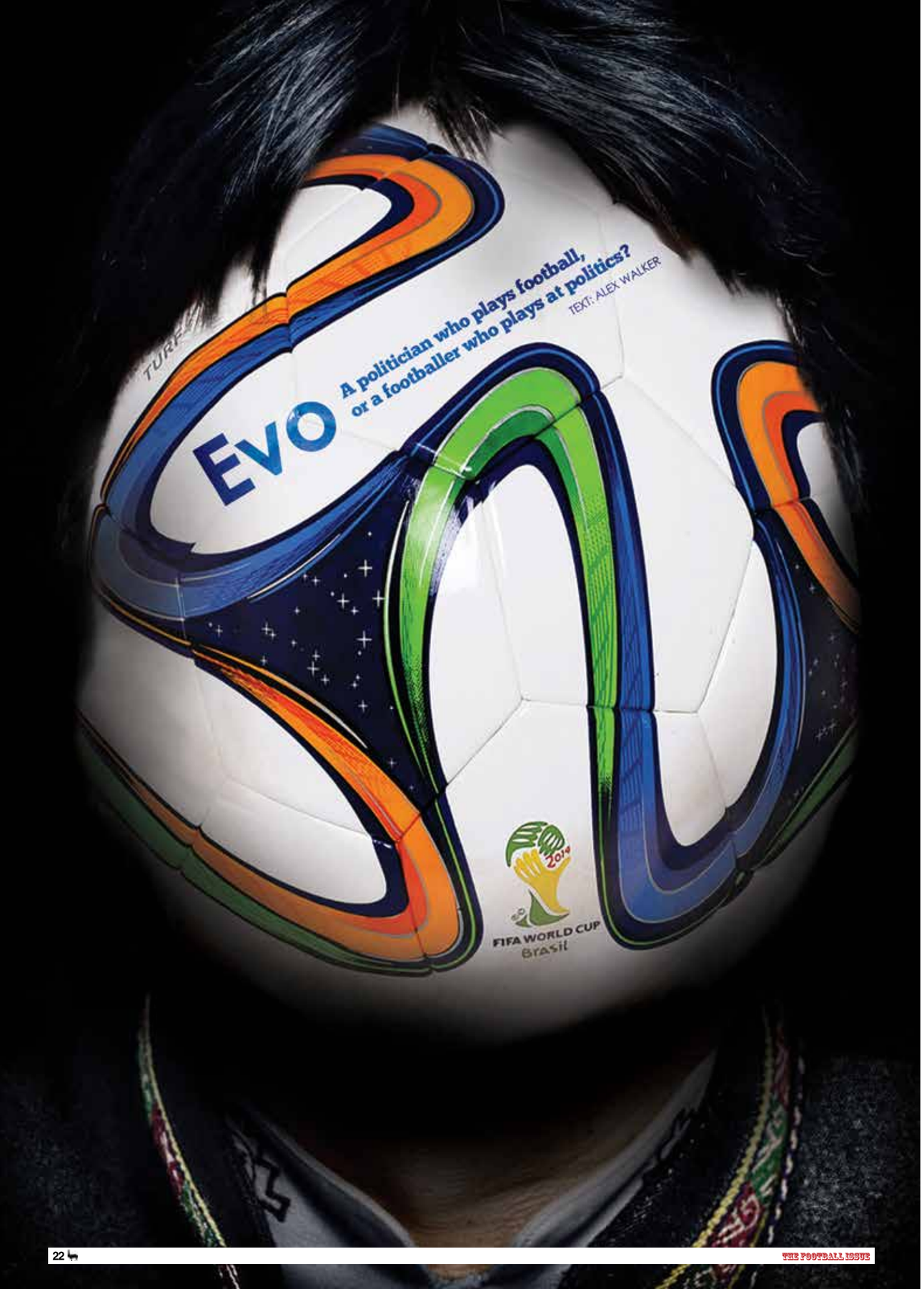
Former President Carlos Mesa also agrees that this was a rare moment of national unity. 'Bolivia's qualification to the World Cup constitutes a sociological phenomenon, not only linked to football itself. It constitutes a moment of unity in which people across the country could truly feel Bolivian. In later years we began to affirm our diversity through the constitution of the Plurinational state and the creation of local autonomies. The national football team comes second only to the sea as a symbol of unity'.

