

FC Sapiens

What football tells us about human behaviour

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****Sample chapters****

If there was more football, there would never be another war'.

Willem Frederik Hermans

Football is war

This book is about a secret, a secret that can change the world. Yet it is not hidden in dark caves or obscure storerooms. It is all around us. Not a day passes without us being confronted with it. It is often like that with great secrets. You look around, but "you don't see it until you see it through," according to a famous philosopher with a lightning-fast dribble. All it takes is a little historical knowledge, a broad outlook and, above all, imagination. What helps is scientific underpinning to win over the doubters. That is why we, Mark van Vugt and Kees Opmeer, have joined forces. Mark is professor of evolutionary psychology at the Free University of Amsterdam and affiliated with the University of Oxford. Professor Mark knows everything about our primal brain. Kees is an author of children's books and non-fiction books. And we are both football fans.

The question is: Who believes in our secret? As authors of this book, should we be afraid of being laughed at or made to look like rotten fish on social media?

The point is that we have no choice. We know how it is with secrets. They swirl around in your head and start making more and more noise, like bluebottles crashing into the window. They have to come out before the pain becomes unbearable. It does not matter whether you love or hate football. In both cases, you have something to think about. Maybe this book will make you love football or vice versa. As a football fan, after reading this book you might think: If this is it, I don't need it any more. We can imagine that some people find football a strange and boring game. Men or women running after a ball, arguing and cheering like mad when the ball rolls into the net. What is the fun in that?

When you think about it, there is something strange about how a simple game like football dominates the lives of millions of people. But there is a reason for this. Behind an ordinary football game is a world that goes back to the distant past.

Years ago, an article appeared in the newspaper Trouw. It looked back on a symposium that focused on the (unresolved) past of the Second World War. One of the speakers was the author Willem Frederik Hermans, one of the 'big three' alongside Harry Mulisch and Gerard Reve and author of the masterly novel 'The Darkroom of Damocles' about war and resistance. Would a world without war be possible? was a question he asked himself.

After the First World War, Hermans told us, many people, shocked by the enormous number of victims, thought that this would be the last of all wars and that the waging of war could best be replaced by the holding of football matches and thus the literature of war by sports journalism.

The audience burst out laughing. They knew how cynical and challenging Hermans could be in his statements. But the author, who had also previously written the book 'Ik heb altijd gelijk,' was dead serious. Without flinching, he continued. *...And when, to everyone's relief, the Second World War finally came to an end, football reared its leather head again...*

The audience no longer dared to laugh. This was no joke. At the end of his story, he expressed the hope that someone would write a novel about war and football. *It would probably not be a novel of resistance, because nobody opposes football.*

This book will not be a novel. It will be a marriage of science and stories from practice, but the distinction will remain recognisable. Einstein said: *Logic will take you from A to B, but imagination will take you everywhere.*

Read how the stories of football and our primal brain lead us to one of the greatest secrets of our time.

1. Out of the trenches

A Scottish soldier appeared with a football that seemed to come out of nowhere and a few minutes later there was a real football match going on'.

Johannes Niemann, a German lieutenant

We begin with a story that shows how football and war are related. It was the eve of Christmas 1914. World War I was only a few months old, but it had already broken out in full force.

Christmas at the front

Soldiers on both sides of the front in northern France were tired of the massacres. The battle was hopeless. In the village of La Chapelle-d'Armentières, not far from the front and the Belgian border, the Christmas lights burned in the houses. Christmas carols from the old village church drifted like wisps of smoke across the barren landscape into the trenches.

Shivering with cold, British soldier Percy Jones sat with his back against the hard frozen earthen wall in the trench. Looking up, he saw light snowflakes whirling down. He heard the soft music coming from afar. His thoughts wandered home to his parents, friends and the girl he was in love with. They were probably in church right now. Would they be thinking of him too? He kept a diary, so that later his loved ones could read what he had experienced.

Sounds came from the German trench a few hundred metres away in no-man's-land. It happened often. Bold shouts, curses, nonsense and once in a while something friendly. *We wipe our*

ass with your flag! Or Trek in Schnapps? Too bad! Then they would roar with laughter. Of course, the English soldiers would shout back. Something about how ugly German women were and that their helmets looked like piss-pots.

Now it sounded different. Percy came up to hear it better. Damn. It was carols, German carols. And he also heard: *Where are your Christmas trees?* When he looked over the edge, he saw lights dancing. Was this another of those Germans' tricks? Here and there a fire flared up. Comrades of Percy's also curiously stood up. A little later the roaring order of their commander sounded in the dark Christmas night. Rifles at the ready! Ammunition at the ready! Prepare for attack! The Germans heard the English getting ready. They started shouting. Percy wrote about it in his diary: *Englishmen. Englishmen. Don't shoot. You don't shoot, we don't shoot.*

What should they do with this? Could they trust the enemy? Percy knew the stories about their deception, their lies. You never knew with those *Huns* who were so much different from them. It could be a trap. Don't fall for it.

The shouting back and forth continued. The songs, the lights. Doubt arose, could it be true? Suddenly Percy saw a figure approaching in the distance. He was waving a white flag. *Don't shoot! Please, no guns! It's Christmas. Happy Christmas!*

On his guard, an English soldier with rifle at the ready approached him. They got into a conversation, with many gestures. At a certain point, the English soldier lowered his rifle. He received a blow on the shoulder. Percy saw it happen. Here were no enemies facing each other, but friends. How on earth was that possible?

One thing led to another. They waved and nodded in the direction of the trenches. From both sides soldiers came running, without weapons. Percy could not stay behind, would

not stay behind. Not much later a fire burned and the sworn enemies stood around rubbing their hands together. Where it suddenly came from, Percy did not know, but suddenly there was drink and food; gin, chocolate, cigars. Songs of Christmas rang out over the snowy plain; German and English alternately, sometimes a bit of everything. Silent night, holy night and Oh Tannenbaum. Not pure, but beautiful. For a moment the war and the hatred that went with it seemed far away. But how long does a moment last?

Football match

The next morning, Christmas Day, the war was still absent. Friendly encounters again took place on the battlefield. Hands were shaken and food and objects exchanged as Christmas presents. In daylight, it was now clear to see how many victims lay scattered across this no man's land, covered by the thin layer of snow. Great dismay could be read on their faces. What are we doing to each other? They decided to bury their dead in a respectful way. And then they made a deal. It was a football match, Germany against England. Helmets served as goalposts.

The few photos from that time show how things were. Uniform jackets were taken off, smiling faces, embraces after a goal. And all that on that desolate plain where so many young men had already met a senseless death.

That day, the war turned into a game with lots of shooting. There was attacking and defending. At corner kicks, the air force came forward. The goal was hit. But there were no casualties. Supporters in uniform were passionately involved. They shouted, sang, cheered, threw snowballs, but they did not fight with machine guns. In the end, Germany won by 3 - 2. The national honour of Germany was saved, because they had won. England's national honour was saved because they fought like lions and they were convinced that next time they would win.

That is the beauty of a game. There is always an opportunity for revenge and no reason for long term hatred. The bottom line: they saw each other as people who had more in common than differences.

Similar encounters and football matches took place at other places along the front. A German officer, Kurt Zehmisch, also kept a diary at another place at the front. He wrote: *Finally, the English came out of the trenches with a football, and a lively match soon ensued. How incredibly beautiful and strange at the same time.*

A few days after Christmas, everything was over. The generals had gone over the cards again. With their fingers they slid over the paper. It took too long. There was ground to be gained and there was a breakthrough to be forced. Human life did not count. What had happened at Christmas should not happen again. It was nothing less than collaborating with the enemy. The soldiers showed a great lack of discipline. Whoever was guilty of such behaviour again would be severely punished. Nor did it happen again, with a few exceptions. A few years later, football was still played in an attempt to get the ball into the trenches of the Germans, but that will be discussed later. The Christmas days that were to follow were as bloody as any.

Tribalism

It has happened again, a war interrupted to play football. We are talking about the Biafra war in Nigeria, which lasted from 1967 to 1970. When they hear of Biafra, many older people in particular will again have images in their minds of emaciated children dying of starvation in droves. Horror was the word that travelled the world at the time. Starvation was deliberately chosen as a weapon in this ruthless war of hatred which cost the lives of around two million people. In essence,

it was a tribal war. There was the Igbo tribe from the northern region of Biafra, which was mainly Christian, thanks to the relentless missionary work of the missionaries. It was also the most prosperous region of Nigeria, a former colony of Britain.

