

FIFA WORLD CUP:

Soccer & Global History



HIS 3538

T Th 3:30pm-4:45pm

ABH 240 • Spring 2026

Instructor: Dr. Rwany Sibaja

"Luckily, on the field you can still see, even if only once in a long while, some insolent rascal who sets aside the script and commits the blunder of dribbling past the entire opposing side, the referee and the crowd in the stands, all for the carnal delight of embracing the forbidden adventure of freedom."

– Eduardo Galeano, *Soccer in Sun and Shadow*



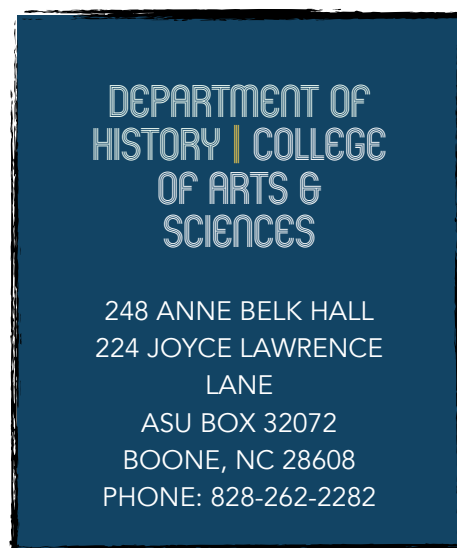
The Department of History at Appalachian State provides students with knowledge of their own cultural tradition and an appreciation of other cultures and societies of the past.

HIS 3538 is a Special Topics course. At the 3000-level, it asks students to examine history at a deeper level; in this case, to look at soccer as a field of research. Students will analyze primary and secondary source materials, discuss scholarship vs. journalism, explore multimedia sources, and, ultimately, research a topic related to *fútbol* with larger implications. The end goal is to appreciate the complexity of human affairs and the difficulties involved in interpreting them.

PEDAGOGICAL GOALS AND PRACTICES

3000-level History Dept. courses provide intensive training in the craft and communication of history. Research methods you will practice include:

-  identification, analysis, and use of primary and secondary sources
-  written prospectus
-  outline
-  rough draft (and revisions)
-  historical narrative
-  Chicago style documentation
-  historiographical essays
-  annotated bibliography
-  oral presentations
-  reading and writing book reviews
-  identification and comparison of different interpretations
-  Introduction to theory
-  use of interdisciplinary methods
-  oral history



About the Course

“Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that.”

— Bill Shankly, former Liverpool FC manager

Shankly’s remark is one of the most famous quotes in the history of the sport, plastered on countless posters and signs. What is it about soccer (football, *calcio*, *futebol*, *fútbol*), however, that stirs such irrational passions around the globe?

The “beautiful game” is the world’s most popular sport. The men’s FIFA World Cup is the largest televised/streamed sporting event – viewed by over 3 billion people every four years. Women’s soccer has also seen enormous growth over the last decades. In our living rooms, EA’s FIFA series (now renamed EA SportsFC) remains a top-selling video game. Here, in the United States, more children play soccer than any other sport. Major League Soccer is almost thirty years old, the USL is introducing promotion and relegation, and Appalachian FC has been a hit in Boone.



The *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*, or FIFA, markets the World Cup as an event to bridge cultures and unite the world. In 2026, the tournament will return to North America for the first time since 1994. The host nations—México, the United States, and Canada—are intimately tied throughout history, but their relationships can sometimes be strained. Will the 2026 edition promote fraternal celebration, or deepen political divides?

In HIS 3538, we will examine soccer as a field of research. Students will analyze primary and secondary source materials, discuss sports history scholarship, explore multimedia sources, and research a topic that situates *fútbol* in world history.

In terms of your research project this semester, find a topic related to the World Cup that excites you. Ground yourself in the necessary background information—not just by reading and annotating our course readings, and engaging in class discussions, but also by sharing research with your classmates. Ultimately, HIS 3538 “FIFA World Cup: Soccer & Global History” is a shared journey ... so let’s enjoy the process!

[Oh, and we might watch some games ahead of the World Cup!]

– [See syllabus for information and links to App State and HIS 3538 course policies](#)

1

North American Soccer: Past & Present

Soccer embodies an array of values around the world. For some, it is a “safe” and healthy game, full of orange slices, minivans, and parents watching on the sidelines from their lawn chairs. For others, it is a matter of life and death. Wear the wrong colors and it may cost you your life. In some societies, the sport is tied to ethnic, religious, class, or racial identities. Soccer can also be an almost-exclusively hyper-masculine social arena. And, in the case of countries like Argentina, it is followed with even more devotion and passion than organized religion.