By now the 1994 celebrations have long died down and all that remains is a sense of nostalgia. It would be amazing to see Bolivia qualify again for a World Cup, if only to see Bolivia's true passion for football explode once more.

The results of last year's qualifying rounds raise doubts as to whether that will happen anytime soon. Bolivia came second to last in South America's qualifiers which has left former FBF President, Guido Loayza, wondering about the future. 'There has not been a detailed analysis of the non-football reasons for our success in '93. I think this limits our ability to plan intelligently and achieve another classification. Those who don't have a certain course will never have favourable winds', he points out.



Bolivia's national psychology remains blissfully trapped between a golden past which is at once half-imagined and half-remembered, and the undying promise of a glorious future which never seems to arrive. This is as true in football as it is in other domains. Away from international contests, football remains central to people's lives across the country in neighbourhood league games and school playgrounds. In any case, Bolivia's football history tells us that one can learn to love a sport without actually excelling at it. And it's these everyday experiences of the game that show us just how deep this love can be. ×



EVO
A politician who plays football, or a footballer who plays at politics?

TEXT: ALEX WALKER

In 2010, a bitterly-fought charity match was played between two teams, one of them led by Bolivian President Evo Morales and the other by La Paz Mayor Luis Revilla—a man whose MSM party had recently joined sides with Morales's opposition. A now-infamous video shows Morales kneeing defender and political opponent Daniel Gustavo Cartagena in the groin. Although the subsequent attempted arrest of Cartagena at the hands of Morales's security team was thwarted by Revilla, it seems that the president was the only party to get off scot-free.

According to former Bolivian president and football fanatic Carlos Mesa, Evo Morales 'doesn't necessarily represent who Bolivians aspire to be, but who they really are'. Indeed, he is an indigenous man, without hardly any formal qualifications, who has become leader of the nation.

Evo's political career has been constructed around the 'everyman' image and football is, perhaps, the most central aspect of this allure. Take his recent contract to play professionally with the Montero–based 'Sport Boys' next season. Despite the insistence of their chief, Mario Cronenbold, that Morales 'has a great right foot and dominates the ball', nobody is under the illusion that the president has earned his contract through footballing merit alone. The question that remains, then, is whether this is a purely political ploy. Although sociologist Mario Murillo believes that it is a move motivated purely by Morales' love of the beautiful game, Club Bolívar president Guido Loayza disagrees, explaining that 'for people in politics, any act is a political act'. While his decision to play in Santa Cruz, the city which his government has most struggled to win over, could be seen as a populist masterstroke, Carlos Mesa believes that by doing so he will be 'forcing an absurdity'. This, however, is not what the former president finds most disturbing about his successor's move. Indeed, Mesa describes this foray into professional football as demonstrating 'a lack of respect for the league, for the fans and for young players who are trying to break through'.

Morales is certainly not unique in mixing politics and sport. Indeed, North Korea's deceased leader Kim Jong-il's biography boasts that in his first-ever round of golf, he achieved 11 holes-in-one, carding a dubious 36 under-par. Closer to Morales, though, is Silvio Berlusconi—a man with very different politics but with a similar populist image—who conjured up a party from thin air based on demagogic policies with the buzzword name 'Forza Italia', the slogan of his own football team, AC Milan. His connection with football is far more than surface deep, however. Perhaps the strongest illustration of Berlusconi's footballing mind-set can be found in his use of language: for example, on his victory over fascist and communist opposition, Berlusconi said, 'I heard that the game was getting dangerous, and that it was all being played in the two penalty areas, with the midfield being left desolately empty…and so we decided that we had to fill that immense space'.

Mario Murillo says that Morales, too, views the world of politics through a footballing frame of mind. He explains that, when Bolivia hosts political summits, the President refers to his government as the 'home team' and that he often uses attack-vs.-defence analogies when constructing political strategies. Carlos Mesa remarks that Morales 'can't spend a week without playing a football match', and you need only flick through a few pages of a Morales biography to understand that football is ingrained in the president's DNA.

Aged 13, Evo set up a community football team called *Fraternity*, captained—as you might expect—by himself. Within two years, Morales had been elected as the training coach for a team in **Oruro**: 'I was like the team owner', he said. 'I had to shear sheep and llama wool . . . we sold the wool to buy balls and uniforms'. In the '80s, drought forced his family to move to the Chapare region, where Morales used football to integrate into his new community: 'One day, I played with the settlers and I scored the winning goal', he reflected, 'then everyone wanted me to play with them'. Later, as Sports Secretary for the region's **cocaleros** trade union, Morales organised football tournaments and, in 1985, was appointed Secretary General, leading six separate **cocalero** federations and getting elected deputy of the union just two years later.