Tensions with other tribes in Nigeria were running high. Outbreaks of violence were the order of the day. These prompted the Igbo tribe to declare an independent Biafra. This escalated the conflict. The Hausa tribe and the Fulani tribe, for the most part Muslim, went to war en masse against the hated Igbo tribe. Here, too, the principle applied was: He who sows hatred will reap even more hatred, the eternal flywheel effect of war.

Rag ball

At that time, Pelé and a number of other Brazilian football stars visited the African continent of his ancestors. Pelé was extremely popular and a role model for many Africans. He was undoubtedly the best footballer in the world then, perhaps the best footballer of all time. Pelé was a nickname and means 'rag doll'. He was given this name by friends with whom he played football as a small boy, barefoot, to which he owed his formidable technique. It was the homemade ball of a stocking filled with paper and old rags that Pelé always used to bring along. There was no money for a real ball in the poor neighbourhood of the Brazilian provincial town where he grew up. His real name was Edson Arantes do Nascimento, but that doesn't sound very nice when you want to cheer him on for another goal.

Armistice

During his visit to Africa, the likeable footballer took part in several demonstration matches to be admired by thousands of supporters. He was also invited to play in Lagos, a city of

millions in Nigeria. Everyone who loved football or Pelé wanted to be there. That is difficult in a country that at the time was torn apart by excessive violence. The solution: a ceasefire of two full days. It allowed friend and foe to travel to Lagos and watch the match. They cheered together for their common hero, without any sign of aggression or hostility. But after that one match, the war continued. What would have happened if Pelé had said, 'You know what? We will stay in Nigeria for a while. Let's have a little friendly tournament between the Igbo tribe, the Hausa tribe and the Fulani tribe. The winner will get the Peace Cup from my hands. I will participate with the Igbos and my other football friends from Brazil will participate with the other tribes. And afterwards, we will have a joint celebration. We will never know, but maybe, just maybe, football could have prevented further bloodshed. Now we had to wait until the Igbos were forced to capitulate in 1970, many deaths later. Recently, Pelé spoke out again. In an open letter, he called on Putin to stop the war in Ukraine.

16. Giant on clay feet

*The roots of the football tribe lie deep in our distant past
Desmond Morris, zoologist*

Supporters are chanting the name of the club. Another fifteen minutes or so. They know that it has to happen now, just as the Haags kwartiertje has often helped ADO Den Haag to a goal. Just at that moment, one of the strikers goes down in the penalty area. Penalty, the supporters shout. The referee waved it away, rightly so. He went to ground far too conspicuously. Penalty, corner, off side, tackle, goalkeeper. You can tell by the words that modern football took its current form in England. Back then, in the middle of the nineteenth century, strict rules were established. Why in England?

Forbid to kill your opponent

Let us take a look at the English town of Ashbourne, located in the county of Derbyshire. There, an ancient form of the game is still played that has been important for the development of present-day football. Ashbourne is a typical English town of over nine thousand inhabitants with a rich history in hilly, almost fairytale-like surroundings. It looks as if it has walked straight out of an English television series like *Midsomer Murders*.

The lovely River Henmore runs through Ashbourne. Those born north of the river are called the Up'ards. South of the Henmore live the Down'ards.

Once a year, they compete against each other in a match that is seen as a primitive precursor to football. The match starts on Shrove Tuesday and ends on Ash Wednesday, two days later, with a name that shines with allure: The Royal Shrovetide

Football Match. The playing field stretches for about five kilometres, far beyond the city. The goals are located at two mills where the ball must be deposited.

A lot is allowed. Apart from kicking, you can throw and run with the ball in your hands. There is no referee. But not everything is allowed. Participants should avoid cemeteries and the greenery around the church. Entering private gardens is prohibited. You are also not allowed to hide the ball, for example under your coat, your jumper, in a backpack, or under your hat if it is a bit loose. The most important rule comes from the seventeenth century: *It is forbidden to kill your opponent.*

Quite reassuring, but also telling. Apparently, it was not self-evident. When this game was emerging, somewhere in the twelfth century, there were quite a few fatalities. Sometimes it was an accident of rough play, but it also happened that the opponent was crushed. You have to be prepared to do something to win. It is all the stranger that the game is also called Hug Ball, which you could translate as cuddly ball. It sounds more fun than football.

Boundary between game and battle

In the second half of the nineteenth century, ball games became increasingly popular in England. It is said to have had something to do with the Industrial Revolution that started in England. Steam engines increased productivity, which in turn increased prosperity and gave workers more leisure time, at least by the standards of the time. Sports and games became more important, like the ancient and then still primitive football. For all these variants of football, a simple and attractive form was sought with fixed rules that were refined over the years. The English did not invent football, but they gave it its present form, including the traditional cup of tea at half-time. Good for the stomach.

The ball became rubber and round instead of oval like in rugby. This led to better control of the projectile, especially when you are not allowed to use your hands. The dimensions of the pitch were fixed with a certain deviation possible. But why these dimensions?

The English more or less took over the size of the Roman arena. This was the place where combat as a game for the entertainment of the public was first made visible. Although the line between play and battle was still wafer-thin then. Gladiators fought to the death in the arena. Spectators witnessed the execution of prisoners. Bloody animal fights took place. Bullfights are a persistent remnant of this, with the matador as the hero. Matador literally means killer or murderer.

Desmond Morris writes: *...Our prehistoric ancestors lived and died as hunters of wild animals. Almost the entire evolutionary history of man is based on that period of hunting, when hunting prey was not a sport, but a necessity to stay alive. Our whole life was focused on the hunt and that is how we became, genetically, what we are today*

And not only that, but: *...Our prehistoric ancestors gradually became more athletic and intelligent. Thanks to this and to working in a team, a kind of hunting pack, they were able to strategise, to decide on tactics, to take risks, to set traps and finally to aim in order to kill the prey with a direct hit. You have to admit that this is beginning to look like the perfect prototype of a football team....*

Big game hunting

The importance of hunting in human evolution should not be underestimated. The change from a lifestyle of gatherers and scavengers to big game hunters has had many consequences for humans. Many innovations took place in the use of weapons, for example spears for hunting and fist axes for filleting the

animal. Hunting also changed the way people communicated with each other. The use of language facilitated tactical cooperation in big game hunting: 'You stand here and I will attack him from behind'.

Scientists believe that big-game hunting was linked to a cooling of the climate, which meant that Africa's forests largely disappeared and the savannah with its large prey animals appeared everywhere. This made meat an important part of the primeval diet, much more important than that of chimpanzees, of whom only about four per cent of their diet consists of meat. In hunter-gatherer tribes, 30 per cent of the diet consists of meat and in the northern parts of the world, for example among the Inuit, it can even reach 90 per cent. Meat has been an important part of our diet for several million years. When hunters succeeded in killing an elephant or rhinoceros, it was celebrated.

Because of these hunting traditions, many people still find it difficult to resist a nice piece of meat on the barbecue. Our bodies, too, show traces of the primitive past as hunters. Our intestines look different from those of other primates who have a predominantly vegetarian diet. Our intestinal system can break down meat, food with a high protein content, very quickly.

Ancient division of labour

Hunting big game in hunter-gatherer tribes is almost exclusively a male activity. If this has been the case for millions of years, it is plausible to assume that men are better hunters than women. We have already discussed evidence that men can throw better than women. Psychologists also look at male-female differences in performance on all kinds of tests. There is no evidence of huge differences in cognitive performance and boys and girls are on average equally intelligent. However, there are small differences on the

various components of the IQ test. For example, boys score better on mental rotation tasks, in which an object is rotated and you have to indicate whether this is still the same object. Girls score better on average on so-called object location tasks. You are shown a number of objects and then the image disappears and some objects have changed location. These differences have been linked to the ancient division of labour between men as hunters and women as gatherers. As a hunter, it is useful to be able to find your way back to the camp after having spent days chasing game. Mental rotation is an advantage here ('that hill used to be in the south and now it is in the west, which means we now have to go north'). As a collector, it is useful to remember where the fig trees and blackberry bushes are, because they do not run away. The male-female differences on these tests have been found in many cultures, even among young children, which suggests that they may be small inborn differences. With the right education and training, these differences can probably be eliminated. For example, it was recently revealed that people who grew up in the countryside have a better sense of direction than those who grew up in the city.

The hunting instinct is not something we get rid of easily. Man wants to show that he is superior to other animals. Many traditional entertainment events remind us of this; some more cruel than others. Swine tapping, eel trekking, cat batting, goose slapping, fox-throwing.

