

## Football

### Patrick

Ever since Mexico 1970 I've been fascinated by the World Cup -all those Brazilian names that commentators couldn't pronounce. Somehow the event is qualitatively different from the competition in any domestic league. It's simply much more glamorous, with players determined to enhance their global reputations -and transfer values. There is lots of scope for inventing new aspects of this beautiful game, so let's kick off...

### Mark

I must be a little older than you, as my love of football, that is World Cup football, happened when we won in 66. Yes, there is the added glamour and razzmatazz, but what did it for me, more than anything else, was the passion shown in every match. I had never seen that sort of passion displayed in our own domestic leagues, except for a small number of memorable FA Cup finals and play-off later. Being a bit of a traditionalist, when it comes to the game, it makes it a little awkward for me, so I do not want to go too overboard for change, for change sake.

### Patrick

When there's big money in-play, all sorts of innovations happen. I'm keen not to see The World Cup become like Formula 1 in which driving skill is just one factor in competing to pilot the best technology -which then wins the race.

Having said that, I thought it must be April 1st when I read about non-circular training footballs. As another slightly crazy idea, why not have golf ball dimples applied to the outside of footballs to make them travel farther? Personally, I'd like to see these on only one hemisphere, so that more extreme bending shots could be played. I'd also arrange for the ball to be spotlit by training some lasers on its location -as determined by a high-resolution GPS watch and transmitter embedded within it.

Just as Nascar races can now be viewed with streamlines superimposed, we could have these patterns added to the ball in flight on tv (using realtime airflow simulation). It might make the ball easier to follow and show whenever a particularly hard shot had taken place.

### Mark

It may not be an April fool's day wind-up, but I think they have a slightly warped sense of humour.

We know that two aerodynamic drag forces - **pressure drag** (due to separation of the air flow behind the sphere) and, to a lesser extent, **friction**, play a key role in the flight of a ball. Dimples, as opposed to a smooth surface, causes a turbulent air flow behind the golf ball helping it to go further. Whether or not it would have a noticeable effect on a much larger and lighter football, travelling at lower speeds, is in question and one for testing. I certainly wouldn't want half dimples and half smooth footballs, if it bent the ball on every pass. Is not accuracy essential in passing? If so, the ball must be 'straight and true', like an arrow. Leave any bending shots to foot skills alone.

### Patrick

Sounds like you are more of a Charlton man than a Beckhamisto?

### Mark

As football is not held in the dark, your 'spotlit by training some lasers on its location' idea is what I was talking about avoiding earlier - going too overboard for change, for change sake. I did, however, like your streamline superimposed ball flight imaging

system - using real-time airflow simulation. Is it me, or does the Plain English Campaigner need to work on this last sentence? Anyway, the only aspect I would change, apart from the description, is the **real-time** element, being too distracting in play and use it solely for action replays.

### **Patrick**

The action replay itself used to be considered new-fangled, high-tech nonsense of course. Now, it's used by every armchair supporter to pick apart slowly moves and judgements that happen in milliseconds.

On which subject...poor old ref. He's the traffic warden of the turf. My proposal here is to provide referees with a whistle to which the ball reacts. A microphone inside would 'hear' a specific set of frequencies emitted by the electronically enhanced whistle and plastic electronic spots in the ball's panels would change colour to indicate that the ball was in or out of play.

I'd also like to see a referee's performance on a bank of fitness tests being published the day before a big game, so that they could be shown to be at least as fit as the players.

### **Mark**

Far too gimmicky/unnecessary and, with band wave technology as it is, more than likely it will tune itself into radio 4 with every second kick. Also, less of the 'Poor Old Ref' please, as part of the fun on the day is giving them grief - subconsciously it is our way at getting back at traffic wardens, bankers and politician types, e.g. establishment. That said, expecting a ref to be 'player fit' is not right, you could lose 90% from the pool. Just get them to leave out the full English and 20 sigs on the match day is enough.

### **Patrick**

Ok, but try telling that to the managers, whose jobs depend on the puffing 90%.

Turning now to the stadia, there are lots of innovations that might improve the experience for the paying punters. The seats in football grounds could easily be wired so as to signal the occupant at the exact moment when they were required to raise their arms to form a Mexican wave.

### **Mark**

It would work really well if it gave them an electric shock. A Mexican shockwave!

### **Patrick**

Hmmm. 39 goals in their 13 appearances at the World Cup finals? Viva Mexico.

People who have bought a ticket for some match using their mobile could, during a game, be allowed to text the shirt numbers of their favourite players on the day, in order of preference, to a telephone number set aside for the purpose.

The preferences could be displayd, in realtime on a screen within the ground, indicating how each player was performing, in the view of the paying public. This might cause managers to make substitutions in response to public opinion and exhort players, low on the scale, to greater efforts.

Such data could even be gathered from match to match and help influence the post-cup salary and transfer fees associated with any given player.