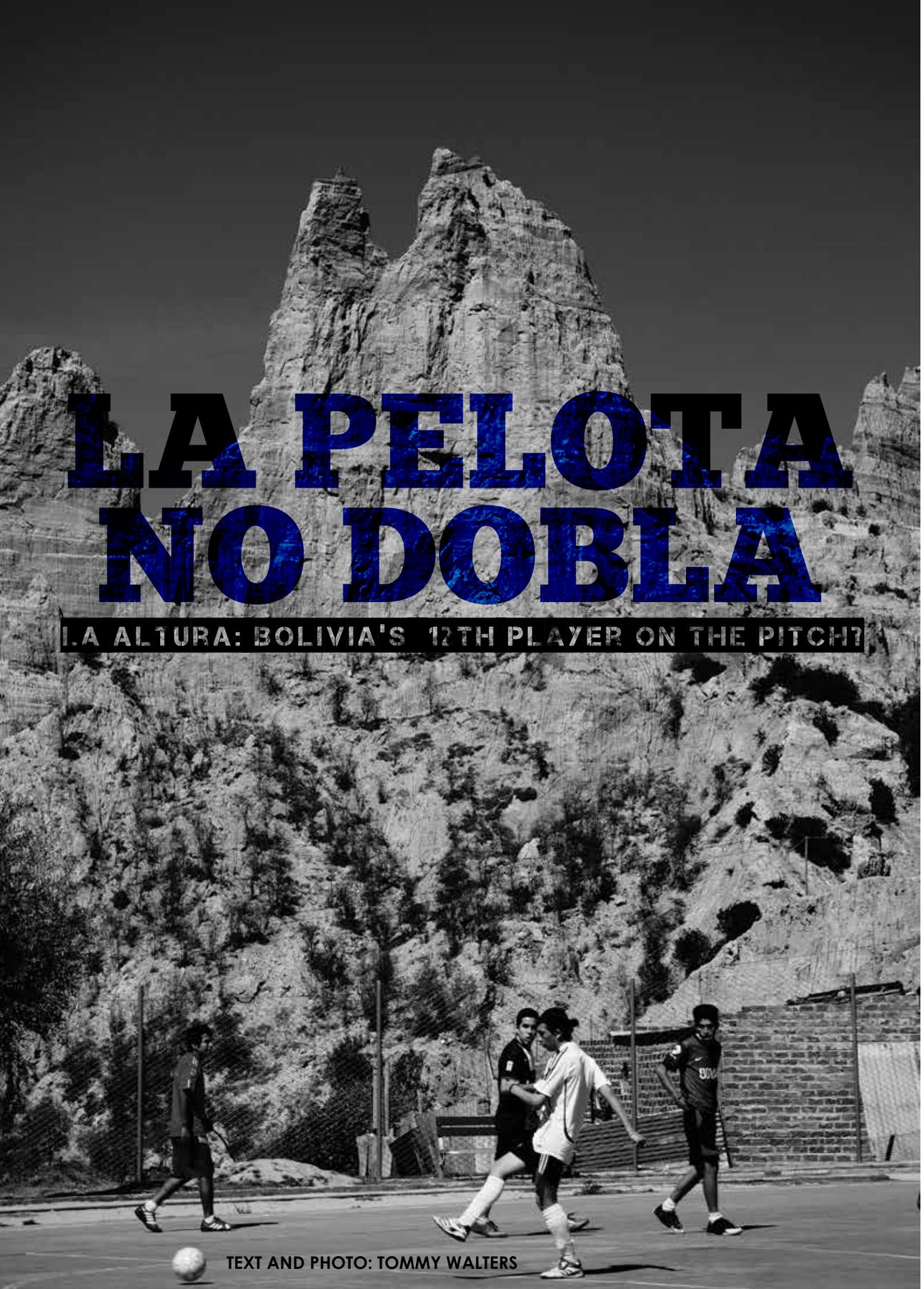
Morales, as president, is no stranger to using football as a political instrument. For instance, when playing in a match at 6,000 metres to protest the efforts to ban Bolivia from international fixtures at high altitude, the president used the situation to act as unifier and enhance his reputation—something encapsulated by his statement, 'If love can be made, football can be played'. Referring to this political strategy, Eduardo Gamarra, a Bolivian political scientist at Florida International University, declared that 'FIFA have done Evo a big favour'. Similarly, in September last year, Morales and several UN officials took time out from the General Assembly to play a football match to raise awareness of a UN campaign against domestic violence. Heraldo Muñoz, Chilean Minister for Foreign Affairs, describes football as 'a global passion and a great way to win hearts and minds', and Morales has proven adept at using it as a means to an end.