Cambridge Rules

What else did the English do? They stipulated that a football team had to consist of eleven players, including a goalkeeper who had to defend the goal. You could feel sorry for the goalkeeper in those early days, perhaps you still do. He was just one of the eleven players, but with an extra task. The

opponents found that very irritating. In the hunt for goals, the goalkeeper was an annoying obstacle who appeared everywhere. Tough tackling was the credo. A death kick, a blow to the head. It was all part of the game. The referee, if there was one, did not make a fuss about it. In essence, this poor man was outlawed. That is where the word 'flying keep' comes from. It's a term we still use when we play football in the street and when the goalkeeper comes forward in injury time to force a decision.

Rules Football initially emerged at posh boarding schools for wealthy children such as Eton College, where the first rules were drawn up, but also at Oxford and Trinity College in Cambridge. In fact, each boarding school drew up its own set of rules until Trinity College took the initiative to unify the jumble of rules and customs. These became known as the Cambridge Rules which were written down in 1848. In those early years, the number of rules was further expanded, but the basis still lies in the Cambridge Rules. And - not entirely coincidentally? - there were exactly eleven. To give some examples:

The ball may only be stopped with the hands in order to place it in front of you for a shot. It is forbidden to kick the flying ball. It is forbidden to trip, sweep or kick the opponent's legs.

Rules are needed to turn combat into a game. The Israeli historian and writer Yuval Noah Harari explains it in his book Sapiens. He indicates that the rules of football are relatively simple and limited, just like the rules needed to work together in a group of gatherers and hunters.

...To play a game with the strangers we meet in the schoolyard on a random afternoon, we not only have to cooperate with ten teammates who may be complete strangers to us, but we also have to know that the eleven players on the team opposite us

are playing football according to the same rules. Other animals that engage in ritualised aggression with strangers do so largely instinctively. Puppies all over the world have the rules for a romp ingrained in their genes. But human teenagers do not have football genes. Yet they can play football with total strangers, because they have all been taught the same ideas about football...

Military career

Why is it that a football team consists of 11 players and not 10 or 12 or, as in rugby, 15? It seems so arbitrary, but it is not. We have already seen that football was intended as preparation for a military career and practice for battle, as in many ancient variants of this game. Football required discipline, tactical insight, perseverance, fighting spirit, physical fitness, team spirit, you name it. Everything a successful soldier needed. At boarding schools where football became popular, boys slept in dormitories for ten under the supervision of one supervisor. Football teams were formed per dormitory, including the invigilator.

What began as an elite sport for boys being groomed for a glittering military career in the British Empire ('Britannia rules the waves') soon developed into a popular sport. This is not so surprising. All you need is a grassy field, a ball, enough players and you're good to go. The rules were easy to understand and there was no need to buy expensive equipment. It was not long before the first official football club was founded in Sheffield in 1856. More clubs followed, also in our country. The first Dutch football club was HFC, Haarlemsche Football Club, founded by Pim Mulier in 1879. The Haarlem mayor's chain of office incorporates the club's logo. Things also moved quickly here. Just a few years later, in 1894, the first match of the Dutch national team was played against the English amateur club Felixstowe. In 1905, we

played our first official international match. It was in Antwerp against Belgium. The final score was 1 - 1, after extension we won with 1 - 4 .

World empire in decline

More free time, so more time for sports and games like football, which eventually became the most widely practised sport in the world. But that is not the whole story. There is something else at play here, something that ultimately turned out to be much more important. This brings us one step closer to the secret of this book.

As a seafaring nation, England was heavily dependent on trade with other countries. Interests had to be defended. Partly for this reason, England has a long history of wars and military conflicts. From the sixteenth century onwards, England developed into an economic and military world power that would become known as the United Kingdom. Around 1900, all the countries that fell under this kingdom together covered a quarter of the earth's surface. On every continent, the United Kingdom had colonies or conquered countries, from Canada, India and Australia to states in Africa. Following in the footsteps of Charles V's empire, people spoke of the 'Empire where the sun never set'. Over 40 0 million people were subjects of the British Queen Victoria. In the history of mankind there has not been an empire more extensive and powerful than the United Kingdom, not even the Roman Empire. It is not for nothing that English has developed into a world language.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the empire began to show the first cracks. The military and economic superiority was no longer self-evident. From 1870 onwards, the German Empire was on the rise and began to overtake England in terms of industrialisation. They had never had to deal with

such a strong competitor before. Not much later, the same applied to the United States.

In 1873, the world was hit by an economic crisis that lasted until 1896. The United Kingdom was hit hard and lost its long-cherished hegemony. Free trade, so cherished by the British, had to be abandoned.

At the end of the century, the United Kingdom began to lose its exclusive right to trade with India, China and countries in South America and South Africa. By all means, including military, a desperate attempt was made to retain the position that had been won, but this only postponed the end of a world empire.

Loss of face

Look at the Boer wars in South Africa, for example. The United Kingdom was in charge of the Cape Colony, the strategically important area around Cape Town. They had conquered this colony from the Dutch about a hundred years ago. African farmers, many of them of Dutch origin, had founded the independent Boer republics Transvaal and Oranje Vrijstaat in the nearby region. This was against the wishes of the British. With great display of power, they took Transvaal at one point. The farmers did not accept this. After several years of unsuccessful negotiations, in 1880 they started a freedom struggle under the leadership of Paul Kruger. This apparently irregular bunch of farmers' fighters managed to recapture the Transvaal from the British. It was the first time in a long time that the mighty United Kingdom had been defeated by a much smaller opponent. The loss of face was enormous. Peace was signed, but frustrations lingered. Tensions between the free-spirited farmers and the complacent British erupted in 1899. The United Kingdom felt compelled to save the national honour and the Second Boer War was a fact.

In 1900, an event took place that had a direct link to the world of football. The British captured the Spion Kop, no more than a bare, rocky hill, but strategically of great importance. They had not thought it through. From the surrounding hills, the peasants were shooting at the unprotected British. In no time at all, the farmers had recaptured the Spion Kop at the cost of many casualties on the British side. Winston Churchill witnessed this humiliation as a war correspondent.

Spion Kop

A few years later, the Liverpool FC stadium at Anfield Road was built. The stand behind one of the goals was renamed Spion Kop, later shortened to 'the Kop', a Dutch name in an English city. This stand became renowned and feared. Visiting clubs would come to the stadium at Anfield Road with their eyes wide open. On the Spion Kop, close to the pitch, supporters shouted their idols to victory or later sang songs by local bands such as Gerry & the Pacemakers ('You'll never walk alone') and the Beatles ('She loves you') to encourage the players. The Spion Kop in Liverpool became a symbol of victory, meant to erase the ignominious defeat against a handful of farmers in South Africa. It was as if they wanted to repeat the war in this way. A contributing factor was that many young soldiers from Liverpool died on that barren hill. In 1994, the Spion Kop was demolished and replaced by a seating gallery. A plaque still commemorates this dreaded stand.

After this defeat, the United Kingdom deployed a surplus of soldiers and weapons to defeat the damned peasants. After a bloody guerrilla war that lasted until 1902, the farmers eventually lost. The British were the first nation on this scale to build concentration camps where South Africans were held in appalling conditions. Thousands of people died in

these camps. They were a source of inspiration for the Nazis in the Second World War.

Footballing to the trenches

The First World War did not do the United Kingdom much good either. They were among those who triumphed, but in many ways it was a false victory: many casualties and enormous economic damage. The United Kingdom never quite recovered from this blow and became a giant on shaky feet.

Many British servicemen who took part in the war believed that football and war were based on the same values. Young Captain William Nevill, only 22, of the Eighth Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment took this very literally. On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, he gave his still inexperienced men a special instruction. They were to cross the no-man's-land to the trenches of the Germans by playing football. In this way they could show the enemy that footballers are the best fighters. To reassure his men, he told them that they did not have to count on much resistance. The trenches had been bombed earlier and, he said, had softened the Germans.

Heroic poem

With four footballs, the vanguard of the British soldiers was sent into the desolate, flat, no-man's-land of northern France, led by Captain Nevill himself. Each platoon had a ball. As a reminder, a platoon was the size of a football squad or a primitive tribe.

It must be a strange sight. Ordinary young men, dressed as soldiers, walking across the plain with their rifles and bayonets at the ready, stooped down. They took turns to shoot the ball a little ahead of them. Some of them started dribbling the ball, to the great hilarity of the others. It

seemed to go well. The mood was exuberant. To the soldiers, it seemed more like play than reality.

Captain Nevill offered a prize for the platoon that went furthest. One of the balls had an elaborate inscription: *The Great European Cup. The Final East Surreys v Bavarians. Kick off at Zero.* Another ball was marked: *No referee.* It must have been the first European Cup match.

