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Introduction to football history issue of *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, co-authored by David Wood, Brenda Elsey and Matthew Brown.

It has long been a commonplace to describe Latin American countries as “football crazed” or “countries of football”. While the sport’s popularity, revenue, and political capital are undeniable, the specific meanings of the sport within different places challenge any easy description. At the end of the twentieth century, Eduardo Galeano (1995) situated football at the centre of a Latin American identity. In his essays of football anecdotes, Galeano found a compelling way to reflect upon the creativity, inequality, colonialism and violence in the region. No sooner than one puts together a regional story, however, it falls apart because football also reveals and produces deep divisions. Places that embraced baseball, for example, clearly lay within a U.S., rather than British, orbit at the end of the nineteenth century and the division of football in the Americas between the confederations of CONCACAF and CONMEBOL reflects the existence of regions within the region. More recently, the mass export of players, from South America in particular, has oriented football fandom and spectatorship toward European leagues. Football has thus prompted all types of ruminations from economists to journalists on how the region grapples with the forces and meanings of globalization.

The publication of this special issue of the *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, a major interdisciplinary Area Studies journal, on Latin American football, reflects the rapid expansion of football as a research field over the last decade. We have come a long way since scholars and students interested in Latin American football relied on Lever (1983), Mason (1995) and irregular anthologies of pioneering work such as Arbena and LaFrance (2002). Those publications encouraged historians to delve into the archives and analyze the

significance of football in Latin America. The articles collected in this special issue demonstrate that while Latin American football history has retained its recognition of the game as a significant everyday practice and marker of identities, it can now engage with a major body of scholarship to situate its findings with regard to social, cultural, economic and political processes.

The 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, alongside the global visibility of Latin American football stars, from Maradona to Marta to Messi, has served to catalyse researchers and convince scholarly publishers, universities, and funding bodies of the relevance of the subject. This has happened to a degree in the Anglophone academy, where the three co-editors of this special issue are based, but the real revolution in the field has taken place within Latin America itself. Growing out of the productive interface between history and sociology, work on sport history across the region has exploded in the last decade, reflecting the growing recognition of football as a key aspect of historical processes. This has been notable in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay, and especially in Brazil, where there are now major books, collections, centres, and journals that explore football's role in national history. In Brazil and Argentina in particular influential researchers have inspired a new generation to draw upon sophisticated theoretical frameworks and engage with other trends in cultural, social and transnational history in ways that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. Despite this engagement with transnational trends, that Latin American football history has retained the national paradigm still common to most works of Latin American history should not surprise, given that the tendency is reinforced by football's own importance in national myth-creation through representative teams.

One of the strengths of sport history is its interdisciplinarity. This was already clear in Miller and Crolley's classic analysis of the field (2007), and has been intensified in creative

ways ever since (see essays in Elsey and Pugliese 2017; Wood 2017; and Brown 2014). The influence of geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists is evident in all the works cited here. Football as a simultaneously global and discrete subject that permeates multiple aspects of daily life lends itself to such disciplinary crossings.

This special issue is the culmination of a series of discussions at the annual conference of the Society for Latin American Studies, whose support we gratefully acknowledge. These meetings have generated conversations between established authorities and emerging scholars alike, working at institutions across Europe and the Americas. Although the research field has been manifestly strengthened in recent years, there are still many areas that require attention, including women's football, national identity and politics, fan cultures (especially *barras bravas*), and histories of rural and amateur football. The articles collected here demonstrate the creative turn that the historiography of Latin American football has enjoyed. Hopefully, they serve as an invitation for readers to ponder a subject that demands – and deserves – our critical attention.

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