In times of political difficulty, Morales has also used football as a deflection tactic. In April 2010, for example, just a day after he controversially warned Bolivian males to eschew chicken because it caused baldness and decreased virility, the president organised a football match between representatives from all over South America in the mountain village of Colomi — arguably succeeding in diverting public attention away from his statement. Perhaps more puzzling, though, is the fact that his administration has been accused of building **canchas** in areas of political opposition to pull wool over the eyes of his critics. Ironically, while a blatant populist act, there is no doubt that this ploy will directly contribute to the development of grassroots football in Bolivia. Carlos Mesa believes that 'without a single doubt' Morales has improved the state of the game in Bolivia in two main respects: Morales has established football as a part of the quotidian Bolivian culture, and he has inculcated the idea that 'football can be played in any place at any time'.

Carlos Mesa explains that he 'couldn't have gotten away with half the things that Evo does because there are certain things that the public expect of their current leader'. Morales, then, has built a political career on a populist image centred around football. Like the man who built his house upon the sand, having constructed a political career on footballing foundations, you would assume that it is only a matter of time before Morales's luck runs out. Indeed, David Goldblatt, author of *Futebol Nation: A Footballing History of Brazil,* believes 'as widespread protests in [Brazil] in the past year have shown, the public is too educated, too organised and too cynical to accept the tropes of the past—that football and glory are a plausible substitute for health-care and good government'. Morales, though, is not offering football as a substitute. For him, politics and football are one and the same. While his decision to play professional football next year does not exactly send out a message of total commitment to his presidential duties, it is difficult to disagree with the idea that, in many key respects, Evo Morales has been a good president. Rather, Morales has so effectively conflated politics and football that both have become inseparable from the man himself.

LA PELOTA NO DOBLA

LA ALTURA: BOLIVIA'S 12TH PLAYER ON THE PITCH?



TEXT AND PHOTO: TOMMY WALTERS

As Club Bolívar take on San Lorenzo for the semi-finals of the Copa de Libertadores on 30th July, the longstanding question of an apparent 'altitude advantage' is yet again brought to the surface. This debate has been at the centre of a notorious footballing contretemps between Bolivia and Argentina. Visitors to La Paz's Estadio Hernando Siles at 3,637 metres above sea level, have had some shocking results – notably a 6-1 defeat of Maradona's side in 2009. In a recent match where the score ended 1-1, some of the Argentinian drama queens had to call for oxygen masks and performed questionable acts of fainting at half-time to an unconvinced Bolivian audience.

In 2007, FIFA banned international matches played in stadiums situated above 2,500 metres, including La Paz and a number of other Andean cities. Bolivian President Evo Morales reacted with disgust, calling it a 'football apartheid', and organised 1 million letters of complaint to Joseph Sepp Blatter, the president of FIFA. Morales even played a historic game on the Sajama Peak at 6,000 metres to prove that it had very little effect on the body. Quite rightly, the ban on Estadio Hernando Siles was overturned a year later. But is this problem really such a myth as many Bolivians would suggest?

'You breath 35 percent less oxygen up here', Dr Guillermo Aponte, Club Bolivar's medical director and a member of the Bolivian Commission for Defence of High Altitudes, remarks, 'leaving your haemoglobin with less to carry around to cells in your body'. As a result, players coming to La Paz suffer from increased heart rates, and lowered metabolism, with stamina reduced by 25 to 32 percent, according to Dr Aponte.

However, those living at high altitude have it hard too. When they go down to play at sea level, the symptoms are more severe. The atmosphere is obviously thicker and, while you would think the extra oxygen would act as a saviour, it actually causes the entire nervous system to diminish, slows the heart rate, and causes swelling in the feet (not good for putting on those new football boots). Many Bolivian players record an increase in sickness and fatigue. 'There are more problems when you go down than when you go up', Dr Aponte concluded. 'We don't have a single international title; if the high altitude really was an advantage, we would be champions every year.'