From their trenches, the Germans watched in amazement as the British approached, kicking, dribbling and laughing. What were they doing with those balls? Had they gone mad? One thing was certain. They had not been bombed to pieces. Their machine guns rose menacingly above the trenches, ready to slaughter the British soldiers.

It was a bloodbath. They were mown down in bunches. Captain Nevill was one of the first casualties. Two balls made it to the trenches. Almost half of the British vanguard died. In total, almost sixty thousand were killed in this battle. The Germans understood nothing of this idiotic action, but the British press praised so much courage and resourcefulness. The Daily Mail even published a heroic poem about this suicide.

*On through the hail of slaughter
where gallant comrades fall
where blood is poured like water
they drive the trickling ball.
The fear of death before them
is but an empty name.
True to the blood that bore them
The Surreys play the game!*

People's sport number one

After the First World War, the decline of the United Kingdom continued. The territory was further expanded, but economic

and military losses made the power base increasingly unstable. In India, under the leadership of Gandhi, a non-violent fight for independence began. Other countries followed. Ties with the colonies were increasingly loosened. This was replaced in 1926 by the Commonwealth as an alliance of independent states, with more countries gradually joining in. The struggle to retain the Falkland Islands in 1982 was the last war the United Kingdom fought in defence of its empire.

Looking back, around 1900 football in England started to become really popular among a broad section of the population. The number of clubs increased. Stadiums were built. Football became the number one popular sport. It seemed that the English had found a way to save national honour in the game of football. If you cannot win a war, then win it on the football pitch. What does that say about the connection between war and football?

17. In wartime

A hundred thousand men have left the stadium depressed. Winning this match is more important to them than the conquest of some city in the east.'

Paul Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Information and Propaganda (1933 -1945)

This time it was a penalty. A clear case of hands. The captain puts the ball well. It is important that he is the last to touch the ball. He must have the feeling that the ball is his weapon and no one else's. In the greatest of concentration, he takes a few steps back for his approach. The pressure must be enormous. A goal means a longer stay in the Eredivisie, a miss means relegation. Supporters chant his first name en masse to give him a boost. Everyone misses sometimes, but when it comes to battle you have to be optimistic and self-confident.

Anything else is a form of desertion.

When the captain makes his run, the stadium goes silent. He holds back for a moment, takes it out and slides the ball into the corner. The goalkeeper falls the other way. A noise bomb explodes in the stadium. All around us people are falling into each other's arms.

After the ritual dance, the game continues. You never know. Many goals come in injury time, when it's all or nothing. But after half a minute, the whistle blows. We have succeeded. The war for a longer stay in the Eredivisie has been won, a war without deaths or injuries. A real war is very different.

From underdog to championship contender

The Germans had lost the First World War. Their pride was wounded. The country was condemned to all kinds of strangling

restrictions. They were struggling with sky-high debts. Like a badly injured football player, the Germanic Empire lay groaning on the ground.

Ten years after the war, something changed. A new religion, National Socialism, emerged under the leadership of a man from Austria, a man with a smooth tongue, a rasping voice and a strange moustache. He knew how to touch a nerve.

What began as a small club grew within a few years into a mass movement. Hitler and his fellow believers made it clear to the masses that they were a super race that had the right, nay, even the duty, to dominate the world. Other races were inferior, with the Jews designated as the greatest scapegoat for the economic misery in which the country found itself. Someone had to be blamed for all the misery. Who were better suited for this than the Jews, who had aroused revulsion for centuries? That's what you get for being different.

Hitler gave the Germans new self-confidence, from underdog to champion. In the 1930s, a gigantic arms industry came into being. War was inevitable. In 1939, the kick-off took place that led to the Second World War with more than fifty million dead, far more than in the First World War. Football was relegated to the background, especially in Germany.

Loathe for football

Germany has been one of the best football countries in the world for the last 50 years, along with countries such as Brazil, Argentina, France, Spain, you name it. Even the Netherlands and Belgium belong in this list. But it was not always like that.

After the First World War, the number of football clubs increased further. Leagues were founded, large stadiums were built and more and more international matches were played, which were good for the national honour. But Germany did not make much of it.

In the 1930s and the years that followed, Germany did not have much in the way of football. There was no serious competition. Hitler hated football. According to experts, this was not only because he did not like sport, but even more because he was a real control freak. He disliked events over which he had no influence, such as the outcome of a football match. This is not to say that the Nazis did not want to use football as a propaganda tool. They deliberately picked weak opponents to be sure of victory, but even that regularly went wrong. Against stronger opponents, they usually lost.

Hitler resented that. As far as we know, he only managed to attend one football match. That was during the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. For Hitler, these Games were primarily a means of presenting the new, glorious Germany to the world. The first match against the puny Luxembourg was won 9-0. This was the signal for Hitler to show up at the next game in full dress and be cheered on. This time they played against the not too strong Norway, success guaranteed. It was a hopeless defeat, 0 - 2. There was not much cheering. For Hitler, it felt like a huge loss of face, such a defeat in front of the world. Football was not the stage on which his Germany could display its fighting skills and glory.

Think about it. The first football world championship took place in 1930. Germany did not participate. Four years later, in Mussolini's Italy, Germany did take part. It was no real disaster, but the elimination in the semi-finals by the inferior neighbour Czechoslovakia hurt a lot.

For the 1938 World Cup, France was chosen as the host country. Germany had also applied to host the tournament, in an ultimate attempt to improve its football record, but received exactly zero votes. They did participate, but for the Nazis, the tournament turned into a complete disaster. As early as the first round, Switzerland eliminated the mighty, belligerent Germanic Empire by 4-2. The German team was

reinforced by five footballers from Austria, which had a strong team at the time. Together, they formed the Greater German team that the Anschluss had made possible. This failure hit Hitler hard again. He would rather fight a real war than surrender to such a strange, unpredictable game.

How weak are strong leaders?

When there is a threat of war, the people like to rally behind a strong, dominant leader. History teaches us this. It also emerges from our scientific research. If we ask people to choose a political leader when the country is at war, they are more likely to choose a leader with a masculine, dominant appearance than in peacetime. In itself, this choice is conceivable. A dominant leader - think of Erdogan, Putin or Trump - radiates aggression and that has a deterrent effect. A dominant leader is also seen as someone who can guard the unity of a country by, for example, taking action against people with a different opinion. The question is whether a dominant, authoritarian leader is of any use to the citizens of a country.

Research shows that support for this type of leader is not without danger. Dominant leaders tend to overestimate themselves. They consider themselves and their tribe stronger and more brilliant than their rivals and are therefore more likely to take up arms. Also, dominant leaders do not always play the game by the rules. They do not seem to care too much about international rules. Just think of Putin and the Russian state-sponsored doping programme of athletes at the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014.

Dominant leaders are often driven by self-interest and this means that they have difficulty giving up their position of power. In a psychological experiment, participants were assigned as group leaders to solve a puzzle with the group, based on their score on a leadership test. Half of these

leaders were told that their leadership position was not stable and that they might be replaced by another group member who had also performed well on the leadership test. The other half were told that their position was stable. They were then asked if, as a leader, they wanted to throw someone out of the group because it consisted of too many members. Leaders in an unstable position of power more often threw their direct competitor out of the group, even though this meant that the group would perform worse at the puzzle. On this basis, we can make a scientific prediction: Countries that are authoritarian led perform less well in sports where cooperation is very important, for example football.

Nothing is more dangerous than a conviction'.

If Hitler had loved football, there would have been no war. It sounds simple, but perhaps there is some truth in it. Every war between nations is rooted in nationalistic feelings. Our country, our tribe is better than others and therefore the others are the enemy. We must protect ourselves against the enemy or impose our will on them if necessary. We are convinced that our way of life is the best. To quote a variation on the statement by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: 'Nothing is more dangerous than a conviction. ' If Germany had been a great football nation in those days, they might have been able to satisfy their national pride and command respect instead of starting a world war led by a football hater like Hitler.

The Nazis had a Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels, a sort of Minister of fake news, who understood how important football could be. He organised a football match in Berlin against Sweden. That country was neutral in the war, not an enemy. It was 20 September 1942. After the great victories in the first years of the war, the shine had begun to fade. The armies on the Eastern Front suffered heavy losses against the

Soviets. The Allies were advancing in Africa. And what struck the German population the most: they no longer felt safe in their own homes. In 1942, the bombing of German cities began systematically. In May, Cologne was bombed. This caused a great shock. Other cities followed. In Berlin, the inhabitants had to flee into the air raid shelters whenever the air raid alarm sounded. How could that be? They were Übermenschen and invincible according to their captain, the Führer. Goebbels wanted to distract the citizens from the gloomy events and revive their wounded pride. What was better suited for this than a football match? Despite Hitler, football was very popular among ordinary Germans. Sweden seemed a suitable opponent for the minister of fake news. Not a weak country, but not so strong that Germany had to fear the worst. But the worst became true. Germany lost at home by 2 - 3.