We open HIS 3538 with a preview of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, followed by a survey of soccer’s early history in North America. The unit ends with a look back at the most recent World Cups on North American soil: the 1970, 1986 and 1994 editions. The readings selected are just a sample of how journalists and scholars analyze soccer through an academic lens. This introductory unit sets the stage for deeper analysis in the run up to the 2026 FIFA World Cup hosted by Canada, Mexico, and the United States!



TOPICS TO DISCUSS

-  Syllabus & Guiding Document; Website; Messi, Son, and MLS; FIFA and the 2026 World Cup [\[Jan 13 & 15\]](#)
-  Origins of soccer in the United States; *Billion Dollar Goal* documentary [\[Jan 20 & 22\]](#)
-  Previous World Cups in North America: 1970 Mexico, 1986 Mexico, and 1994 United States; *Billion Dollar Goal* documentary. [\[Jan 27 & 29\]](#)

READINGS



Access your group readings (make a copy so you can record your progress each week): [Maple](#) / [Clutch](#) / [Zayu](#) - read selections for Unit 1 - Weeks 1, 2, 3

2

Early History of the FIFA World Cup



The FIFA World Cup is the biggest sporting event in the world, watched by more than four billion people around the world. But it didn't start that way. In this unit, we will look at the amateur beginnings of world football, the emergence of FIFA as an economic and political entity, and the early history of the tournament. Before FIFA created its own tournament, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) asked FIFA to organize the men's football event at the 1924 and 1928 Summer Olympics, held in Paris and Amsterdam respectively. Football fever gripped Europe at the time. However, it was the small South American nation of Uruguay that won the gold medal and captivated audiences with its free-flowing style of play. Their triumphs generated the Europe-South America rivalry that continues to define international football.

In this unit, we examine the early roots of association football, the first international tournaments in South America and the Summer Olympics, first World Cup held in Uruguay in 1930, and the rise of Italian *calico* under Mussolini's Fascist Italy. We end with an overview of the FIFA World Cups in the Cold War era.



TOPICS TO DISCUSS



Origins of "Soccer" (Association Football) [\[Feb 3 and 5\]](#)



1910-30s. Early tournaments, the first World Cup (1930 Uruguay), and Fascist Italy. [\[Feb 10 & 12\]](#)



1950. The "Miracle on Grass" and the "Maracanazo": 1950 World Cup final in Rio de Janeiro (Uruguay vs Brazil) [\[Feb 17\]](#)



1950-1982. World Cups in the Post-WWII & Cold War era. [\[Feb 17\]](#)

READINGS



See group readings ([Maple](#) / [Clutch](#) / [Zayu](#)) for Unit 2 - Weeks 4, 5, 6.

3

Race, Politics, and National Identity



What does it mean to be “French”? Can *futebol* truly help us understand *brasildade* (Brazilian identity)? Intellectuals, journalists, and historians have all tried to unpack *brasildade*, Frenchness, German identity, etc. through the “beautiful game.” Their analyses are crucial to understanding how soccer can shape racial and national identity. Their studies position soccer at the center of an ongoing process of state formation and empire building.

This unit examines how soccer has been central to the construction of national identity. Afro-Brazilian players like Pelé have been crucial to the development of *futebol* and the “*jogo bonito*.” Previously, that same black identity became a scapegoat for failure. In Europe, heated political debates swirled around the ethnic, racial, and religious diversity in the French national team ahead of the 1998 World Cup, hosted by France, as well as the modern Belgian and German squads (among others). Players of African and Caribbean backgrounds, in particular, challenged notions of a white, European nation. When Marseille-native Zinedine Zidane (born of Algerian immigrant parents) scored two headers against Brazil in 1998, they not only secured France’s first-ever World Cup trophy on home soil, but they shifted conversations about French national identity in a team full of players from diverse backgrounds. The unit ends with an analysis of state uses (and misuses) of soccer and the World Cup, with a focus on the brutal military junta that staged the 1978 World Cup in Argentina.



TOPICS TO DISCUSS

-  Evolution: Immigration and its impact on national teams [\[Feb 19\]](#)
-  Tropical Modernity: the “Maracanazo” and the 1958 World Cup team in the shaping of Brazilian national identity. [\[Feb 24\]](#)
-  The Age of Pelé and the *Jogo Bonito*; Afro-European national teams. [\[Feb 26\]](#)
-  State involvement in the World Cup: Case studies from 1962, 1966, 1970, and 1978 (with a brief look at USA ’94) [\[Mar 3 & 5\]](#)

READINGS



See group readings ([Maple](#) / [Clutch](#) / [Zayu](#)) for Unit 3 - Weeks 6, 7, 8.