...Here's another one you will probably find offensive ;) Imagine an international match where microphones are placed around the pitch. If your team has the ball, as a supporter you cheer and scream your heart out. This noise would be captured by the

microphones and used to widen both goalmouths using uprights driven along a track by some accurately controlled electric motors. Widening both goals removes the need to identify who is in possession (only one goal can be under attack at a time). Naturally, if your side is dispossessed, the test would be to be as quiet as possible (a valuable education in itself for the average football supporter).

This would allow much greater participation and even more fanaticism by the crowd (who would probably have to be searched, on entry to the ground, for any noise generating equipment -I'm sure FIFA could come up with some rules in less than a decade or so). This scheme might be adapted to allow input from a global, online audience. This could take the form of financial pledges made to charity, rather than cheering volume.

I know you also dislike helmets so I won't witter on about head injuries in football. Instead, how about shinpads with embedded small-scale airbags? As well as protecting the wearer, their deployment would also indicate to the referee that a clumsy tackle had just occurred.

### **Mark**

Stop with the data collection, microphones and widening goal posts brainstorming. You are playing with my head.

With the cost of footballers, I am surprised clubs do not cover them in bubble wrap. But shin pads are used already in football and adequately protect the shin. If we want to invent something commercial, nothing wrong with that, you need to identify a real problem and, ideally, find the best solution for it to have a chance of making money. Remember, I am a capitalist at heart and that is what makes the world go round, or did once.

### **Patrick**

Well I have some serious reservations about what money is doing to the passion in sport, but supporters can restrain that, if they want, by spending their TV subscriptions elsewhere. Running World Cups certainly needs significant commercial sponsorship. I love the idea of firing promotional t-shirts into the crowd...but somebody thought of this first.

### **Mark**

Actually, I hate it, because it can cause ill feelings in the crowd if two people claim ownership and start fighting eventually ripping the thing in half. If you ever watch the TV program 'You Have Been Framed', one of the most common videos, because of the calamity it causes, is when the Bride throws the bouquet over her shoulder into the crowd behind.

### **Patrick**

Football is very much about TV these days. I'd like to see each player equipped with his own micro helicopter uav which would fly above his head carrying a small video camera (this aircraft would detect and pursue a player-specific radio signal from a small transmitter carried in their waistband). That way, people could see the game from a player's-eye view. They might even choose to subscribe to the pitch channel of their favourite star. Anyone trying a quick off-the-ball foul would, as an added benefit, immediately be caught out.

### **Mark**

Talk about over engineering and making a relatively easy job complex. Just add a small video camera on a number of key Players shoulders. They do something similar on TV's 'Police Camera Action' and F1 racing cars (but on the car itself). The trick is that it must be light and small, which is feasible, without an expensive, difficult to

control, crash and burn uav in sight.

### **Patrick**

Penalties are always controversial as well as dramatic. It turns out that when a footballer sees himself (or herself) score, the size of the goal subsequently seems wider (and makes the next shot on goal much more confident). This has implications for training, so that before a big game, players should each be shown a film of themselves scoring important goals.

During any penalties, to add to the drama, I suggest displaying a big-screen image of the target goal with a numbered grid superimposed.

Spectators would have two minutes to text the coordinates of the square they wanted the shot to be directed at. The penalty taker could choose to take this advice or ignore it, but either way, the crowd would have increased influence over a game.

### **Mark**

Rather than have a means for crowd interference, as players would see it, it could be used successfully for a kind of live 'spot-the-ball competition'. The possibility of winning a prize would add nicely to the tension and will milk that well needed extra bit of cash out of your fans.

### **Patrick**

I'm not sure I'm keen on the idea of milking fans for cash...better to treat supporters as avid, longterm customers and give them reasons to buy-in wholeheartedly.

One thing that limits that process is professional cynicism. I do get disproportionately annoyed by 'professional' footballers who are allowed to break the rules by tugging at each others' shirts. Nothing at all wrong with shouldercharging, but dragging back a player because he's beaten you, should really be a sending-off issue. All professional (outfield) soccer players should be equipped with a mandatory pair of mitts before each match. These would be stretchy and breathable but would restrict the fingers and thumbs into a loosely-closed fist, enveloped in a continuous fabric sheath. It would be like wearing several very thick socks on each hand -thus preventing them gripping anything smaller than the ball. Players could still lift the ball (using spherical, apparently thumbless hands) and perform throw-ins but without the ability to impede the opposition.

Maybe, on committing a yellow card offence, players would be forced to swap positions with a random team-mate. That might have the effects of reducing player specialisation and cutting the frequency of rule breaking.

### **Mark**

Having to swap positions with a random team-mate, for a yellow card offence, is both unfair on your team mate and probably a game spoiler. A better solution, as a deterrent, maybe to pin a yellow glowing 'timeout' badge (I know you like badges), or bracelet, on the offender, which after 5-10 minutes on the by-line, glows green indicating he/she can return, with the referee's knowledge of course. First offence 5 mins, second 10 mins and third a red light and off completely.

As the products success all hinges on a football rule change, I would get that first.

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