

The last time Brazil hosted the World Cup, in 1950, two hundred thousand people—a tenth of the population of Rio de Janeiro—streamed into the newly completed Maracanã Stadium to watch their beloved national team, the Seleção, compete for the title against Uruguay. A monumental concrete bowl, intended to rival the Christ statue atop Corcovado, the Maracanã resembled a spaceship and was meant to embody, as the British journalist Alex Bellos writes in “Futebol: The Brazilian Way of Life,” not only Brazil’s athletic ambition but also “the country’s place in the modern world.” Its capacity was greater by several magnitudes than any other Brazilian stadium. Some ten thousand men had contributed to its construction, practicing goal celebrations while they worked. They’d even, somehow, finished ahead of schedule.

Then Brazil lost, 2–1. Back home, while listening on the radio, three Uruguayans reportedly died of excitement. In the Maracanã, there was stunned, eerie silence, so unfathomable and disconcerting that it left a formative wound in the national psyche. The novelist Nelson Rodrigues identified the moment as the source of his country’s “stray-dog complex”—“the inferiority with which the Brazilian positions himself, voluntarily, in front of the rest of the world.” In spite of the five World Cups that Brazil has won since—more than any other country—the Maracanã humiliation remains the most intellectualized aspect of its sporting legacy, if not of its modern history altogether. “When the players needed the Maracanã most, the Maracanã was silent,” the singer, songwriter, and poet Chico Buarque once declared. “You can’t entrust yourself to a football stadium—that’s the lesson that sunk in after 1950.”

The lesson may have been forgotten. The economic boom that recently brought Brazil, with its burgeoning middle class, to the brink of First World respect has been dizzying. This June, the opening game—Brazil vs. Croatia—of what the *New Statesman* suggests may be the last World Cup that ever matters will be played at the Itaquerao, a new stadium going up in São Paulo for the storied Corinthians, a professional team known both for its historical ties to the proletariat and for its thuggish fans. The stadium,



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THE SPORTING SCENE

SAMBA SOCCER

The transformation of Brazil's most storied team.

BY BEN MCGRATH

Soul of the game: As the World Cup looms, Corinthians, the traditional favorites of Brazil's



proletariat, are bringing First World marketing and merchandising to bear on the country's emerging middle class. Will the fans behave?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SEBASTIÁN LISTE

a monument to gentrification, will feature the largest digital screen on earth and lighting twice as bright as that used in Munich's Allianz Arena, said to be visible, on a clear night, from nearly fifty miles away. "The idea was to build the best, biggest shopping mall in the world, with a soccer field in the middle," Andrés Sánchez, the former Corinthians president, who is supervising the construction, told me, sounding more like Donald Trump than like a steward of the *jogo bonito*, or beautiful game. Every square metre on the premises has been plotted as a "money-making scheme." No stray dog, Sánchez likes to say that Corinthians has "changed the way Brazilian football thinks," and, between cigarettes, which he tossed on the floor, half smoked, he argued with the conviction that history was now on his side. Europe was in decline, and it was only a matter of time—economic determinism, really—before its fabled clubs would cede their monopoly on the best players. True, the Brazilian professional league still had some kinks to work out, but even so, he said, "we're easily going to surpass the European teams, and we will be the best championship in the world."

This boast was of no small importance. The *New Statesman* argument, perhaps overstated, that this might be the last significant World Cup reflects an increasing reality of globalization. The top professional leagues have achieved such international reach, both in filling out their rosters and in the fan bases from which they draw their support, that the allure of ostensibly amateur spectacles like the World Cup and the Olympics (which Brazil will host, too, in 2016) is diminished by comparison. We associate Lionel Messi, by consensus the best player in the world, as much, if not more, with Barcelona, for whom he plays most of the year, as with his native Argentina. Last spring, Neymar, Brazil's next great hope, decamped for Barcelona to join him. Diego Costa, a Brazilian forward who plays professionally in Madrid, stunned fans of the Seleção when he announced, a few months ago, that he'd be playing next summer for the national team of his host country, which had granted him dual citizenship.

A truism of Brazilian politics holds that a victory for the Seleção confers instant job approval on the incumbent

regime. But this World Cup belongs in many respects to the legacy of Brazil's ex-President Lula da Silva, a populist and a rabid Corinthians fan, who within months of taking office, in 2003, signed legislation for a soccer fans' bill of rights. Dilma Rousseff, Lula's more technocratic successor (and Brazil's first woman President), saw her popularity plummet last June, as a wave of protests—an echo of the Occupy movement—sent more than a million students and young professionals into the streets of Brazil's cities. (Lately, in the wake of the Edward Snowden affair, Rousseff's standoffishness toward the Obama Administration has helped her in the polls.) The protests were spurred, notionally, by a twenty-cent increase in bus fares, but it was no accident that they coincided with the Confederation Cup—a kind of World Cup dress rehearsal—and the disturbance was seen in some ways as an indication that the country was outgrowing its long romance with the sport. Among the protesters' chief grievances was the huge public expenditure on showy stadiums instead of on grownup concerns, like improving public transportation, schools, and hospitals.

At least the Itaquerao will have a major team to play in it after the World Cup. But what will become of the newly refurbished seventy-thousand-seat Estádio Nacional, in Brasília, a city whose biggest club plays in the D league, to crowds regularly numbering in the hundreds? (One worker has died on the proj-



ect.) Or consider the Arena Amazonia, in Manaus, a city in the northwest surrounded by two million acres of rain forest. Its opera house, completed in 1896, served as the inspiration for Werner Herzog's "Fitzcarraldo," about the folly of grandiose jungle construction. The stadium builders had first to drain a river tributary that flowed through the proposed site, in the state of Amazonas, and then to install seats with a special kind of paint that doesn't melt under the equato-

rial sun. No club from Amazonas has competed in top-level play in Brazil in thirty years. Two workers died while building the stadium. "We always think in Brazil there will be a miracle," Paulo Vinicius Coelho, the Brazilian Bob Costas, told me. "This time, there is not going to be a miracle."

Tellingly, the hero of the 1994 Seleção, Romário, whose feet are sometimes credited with electing President Fernando Cardoso, has reemerged as a leading voice of the World Cup opposition. "Brazil is hosting it, but it's not for the Brazilian people," Romário told me. "The lower classes won't be able to buy tickets." Once known as a playboy, he is now a socialist congressman representing Rio de Janeiro—a Derek Jeter figure who recast himself as Muhammad Ali to seize the political moment.