I then ask about Argentina. 'The problem with the Argentines is that they have made it a very psychological subject.' When looking at the international scores in La Paz, it seems like the other South American countries are barely affected. The so-called 'Spanish Reinforcements' (Moya, Capdevila and Callejón) of Club Bolívar who joined a year ago have experienced no problems at all. '[The Argentinians] have a special fear of coming to the high areas of Bolívar', Dr Aponte said. 'They don't like the country; they don't like the cold air. They are paranoid and tend to analyse every single aspect of football, and the Argentinian Institute of High Altitude Research thinks that it could be dangerous.' Dr Aponte dismisses the claim by saying there have never been any casualties, and explains that it's actually much more dangerous to play in areas of high temperature. 'Altitude doesn't kill you. Heat is much more dangerous.' (Congratulations goes to FIFA for choosing a 50-degree Qatar to host the World Cup in 2022. High-altitude matches, bad. Extreme heat, corruption and slave labour, fine. Nice, FIFA.)

Dr Aponte's vehement repetition of 'they' is another articulation of Bolivian-Argentinian attitudes towards each other. He points to the fact that the Argentines started to blame the altitude very late on in the 90s (as if La Paz had been at sea-level before then), just when Bolivia had started to become a footballing threat.

These kind of underlying political conflicts are often reflected in football. Take the war between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969 as a famous example, when it took a disastrous football match to act as the tipping point for their relations to collapse. Argentina's history with Bolivia is wrought with racism and mutual mistrust: Bolivians still make up the majority of those who forge a living picking fruit and vegetables around the slums of Buenos Aires. It comes at no surprise that these problems are mirrored in a football rivalry.

So was this '**altura**' problem all psychological as a lot of people say? Playing football in La Paz left me gasping and wheezing like a strangled goose. This would have been partly from the lack of oxygen, but then perhaps also from my own brain playing tricks given that I had spent the previous day researching all the effects and symptoms. The scientific evidence cannot be denied, though, it's just up to the effect on your mind to make it a whole lot worse. However, even if there is an advantage, people forget that we are in a beautiful continent spanning from vast tropical rainforests to great mountain ranges. This gives us a range of climatic conditions and different altitudes, extreme temperatures and humidity, and all sorts of other unique characteristics. To adapt physically and psychologically to these particular conditions (as well as to a rowdy home crowd) is one of the great challenges in football, and so incongruous to the unpredictability and surprise of the game.

LAS 7 LIGAS:

Bolivia's Unofficial Professionals

TEXT: LEO NELSON-JONES
PHOTO: SILVIA ROCCHINO

The name ***Siete Ligas***, contrary to what I and presumably many others may have thought, does not actually refer to there being seven amateur leagues (there are many more), but instead to those who play in these informal leagues. These players are paid by their clubs but, crucially, are not on a contract, meaning one can't exactly describe them as professionals. The name—the 'seven leagues' in English—stems from the idea that one player could theoretically take to the pitch in seven different leagues through the week (for seven different teams) if he so desired. The reasons why this is not an uncommon thing for a player to do lie in the nature of the leagues in which they play, and the state of Bolivian football in general.

Siete Ligas take part in a unique system of football, comprising many different leagues, existing in a space somewhere between the amateur and the professional. Each league has its own slight variations in rules that govern how many contracted professional players a team may employ. Normally, it's three, as in the case of perhaps the most famous and impressive league operating in La Paz: **El Tejar**.

Nowadays, these contracted players come from smaller second-division professional clubs and play in one of these informal leagues as a way to earn extra money. In the past, players from some of the biggest clubs in Bolivia would turn out. However, over the last 30 years, established clubs have become more protective of their players and are no longer willing to let them risk injury by letting them play on these teams. It's not just these contracted players who are able to make money in these leagues, though.

The fundamental reason behind the existence of los *Siete Ligas* is the fact that players get paid. Unlike the contracted pros, a *Siete Ligas* is able to turn out for as many teams as will have him and, typically, he will get paid for this service. This payment will vary from player to player and team to team. More often than not, it will be a straightforward case of the **dirigente** paying a *Siete Ligas* player perhaps 200 bolivianos for a match. Sometimes, however, this payment can take a more indirect form. Players may be treated to nice dinners at fine restaurants with their families and be provided free high-quality transport to and from matches. This is, admittedly, more frequent in the higher-profile leagues such as *El Tejar*, where, according to Mario Murillo, a sociology lecturer at UMSA (Bolivia's largest state univeristy), and an expert in los *Siete Ligas*, **dirigentes** can spend up to 5,000 bolivianos per match. In smaller leagues, the teams are more often made up of genuine amateurs. These may be friends or family members of some of the *Siete Ligas* players, or simply just members of the community that they're representing.