4

Myth making, Heroes, Villains, and Fandom

Fandom is a funny thing. One person's hero is another's villain. Examples abound, whether it's Uruguay's Luis Suárez, Argentina's Diego Maradona, Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, Brazil's Vini Jr., or historic teams of past World Cups, some figures or teams are praised and hated to an intense degree.

It's no surprise that the “beautiful game” incites passions around the world—often at unhealthy levels. Club or national team identities are often intertwined with ethnic, racial, religious, and class identities, and rivalries bring out abusive behaviors. Sometimes contradictions occur, but worse violence ensues. In this unit, we will look at how myths are created, when soccer fandom goes too far, and the significance of particular players in upholding or challenging existing narratives. We will examine questions such as: “Are there true heroes and villains in world soccer?” “How does a game consisting of one ball and twenty-two players take on socio-political-economic significance—sometimes to a violent degree?,” and “Who is left out in the myth making of the sport?”.



TOPICS TO DISCUSS

-  Fandom, stadiums, and the culture surrounding the FIFA World Cup [Mar 17]
-  The ultimate “pibe”: Diego Maradona, 1986, and the “Hand of God” [Mar 19]
-  What makes a soccer hero or villain? Focus on Ronaldo, Zidane, and Messi [Mar 24 & 26]
-  Spain's Golden Era: regionalism, immigration, national identity, and Lamine Yamal. Guest: Adam Winkel, Spanish professor at High Point University. [Mar 31]

READINGS



See group readings ([Maple](#) / [Clutch](#) / [Zayu](#)) for Unit 4 - Weeks 9, 10, 11.

5

Futboleras: Women Who Changed Soccer

Women have played soccer from the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet, for most people, their impression is that women only began playing the sport at a professional level over the last few decades.

In this unit, we will explore the long history of women's football—from its earliest beginning, to the glory days of the Dick, Kerr ladies team in England in the 1920s, the first starts in the United States, to the adventurous *futboleras* of the 1950s, the unofficial Women's World Cup in Mexico in 1971 (which set record crowds that still stand today), the impact of Title IX on collegiate soccer in the U.S., and up to the modern-era of FIFA World Cup and Olympic tournaments.

We will discover the pioneers, the trailblazers, and icons that not only played soccer at the highest levels but also used their position to advance women's rights and push for greater equality within the sport.

And let's get ready for Brazil 2027, and USA-Mexico-Costa Rica-Jamaica 2031!



TOPICS TO DISCUSS



The early history of women's soccer [\[Apr 2\]](#)



The early history of women's soccer in the U.S. [\[Apr 14\]](#)



The USWNT: Title IX, collective bargaining, and the continued struggle for equal pay-equal rights / Marta & Brazil [\[Apr 21\]](#)



READINGS



See group readings ([Maple](#) / [Clutch](#) / [Zayu](#)) for Unit 5 - Weeks 11, 13, and 14.

Course Structure

GRADING

HIS 3538 (Special Topics)—FIFA World Cup: Soccer & Global History—follows the standard grading scale used at Appalachian State University (A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, F).



GRADE DESCRIPTORS

- **A/A-** 100-94/93-90 — Superior Work
- **B+ to B-** 89-87/86-83/82-80 — Above Average Work
- **C+ to C-** 79-77/76-73/70-72 — Acceptable Work (Room for Improvement)
- **D+ to D-** 69-67/66-63/62-60 — Below Average Work (Significant Issues)
- **F** 59 or less — Unacceptable Work (Failure)

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment	Due Dates	First Draft	Final Draft	Points
* Engagement (Attendance, Participation)	Ongoing	–	10	10
Weekly Readings Analysis	Ongoing	X	√ (10 entries, 3pts. each)	30
Film/Book Review	by March 18	10	√ (revise + resubmit if needed)	10
Final Exam Paper	by May 7 (2-4:30pm)	X	10	10
RESEARCH PROJECT (40%)				
<i>Project Items: topic, questions, and plan; secondary sources; primary sources & thesis; annotated bibliography; draft of digital product</i>	by Jan 29; Feb 12; Feb 26; Mar 5; Mar 26	X	25	25
<i>Research Project Presentation</i>	Apr 7 & 9	X	5	5
<i>Final Draft - Digital Research Product</i>	by Apr 24	√	10	10
TOTAL	100			

* We will meet twice on most weeks. You are allowed to miss three (3) class meetings. Afterwards, you will receive a notification. After a fourth absence, you must meet with the instructor via an individual conference to discuss your progress in the course. A fifth absence is the final notice and will require an additional make-up work assignment. Six more or absences is an automatic failure (“F”).

