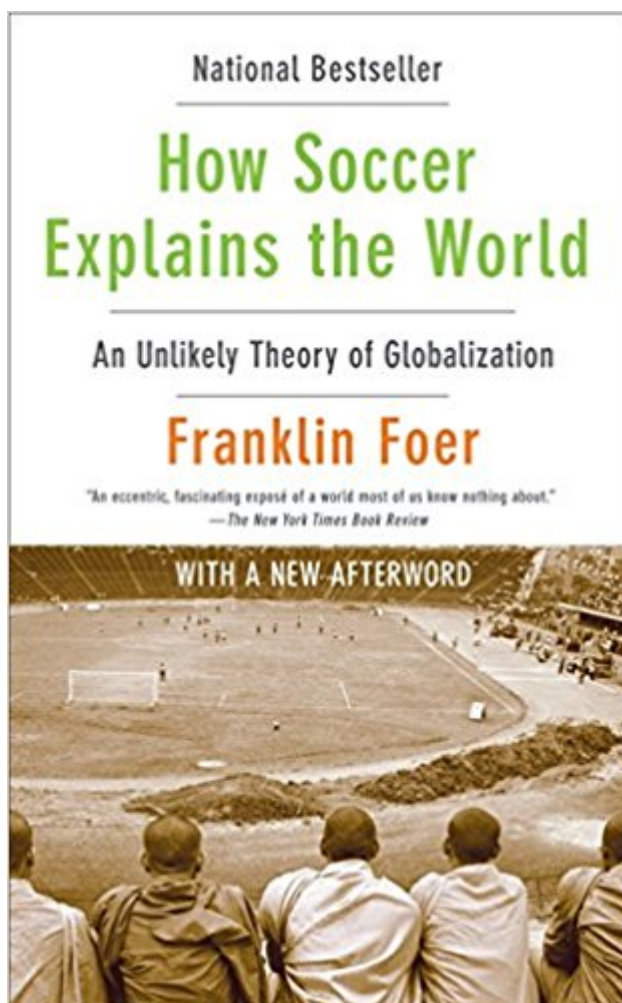


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# How Soccer Explains The World: An Unlikely Theory Of Globalization



## Synopsis

“An eccentric, fascinating exposé of a world most of us know nothing about.”  
•The New York Times Book Review "An insightful, entertaining, brainiac sports road trip."  
•The Wall Street Journal "Foer's skills as a narrator are enviable. His characterizations are comparable to those in Norman Mailer's journalism."  
•The Boston Globe A groundbreaking work named one of the five most influential sports books of the decade by Sports Illustrated  
•How Soccer Explains the World is a unique and brilliantly illuminating look at soccer, the world's most popular sport, as a lens through which to view the pressing issues of our age, from the clash of civilizations to the global economy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The global power of soccer might be a little hard for Americans, living in a country that views the game with the same skepticism used for the metric system and the threat of killer bees, to grasp fully. But in Europe, South America, and elsewhere, soccer is not merely a pastime but often an expression of the social, economic, political, and racial composition of the communities that host both the teams and their throngs of enthusiastic fans. New Republic editor Franklin Foer, a lifelong devotee of soccer dating from his own inept youth playing days to an adulthood of obsessive fandom, examines soccer's role in various cultures as a means of examining the reach of globalization. Foer's approach is long on soccer reportage, providing extensive history and fascinating interviews on the Rangers-Celtic rivalry and the inner workings of AC Milan, and light on direct discussion of issues like world trade and the exportation of Western culture. But by creating