A considerable amount of the traditional Brazilian fixation with soccer, and with intellectuals' embrace of Brazilian soccer as a global ideal, is bound up in the notion that Brazilians play not just better than everyone else but somehow differently—that they'd improved on a colonial import and made it their own. Whimsy and creativity exemplified by talents like Pelé and Mané Garrincha, the so-called Angel with Bent Legs, are, according to this mythology, part of the national DNA, a product of the country's unique history of miscegenation. (Or a result, some argue, of black players having learned how to dance out of the way of onrushing whites in the days when even accidental body contact might have been interpreted as intolerable aggression.) This soccer-as-samba idealization, too, is largely a casualty of globalization. "Brazilians learned how to be technocrats, and Europeans learned how to be artists," Tostão, an integral member of perhaps the finest of all World Cup champions, the 1970 Seleção, said, and suggested that if I wanted to see the beautiful game now I might as well head to Barcelona or Manchester. Romário and his contemporaries may have had genius in their feet, as the saying goes, but the World Cups they won for Brazil, in 1994 and 2002, came after a long spell of elegant failure, and were triumphs of defensive tactics, not wizardry—a cynical concession, you might say. Sports fans, at heart, are not intellectuals but crass capitalists, who

prefer winning at all costs. "Playing beautifully and losing is horrible," Luiz Felipe Scolari, the coach of the Seleção, told the *Times* recently. "Whoever says the opposite is an idiot."

The problem is not just that so few members of the Seleção play professionally in Brazil but that the national team itself sometimes goes years without playing on home soil, instead touring the world—like the Harlem Globetrotters—to make money for the disreputable Brazilian Football Confederation, or C.B.F. Corruption is the essence of what the protesters are against, as they try to form a stable middle class, and the C.B.F. makes for a convenient villain. "I believe it will be the last corrupt organization to be extinguished," Juca Kfour, the country's most influential sportswriter, told me, and then brought up a video that Brazilians snicker about, in which José Maria Marin, the head of the C.B.F., can be seen pocketing the medal of a junior player at an under-eighteen tournament. Marin succeeded Ricardo Teixeira, who resigned amid a bribery scandal. "If Brazil wins the World Cup, well, good," Kfour added, and offered some tepid applause. "The sixth time, O.K.? It's a banalization. We need to have strong clubs in Brazil, not a strong Brazilian national team."

Soccer allegiances in Brazil are driven as much by social status as by geography. Sport Club Corinthians Paulista is the team of the *povo*—the people. Last winter, after the club travelled to Japan and defeated Egypt's Al Ahly and England's Chelsea to claim the FIFA Club World Cup, a tournament that pitted the winners of six continental championships against one another, its coach held aloft a banner that read "The favela is here!" The team's recent success concluded a decade in which tens of millions of Brazilians were lifted out of poverty, helping to make Corinthians' official merchandising outlets the country's fastest-growing retail chain. The mere existence of those outlets was a novelty when they were introduced, five years ago, at the suggestion of an economist named Luis Paulo Rosenberg. Brazilian clubs had not previously been in the business of selling luggage and lingerie. Nor, for that matter, had their executives included people like Rosenberg.



"Enjoying a sudden decrease in vision and hearing, are we, Horndog? Well, guess who's enjoying a headache!"

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"Definitely, I was the first Ph.D.," Rosenberg said of his installation, initially as the marketing director and later as vice-president, when I visited his duplex apartment in Higienópolis, a prosperous Jewish neighborhood in downtown São Paulo. He was also one of the first to speak fluent English. The son of a prominent Brazilian surgeon, he did his graduate work at Vanderbilt and served as the chief economic adviser to José Sarney, the first civilian President after the fall of Brazil's twenty-one-year military dictatorship, in 1985. "Once he decided to become a populist and do price freezing and all that crap that populists like to do, I moved away," Rosenberg said.

He spent two decades teaching and running a private consultancy, and then Sánchez approached him about taking the unusual leap into a business known for attracting rogues and crooks. "Andrés said, 'Look, I know how to run a soccer club, but I don't have the faintest idea how to make money, so you come and do what you have to do,'" Rosenberg said. "I already had all the money I needed, all the positions in Brazil—my clients were all the large multinationals—fantastic women, beautiful kids, the

best cars, but I had never been a Latin-American champion. I didn't have a stadium!" He went on, "I had the opportunity in this backward environment to apply all the good liberal classical principles of pricing and marketing and all that." It was as if Larry Summers had been summoned to rescue the Redskins from Dan Snyder.

Rosenberg is sixty-nine, small, unassuming, and bald, with a neatly trimmed goatee, but he exhibits a boyish smile, with a trace of mischief, when he recounts the excitement of turning around the club's fortunes. ("Running Corinthians must be comparable to running a whorehouse. What else can you ask from God?") In 2007, amid allegations that Corinthians was being used as a front for money laundering by foreign investors, including the Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky, the team performed so badly that it was demoted to Brazil's B league, a crippling humiliation. Sánchez and Rosenberg took the reins, and within a year they had persuaded Ronaldo, the most prolific goal scorer in the history of the World Cup, and as outsized a figure as they come in contemporary Brazilian sports—A-Rod and Big Papi at once—to return home from Milan. Ronaldo

was injured at the time and had grown overweight. “And he had been caught going to a motel with transvestites,” Rosenberg added. “So, you know, it was like two drunkards—they lean against each other to stand up. That was the kind of agreement I proposed to him.” Corinthians, lacking the cash to offer Ronaldo a competitive salary, came up with a partnership, through which he could share in whatever sponsorship deals his star power brought the club.

In addition to renewed success on the field, Ronaldo introduced glamour. Celebrities like Hugh Jackman and members of Coldplay started turning up at the stadium wearing Corinthians’ black and white. Rosenberg’s singular achievement had been to brand the club’s maniacal fan base as a kind of Red Sox Nation of the underclass—the “People’s Republic of Corinthians,” according to the Nike campaign, which marks the company’s biggest-ever commitment to a South American club. The Corinthiano loyalty was such that thirty thousand supporters followed the team from Brazil to Nagoya and Yokohama for the Club World Cup last year, among them people who quit their jobs, divorced their wives, mortgaged their homes, and sold their refrigerators to make the pilgrimage.

Corinthians now claims as many fans as Canada has citizens: thirty-five million. Rather than accept an equal share of television revenues, as custom dictated, Rosenberg and Sánchez threatened to stream Corinthians games online, for free, and thereby ushered in a system increasingly like Spain’s, or Major League Baseball’s, with a few high-earning clubs and a supporting cast of also-rans. Corinthians increased its annual revenues from Globo TV, Brazil’s monopolistic network, by threefold, and *Forbes* now values the club at more than a billion reais—the first ten-figure Brazilian team. Sánchez predicted that within four years they’d be among the three most valuable worldwide, rivalling Real Madrid and Manchester United, and talked idly about expanding into America, with a franchise in Major League Soccer.