Better football than a real war

Goebbels was in sackcloth and ashes. In despair he exclaimed: *A hundred thousand men have left the stadium depressed. Winning this match is more important to them than the conquest of some city in the east'.*

He was right to do so. Better football than a real war. The defeat was so severe that no national team played an international match during the war years. After the war, it took until 1950 before the first international match was played. That was the start of a new career for Germany as a football nation.

In 1954, West Germany became world champions for the first time. In total, the Mannschaft has won the World Cup four times, as many times as Italy and only surpassed by Brazil who was the best five times.

The European Championship was only held from 1960 onwards. Germany has won three times so far, matched only by Spain.

Germany also reached the final three times. They no longer needed a war to show they were the best.

With a great sense of theatre

Countries that are not good at football may need war when their national pride is at stake. Although, of course, there are always exceptions. Italy was such an exception, or was it not? In 1934, the World Cup was held in Italy. That country undeniably had a strong team. Like Hitler, Mussolini did not like football. Neither did the Spanish dictator Franco. What would that mean?

Benito Mussolini realised that football was an effective means to increase his popularity and thus his power. Bribery, intimidation and even violence were not shunned by his black shirts in order to influence the results of matches. The World Cup in his own country offered him a stage to show the superiority of his country to the rest of the world with a great sense of theatre. The team was reinforced by foreign stars, especially from South America, who had Italian roots. It did not matter how many generations back, a name with an Italian sound was enough. It was against the rules, but that was turned down under Italian pressure.

Mussolini managed to steal the show time and again by being conspicuous in the stands and by unusual actions, such as the time when he himself went to sell tickets in front of the stadium entrance in the presence of much press and cameras. It seems that Mussolini also had an influence on the appointment of referees to officiate at matches of the Italian team. It is a fact that they remarkably often whistled in favour of the home country, with the result that Italy made it to the final where Czechoslovakia was the opponent. Referee in this match was a Swede with little international experience. Beforehand, in front of thousands of spectators, he made the Mussolini salute on the pitch; right arm outstretched forward,

exactly... just like the Hitler salute. The referee did his best to let the Italians win, but nevertheless the match ended in 1 - 1. In the extension the Italians scored and of course won the match.

Four years later, Italy won the world championship again, but after that, football pride was over. In 1940, Mussolini entered the war. Italy sank as a football nation and only became European Champion in 1968 and World Champion much later in 1982.

All countries that took an active part in the Second World War, such as England and France, did not play a significant role as national football teams in the years before and after. It took years before success was achieved again. In England's case, it was not until 1966, 21 years after the war, when, with a home crowd and a dubious goal, they became world champions. Undoubtedly, the damage caused by the war to the infrastructure and the many casualties suffered by these countries will have played a role. We will see how the war between Russia and Ukraine will affect both national teams. In comparison, countries that were officially neutral in World War II, such as Spain and Portugal, did very well in the post-war period, especially their clubs. Real Madrid and Benfica, for example, shared the European Cup 1 cups between 1955 -- the year the European competition started -- and 1962.

Bread and Games

History shows that dictators have used football and other major sports as a means to enhance their international standing or that of their country. Mussolini and Hitler have already been mentioned, but the Soviet Union under Stalin was the first in the inter-war period to launch an extensive sports programme to promote the physical and mental strength

of citizens. All this probably with a view to an approaching war.

When the state-sponsored doping programme at the 2014 Winter Olympics came out and Russia was excluded from international sport, Putin was left with only one thing: to start a real war against Ukraine.

Leaders with dictatorial tendencies have in the past used many different tactics to use sport to strengthen their position of power. Corruption and nepotism is one of them. Sepp Blatter, former head of FIFA, is suspected of having taken bribes, for example in the sale of media rights of FIFA matches and the elections for the organisation of the World Cup. In particular, the choices for South Africa in 2010 and Qatar 2022 are suspect. Blatter and his colleague, former footballer and UEFA president Michel Platini, will soon be on trial in Switzerland for fraud and bribery at .

Another common tactic of dictators is bread and circuses. Give the people food and entertainment. This will keep them happy for a while. This strategy was first described in ancient Rome, where emperors gave out free food to the people who complained, because food prices were so high. Citizens were also allowed to attend chariot and horse races for free. With the rising cost of food in the world, we are bound to see a few more examples of this in 2022.

With dictatorial aspirations, you can try to conquer the hearts and minds of the football-loving people. Political leaders are not averse to 'BIRGen' and like to show off when there is something to celebrate. Our own Prime Minister Mark Rutte, the democratically elected leader of a small country, does a decent job of making a phone call to the Dutch sports winners. But look at how Macron presents himself as a little Napoleon at the sporting successes of his country. There are images on the internet of the 2018 World Cup in Russia where Macron is loudly cheering the French goals in the final. He

does not seem to mind the subdued national leader of opponent Croatia, Ms Grabar Kitarovic (who, by the way, was wearing her national team's shirt). Afterwards, Macron joined in the celebrations and had his picture taken with every French player, singing. Not only for the glory of les Bleus, but perhaps even more for himself.

After all, one strategy of dictators is to actually start a war if they fail to unite the country. Experts often point to Argentine junta leader Videla. The military rulers did everything they could to win the 1978 World Cup in their own country. The final against the Dutch took place a few hundred metres from the torture chambers of the army. In the Netherlands, we listened to Bram and Freek's Bloed aan de Paal, but ultimately did nothing against the propaganda war of this military dictator. It will be discussed later.

The Hundred Hour War

It has happened that a football match turned into a real war. El Salvador and Honduras played each other in 1969 for a place in the 1970 World Cup. Now you have to remember that these countries were already at war with each other. Many people from El Salvador sought refuge in the much larger Honduras. They had had enough of the dictator, the poverty and the lack of freedom. In neighbouring Honduras there was plenty of room with the promise of a better life.

Honduras was not happy about it. The presence of so many foreigners in a country that was itself struggling with poverty led to much tension. Plans were made to send these people back. This, in turn, went against the grain of El Salvador. Tensions rose further and further.

Under these circumstances, the two decisive matches for admission to the World Cup were held. The first match was won by Honduras at home with 1-0. Expectations were high now. The second match in El Salvador went very differently. Honduras

suffered a hopeless defeat of 3-0 in a match full of incidents and disturbances. Less than two weeks later, El Salvador won the play-off match on neutral ground 3-2 after extension. The hot-tempered supporters in Honduras did not take it. The flame burst into the pressure cooker, which was filled to the brim with frustration. Riots broke out. Looting took place in many cities. The foreigners from the neighbouring country were the targets of the sudden outburst of anger. For the military regime in El Salvador, this was an ideal occasion to invade Honduras, with the argument of protecting its own citizens. The real reason was to contain the dormant dissatisfaction with the dictatorship by uniting the people behind them against a common enemy.

It led to a battle called the 'war of one hundred hours'. The fighting lasted just over four days, with two thousand deaths. After mediation by the Organisation of American States, both countries were more or less forced into an armistice. But tensions remained, until today.

Was this war proof of the opposite? It would seem so, but perhaps it was not. There were so many tensions between the two countries that anything could have happened to set them on fire. It could have been anything: a stray army jeep at the border, a row that got out of hand between someone from El Salvador and Honduras, an embassy that was defaced. It happened to be a football match that meant a lot to the national honour.

It went wrong during the warm-up

One last example. In 1991, Yugoslavia fell apart. The federal states wanted to be independent and no longer dominated by the most powerful state, Serbia. We saw a similar development in the Soviet Union at the same time. In 1989 the Berlin Wall fell and two years later the Soviet Union came to an end.

The resistance of the federal states in Yugoslavia led to a bloody Balkan war, which also included the fall of Srebrenica. Under Tito, the federal state was still held together, but after his death in 1980, more and more cracks began to appear in the artificial unity.

The crowd exploded prior to the match between Dinamo Zagreb from Croatia and Red Star from Belgrade, the Serbian capital; a loaded match in the Yugoslav league. It was Sunday, 13 May 1990. The Maksimir stadium in Zagreb looked peaceful in the spring sunshine, but appearances were deceptive.