In a league like *El Tejar*, the quality is often of professional standard. In fact, players can often make a better living as *Siete Ligas* than if they went fully pro (apart from the big-name clubs such as Bolívar or The Strongest, professional football in Bolivia does not pay well). A *Siete Ligas* can earn up to 1,500 bolivianos (a little more than $200 US) a week, whereas a small professional club would often pay significantly less. Accordingly, players in leagues such as *El Tejar* are very often just as talented as many professional players. In many cases, they may actually have played professionally for a period. Additionally, some of the older *Siete Ligas* players are ex-professionals who formally retired in their early 30s but still earn money on the pitch. In this way, these informal leagues provide a similar quality of football and standard of living as the professional leagues, but in a less formal setting.

The very existence and nature of los *Siete Ligas* suggest another reason why many young players join the system. Although the established football leagues present themselves as professional and serious, there is a sense that this isn't quite true. Mario Murillo expressed this sentiment by saying, 'Everything is make-believe. If you see a football match in Bolivia, everyone is just standing around or rolling around on the floor. It pretends to be real but it isn't'. Also, the Bolivian football infrastructure and institutions are almost non-existent compared with other countries, especially when it comes to discovering and cultivating new talent. Football scouts are virtually unheard of, and football schools are scarce. As a result, young talent routinely goes unnoticed. In contrast, other South American nations such as Argentina actively scouts its youth, who are often from very poor backgrounds (Carlos Tevez, for example). One can't say that there's any shortage of talent or passion for the game in Bolivia; it's just never introduced into a formal football setting. People grow up playing on the street or in parks like everywhere else, but, whereas in other countries they're placed into football schools and programmes that can lead to professional careers, in Bolivia they end up becoming *Siete Ligas*.

But being a *Siete Ligas* can also confer a certain amount of status upon a player. These leagues provide players with the opportunity to achieve a level of fame and respect that would otherwise be unattainable for them, while also allowing them a more relaxed lifestyle than they would have playing professionally. Players can become famous within the circles that follow the leagues and in their respective communities. There are seldom cash prizes awarded for winning the leagues (though heads of cattle are known to be offered as trophies), which means that the ***dirigentes*** both run and invest their time and money into these clubs solely for pride and the love of the game. This passion is echoed by the players and spectators, a fact which is evident in the energy on the pitch and the cheers from the crowds, which can number up to a thousand in some of the more popular leagues.

Las Siete Ligas provide players with the opportunity to achieve a level of fame and respect that would otherwise be unattainable for them.

These leagues have found a special place in the landscape of Bolivian football. The quality that they exhibit and the passion which is displayed for them, both on and off the pitch, have lead to them becoming a well respected institution in themselves and they now attract some of the brightest talent that Bolivia has to offer. In a way, though, they are also a reminder of what is wrong with Bolivian football. The lack of a widespread infrastructure has fostered the development of informal leagues but it has certainly held Bolivia back. The talent that can be found in leagues such as *El Tejar*, had they received some proper footballing schooling, could have grown into top quality professional footballers and to an outsider, this seems like a bit of a waste. However, there is a sense that many Bolivians don't seem to mind this. Mario Murillo concluded our conversation and summed up this attitude by saying this: 'Things aren't really changing in Bolivian football because we don't necessarily want them to'. It seems that even though informal leagues draw talent away from the professional game and thus from the national side, people have forged out a special place for them and now couldn't imagine Bolivian football without them.

SETTLING THE SCORE

The struggle for Women's football to be recognised in Bolivia

Football is an integral part of Bolivian society, and this goes just as much for women's football as it does for men's. Festival tournaments bring women to the pitches even on national and religious holidays. However, something seems to be holding back the development of women's football at a professional level. Tommy Walters identifies the many problems that women encounter when trying to break into this male-dominated sport.

On the concrete courts of **El Tejar**, in the North of La Paz, the difference between men and women's football is barely distinguishable. The matches attract similar crowds, the teams train four times a week, and the women play with just as much vigour and skill as the men. The same passion is shown, and even with less egotism involved (at this level, the women don't find it obligatory to dribble up the pitch on their own in a desperately ostentatious alpha-male display).