Rosenberg’s global-domination scheme extended to Asia. “Everybody knows that the real money is in China,” he said. “And, you know, Chinese—they don’t know shit about soccer.” In-

stead of scheduling a promotional tour through Shanghai and Beijing, the way some of the big European clubs have done, he conceived of a cultural exchange. “I have to think out of the box,” he said. Corinthians would develop a relationship with the Chinese soccer federation, lending medical and training support, and in return the Chinese would send him an athlete—a potential idol, a marketing sensation. “Because I’ll have a billion Chinese say, ‘What? We don’t know how to play soccer, and one of us is playing for the world champion!’” he said. He asked the Corinthians coach, known as Tite, to scout Chinese prospects. “He watched three hundred videos,” Rosenberg said. “And finally he came to me and said, ‘Look, this Zizao is not illiterate. We can make something out of him.’ So I bought him.” Chen Zhizhao, or Zizao, as he is known in Brazil, arrived in São Paulo in 2012 and was introduced at a press conference that featured women in silk dresses and dancing Chinese puppets. He was twenty-three years old, and had proven an effective goal scorer while playing for Shanghai Shenxin. “Then the bastard coach decided that this is interference, that he will lose face, that marketing decided to bring the player, that he’s not that good,” Rosenberg said, looking incredulous. “And he benches him! So I used the guy for social activities—to take gifts to the children in the hospital.”

This, too, was a novel concept: conspicuous social outreach. Corinthians donated money to combat obesity and Down syndrome and, after the 2011 tsunami, wore Japanese flags on their jerseys. They started planting a hundred trees on old São Paulo brownfields for every goal the team scored. Eventually, they were winning often enough that they could claim to be among the world’s first carbon-neutral soccer teams.

Rosenberg stepped out on his balcony and contemplated the new stadium, which presented problems. For one thing, it was perhaps an hour’s drive from downtown. Itaquera, the scrappy neighborhood from which the stadium gets its nickname, has the densest concentration of Corinthians fans, and São Paulo offered a large tax credit for construction projects in the area. But was it too far from the money? “That’s the question I



Gaviões da Fiel, or Hawks of the Faithful, are

lose sleep over,” Rosenberg said. Also, there was the nagging issue of crowd violence, a cultural legacy that he hoped to suppress, not with moats and fences, in the familiar Third World fashion, but with twenty-first-century technology: facial-recognition software, bought from his new friends in China, that would automatically lock the turnstiles when known troublemakers approached.

Corinthians was founded by a group of railway workers in 1910, sixteen years after Charles Miller showed up in the port of Santos, outside São Paulo, carrying a couple of balls that he’d



the largest Corinthians booster organization. They're politically powerful, with a reputation for using intimidation to get what they want.

picked up at school in Southampton, along with a set of rules for what to do with them. Soccer was just beginning to be more than a pastime of the urban elite, and the new club's founders took the name of a British team that had recently toured Brazil and handily beaten its aristocrats. For a few years, the workers played Várzea, or floodplain football, before more established clubs deigned to accept their challenges. Gentlemanly play, albeit fraught with class aggression, gave way to professionalism in the nineteen-thirties, as a response to European poaching. Like coffee and sugar, soccer talent had

become an exportable commodity. One Brazilian joke has it that the country's first World Cup title was won not in 1958, by Pelé and Garrincha, but in 1934, by Italy, which had repatriated its most talented South American emigrants.

Clubs competed either for the Paulista or the Carioca championship, in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro, respectively; a nationwide league wasn't established until 1959. This was the early period of what in Corinthians lore would come to be known as the drought—a twenty-three-year stretch, from 1954 to 1977, in which Corinthians failed to

win a championship, local or national. All great teams need a larger idea to elevate the endless strings of wins and losses, and for Corinthians fans the drought lent a sense of noble suffering that fit the time and the national mood. It coincided with a period of rapid urbanization, including an influx of immigrants to São Paulo from the north, in search of low-wage jobs; their position as outsiders in the big city drew them to the big team with black-and-white jerseys who couldn't win. And, just as important, it overlapped with the military dictatorship that took power in 1964. Corinthians' failures and near-misses

were a more realistic counterpoint to the mythology of the Seleção, which the generals exploited for political gain. The northern arrivistes sang darkly humorous folk songs about the plight of Corinthianos amid such hardship. Because of their outlander accents and stuttering laughter, I've heard it claimed that these fans were the first M.C.s.

Historians—or soccer historians, at any rate—identify the so-called Corinthians Invasion, of Rio de Janeiro, in 1976, as the largest peacetime mobilization of a population anywhere. The occasion was a semifinal match at the Maracanã between Corinthians and Fluminense, an upper-class club with a dubious racial history. (Flu fans still scatter talcum powder at the start of games, in honor of their team's practice, a hundred years ago, of camouflaging a mixed-race player with whiteface.) Seventy thousand Corinthians diehards followed their heroes north, in a raucous caravan of jeeps and buses; in old film footage, they appear to be headed for Woodstock.

The famous Brazilian clubs of that era were Santos (Pelé's team) and Botafogo (Garrincha's), which toured the world and drew crowds almost as large as the Seleção. It wasn't until the early eighties, according to Juca Kfoury, that Corinthians really achieved national, and even global, relevance, by making explicit the club's opposition to the dictatorship. "I'm going to tell you a story for you to have a grasp," Kfoury said. "Trotzky, when tired of all his work, asked for a vacation from his boss—from Lenin—to go duck hunting in Siberia. There he caught pneumonia and became immobilized. At the same time, Lenin fell terminally ill in Moscow, and Trotsky watched as Stalin took over in a coup." Kfoury, who had been slipping in and out of English and Portuguese, paused for a translation break, leaving me to marvel a little longer over the metaphorical power of *futebol*, before the inevitable transition, which involved a Corinthians players' revolt led some thirty years ago by a brilliant Marxist midfielder named Sócrates, a "black nationalist" defender named Wladimir, and a rebellious teen-age forward known as Casagrande. Hardly catastrophic, like Stalin's, their coup was a triumph—grist for graduate theses on

BRUISE

In the medieval darkness of the Holland Tunnel
with luminous green paint, on whitewashed walls
of the Madrid zoo, in his thick-fingered handwriting
onto dust at the dry Casablanca aquarium

*"When last I held you in my arms,
my love, the West African Black
Rhinoceros was still magnificent
and still alive..."*

What have you been doing to Paul Vermeersch?
He has searched for you encyclopedically
in Albacete, in Zagora, in those cities
whose names have changed,
till the maps he relies on wear out.
In what disguise did you leave him?
So he will not recognize
your gait anymore,
or your stare out from a diorama.

the political power of sport. But it, too, had its origins in the mundane: a love-sick Casagrande's request that he be allowed to leave a long road trip to visit his new girlfriend. The request was put to a vote. A kind of "bros before hos" camaraderie prevailed—Casagrande agreed to remain and play on—and from this was born Corinthians Democracy, a movement that, in Kfoury's estimation, "changed the whole image of the club, and the perception of the fans toward it, for the rest of history, till this day."

The players no longer took orders from management. They voted on everything, including when to stop the team bus for bathroom breaks and whom to invite for motivational lunch meetings before games. (Sócrates, who had studied to be a doctor and was bored by soccer talk, favored architects and musicians, and was said to play better when intellectually stimulated.) Their success on the field bought them some tolerance from São Paulo's professional class, which initially perceived them as anarchists and bearded Commies.