Beforehand, there had been riots outside the stadium. The tension was palpable in the city centre, whipped up by the elections that had just taken place. In Croatia, the party led by Franjo Tudman that fought for more autonomy had won. In Serbia, the communist Milosevic, who wanted to keep Yugoslavia together, had won.

Things went badly wrong during the warm-up. What started with a minor scuffle between supporters of both sides got out of hand. Fierce fights broke out in the stands. Everything was destroyed, objects flew through the air. The police were forced to intervene with tear gas.

The players of both teams fled inside. But a little later, Zagreb's brave star player Boban had second thoughts. As captain, he wanted to do something by trying to calm things down. Back on the pitch, he got into the fights. He was beaten up himself. Enraged, he realised that the police were mainly targeting his club's supporters. He could no longer control himself and kicked the nearest policeman.

The match was never played, but converted into a 3 - 0 regulation defeat for Dinamo Zagreb. Boban was given a six-month suspension. It only further aggravated tensions between the two strongest states, resulting in a bloody battle.

One thing became clear again here: war and football are close together. What would have happened if all those states had had

their own league, the winners of which would then have competed against each other for the championship of Great Yugoslavia? Would it have breathed air into the flames of nationalism? Would it have prevented the war?

A song by the Nits, *J.O.S. Days*, is playing in our heads. It did not become a hit, but it is nevertheless a beautiful song. Singer Henk Hofstede sings about his failed football career with J.O.S. from Amsterdam. It reminds him of all those footballers who, like him, dreamed of a football career but were killed as soldiers in the Second World War. A monument on the sports field should keep the memory alive... and his song.

The war monument is still standing

Between two football fields

With the name of the men killed on the battle fields

They were centre forwards, goalkeepers and backs...

18. Can football prevent war?

Football is war without the shooting

George Orwell, author of '1984

No other sport has as many practitioners and attracts as many viewers worldwide as football. Not only increased prosperity, but also the rise of radio and television and nowadays social media play a role in this. For many fans, football is the most important thing in their lives. They live from match to match, read everything, watch everything and can hardly talk about anything else.

Even training sessions are visited so as not to miss anything of the heroes. There they are, mostly older men, standing shoulder to shoulder at the edge of the training ground. They are not bothered by the cold or by the rain. With heated heads, they are talking to each other. They shout instructions across the pitch and gesticulate so wildly that it seems they are having a falling out.

What is going on in the minds of the real enthusiasts and fanatics, soldiers of the cold ground?

Testosterone evaporates in the office

It seems as if boys and men only have football left to act as hunters or warriors. The British journalist and documentary maker Tim Samuels wrote a book about it: 'Where is my spear? ...In the old days, my dear fellow, you and I used to run out of our cave every day. With a spear. Then, too, those hormones were coursing through our bodies because we were chasing a hairy mammoth on the wild plains. Or having to defend ourselves against a lion. Working together, hunting, fighting

for survival, that is when we are at our best. That is what we are made of...

Samuels describes how the original characteristics of men are no longer needed in our modern society, such as heroism, stubborn individualism and aggression. Men no longer know what is expected of them. Testosterone evaporates in office gardens with coffee machines and giant plants.

This suppressed masculinity leads to problems. Four times as many men commit suicide as women. Boys are diagnosed with ADHD six times more often than girls. In prisons, ninety percent are men. Many more men than women are addicted to alcohol and drugs. Some can think of nothing but sending dickpics to women around them, in the strange expectation of impressing them. Samuels' advice to men is to spend more time with your tribe, be productive outside of work and work more on your physical fitness and a muscular body.

He overlooks one thing. Football is a godsend for these men. In the stadium, you can still shout, be unashamedly aggressive and fight along with the warriors on the pitch. There, you can still be a man.

The football talk show Voetbal Inside with Van der Gijp, Derksen and Genee, was so popular for a reason among real men who cannot express their masculinity. Tough talk, bad jokes, aggressive discussions, sniping at women and finally the generous laughter of men among themselves. It was a feast of recognition. Fortunately for these men, the programme has been followed up with a broader setting, so burping doesn't have to disappear from the airwaves.

The playing man

The global top ten of most watched live broadcasts on television consists exclusively of sports events. The 2021 European Football Championships are in first place with over five billion viewers, followed by the Summer Olympics in Rio

de Janeiro (3.6 billion). Only on the sixteenth place we find an event that has nothing to do with sports: the funeral of Michael Jackson (2.5 billion).

In the Netherlands, too, a sports moment is leading the league table. According to Stichting Kijkonderzoek (Foundation for Audience Research), more than nine million Dutch citizens watched the semi-finals of the 2014 World Cup football, the Netherlands versus Argentina, live. This means that sport wins from the coronavirus. The press conferences of Mark Rutte and Hugo de Jonge attracted an average of seven million viewers. Where does our fascination with sport come from and does it have anything to do with our evolution? Scientists have mainly looked at the cultural and ritual significance of sport. The historian Johan Huizinga described in his book *Homo Ludens* that sports and games are important pillars of culture, because they teach us to get along with each other and to create community bonds. He feared that the increasing professionalisation of society - he called it the 'Vernalisation' - would put the playing man under pressure. That fear has proved unfounded. The Dutch not only watch a lot of sports, but they also play a lot of sports themselves. Comparative European research shows that almost sixty percent of the Dutch population participate in sports at least once a week. Only in the Scandinavian countries do people do more sport.

The males perform all sorts of tricks

When we look at sport through evolutionary glasses, two things immediately stand out. First of all, sports activities seem to have much in common with the activities our ancestors, the hunter-gatherers, undertook to stay alive. Running, throwing, shooting, chasing and subduing opponents were important actions for hunting and warfare. Through sports and games, children in traditional societies practise their skills. Our

popular children's games such as tag ('catch as much prey as possible') and hide-and-seek ('don't show yourself to the enemy') are probably remnants of these, but we have talked about that before.

The second thing that stands out is the male-female differences in sports practice and the perception of sport. In most sports, men are better than women because they are stronger, faster and more aggressive. These differences have come about through the more prominent role of our male ancestors as hunters and warriors. Also, many more men than women watch sporting events and their experiences are more intense. During exciting sporting events, male spectators' hormone levels fluctuate more and the risk of heart failure also increases. During the World Cup final between Germany and Argentina, considerably more men than usual were rushed to German hospitals. What was the cause? A heart attack.

A deeper evolutionary explanation for our fascination with sport can be found in the behaviour of birds. During the mating season, birds come together in large groups, called leks, where they can evaluate each other at low cost. The males perform all sorts of tricks. The females look on and choose their partners for the breeding season from the large and diverse supply.

A sporting event, such as the Olympic Games, is also a kind of lek, in which men and women showcase their talents to each other and to an interested public. If you are good at sports, it gives reliable information about your physical and mental abilities, such as your strength, flexibility, ambition and resilience. And that makes you interesting as a love partner. In some traditional societies, the winner of a wrestling match may choose a young bride. In our society too, top male athletes, be it footballers, basketball players or Formula 1 drivers, are sought-after romantic partners.

The problem with this theory is that it does not adequately explain why more men than women watch sporting events. But if you consider that in prehistoric times it was mainly men who fought and hunted together, then it is logical that it is especially important for men to gather information about possible competitors or partners.

Sport as a source of knowledge

Watching sports is a cheap source of knowledge. This is evident from research into the favourite sports of the average man and woman. Men like to watch sports in which there are frequent physical confrontations, whether or not in teams, as in boxing and football. Car racing is also popular, probably because it involves dangerous situations in which one can show off one's courage. Women, on the other hand, prefer sports that do not involve physical aggression and in which technique and flexibility are paramount, such as gymnastics and figure skating.

Another remarkable difference is that women more often watch sports with family and friends, while men also like to watch sports alone. Moreover, women rarely talk to each other about the sports they have seen. For men, this is an important topic of conversation, for example on the Monday after a weekend full of sports on television.

Finally, what remains to be explained is why sport, and football in particular - contrary to what Huizinga predicted - plays such an important role in our modern society. Especially after the industrial revolution, we see an increase in the interest in all kinds of team sports. Football, rugby and cricket all come from the Victorian era. Our thesis is that this is because men were less likely to fight or go hunting together. It was no longer possible to assess each other's strength, courage or resilience. Fortunately, watching sports in the stadiums and later on television offered a solution.

This hypothesis deserves further investigation. Many countries that do not wage much war, for example, seem to have a very strong culture of sport. This applies to the Scandinavian countries, but also to Australia and the Netherlands. Just look at the relatively large number of medals we win at the Olympic Games or at our achievements in team sports such as football and hockey. Moreover, it seems that in peace-loving countries there is more room for women's top sports and the Netherlands benefits greatly from this in the medal count.