'Nobody really cares about gender differences here', Professor Mario Murillo says, in reference to football in the Bolivian countryside and at a grassroots level. Murillo is a Professor of Sociology at the Universidad Católica in La Paz, and specialises in football. According to him, 'For both men and women, football is life. It is the next thing to a religion. In Easter, football tournaments take priority over everything else.'

This is unfortunately not the case of football at a professional level, where women struggle to find opportunities and recognition. The Federación Boliviana de Fútbol (FBF) is notoriously incompetent at promoting gender equality in this patriarchal sport. In fact, football officials at the highest levels can even get away with making disturbing sexist comments in public.

This season, for example, Mauricio Soria, who is the coach of Real Potosí, publicly harassed the manager of Santa Cruz side 'Sports Boys' during a match, making sexist remarks. 'Shut your mouth,' he said to Hilda Ordoñez, who is the first female coach to manage a top flight Bolivian football team. 'Go wash some pots and dishes. You have nothing to do on this pitch,' he added.

NO STRUCTURES

One of the main limiting factors surrounding professional women's football in Bolivia is the lack of existing structures of competition for them. This is clear from Cassandra Camacho's story, which is deeply telling of the struggle women face in the world of Bolivian football.

As a prominent player and Vice President for the women's club 'Las Ninfas', Camacho has personally experienced gender discrimination in the footballing industry. She has gone out of her way to organise official tournaments in La Paz, but is sadly familiar with rejection – she receives little to no support from the Federation. 'We were once given two weeks,' she said, 'to form eight female teams for a tournament. We managed to do it easily with more than 100 girls on board. Then they cancelled the event, saying there was simply "not enough money or support".'

Despite the obstacles she has faced as a female player, Camacho talks with great conviction and purpose. She was a former Miss La Paz Model in 2009 and has certainly found it a challenge to climb out of an industry based on delicacy and beauty, into one where she has had to prove herself through physical prowess and athletic talent.

Part of her inner strength comes from her Christian faith. She speaks of the inspiration she has gathered from Old Testament stories, as well as the motivation provided by her 'dad-slash-coach', Victor Camacho; a key figure who is constantly helping her to achieve future goals. Her fight to be recognised as a footballer, in spite of her former profession, seems to embody a more general struggle that Bolivian women face: to shed the traditional image of a woman –objectified and limited in career prospects– and become accepted in parts of society where men walk the avenues of influence.

PHOTO: SILVIA ROCCHINO

Her first aspirations to play football professionally were met with surprise. 'Go back to being a model,' opponents used to shout at her. However, she has turned her past around and she now loves being underestimated.

'Turning up to a press conference in stilettos and saying you are a footballer was often met with laughter,' she exclaims. 'But we would then invite the media to our matches, and they would have a very different impression of us by the end.'

A particular moment she cites was when her team, 'Las Ninfas', played at the Hernando Siles stadium in 2012 as a trial to become a part of Club Bolívar. 'That game really got their attention,' she says, as she remembers starting to be treated seriously a player, and even being compared to her male counterparts.

> It seems as if the route to fame in women's football hasn't been a particularly well-trodden path.

THE NEED FOR ROLE-MODELS

Apart from the lack of structure, some of the female players who show promise are barred from the game given the broader gender obligations of Bolivian culture. 'We've lost a lot of girls to unplanned pregnancies,' Camacho recounts, 'as well as to the conservative thinking of some parents'.

Most of the girls Camacho has encountered don't have a clear vision of how to grow in the sport due to a lack of adequate role models. It seems as if the route to fame in women's football hasn't been a particularly well-trodden path. Most women footballers don't even know whether they can be scouted or not.

'In the States, it's something that girls have grown up with,' Camacho explains. 'The role models are already there. They know the way they can make it to the national team. Here, you don't exactly have a door that's open to international tournaments.'

The only way success has been found abroad is through migration. Many Bolivian women now participate in Spanish leagues, especially around Sevilla. It seems fitting, then, that Sevilla was once described by Spanish playwright Lope de Vega as a 'door between Europe and the Indies'. Bolivian women have reached the fringes of European football, but there is still a long way to go. Camacho believes her personal struggle can lead as an example for others. Her aim is to show that it is possible for women to succeed at an international level. Camacho is already learning French as part of her dream to play for Lyon, the female team that have won the French league for six consecutive seasons.