A bit of strategic branding helped, too. That duty fell to Washington Olivetto, an advertising star and an almost Warholian figure who lent his nights and weekends to the team's mar-

keting. Olivetto came up with a new jersey design, in which the word "Democracia" appeared on the back in black block letters above the players' numbers, along with a blood-spattered red "Corinthiana," in the cursive style of Coca-Cola. The players weren't just hippies; they were culture warriors—pop stars, even, who appeared onstage at a Rita Lee concert in São Paulo's Ibirapuera Park. As revolutionaries, Corinthians won back-to-back Paulista championships, in 1982 and 1983. "Until that time, professional footballers were slaves," Wladimir has said. Thereafter, Corinthians and their supporters were written into the plots of prime-time soap operas that rival soccer in popularity. Today, a bronze plaque greets players as they exit the weight room on their way to the practice fields. "Nothing compares to the Corinthians in this land called Brazil," it says, quoting Sócrates, and goes on to cite Karl Marx, Napoleon, the Dalai Lama, and Nelson Mandela as inspirations.

When I arrived in São Paulo, in October, Corinthians, like the Brazilian economy, were in a slump. "Maybe it's like when you finish having sex," Raul Correa, the club's finance director, told me. He recounted a succession of titles the team had won in the past year and then

Hunt and Torment. Call but no Response.
 In the end words of love reveal
 just yourself. Not why
 or the wished-for thing. Only the Spanish
 consider his plea, only the drivers
 deep in a tunnel into New York
 nod wisely, agree with him.
 But it is the black rhino whose loss they mourn,
 not the person he held once in his arms.

When it is over, it is over,
 they say in the passing dark.
 There are no longer great nostrils
 to scent out the source of torment.
 It is a generation since our love,
 to justify anger, had a horn, a tusk.

—Michael Ondaatje

feigned collapse from exhaustion. What was more, they were being punished for the behavior of some of their most committed fans, whose aggressive exuberance had led to a temporary ban on Corinthians games in the club's home city. Instead, they were required to find playing accommodations beyond a hundred-kilometre radius of São Paulo—an inconvenience for the *fiel*, or faithful, as Corinthians loyalists call themselves, which was costing the club as much as twelve million dollars in lost revenues. They had a home game scheduled the first night I was in town, but it was actually going to be played in the small city of Mogi Mirim, at a stadium with lights on only one side of the field, so that the ball would be cast partly in shadow. The grass pitch was so uneven that the Corinthians captain, the graceful defender Paulo André, was taking the evening off as a precaution against injuries.

I caught a ride to Mogi Mirim from Marcio Rosenberg, Luis Paulo's son. Marcio, who is thirty-six, grew up partly in New York and Washington, D.C., where his mother worked at the World Bank, so he was an especially helpful cultural translator as we fought our way north through traffic that reminded me of the Thanksgiving rush to J.F.K. "Experts are calculating that in twenty years the traffic will stop," he said. "It will not even be slow. The cars simply won't

move." Marcio was driving an armored car—a souped-up black VW Beetle—and struggling to find a signal strong enough to operate the G.P.S. on his iPhone. Among the many promises politicians and business leaders have made in the run-up to the World Cup is to revamp the country's antiquated telecommunications network. We missed a crucial highway exit, causing Marcio to yearn for his old jeep, with which he'd have made up for lost time by off-roading across a hilly median.

The trip took nearly three hours—long enough for Rosenberg to fill me in on the club's disciplinary predicament. The trouble began last February, with "the tragedy in Bolivia," he said. Corinthians fans were setting off fireworks inside a stadium in Oruro, and an errant—or weaponized—flare struck a fourteen-year-old Bolivian boy in the eye, killing him. Unable to identify a lone assailant amid the chaos, the Bolivian authorities detained a dozen members of Gaviões da Fiel, or Hawks of the Faithful, the largest Corinthians booster organization, sparking a diplomatic incident that rose to the level of hostage negotiations.

Weeks of imprisonment turned into months. No evidence was produced, no charges filed. The Hawks are the oldest and best known of Brazil's *torcidas orga-*

nizadas, and politically powerful, with nearly a hundred thousand dues-paying members and a reputation for using intimidation to get what they want—the Teamsters of the pitch. Shortly after the incident, a seventeen-year-old boy confessed. (He was safely back in São Paulo and conveniently ineligible for extradition, owing to his status as a minor.) Meanwhile, Dilma Rousseff dispatched an aide to plead directly with the Bolivian President, Evo Morales, for the release of the incarcerated fans.

Corinthians eventually pledged fifty thousand *reais* to the victim's family, and the last of the "unjustly imprisoned," as the club's new president, Mario Gobbi, described them, were set free late in July, after nearly six months in lockup. Then, in August, a riot broke out at a Corinthians game in the new Brasília stadium, and photographs indicated that at least a couple of those same men had been involved. "It was their first game back!" Rosenberg said. "You would think they would stay out of trouble." Another was wounded in a gun battle with the police in the northeastern state of Bahia, in September. It had become harder to view the ex-prisoners as martyrs for the Corinthians' populist cause, and Rosenberg now contended that the real hostages were the team's players and the silent majority of fans who were being held to account for the behavior of what he called an "organized crime syndicate" that assembled twice a week to bang drums in unison at soccer games while unfurling the world's largest flag.

Brazilian league games are played either on Sunday afternoon or, as in this case, on Wednesday night. The Wednesday games don't begin until 10 P.M.—after the *telenovelas*. The Metro shuts down at midnight. The conditions don't favor family excursions to the local stadium. "They say we have the ugliest fans," Rosenberg said, as he escorted me through a crowd that appeared to have few middle-class representatives. "Unfortunately, they're right." We found space to stand in a corner of the stadium, which was built in the concrete brutalist style for a team in Brazil's C league, and were surprised to hear someone speaking English behind us, comparing the size of the capacity crowd, of around twenty thousand, to

that of a college basketball game in the United States. His name was Ron, and he was from Ohio: late twenties, blond goatee. He had married a Brazilian woman and followed her home to Mogi Mirim. She worked for I.B.M., while he taught English. "That's why I like college *football*, bro," he said to his Brazilian friend, implying that this spectacle was seriously lacking, by comparison. "You got to come with me to the States."

The fans displayed banners from Gaviões and smaller guilds, with names like Estopim (Fuel) and Pavilhão 9—a reference to the cellblock where a famous prison riot took place in 1992. An ominous barbed-wire fence encircled the grass. Rosenberg began pointing out some of Corinthians' key players. There was Ralf, "a guard dog," and Douglas, "the maestro, the guy with the light touch," as well as Emerson, who is better known as Sheik, because he played for several years in Qatar. None of these names appeared on the backs of the supporters' shirts. That honor was reserved for Ronaldo, who retired in 2011. "He was fat, he was smoking, he was drinking—he was sort of Corinthians!" Rosenberg said, explaining the lasting appeal, in contrast with the rel-

ative unpopularity of Alexandre Pato, a twenty-four-year-old sniper and the team's current leading scorer, who was in South Korea at the moment, touring with the Seleção. Pato had also been wooed back from Milan and was in some ways a more significant acquisition: a rare instance of a Brazilian club outbidding the Europeans for a player in his prime. But Pato, Rosenberg said, had grown up as "a rich kid," and the fans remained wary.