Almost too good to be true

Stories and science show that football and war have a lot in common, with the greatest common denominator being our primal brain. Both are about battle, honour and winning. The interests of one's own country, tribe or club are paramount. It is not only the football team that takes part in the battle, but in a derived form also the supporters. There is never a greater sense of solidarity than in times of war and other major crises. That solidarity is reflected on the pitch and among the supporters; together against the unreliable enemy. Sport unites and fraternises.

But if there are so many similarities, can football replace war? Can football be used as a means to prevent or end armed conflict, as W.F. Hermans suggested? It is a thought that is almost too good to be true.

White, brave dove of peace

Almost too good to be true? What about this story about Papuans in the jungles of New Guinea? Two tribes had been having big problems with each other for a long time. A lot of threats back and forth, a lot of verbal aggression, sometimes an incident. There was a suffocating tension in the air that could at any moment lead to a tribal war with many victims. It was a fuse in a powder keg. Remember that Papuans have been

headhunting for centuries. Nothing had changed in that respect. They cut off their opponent's head to take it away as a trophy. Tribal warfare is almost a tradition there, a stage where you can show how brave you are.

A missionary who wanted to convert the Papuans to Christianity saw it with regret. If it came to tribal warfare, all his missionary work over the years would have been in vain. His God preaches love and that does not include headhunting. This missionary was not only filled with a deep faith, but knew how to combine it with a creativity that you don't see in most missionaries. He devised a ruse to prevent a war that would certainly result in deaths. Instead of fighting each other to the death, he suggested that the two tribes have a football match.

His plan worked out well. Early one morning in a clearing in the jungle, the warriors of the two tribes faced each other. The missionary was there as a referee, as a white, brave, dove of peace between all those black warriors. This was accepted by both sides. Painted and dressed for battle, they began the contest. The rest of both tribes, women, children and elders, watched from the sidelines. It is striking that some football supporters resemble these jungle warriors in their outfits, except perhaps for the bones through their noses and the penises.

At the missionary's suggestion, they had agreed that the contest would not be over until a clear winner had emerged. It was up to the venerable missionary to decide. In practice, it meant that the contest went on for days, but eventually a winner emerged. The other tribe accepted its loss. After all, they had fought like lions and shown their manhood to the other members of the tribe. It is not known whether the missionary saved many souls in this way, but honour was saved, without bloodshed. No head was chopped off and no hatred was sown. The missionary's initiative was copied in the jungle of

New Guinea. Papuans started playing football. Sometimes until a winner was known, sometimes they stopped at a draw. In any case, the emissary of God proved: Football can prevent war.

Invisible crown

The memories of the United Kingdom's glorious period as a great military and economic power are deeply embedded in the consciousness of the British people. They wear the past like an invisible crown on their heads. National feelings of honour and pride are still alive and well. Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves! According to those in the know, these feelings or the playing of them have played a major role in the Brexit that has brought more disadvantages than advantages to the British in economic and other terms.

The same sentiments arose when the United Kingdom quarreled with Argentina over some insignificant islands off its southern tip. It has already been briefly mentioned. These Falkland Islands, or Malvinas in Spanish, are not much bigger than North Brabant and Gelderland put together. About three thousand people live there, even less than on Ameland. You can't really call it an attractive holiday destination. No waving palm trees with golden beaches and boulevards here, but barren grassy plains over which a fierce wind blows and where it rains more often than in England. Long ago, the British annexed these islands because they are strategically located near Cape Horn. Argentina has traditionally considered the Malvinas to be part of its territory.

On 2 April 1982 something crazy happened. Totally unexpected to the outside world and to the British, Argentina attacked the Falklands. In two days they had conquered those few measly islands from the British. But was that really so crazy?

But what if our Rob had scored?

Since 1976, Argentina has been ruled by a military junta, led by General Jorge Videla. This junta ruthlessly carried out abductions, torture and executions. As a deterrent, opponents were thrown from planes over the sea to disappear forever in the waves. This reign of terror was known by its self-chosen name of 'Dirty War'.

Two years later, the World Cup was held in Argentina. Following Mussolini, Videla used this tournament as a propaganda tool, as he would again in Qatar. The outside world saw nothing of the 'Dirty War' during the tournament, only clean streets and squares, lush parks and stadiums full of enthusiastic fans. Videla made sure he was in the picture as a super supporter. According to the stories, he also made sure that Argentina reached the final by exerting the necessary pressure and making threats here and there. In fact, Argentina would only reach the final if they won Peru by at least four goals. It ended up being 6-0, an unbelievable result considering the balance of power. Afterwards, several people involved, including the players, indicated that Peru had been bribed.

The final took place against the Netherlands. The score remained the same for a long time, 1 - 1, until just before the end Rob Rensenbrink, nicknamed the snake man, had a huge chance and hit the post. It became an extension in which Argentina eventually drew the longest straw. Argentina world champion! The people were ecstatic with joy, the growing discontent temporarily stifled. With this, the junta could move on for a while. But what if our Rob had scored? The question is whether Videla and his regime would have survived this disappointment.

Emergency handle

In the first period after this historic victory, there was not much for Videla to do. The euphoria had not faded. The

national team and the top clubs continued to perform well. New talent was on the way, such as the sensational Maradona and that other talent Ramón Díaz. The Argentines had plenty to be proud of.

But the economic situation got worse and worse. People in working-class neighbourhoods could barely make ends meet. Meanwhile, repression remained brutal and criticism from abroad increased. This was not least thanks to the 'Foolish Mothers', ordinary but courageous mothers who gathered every Thursday afternoon at 3.30 p.m. in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. They called attention to their sons, daughters, grandchildren and husbands who had disappeared without trace. Not even the pride of Argentine football could compete with that. Dissatisfaction grew again and in 1981 Videla had to step down in favour of a new dictator.

The junta wanted to stay in power at all costs. They had pinned their hopes on the 1982 World Cup to be played in Spain. As reigning world champions, they were automatically qualified for that tournament. The successful 1978 team had not changed much. The talents Maradona and Ramón Díaz would only make the team stronger. But it was a big gamble. They were not playing in their own country. Therefore, they could not exert much influence on the course of the matches. Moreover, it was doubtful whether the junta would be able to hold out until the summer of 1982.

A coup d'état was the result. The Argentine military attacked the Malvinas, their Malivinas, with great force. Proud Argentina would teach the arrogant British a lesson. In this way they would unite the people behind them again and crush resistance. It was a calculated risk. Resistance was hardly to be expected. England was thousands of kilometres away from the insignificant islands. There was no longer any strategic interest. What would the British care?

Thank you Argentina

How did the United Kingdom react? Margaret Thatcher, the 'Iron Lady', had been in power since 1979. At the time of the Argentine attack, things were bad in the UK. Economically, the country was in a deep recession due to outdated industry, high inflation, huge unemployment and, as a result, growing labour unrest. Thatcher intervened with a heavy hand, driven by her conservative ideology. Many state-owned companies were privatised. The power of trade unions was curtailed. Benefits were cut. Plans were made to close unprofitable mines, threatening thousands with redundancy. The United Kingdom was a country with great contrasts between rich and poor. There was so much social unrest that in 1982 Thatcher was the least popular Prime Minister since the Second World War.

That is why the Argentine attack came at just the right time. A war offered her an excellent opportunity to divert attention from domestic problems and nurture national honour, just as recently for Boris Johnson the Russian invasion of Ukraine diverted attention from his partygate. Thatcher did not hesitate for a moment and sent a special naval task force to the archipelago. In May, the British marines, including Prince Andrew who was a helicopter pilot, began the attack. This way, the royal family could also benefit from the revived national feelings.

It was a short but bloody war that cost the lives of almost a thousand young men on both sides. The barren isles were recaptured and a ceasefire declared on 14 June. The people stood united behind Thatcher. Thank you Argentina.

With the tail between the legs

One month later, the 1982 World Cup started. As mentioned, Argentina did not have to qualify. That meant no qualifying games with resounding victories that could make the Argentines' breasts swell with pride. They had to make do with

high expectations. Imagine if they had been able to show their footballing prowess in the run-up to the tournament. Would a war have been necessary?

They started the tournament in Spain as top favourites. This was the strongest team Argentina had ever fielded. With some difficulty, the team reached the second round. That was it. The next match against Italy was lost, despite the presence of Maradona. Argentina had to return home with their tail between their legs. Coach Menotti saw no other option than to resign. After the lost war over the Malvinas, this premature elimination was the final blow to the junta. In 1983, the reign of terror finally came to an end. In the same year, democratic elections took place and Videla and his accomplices had to appear in court.

