

Wholesale corruption of “the beautiful game”: FIFA’s World Cup 2026

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The capitalist media has feasted on the ugly scenes after Sunday’s final—Argentine players physically confronting their Spanish rivals, the deserved champions. The tabloid narrative writes itself: sore losers. It is not a good look, but it is nothing football has not seen many times before.

What no editorial will examine is where such fury comes from: the nationalist frenzy whipped up for months by governments and media on every side, which have a direct interest in setting worker against worker along national lines. When Donald Trump appeared on the stadium screens, tens of thousands of spectators booed. The halftime show, featuring Madonna, Bieber, Shakira, Burna Boy and BTS, nearly eclipsed the final itself. In what could only be described as a gesture of staggering hypocrisy—no fault of the performers—they sang alongside children for world peace while the tournament’s host looked on from a bullet-proof-glass-protected luxury box. Trump listened to the songs while planning the next round of bombings against Iran and backing the Netanyahu regime’s murder and starvation of Gaza’s children.

Within 24 hours, Spanish media applied artificial intelligence to erase Trump from the photograph of the team’s captain, Rodri, lifting the trophy. Days later, Trump announced tariffs amounting to economic war against a huge share of the countries whose teams had just competed—including the co-hosts, Canada and Mexico.

World Cup 2026: turning the beautiful game into a billion-dollar business run by mafia bosses

The tournament—staged across Mexico, the US and Canada, with most matches in the US—was organized by FIFA and its New York billionaire partners, who rewrote the rules to subordinate it entirely to profit. They largely succeeded. By their measure, it was a triumph: *The Guardian* reported record revenues of \$15 billion, dwarfing Qatar 2022’s \$7.5 billion.

The 2026 World Cup marked a qualitative escalation in the degradation of sport by capitalism. Five-minute hydration breaks were mandated each half—not for player safety, but to sell commercials. FIFA expanded the tournament from 64 to 104 matches, a 62.5 percent increase, wringing more television slots and more advertising revenue out of players’ bodies.

In keeping with American capital’s individualist mentality, this

World Cup was about Messi, not Argentina; Mbappé, not France; Cristiano Ronaldo, not Portugal; Haaland, not Norway. The motive was marketing—billions in advertising revenue. Teams now change jerseys annually, attempting to lure working class children into buying endlessly. A sport born in streets and factories has been priced beyond the reach of the working class that loves it.

The trophy itself arrived inside a trunk made by Louis Vuitton, the luxury fashion house whose handbags fill the windows of Fifth Avenue in New York and the Champs-Élysées in Paris. The sport of the world’s poor was delivered in the packaging of the super-rich.

The illegal intervention of fascistic President Donald Trump, demanding that FIFA president Gianni Infantino rescind the red card issued against US striker Folarin Balogun—which carries an automatic suspension—was a naked abuse of state power on behalf of the host nation’s team. FIFA complied. Nothing better illustrates the fusion of the sport’s governing body with the American state and the billionaires who direct it.

Dynamic pricing and the cult of the star

Dynamic pricing, imposed by American capital, proved a crucial tool for wresting maximum profits from the tournament, while pricing the vast majority of fans out of the stadiums. For South Africa 2010, FIFA set the cheapest final ticket at \$100 for nationals. For Qatar 2022, the minimum rose to \$200. For the tournament just concluded, it jumped 900 percent, to \$2,030. Yet even this figure pales against resale prices: the cheapest between \$7,000 and \$10,000, the most expensive between \$35,000 and \$39,000. “Official hospitality packages exceeded \$57,000. In extreme cases, offers reached \$575,000 and even millions for premium seats,” reports CNN en Español.

The tournament’s financial center of gravity was New York City, which boasts the highest concentration of billionaires on earth and houses the offices of FIFA’s corporate partners.

The frustration of Argentine supporters is understandable but must be analyzed in context: a fourth title was expected to provide an escape valve for Milei to continue immiserating the masses. When the ruling class finds itself cornered, it deploys fanatical nationalism to stupefy the exploited. The billionaires who prop up

the US president also had an interest in an Argentine victory, lending space for its fascistic President Javier Milei and his ultra-right accomplices to align with Washington in its war preparations against China.

The bleak reality back home

Argentina has been brutally impoverished by Milei's "chainsaw" austerity policies, imposed under IMF dictates. Unemployment has reached 7.8 percent. The average wage covers just 72.1 percent of the Total Basic Basket. Two in five workers labor informally in extreme poverty. Close to 80 percent of those employed earned less than 1,500,000 pesos a month, below the Total Basic Basket of essential goods and services. Messi is conscious of his compatriots' suffering. He declared:

For us, World Cups are special—we forget everything bad we've had to go through. There are people having a hard time. As you say, people without work, who can't make ends meet, who are fighting every day.

Messi's interviewer, taken aback, rebuked him, "Now he really is Maradona!"—the former Argentine football star, known for defending Cuba from the US criminal embargo and Palestine. The interviewer opposed Messi's protest and defended the poverty imposed by the fascist Milei, accusing Messi and his teammates of being millionaires with no political commitment.

What capitalism wastes

The majority of football's geniuses were forged in poverty. Maradona shared a 4x4-meter room with seven siblings. Di María's father sold charcoal to survive. Pelé played barefoot with a ball of rags and socks. Ronaldo Nazário hit Rio's streets at 13 when his father abandoned the family. Cristiano Ronaldo's mother was a cook, his father a gardener in Madeira. Mohamed Salah emerged from a humble Nile Delta village. Samuel Eto'o kicked a coconut for years in Cameroon. The list is endless. Capitalism plunders the talent the oppressed masses produce, then sells it back to them at a massive markup.

These footballers are not merely physical specimens. Psychologists identify a superior mind: high cognitive intelligence, extraordinary spatial vision, the capacity to process millions of data points per second and make perfect decisions in milliseconds.

Einstein did not consider himself a great mathematician. General Relativity began as mental experiments. To translate his spatial vision into equations he needed mathematicians, principally Marcel Grossmann. His thinking was visual, driven by curiosity

and persistence—traits shared by football's geniuses.

The conclusion is not that footballers are exceptional freaks of nature. It is that capitalism suppresses the creative and intellectual potential of every human being and permits a handful to develop only what can be monetized. The \$15 billion and the Louis Vuitton trunk are not, as FIFA claims, the means by which the people's passion is "financed." They are the mechanism by which the sport is taken hostage from those who created it, and through which society is prevented from raising it—and art and science—to the level humanity is capable of.

The struggle ahead

The 2026 World Cup has concluded with the devastating triumph of Spain, and with the lesson that nothing lasts forever when age imposes its limits. FIFA and its billionaire patrons got the billions they wanted.

The same oligarchy that has managed to turn football into a source of mega-profits is driving humanity into a world war. In this sphere, it will not be a question of billions of dollars, but billions of dead.

It is not football that will unite the world, as the organizers cynically claim. What is required is the abolition of capitalism and its replacement with world socialism—production to satisfy human needs, where education, healthcare, housing, nutrition and recreation become inalienable rights, and every human being may flourish in sport, the arts and science.

Something of that future was glimpsed on the field. The most wonderful revelation of the tournament came from Africa: a true pleasure to see Ghana, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Morocco and Egypt fighting on equal terms with the giants of Europe and South America. Talent is distributed everywhere; only the means of developing it are hoarded. Under socialism this will not be a revelation. It will be the norm.



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