Corinthians do not play the beautiful game. Tite, the coach, had come from the south of Brazil, where a defensive posture is favored, as in Uruguay, across the border. This cautiousness, I gathered, sometimes confounded the *fiel's* expectations of aggressive running, as proof of constant effort—a blue-collar style for a blue-collar team. I began to detect some restlessness: groans amid the synchronized chants. "Some of our fans don't like it when the ball goes backward," Rosenberg explained. "They only want forward." Yet Corinthians supporters pride themselves on never booing their players during games, a tradition that is enforced by the Hawks, and this, like the lack of a large scoreboard with a clock on it, was an aspect of the local sporting culture that our new American

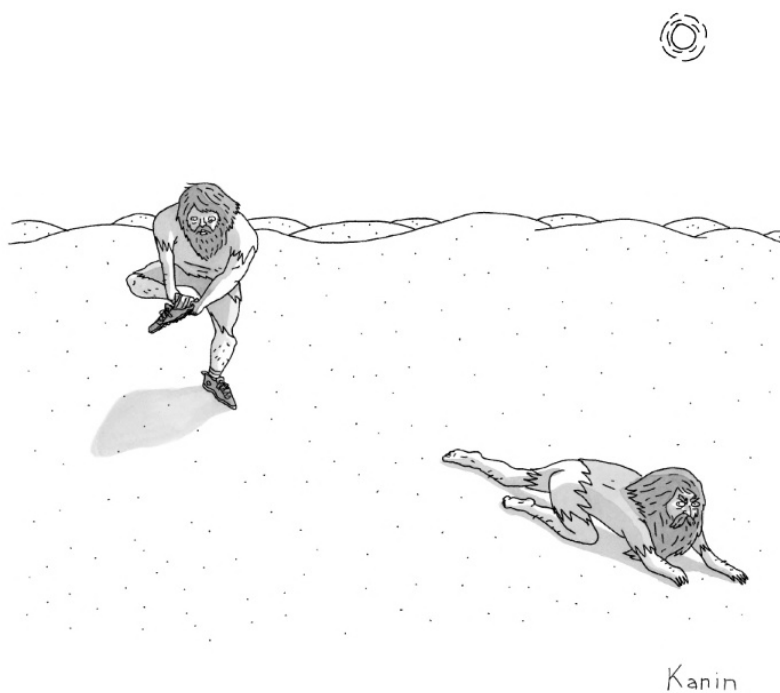
friend couldn't abide. "I hate clapping for shitty shots," Ron said, when a ball sailed wide of the goal, spurring a brief revival of intensity to the chanting. The American tendency to confuse scoreless soccer for an absence of action is often ridiculed—rightly—by connoisseurs, but on this night it was hard to escape the conclusion that nothing much was happening.

Ron left early (he had to get up to teach in the morning), and a more universal theme emerged: complaining about the officiating. The long-suffering Corinthians have a reputation for feeling especially aggrieved on this count, and the fact that they now represent the establishment didn't seem to have reassured them. "The ref, he thinks this is *ballet*," Rosenberg complained, after a yellow card was issued to a Corinthians defender. He also complained after the ref permitted several aggressive slide tackles from the other side. "He's not calling anything! He must think it's American football." For decency's sake, he declined to translate some of the chants.

On the drive back, I asked Marcio Rosenberg about a gruesome story that had turned up on the Drudge Report and in the British papers, involving an amateur soccer match in the rural northeastern state of Maranhão, some nine hundred miles from São Paulo. During an altercation on the field, the referee, who was twenty, took out a knife and stabbed one of the players. The player's friends and family retaliated by quartering and decapitating the ref and running motorcycles over his limbless torso. Rosenberg knew about the incident, and had seen the YouTube video of clinicians at the morgue reattaching the severed head. "It was bound to happen one day," he said, half-joking. Then he mentioned the barbed wire at the stadium we'd just left, and remarked, "If there was no fence there, and nothing keeping people from the field, that ref today would have been beheaded."

To meet FIFA standards, the new stadium will not have fences—a requirement that left Marcio uneasy. "Some people are betting that we're ready. I still believe this is very risky."

When meeting new people, I some-



"Hold up—I got sand in my shoe again."

times tried to use the Maranhão beheading as an icebreaker, but many of them hadn't heard of it. One guy, a young tech consultant, Googled the incident on his phone and turned ashen. He was surprised, he said, to realize that foreigners must "look at us the way we look at China." Others merely rolled their eyes at the persistence of a tabloid trope. "That was only news in London and New York," a journalist named Mauricio Savarese explained. "Because, in the inimitable words of the *Guardian*, it 'raises concerns about the World Cup.'" From his perspective, it raised concerns only about the way the international media were likely to cover the World Cup. The killing was a function of rural poverty, of which Brazil still has plenty, and it had little to do with soccer. One of Savarese's friends asked me what it would say about America's supposed national pastime if an amateur baseball player in a remote part of the country were to turn up dead, the victim of a random heinous crime. Without much Googling effort, I was able to find a news story about a twenty-three-year-old baseball player recently killed in Oklahoma by three teen-agers, who explained that they had been bored.

Savarese and his friends argued that Brazil's soccer culture was less violent than Argentina's, and noted that the local corruption problem wasn't anywhere near as bad as in Russia, where fifty billion dollars has already been blown on preparations for the Winter Games in Sochi—as much as Brazil expects to spend for the World Cup and the 2016 Summer Games combined.

The more interesting problem, they said, was that Brazil's domestic soccer league was suffering from arrested development, and seemed to be thriving and foundering simultaneously. Clubs were earning record revenues, from television rights and gate receipts—a result of price increases to offset the debts from new stadium construction, in some cases. But ticket prices had also risen in excess of demand, and live attendance—the fervor of Corinthians notwithstanding—was dwindling. The average crowd in the Brazilian A league numbered around thirteen thousand, below that of Major League Soccer in the United States, where the sport rarely makes headlines. The game in

Mogi Mirim, everyone agreed, had been lousy, but, in a general sense, so had the entire season—the least compelling in recent memory. The only certainty was that 2014, with the distraction of the World Cup, would be worse.

Flush with their newfound revenue streams, Corinthians spent twenty million dollars in 2010 building a lavish new training complex near the airport. It has indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts, a private thirty-two-room hotel, Foosball tables, a music-listening room, a barbecue pit, poker tables—and even some soccer fields. "Footballers are not mature enough to behave themselves before games without anyone supervising them," Luiz Felipe Scolari, the Seleção coach, once told Alex Bellos, justifying the Brazilian concept of *concentração* (concentration), which calls for players to be sequestered, sometimes for days, before big matches. "It's been proved that sex before a game isn't bad for you," the coach acknowledged. "But, for our players, they don't do things by halves."