Mudfigure

In the qualifying series for the 1982 World Cup, England made a muddle of things. The team lost without a chance against small countries like Romania, Switzerland and Norway. With luck and just enough points, they managed to qualify. It gave the people little reason to be proud of their representatives. At the World Cup itself, England managed to reach the second round, but were eliminated there to the shame of the entire nation. Coach Ron Greenwood resigned.

It was that the United Kingdom had won a war that brought Thatcher from an initially hopeless position to re-election in 1983. Football was not the national honour.

Both countries' rulers seized the opportunity of war to stay in power. The price was high. The performance of their football teams fell short of avoiding war. The question remains whether this could have ended differently.

David and Goliath

A few years before that, something remarkable also happened. It was at the end of December 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The immediate cause was the uprising of the Islamic Mujahideen who wanted to oust the communist regime in Afghanistan. As a neighbouring country, the Soviet Union would rather not have an Islamic state next door, but of course the poor and sparsely populated Afghanistan did not pose a real threat to the powerful Eastern Bloc with their advanced weapon systems. By way of comparison: in 1979, the Soviet Union alone had almost three hundred million inhabitants compared to over thirteen million Afghans. David versus Goliath, like Ukraine versus Russia today. The world military power thought it would be ready in a few weeks, but it turned out to be almost ten bloody years. Initially, the Soviets managed to conquer almost all major cities. Only in the inhospitable countryside did the Mujahedeen remain in control, where they fought a guerrilla war. Because of the brutal action of the Soviets, the population began to get fed up with the communists. The Moedjahedien gained more and more support and managed to inflict painful defeats on the Soviets. Year after year it looked worse for the Soviets. At a certain point, Gorbachev decided that enough was enough. This war was unwinnable. In February 1989 they decided on an inglorious retreat from Afghanistan. What they left behind were between one and two million dead: Soviet soldiers, Mujahedeen fighters and, above all, innocent civilians.

What about the other way around?

Was this senseless war linked to football? Yes, it did. The war began at a time when the Soviet Union was underperforming in football. The supporters did not have much to be proud of. The immense country did not even manage to qualify for the 1978 World Cup. It became a dramatic qualification series with

losses against small countries such as Hungary and Greece. The Soviet Union also failed to qualify for the European Championships in 1980. They finished last in a group with Finland, Hungary and Greece; not countries that are high in the hierarchy of the football world. In the years that followed, the football performances did not improve much. Not until the 1988 European Championship did they have more success, even reaching the final against the Netherlands. Six months later, the Soviet Union decided to withdraw from Afghanistan.

One example might be a coincidence, two examples might also be. But a pattern seems to be emerging. Football is a welcome tool for propaganda, connecting citizens and distracting them from everyday concerns. But more remarkable is the following: If a country performs badly in terms of football, it is more likely to seek its national pride in war. And what about the reverse? It could well be that the earlier question can be answered with 'yes'. Football can indeed prevent war.

History is an animal

To conclude, the most recent example. Twenty-four countries took part in the last European Championship in 2021. Two of them were involved in an armed conflict as aggressors. The Turkish army invaded Syria at the end of 2019, after the Americans had begun a retreat. This happened to the great surprise of NATO of which Turkey is a member. Erdogan, President of Turkey, said he wanted to create a safe zone in the border area. The real reason is that Erdogan wanted to tackle the Kurds who have been fighting for independence for years. Many times there has been heavy fighting, supported by air strikes, between Turkish army units and Kurdish militias and the Syrian army. At the moment, the northwest of Syria is still in Turkish hands.

The other example does not need much explanation. On the night of 24 February 2022, the Russian army entered neighbouring Ukraine in several places. It was not thought possible, but it happened. This was eight years after the occupation of Crimea, which ushered in a period of increasing aggression. As a reason, Putin used the argument that Russia needed to be protected from threats from Ukraine and to liberate the brotherland from the Nazis. Incredible arguments that concealed the real reason: the dream of a great and powerful Russian empire, rooted in the national feelings of an autocratic leader with a Napoleon complex, as Mark diagnosed. And it is so pointless. Thousands have already died, mostly among civilians, the economic damage is enormous and Russia has made its supposed enemy stronger than ever. Will it never end? History is a beast that returns in an ever-changing guise.

We played for those in the trenches'.

The national football team of Ukraine is taking part in the war in its own way. The players wanted to do everything to qualify for the World Cup in Qatar. To do so, they first had to win against Scotland and then against Wales. At the press conference, a day before the away match against Scotland, Manchester City star player Zinchenko declared: *Every Ukrainian has only one dream: that the war stops.* Then he burst into tears.

It was a match full of emotions, led by our own Danny Makkelie. The players of Ukraine came onto the field dressed in their blue and yellow flags. The Scottish crowd sang en masse the Ukrainian national anthem that had been written down phonetically especially for them. And Ukraine won, convincingly, 1 - 3.

We played for those in the trenches, for those fighting for their last drop of blood. These were the words of national coach Petrakov afterwards.

In the decisive match against Wales, it still went wrong, despite the expressions of support from the Ukrainian military at the front. Win for us! They lost by an own goal. Ukraine not going to Qatar. It is different from the song contest. Football is real struggle.

Why Qatar?

Let's take a look at what Russia has achieved in football in recent years. At the 2014 World Cup, they did not survive the first round. At the 2016 European Championship in France, it was the same story. In the group stage they suffered two defeats and played a draw, finishing last in the group. At the 2018 World Cup, they performed a little better and managed to reach the quarter-finals. Still, that was quite disappointing as the tournament was held in their own country.

The European Championship in 2021 is still fresh in our minds. Like Turkey, Russia fell in the first round and also finished last in their group. At present, Russia and Turkey are respectively number 36 and 43 in the FIFA world rankings, large countries with millions of inhabitants and involved in armed conflict. A further fall is in store, especially now that Russia has been banned from international competitions. Countries like Iran and South Korea are higher on the list. So are countries like Ukraine and Costa Rica, a small country that does not have an army. China, a country with nearly one and a half billion inhabitants, is in 77th place.

Qatar is number 51, a country with less than three million inhabitants. They have brought in almost two million migrant workers to do the work for the 2022 World Cup; building stadiums and hotels, constructing roads. It is slave labour in the burning heat without decent wages and rights. According to

journalistic sources, there have been 6 500 fatalities; according to the President of FIFA, no more than three. Qatar has 6500 registered footballers, as many as the number of workers who have died. A strange coincidence. By comparison, our country has 1.2 million registered footballers who run onto the pitch every weekend. The comparison with Iceland says even more. With a population of 330,000 they have 20,000 active footballers.

The question remains: why Qatar? Answer: lots of money.

Scientific analysis: link between football and war

The FIFA world rankings can teach us something about war and peace. Why would countries that are high on this list still go to war? They will gain their national pride through other means. If not, watch out...

For this book, Mark has carried out a small scientific analysis that supports the relationship between football and war. He has taken a sample of 25 countries that appear in the FIFA rankings. The sample includes the national (men's) football teams of countries from all inhabited continents, from Africa (Kenya, Nigeria), Australia, Asia (China, South Korea), Europe (Netherlands, Ukraine, Russia), North America (USA, Canada) and South America (Chile, Columbia).

He then looked at the FIFA rankings of each country, for example, when we wrote this book, the Netherlands was in 10th place, Nigeria in 30th place, Australia in 42nd place and China in 77th place. He compared that with the defence expenditure of the country concerned. Specifically, it is about the percentage of the gross national product that is spent on military expenditure, which indicates something like a country's readiness for war. In the case of the Netherlands it is about 1.5% and in the US it is 3% of GNP that is spent on defence. If you then compare the FIFA rankings with

defence expenditure, a strong correlation emerges. Countries that spend more on military purposes are worse at football. Finally, we have also looked at data from international research. How do citizens of the countries surveyed view the danger of war (these data were collected before the war in the Ukraine began)? To the question: 'How afraid are you that a war will break out in your country?' the answers from these countries differ considerably. But there too we find the same pattern. Countries where citizens are more afraid of the threat of war score lower on the FIFA rankings.

There seems to be a link between football and war based on this sample. The better a country plays football, the less it is involved in war. Or vice versa: the more a country is engaged in war, the worse it plays football. This confirms the main thesis of this book. But we do not know whether football is the chicken and war the egg, or whether it is the other way around. This calls for further research.