* *Need an extension on an assignment?* You can submit up to four late-work tickets using [this Late Work-Ticket Google Form](#), which extends your deadline by three (3) days without penalty. [Exceptions: final project, final exam, presentation]

Course Objectives

PRIMARY

Participants should be able to use their knowledge of the history of soccer to **evaluate** the degree to which the FIFA World Cup has shaped intercultural relations over time.



SECONDARY

Participants should be able to...

1. **Articulate** continuities and changes over time. [Temporal; Context]
2. **Interpret** the many meanings people have attributed to soccer. [Context]
3. Use primary and secondary sources, to **construct** research-based historical arguments by analyzing and synthesizing information through a social, cultural, political, gender, racial, ethnic, or national lenses. [Analysis; Interpretation]
4. Practice public speaking and writing skills by **presenting** digitally-infused work to others, with a nod to understanding soccer from a global perspective *and* providing a unique insight through your research. [Historical, Digital, and Global Literacy; Respect]

COURSE TEXTBOOKS (CT) & READINGS

-  Bowman, William. *The World Cup as World History*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019.
-  Campomar, Andreas. *Golazo!: The Beautiful Game from the Aztecs to the World Cup: The Complete History of How Soccer Shaped Latin America*. Riverhead Books, 2014.
-  Bolsmann, Chris and George N. Kioussis, eds. *Soccer Frontiers: The Global Game in the United States, 1863-1913*. University of Tennessee Press, 2021.
-  Williams, Jean. *The History of Women's Football*. Pen & Sword History, 2024.

- All assigned textbooks will be on course reserve at ASU's Anne Belk Library, and listed at the [ASU Bookstore's Adoption page](#).
- Course textbooks & other books for possible research projects are accessible via the [HIS 3538 FIFA World Cup Amazon list](#)
- Other course readings will be set aside at the library on course reserve, or available through online databases.

Helpful books on writing history papers:

Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing In History*, 10th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2020. [[link](#)]; Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. [[link](#)]

Assignments



ENGAGEMENT

Your engagement matters. It helps to build a shared learning community.

Engagement includes regular attendance, but also the quality of contributions you offer to class conversations (in person and online). In short, engagement implies doing the work (reading, taking notes, completing assignments) so you can offer something of value to the class discussions and activities. *(See attendance policy on pg. 10)*

WEEKLY READINGS ANALYSIS

Each week, you will be expected to read one or two reading selections on average. Reserve about 30-60 mins. to complete your readings and note-taking. Use your notes for the Weekly Readings Analysis and for class discussions. You have 13 possible weeks to choose from to complete your 10 blog posts. This means you can have 3 weeks off! >> *choose wisely!*

[Possible weeks: 02 to 11, and 13 to 14]

Your readings will be either:

1. **“ALL”**: common readings for the entire class; or ...
2. **by Groups**: each student has been assigned a group named after one of the three 2026 World Cup mascots: **Maple**, **Clutch**, or **Zayu**.

To complete the Weekly Readings Analysis assignment, you will submit a 300-450 word blog post on the course website by Mondays at 11:59pm. Before posting, make sure the correct “category” is selected based on the week and your group (e.g. Week 02 - Clutch; Week 08 - Maple; Week 06 - ALL; etc.). Your blog posts should **synthesize** the readings - make them speak to each other by focusing on a common thread. **Do not** summarize the articles; instead, analyze and offer an evaluation or application. *[See handout on course website]*

FILM / BOOK REVIEWS

Students will select either a book or movie focused on the World Cup. The idea is to analyze how the medium - book or TV/film - shapes the creator’s research, arguments, selection of sources, and storytelling. The course website has examples of a formal (academic) book or film review. The final Book/Film analysis must adhere to guidelines and posted on the course website >> category: “Book/Film Review.” *[See handouts and samples on course website]*

Books: Select any from the [HIS 3538 Amazon page](#). Check with Belk Library about any books they have accessible on shelves or as e-versions. Contact me as soon as possible if you run into a problem.