"It's the opposite of empowering," Paulo André, the Corinthians captain, complained before practice one day. "It takes away from your ability to grow as an individual, and make your own decisions, and know the difference between right and wrong. Because here everything is provided for you. You just breathe and walk. So when you go home you're basically a little bit lost." Paulo André is thirty, tall and lean, with tousled brown hair and contemplatively cultivated stubble—the intellectual of Brazilian soccer. "I wrote a book in nine months, three hours every day, during concentration," he said. "I've watched every single TV series that there is." He paints, too: abstract expressionism with a recurring soccer-cleat theme. "I find inspiration in many things," he said. "Sometimes I just have a bottle of wine and go crazy."

Like other forms of paternalism, *concentração* has its virtues: it protects the players from their fans. But when the Hawks are especially unhappy they storm the gates of the training complex. Paulo André brought up an incident

in 2011, after Corinthians were unexpectedly eliminated from the Copa Libertadores, South America's most prestigious tournament, by Tolima, a little-known Colombian team. He called it "our worst day." Fans smashed car windows in the players' parking lot and occupied the grounds for twenty-four hours. Paulo André was moved to write an essay, "True Love," that he posted to his personal blog. "I think the truly passionate love the club unselfishly, without demanding anything in return, like the feeling of a father for a son or a man for his wife," it said, and went on to wonder why the team's frustrated fans couldn't direct their reformist convictions toward civic activism ("Education, public transportation, slums") and "stop depositing all their joy and hope in the teams they love."

Before posting it, he sent the statement to Sócrates, the hero of the Corinthian players' revolt thirty years earlier. "You're fully right in your words," Sócrates told him. "My only critique is to keep in mind that the fans, they're extremely emotional. They love this team above all, and even above reason."

The popular success of the June protests had emboldened the players to speak out politically, with mixed results. Sheik, for example, had recently invited controversy by dabbling in Instagram activism, posting a picture in which he and his male business partner posed smooching across a table in a restaurant they own, in Rio de Janeiro. Intended as an expression of support for gay marriage, the image incensed the Hawks, who feared ridicule from rival teams' supporters, and Sheik, who is not gay, was compelled to apologize in person to the Hawks' leadership for the distraction.

"The protests showed us that there is a forum to call for change," Paulo André said. "But we are a little bit afraid, because we go up against the clubs and the fans, who have this mind-set that we are racehorses who serve only one purpose: run after the ball." Having learned from his past missteps, he had chosen to wage a more technical battle for players' rights, by focussing on "the calendar." Brazilians, he argued, play too many games—as many as





"Honey, I cheated on you. Wow! That went much better than I thought it would."

eighty-five per year, compared with fifty or sixty in Europe. They don't break for international tournaments, leaving clubs shorthanded in crucial matches. Their winter vacation is too short. They have to wait for *telenovelas* to end. Framed the right way, it was more than a conventional labor dispute; it was an argument for rescuing the Brazilian game from mediocrity.

As Sócrates and the democratic revolutionaries had done decades earlier, Paulo André enlisted the help of Washington Olivetto, the adman, who allowed the captains of all twenty A-league teams to meet secretly in the São Paulo offices of the international firm WMcCann, of which Olivetto is chairman. "It's a historic event!" Paulo André said. "The first time we were able to unite twenty players from different clubs in one place to talk about issues like these. Never before." Olivetto listened to the players' demands, told them that it all sounded like *bom senso*—"good sense"—

and mocked up a jersey and logo for their newly branded movement: the Bom Senso Futebol Clube.

You're going to get there and realize you're covering the wrong team," Marcio Rosenberg's girlfriend, Andrea, told me, as she prepared to drop us off outside São Paulo's biggest stadium, in the wealthy, hilly neighborhood of Morumbi. "You'll see all the beautiful people, with actual teeth, who can say the alphabet." She was referring to the fans of São Paulo Football Club, the team of the city's elite, and Corinthians' next opponent. A match between Corinthians and São Paulo is called a *Clássico Majestoso* and invariably draws big crowds, in this case fifty thousand.

We watched the first half from what had passed for a luxury box when the stadium was built, a half century ago, and I could immediately see why World Cup games in São Paulo would be hosted elsewhere: the seats were recessed so far

underneath the upper deck that one's view was reduced to the perimeter of the field and little else. The effect was of watching on television, without any of the panning shots that capture the thrilling pageantry of the spectators. You'd never be able to extort corporate sponsors' executives for tens of thousands of dollars to watch Croatia play South Korea from such a bunker.

The box was glassed in, but I could occasionally make out the thrust of the São Paulo fans' taunts. These were aimed at Sheik, the Instagrammer, and resumed whenever he touched the ball: "*Sheik, veado! Sheik, veado!*" ("Sheik, queer!") Later, after Sheik sprang loose for a breakaway and pushed the ball just wide of the goalmouth with the outside of his right foot, they began a new chant, which Rosenberg translated for me as "Kiss him, kiss him." After years of being called Bambis by thuggish Corinthians, the São Paulistas were exulting in their easy opportunity for revenge.

Had we stayed in the bunker, I'd have missed the real news of the game (which would end, like the one in Mogi Mirim, without any goals for either side). But, feeling claustrophobic, we took a walk at halftime and were standing in an aisle, across the field from the *organizadas* with their drums and banners, when a couple of deafening booms shook the stadium foundation, followed by dissipating clouds of smoke. The two sides, separated by a barricade and a column of gray-uniformed policemen, were lobbing explosives at one another.

São Paulo F.C. may be the team of the elite, and Morumbi the equivalent of Beverly Hills, but Paraisópolis, an enormous favela, sits in the middle of the neighborhood and provides a ready supply of the sort of disaffected masculinity that drives hooliganism. "We want Gaviões! We want Gaviões!" the men of Independente, São Paulo's counterparts to the Hawks, chanted. "We want to kill you again, you sons of bitches. Come again, so we can fuck you up!" But one of the explosives, thrown from the Independente side, had fallen short of its mark and landed near the police. They charged and began battering the home team's fans with nightsticks. The crowd fought back, kicking and punching. Soda grenades were pitched from above. (Alcohol is forbidden in Brazilian stadiums.) From a distance,

the violence looked almost theatrical, ritualistic—as, in some ways, it was. Several hours later, buses carrying fans from the rival groups intersected at a location that had been arranged on the Internet, and fighting resumed, with scissors, rocks, and iron rods. This time, police set off the bombs, and fired rubber bullets to subdue the thugs. They arrested twenty-two São Paulo fans, but the Corinthians got away.

The fight at Morumbi, I kept hearing, was sadly typical, and a reason that more casual fans had stopped going to the stadiums, content to watch on television. But, coming as it did in the wake of Bolivia and Brasília, it generated enough negative attention that local politicians began calling for the Hawks to be “extinguished”—disbanded by law. Davi Gebara, the group’s official lawyer, smelled an international conspiracy, an extension of the favela “pacification” going on in Rio de Janeiro, in anticipation of the World Cup and the Olympics. “They’re trying to close the *organizadas* only for the sake of appearances abroad,” he told me, through an interpreter, and said that pressure from FIFA was making his job harder and soccer less fun. “Every tree has its rotten roots,” he said. “But the good things happen because the organized groups are there, because they sing and cheer the team on. Who else brings the drums?” He believed that it was the government’s responsibility to manage the bus routes to and from the stadiums, so as to prevent conflict. He suggested blocking certain streets and highways on game days. (This, of course, would only compound the traffic problem.)