'There are times when it seems hopeless,' she admits, 'but I always see a light at the end of the tunnel.' The next step, for her, is to start a league for women in La Paz that is recognised by the FBF.

Having listened to the shouts of support on the sidelines, spoken to the players about their religious training techniques, and witnessed the intense physical battles that play out on the pitch, it is easy to say women's football at base level is taken very seriously in Bolivia. But what is in store for the future of the profession?

There have been small improvements over time that bring hope to certain aspects of the sport. Aracely Castro, for example, who was born in a suburb of El Alto, has worked her way past international barriers to referee professionally around the world. But improvements like these remain exceptions. In Bolivia, it is a question of transforming entrenched views on football and gender stereotypes. Perhaps this could start with success stories of role models such as Cassandra Camacho, which prove to younger generations that it is possible to chip away at the male dominance of the sport.

EARTH'S RICHES JOIN THE GAME

TEXT: INSKE GROENEN **ILLUSTRATION: BRUNO RIVERA**

The big pyramid-shaped mountain overlooking Potosí has always had its power over the city. The silver coming from this Cerro Rico –rich hill– once brought unbelievable wealth to Spain and made Potosí a city similar in size to London and Paris. Nowadays, many people have migrated away from Cerro Rico's gravitational pull as they saw its wealth diminish. However, the influence and riches of the mountain in Potosi have certainly not dissolved completely.

Not too long ago, Cerro Rico brought wealth and fortune to Emilio Alave, who grew up orphaned with his brother in the northern region of Potosí. Far from having great wealth during his childhood, the conditions at the start of Alave's life were very poor. Yet, the faint promise of the Cerro Rico was enough to motivate him to leave his farm work behind and move to the city. The mountain has certainly rewarded him well, with his fortune now estimated to be around 6 million dollars. In 2004, Alave invested part of his fortune in Potosí's football club Nacional Potosí, and so the power and wealth that comes out of the mythical Cerro Rico made its way into football.

When Alave bought Nacional Potosí, the team had never played in the first league. It was always Real Potosí that was mentioned as the city's top football club. So, why did Alave buy Nacional Potosi? Could it be that –given that he is a comparatively *small-time* oligarch– Nacional Potosí was all he could afford? He certainly is no billionaire like Marcelo Claure, who owns Bolivia's top football team Club Bolívar. Or, could there be something more to it?

It is clear that Alave is highly ambitious when it comes to Nacional Potosí. Under his leadership, the team started some serious training to get into the Liga del Fútbol Profesional Boliviano (LFPB), Bolivia's professional league, and – although Alave himself admitted that he is no football expert– he has been able to get them there. Last year, they even qualified for their first ever international tournament: the South American Cup.

Could it be that Alave's ambition comes from a deeper commitment? His investment may indeed stem from an underlying desire to give something back to Potosí. Being the team patron to Nacional Potosí may just be the way for Alave to give part of the mountain's wealth back to the people of Potosí. He may even hope to redeem himself from his role contributing to scraping the mountain bare of its riches. If this is indeed his desire, he still has some work to do because getting Nacional Potosí in the second to last position of Bolivia's professional league is not exactly befitting for a mountain of such reputation and former wealth. But the hollowed out Cerro Rico has started to crumble. If there's a glimmer of justice in this town, perhaps Nacional Potosí can rise up into new heights while the ancient hill falls under its own history and weight. ×

If there's a glimmer of justice in this town, perhaps Nacional Potosí can rise up into new heights while the ancient hill falls under its own history and weight

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GLOSSARY

ALTEÑOS	Residents of El Alto
ALTURA	Altitude, height
CABALA	A system of superticious beliefs
COCALEROS	Coca growers
VENDEDOR	Seller
EL CHUFLAY	A typical Bolivian drink comprising Singani and Sprite, also the nickname of Julio Baldivieso on account of his passion for the bottle
EL DIABLO	The devil, also the nickname of Marco Etcheverry
TARIJA	A region in south-east Bolivia
LAS SIETE LIGAS	Paid, but uncontracted players in Bolivia's informal leagues
DIRIGENTE	The owner/president of a club
EL TEJAR	A neighbour in the Suburbs of La Paz
UNA GRAN FIESTA	One big party
PACEÑA	Popular brand of Bolivian beer

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN CACERES