such a compelling narrative of soccer around the planet, Foer draws the reader into these sport-mad societies, and subtly provides the explanations he promises in chapters with titles like "How Soccer Explains the New Oligarchs", "How Soccer Explains Islam's Hope", and "How Soccer Explains the Sentimental Hooligan." Foer's own passion for the game gives his book an infectious energy but still pales in comparison to the religious fervor of his subjects. His portraits of legendary hooligans in Serbia and Britain, in particular, make the most die-hard roughneck New York Yankees fan look like a choirboy in comparison. Beyond the thugs, Foer also profiles Nigerian players living in the Ukraine, Iranian women struggling against strict edicts to attend matches, and the parallel worlds of Brazilian soccer and politics from which Pele emerged and returned. Foer posits that globalization has eliminated neither local cultural identities nor violent hatred among fans of rival teams, and it has not washed out local businesses in a sea of corporate wealth nor has it quelled rampant local corruption. Readers with an interest in international economics are sure to like *How Soccer Explains the World*, but soccer fans will love it. --John Moe --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Foer, a *New Republic* editor, scores a game-winning goal with this analysis of the interchange between soccer and the new global economy. The subtitle is a bit misleading, though: he doesn't really use soccer to develop a theory; instead, he focuses on how examining soccer in different countries allows us to understand how international forces affect politics and life around the globe. The book is full of colorful reporting, strong characters and insightful analysis: In one of the most compelling chapters, Foer shows how a soccer thug in Serbia helped to organize troops who committed atrocities in the Balkan War—by the end of the war, the thug's men, with the acquiescence of Serbian leaders, had killed at least 2,000 Croats and Bosnians. Then he bought his own soccer club and, before he was gunned down in 2000, intimidated other teams into losing. Most of the stories aren't as gruesome, but they're equally fascinating. The crude hatred, racism and anti-Semitism on display in many soccer stadiums is simply amazing, and Foer offers context for them, including how current economic conditions are affecting these manifestations. In Scotland, the management of some teams have kept religious hatreds alive in order to sell tickets and team merchandise. But Foer, a diehard soccer enthusiast, is no anti-globalist. In Iran, for example, he depicts how soccer works as a modernizing force: thousands of women forced police to allow them into a men's-only stadium to celebrate the national team's triumph in an international match. One doesn't have to be a soccer fan to truly appreciate this absorbing book. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out

of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Foer, F. (2004). *How soccer explains the world: An unlikely theory of globalization*. New York: Harper Perennial. Franklin Foer attempts to simplify the world with his "less economic than cultural" view of planet Earth in, "How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization." The book isn't about what led to globalization, but rather what has become of it, and more specifically what it's done for the sport of soccer. It focuses more on what the sport means to so many people. How they perceive, consume and embody it. The athletes are idolized. The teams are revered. The sport itself is worshiped. Foer traveled the globe in the quest to understand soccer as it strengthens national ties, crosses borders and seemingly extends the arm of diplomacy between feuding states. He posits his argument by discussing the ways in which club teams field rosters of multicultural players. The pitch knows no national boundaries. Continental and global tournaments bring teams from all over together in competition, with the World Cup "[putting] the 'ethnic stereotypes' of nationalities on display." Foer uses the defensive oriented Italians and the rugged brutality of the English national teams to illustrate the homogenous traits that remain on national team squads despite global communities' growing connectedness. Technology, mainly satellites and high-speed internet, builds metaphorical bridges between communities on opposite sides of the globe. Foer's passion for soccer came as a result of it. Media consumption accelerates the sport's growth and increases and enhances its fan base. The modes and methods of soccer consumption vary, with some going to the extreme. Italian media outlets even go so far as to review, critique and referee the performance of referees. Controversial calls are scrutinized, with the help of slow motion replays. Statistics are accumulated with extreme precision, with hopes of exposing bias. Foer uses the passionate Italians as the epitome of die-hard soccer fans. One of the most inspiring in Foer's work is the relationship between soccer fans and their clubs in Islamic nations. With a society and culture stifled by an oppressive religion, Muslims use soccer as an escape from their highly regulated lives. "Fans will curse in the foulest, most clearly verboten language. They will throw punches that can't be justified by any reasonable interpretation of the Koran," Foer wrote (p. 218). The allure of the game makes it difficult for a large portion of the Muslim population, as they are prohibited from attending a live match. Women living in Islamic regimes occasionally risk their own safety by disguising themselves as men to sneak into a match at Azadi, the 120,000 seat stadium in Tehran, Iran. Their actions muster up a faint voice for a population typically overlooked. The Iranian people's celebration after their national team qualified for the 1998 World Cup exemplified just that. For that night, Iranians were free. Women took off their hijabs, throngs of Iranians consumed alcohol