Brazil’s *torcidas organizadas* originated as a decentralizing political movement, in the late nineteen-sixties and seventies, during the dictatorship, and reflected a broader frustration with the establishment, including the management of individual clubs. The fans demanded accountability, but they were also, in some cases, a force for social progress, advocating on behalf of the landless class and donating blood. Raul Correa, the Corinthians finance director, proudly showed me his first Gaviões da Fiel membership card, which identified him as the eleventh person ever to join, in 1969. He was then a teen-ager. Andrés Sánchez, the former Corinthians president, was one of the founders of Pavilhão 9. But in

recent decades the *organizadas* had grown pathological—like British hooligan “firms” and Italian “ultras,” only without the white supremacy.

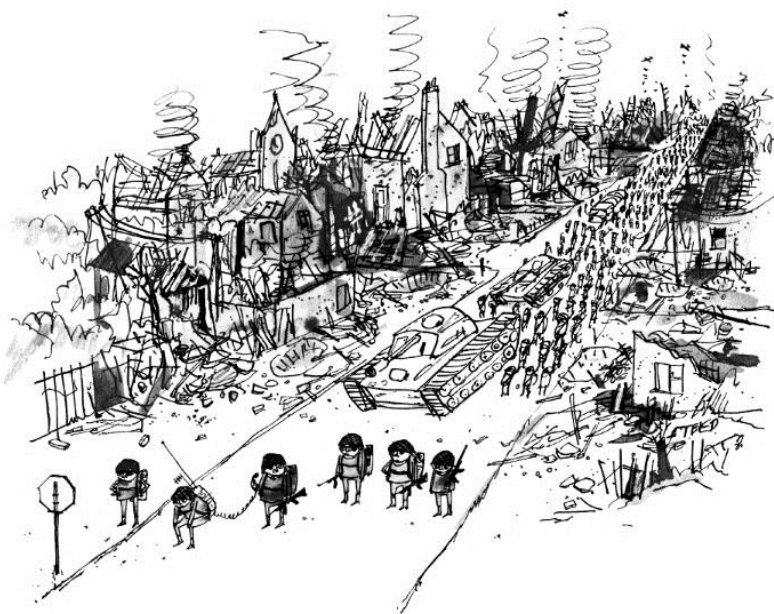
Several years ago, in an effort to control crowd violence, the C.B.F. instituted a rule that limited visiting teams’ fans to ten per cent of the audience at any given stadium. The idea was that such a lopsided ratio would dissuade pesky visitors from picking fights with their hosts, and insure that the home team’s fans never felt upstaged or outclassed. Instead, it placed an artificial premium on the visitors’ tickets and gave more power to the likes of the Hawks, who could buy in bulk and extort the clubs for discounts while they were at it. “Teams give away tickets to these hoodlums,” Tostão, the ex-idol, who is now a revered newspaper columnist, said. “We are at risk of *only* these guys going to the games.”

Luis Paulo Rosenberg was more sympathetic. “The share of Corinthians in their total life is much larger than in ours,” he said of the Hawks, and estimated that “for them, Corinthians must represent ninety per cent, fucking eight per cent, and eating two. That’s about the priority scale. And mine? Corinthians is only fifty. I’m a very normal person.” Rosenberg preferred to think of the over-all Corinthians experience as a product to be sold, like an iPhone, and the action on the field was

only one component. In this, he and Gebara, the lawyer, were kindred spirits. “The players, they provide the video of the spectacle, and the Gaviões, they provide the audio,” Rosenberg said. “So it’s fair that they should get a discount. They are there to work.”

“Of course, they make some crazy suggestions—that I should, for instance, reduce tickets by half,” Rosenberg went on, and explained that he had raised tickets for V.I.P.s by three hundred per cent to try to keep prices affordable on the lower end. “They are trying to convince me, ‘Imagine if the Pope decides to charge for someone to enter into a Mass,’” he said. “They say, ‘You are doing the same! We have to attend the game!’”

Rosenberg also credited the Hawks with having influenced the team’s uniform design for the better. In imitation of the Seleção, whose jerseys display five stars on the chest, one for each World Cup title, Corinthians had begun adding stars to their logo, to reflect each national championship. “One of the guys from Gaviões comes to me and says, ‘Luis Paulo, get the fucking stars out,’” he recalled. “I said, ‘What are you talking about? You know how much it cost us to get those stars? Why would you ask me to remove them?’ He said, ‘Because Nike has a fixed space for the whole logo, so, as we are going to win and win, each time



“He said we can just ignore the sign.”

the emblem is getting smaller to make room for stars. And I don't go to the stadium to see stars.' I stopped and I thought, 'They are darn right.' After the club won its fifth national championship, in 2011, they made a video with Nike that showed a sewing machine adding a fifth star. "And at the end of the spot we cut them all out," he said.

Davi Gebara invited me to watch the next game on TV with him and some of the Hawks' leaders, and wrote down the address of a bar. My interpreter declined to accompany me. "I don't think it would be in my best interest," he said. He had already admitted to Gebara, offhand, that he supports Palmeiras, another São Paulo club, which is traditionally associated with the city's Italian community. Then, perhaps two hours before game time, I received an e-mail from Gebara's wife, saying that Gebara, too, was begging off. I showed up anyway, having already arranged to meet another interpreter—a Corinthians. His name was Daniel (I'll spare him the trouble of identifying him further), and he brought along some friends, who shared pictures and stories with me from their trip to Japan, until two of them apologized and abruptly stood up to leave, saying that they had prior commitments. The Hawks' heavies had arrived.

There was a precondition to our joining their table: they weren't interested in talking about violence. A couple of them eventually produced business cards. They

were Wagner da Costa, a.k.a. B.O., the president, and Rodrigo Fonseca, a.k.a. Diguinho, the vice-president. (Elections are held every two years.) I recognized their names from a news story about an ongoing investigation into the deaths of three Palmeiras fans, in which they were described as suspects. (They were never charged.) Another man, who had a bemused affect, introduced himself briefly and then ceased participating in the conversation. Daniel later told me that this man had a northern accent, and he thought he recognized him as one of the leaders of an *organizada* that supports Botafogo, in Rio de Janeiro. He found this apparent friendship among purported rivals puzzling—disillusioning, even. We prefer our hoodlums pure.