Films: Select a 60-120 minute soccer documentary focused on FIFA, a particular player, team, a World Cup, theme, or event. Soccer documentaries are available on Netflix, ESPN+/Disney+, Amazon Prime Video, Paramount+, Apple TV+, and HBO Max. Belk Library might have some as well to check out. You can also find free documentaries on YouTube, but their quality is very uneven. One free documentary on American soccer is: [Soccertown USA](#).

Note: The film must connect to the World Cup or national team-soccer. A documentary on the Real Madrid vs Barcelona *clásico*, or a Premier League team, will not work.

RESEARCH PROJECT

This research-based assignment is fun, challenging, and open-ended. Your goal is to share your research as if you were writing a standard 5-page paper ... but primarily through a multimedia and multi-sensory experience, with text used only as necessary (historical overview, key claims, image citations, etc).

Examples include (but are not limited to): a carefully curated photo gallery using Flickr or Google Photos; a data-heavy visualization product that either makes use of data through a series of graphs-maps-trees-charts OR represents your research through geo-mapping and data display (i.e. Tableau, Timeline JS, your own Google Map); a folder of annotated historical images with text overlay (i.e. ThingLink); photo collages or posters that capture several areas of your research topic (Adobe Spark offers an easy way to do this); a 5-min digital storytelling film; or an individual collection in group Omeka digital archive. We will discuss in class. If you have other ideas, feel free to share! [\[See handout and rubric on course website\]](#)

Preliminary Assignments: To help you stay on pace, the following mini-assignments will be due in the first half of the semester: A) your topic, research questions, and work plan; B) a preliminary list of secondary sources; C) a description (with links) of your primary sources and your working thesis; D) an annotated bibliography; and, E) first draft of your digital product(s). *All work will be submitted on AsULearn.*

Presentation: You will prepare an 10 min. presentation of your research, which should focus on how you settled on your topic, roadblocks or “a ha” moments in the research process, types and quality of sources, your main argument, and some discussion of how your digital tool helps make your claims come alive. A Q&A/peer feedback section will follow.

Final Product: You will submit your final work as a blog post with a brief explanatory paragraph and link to your digital product(s).

FINAL EXAM

Your FE paper will be submitted on AsULearn. No submissions will be accepted after the end of the testing window on May 7 at 4:30pm. Your task is to use smartly-selected readings from this semester **and** your research to explain how the FIFA World Cup explains ____ (your choice of theme, topic, issue). [\[See handout and rubric on course website\]](#)



DROP-IN HOURS

In-person: T Th 2:00-3:15 pm; Th only
4:45-5:30pm (or Zoom by appointment)

OFFICE LOCATION

Anne Belk Hall 249 M

CONTACT INFO

Email: sibajaro@appstate.edu

Phone: 828.262.8476

Zoom ID: <https://appstate.zoom.us/j/4651190141>

Your Instructor

My name is Rwany Sibaja (Ph.D. George Mason University), an Associate Professor in History and Director of the History Education program. Before coming to Boone, I began my career teaching 9-12 Spanish and History in NC (and coaching girls soccer), then as a K-12 Social Studies Program Director, before pursuing my doctoral degree. I received my undergraduate degree in History from Elon College (now University) as an NC Teaching Fellow, and my M.A. in History from UNC-Greensboro.

My research focuses on the cultural history of Latin America, primarily in the areas of sports and leisure. I am working on a book project that looks at the formation and reimagining of national identity and class identities in Argentine soccer. Beyond sports, other research areas include digital history, history teaching, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

As a Costa Rican-American, the World Cup and passion for the sport runs deep in my family. Beyond the US and Costa Rican national teams, I also cheer on Argentina after many years of conducting research in Buenos Aires. At the club level, I support Atlanta United in Major League Soccer, our local team, Appalachian FC, and L.D. Alajuelense in the Costa Rican first division.

My passions vary, but they usually come back to coffee, travel, and *fútbol*. I live in Deep Gap with my wife, who is an ESL teacher in Ashe County Schools. We have a daughter and son, both in college, and a dog named Django that keeps us busy at home.

Learn more at: rwanysibaja.com



MEXICO 70



Argentina 78



MEXICO 86



ITALIA 90

WorldCupUSA94



FRANCE 98
WORLD CUP



2002
FIFA WORLD CUP
KOREA JAPAN



FIFA WORLD CUP
GERMANY 2006



SOUTH AFRICA 2010
FIFA WORLD CUP



FIFA WORLD CUP
Brasil



COPA DO MUNDO FIFA
RUSSIA 2018



FIFA WORLD CUP
Qatar 2022

FIFA World Cup: Soccer and Global History

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