in the streets while listening to western pop music. When the militia arrived to shut down the parties, they couldn't resist partaking in the festivities. Foer didn't possess, nor need, and expertise in the sporting arena to publish his work. While a vast amount of reporting and journalism experience and an unbridled passion for soccer enhances the final product, no "expertise" in either, nor globalization, was required to understand and disseminate the material. He admitted his 248 page thesis doesn't come close to mastering and abridging the complexity that is globalization theory. He even goes so far as to say he took on the task fueled by personal interest. Yet, what Foer does accomplish is shining a light on areas in the soccer world that even embedded journalists wouldn't uncover. The interconnectedness of soccer clubs in Italy and the ruling class. The working poor in the Balkan nations, who cling to their favorite teams as if it was life support. To some, the world's sport means the world to them. Readers of Thomas Friedman's work may feel slighted at the use of "globalization." While offering only multicultural teams and ease of access to sporting events to explain his theory, Foer's book, while interesting, was but several lengthy accounts of teams and their fans and "stadiums [he] most desperately wanted to see." As a journalist, Foer should have at least considered objectivity before leaving his desk at the New Republic. Soccer fans would undoubtedly enjoy the book, however globalization theorists, anthropologists and sociologists would feel deceived by the book's title. In all, Foer's passion makes for a pleasurable read. While soccer may not bring the world together-- as many Americans delight in despising it -its fans, no matter the demographic, comprise the entire population. While all may not indulge, everyone is represented.

I grew up in the US before youth soccer programs grew to their current popularity. Thus, when I began playing in a weekly office soccer game and found that it was truly a beautiful game, I immediately tried to immerse myself in soccer history, strategy, and lore. I added this book to my reading list because of the title. I am, by trade, a political economist - combining globalization and soccer seemed like a charming idea. I was grossly disappointed. The book is written in a journalistic style that is easy to read and the anecdotes are rather entertaining. That is, however, the extent to which I found this book at all enjoyable. First, the author's narrative often fails to connect the anecdotes with the broader point that he is attempting to make. Even worse, the author often makes claims and offers no support for those claims. When reading pop-nonfiction, one must, to some extent, trust the author's claims. However, the author is attempting to connect soccer to well studied social phenomena - and on many occasions gets it wrong. Moreover, the author's obvious biases make it incredibly difficult not to scoff at his assertions, especially when he offers no support other than his own word. Additionally, the title suggests that soccer will be somehow tied to globalization,

and yet the author only mentions globalization in terms of continued racism. I am inclined to believe that despite his experience with political journalism, the author has only the most basic understanding of the popular notion of globalization and is incapable of providing a meaningful application and analysis. This book is not an analysis or a fresh look at soccer. Instead it is the result of a journalist taking a year off from work, traveling around to watch soccer games and collect stories, and then trying to find a way to write them up in a book with a more intriguing title than "Tales from the pitch". On more than one occasion, I read segments of the book aloud to various people for cheap laughs - colleagues, my political economist/soccer fanatic boyfriend, my boyfriend's soccer fanatic friends. It is at best, a collection of interesting stories about soccer with some very poor narrative in between. If that's all you're looking for, read this book. If you are looking for something more substantive, look elsewhere.

Phenomenal book that any politically minded soccer fan would love. The author is very open about his opinions which in times might aggravate certain readers but all in all it adds to the power of the book

It's a fun light read. A lot of great anecdotes and fun facts about the world of football and the historical contexts of the teams. It makes me ashamed of insignificant history of the U.S. sports teams that I love. I recommend it for any human being. I can't speak for martians, but I suggest they give it a try too. Do they play football?

Enjoyable whether you are familiar with soccer or not. Very interesting perspectives inside societies of countries throughout the world as well as inside sports. Much of what is relayed can be applied to other sports "worlds." Colorful style of writing details that holds attention.

An interesting but unconvincing argument about soccer as a way of understanding nationalism and globalization. The Kindle version lacks a substantial afterword that is found in the printed version.

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