Da Costa, who is black, sat facing the front door, with his back to the television. He had on a Calvin Klein T-shirt, jeans, and a backward-facing blue cap pulled down to his brow. Fonseca, who is white, wore a black hoodie and monitored the game on the screen, which was taking place in Porto Alegre, in the south. They had originally intended to go—sixteen hours by bus. But the politics surrounding the proposed extinguishing had made them cautious. "The government is trying to show the world something that's not really our culture," Fonseca said. "All the problems we have in soccer are not so different from the problems we have in education and health. They are trying to show that we have a country much better than we really have." He gestured at the

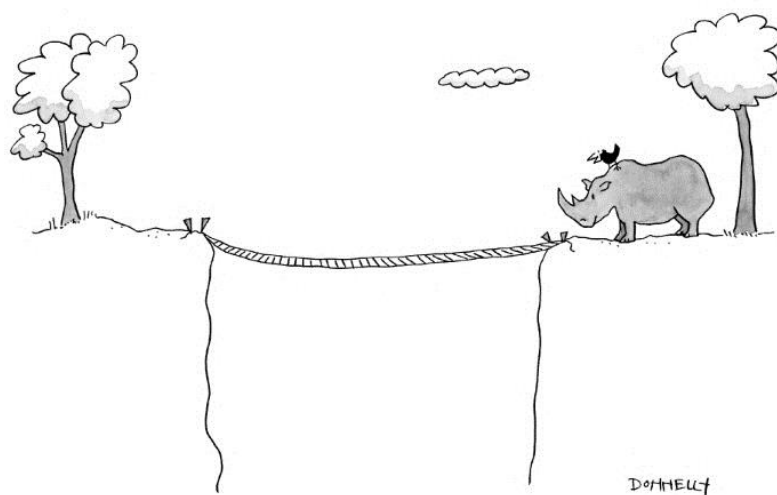
screen. "For example, you see the stadium tonight—it's empty. The cheapest ticket for this game was eighty *reais*"—thirty-five dollars. "That's too expensive for one simple game during the week."

Waiters kept bringing beer and plates of food to the table; Daniel told me he was under the impression that the service was complimentary. "Sometimes I feel like the mayor of a small city," da Costa said, and mentioned that his responsibilities extended beyond soccer. The Hawks had long since diversified and now ran one of the country's largest samba schools, to compete in the Carnival parade. (This year's show will honor Ronaldo; last year's honored Washington Olivetto.) Da Costa said that he was born in 1983, at the peak of the Corinthians Democracy movement, but that he was too young to have felt its power as a source of personal pride. His politics were distinctly Corinthiano. (During the June protests, the Hawks rushed to the Itaquerao construction site to defend it from vandals.)

As we were speaking, Fonseca suddenly threw his phone on the floor. Corinthians' opponents had scored. "The players are not lazy," he said, shaking his head. "But they don't have the same willingness nowadays."

Daniel told me that it wouldn't be long before the fans took out their frustrations on Alexandre Pato, who had been sharing pictures on Instagram of date nights with his girlfriend—too much happiness for an unproved rich kid.

Andrés Sánchez, who was contemplating a campaign for president of the C.B.F., based on the strength of his record reforming Corinthians, visited the club headquarters at the Parque São Jorge, and offered some advice to his successor, Mario Gobbi. "South American football is a complicated business," he said. "If you're not pushing a rod up someone's ass every day, it's time to move on." He meant this to be understood about Tite, who had been with the team for four seasons, a nearly unheard-of tenure for a coach. This had been another source of Corinthians pride, the patience to trust in a system of competent management without reacting hastily. But the team had now been held scoreless in ten of its last twelve games. With so few trees to plant, Corinthians' vaunted carbon-neutrality seemed in jeopardy. Sánchez



"Go ahead. Nothing to worry about."

said that he expected a kvetching phone call from Lula at any moment. (Tite's contract wasn't renewed.) He wondered about Paulo André, too. "Ask Paulo André if he's a painter, a cinematographer, an intellectual, or a soccer player," he said. "Because something tells me you can't be all."

Marcio Rosenberg offered me another lift in his armored car, this time to visit the new stadium, which was said to be nearly finished, in time for a "soft" opening in January, when an exhibition game was planned. "With traffic, this is almost as far away as Mogi Mirim," he warned, as we headed east away from the Tiete River, which is so heavily polluted in places that its surface produces suds. "Someday, that river will be clean, and we'll be sitting on the best address in Brazil," Rosenberg said. "The world is looking at us, worried, like, 'If these little guys ever bind together and get serious, we're fucked.'"

Recent news offered an alternative—less optimistic—interpretation. The protests were picking up again, led now by a smaller, more militant group, the anarchist Black Bloc, who had smashed shopwindows and set fires in Rio and São Paulo, in support of striking teachers. More tabloid fodder, meanwhile, had just landed on the Drudge Report: First Capital Command, a big prison gang, let it be known that it planned to initiate a "World Cup of Terror" for tourists, unless the authorities ceased putting gang leaders in solitary confinement, in preparation for the June games. "That's why we're getting out of Dodge," Rosenberg said, and mentioned that he'd had to disappoint his American friends who'd been calling in the hope that he might score them some tickets. "I don't even want to be close to this place when all hell breaks loose."

The drive left skyscrapers behind and took us deeper into the blighted east zone, where graffiti and trash predominated. As we ascended a hill, at last, toward the giant stadium, there were men in yellow jackets everywhere, busily converting the muddy slopes into a greenbelt. We were made to put on hard hats and boots before entering the grounds. The world's largest screen was not yet lit, but its white panels faced out as we approached, and Rosenberg called my attention to the galvanized



"I want some flowers that say 'Here, have some friggin' flowers.'"

steel girders that were holding it up. They were also white and had been painted in such a way that they wouldn't turn rust-colored, lest anyone confuse the color scheme with that of a rival. Three tanks from Petrobras, the gas company, loomed over the bleachers; their pipelines had been rerouted around the stadium at a cost of about thirty million *reais*. "There's not even going to be room for mosquitoes, we're going to pack it so full," Rosenberg said, as we sat in the front row and enjoyed the feeling of unfettered proximity to the pitch. "The grass is ready," he noted.

In the weeks that followed, the slump persisted before it abated. Pato missed a penalty kick; when the Corinthians bus arrived for a game in the port of Santos, a few days later, angry "supporters" were waiting with rocks and beer cans. They pelted both teams' buses, one out of pique and the other for good measure, delaying the start of the game as officials cleaned up the mess. "This is absurd," a Santos executive said. "We were targeted by *ani-*

mals. We should be playing with closed gates, without fans."

Zizao's contract was up, like that of the coach who wouldn't let him play, and he'd soon be headed back to China. The Bom Senso F.C. was growing in strength, from seventy-five members, when I first spoke with Paulo André, to more than a thousand—a global commune in support of soccer players' rights. Across the league, the players began locking arms at the start of games and refusing for several minutes to kick the ball. Bom Senso, Juca Kfoury said, "is the best thing we have in our soccer."

In late November, a construction worker who had been working eighteen days without a break at the Itaquerao site lost control of his crane, and it crashed through the digital screen, killing two other workers and occasioning another round of news stories that questioned whether Brazil was really up to the challenge of hosting such an event. I suspect it is. The new completion date is set for April. ♦