



The World Cup is over. Finally

Kerry Schmidt July 16, 2006

The 2006 World Cup is over, and Italy won – on a “header.”

No, not the type used to score a goal – if any are scored, but rather the top of the bald head of France’s team captain, Zinedine Zidane.

I guess we can thus call him “ZZ TOP.”

Or the real-life Butt Head.

The fact that “The Butt Heard ‘Round the World” was the most talked about aspect of the World Cup just shows how lackluster and boring the month-long debacle is.

Yes, I know that millions outside of America live and die by this every-four-year event, but it is virtually a “not-happening” thing here.

Before I get into ZZ Top’s big-horned sheep imitation, a last few words on the game and the tournament itself.

BORING.

Yea, I know I have said this before, but when virtually every single game is a, pardon the pun, ZZZZZZZ inducer, one is forced to be redundant.

Here you have the championship game of the universe. Ten guys run around all over the place, fall down often to pretend they got hurt, collect yellow and red cards like souvenirs and, for the most part, no one scores.

In 120 minutes – 90 regulation and two 15-minute overtimes (why two, why not just one?) this grand finale is tied at 1-1, with the story of the game being that each team actually scored a goal.

Then, you have the world champion decided by five penalty kicks.

For those of you who somehow did not catch every moment of this great spectacle, here is the scenario.

After all the above running around pretending to do something, you then have one player readying himself several yards away from the goal keeper while all the rest of his teammates stand there with their arms around each other watching. Now that is exciting.

The championship of the world decided by a one-on-one.

Imagine an NFL game where each team stands around in a big hug-off while their field goal kickers each take five attempts to decide the Super Bowl winner. Great stuff!

But since there is so little scoring in soccer anyway, why not just skip the 120 minutes and go straight to the PK’s.

Note. Stats show that nearly 80% of PK’s are successful.

OK, Ho hum.

Oh, I forgot to mention that a soccer contest is called a “PITCH.”

Say what? you ask. Well, for some reason, that’s it. Period.

Sometimes they do refer to it as a “match,” but since that makes some sense, pitch rules.

I could have done some research to find out why, but what for. And, who the hell cares?

Now we come to our “Head Master,” Mr. Zidane.

While Italy celebrated wildly, all the media centered on ZZ, and the visual replays were shown about 100 times. For several days.



According to ZZ, the player he butted, Marco Materazzi, (for short, we'll call him the "Buttee," as opposed to the "Buttor, ZZ) said some less than flattering things to him. The French SOS-Racism group quoted "several very well informed sources from the world of football" as saying that the Buttee called the Buttor a "dirty terrorist." This is in reference to his ZZ's family having emigrated from Algeria.

Don't you just love it when some organization uses unnamed "well informed sources?" It's possible said sources were some drunken Frenchmen.

Brazil's TV "Globo" and England's "Times" newspaper hired lip readers to watch the replays and said Buttee insulted Buttor's sister and mother, while Spain's "Marca" newspaper said Materazzi did call ZZ a terrorist.

Of course, Materazzi at first told reporters he had said nothing. He later admitted he had insulted ZZ, but denied the terrorist and family insults.

Yea, we can always believe the Dagos, especially since a huge scandal is still brewing in Italy concerning some team owners and managers bribing officials to fix games.

A few seconds before the incident, Buttee had grabbed ZZ's shirt to slow him down in an attack by the French (wait, the French actually attacking someone?).

According to reports, the referee saw neither the shirt holding nor the head butt. This caused many a French media to loudly protest ZZ's expulsion from the "pitch," since according to the rules, replay cannot be used to judge the on-field actions. In other words, the Frenchies felt they were wronged, not Mr. Buttee.

FIFA quickly denied that the ref missed it, and said they would investigate. WOW.

Even French President Jacques Chirac called Zidane "a genius of world football." Well, he may be, but Chirac is a freakin idiot.

And the sad part is that for Zidane, who is regarded as one of the all-time best players, this was his last game – he had announced before the WC started that he would retire after this – he will be forever remembered for this unfortunate debacle.

Plus, ZZ was their best PK man, and as such, his actions just possibly could have caused France the Championship.

Regardless of what was/was not said or happened, the head butt was a disgrace and a huge black mark on a game that needs some good publicity.

This brings up the long-standing aspect of virtually every game, the "art" of trash-talking. Players use it as a means to intimidate or otherwise distract opposing players. Especially if it is known that a player has some "hot button" that can be pushed.

And for ZZ, said sore spot was his reputation for a quick, hot temper.

He was red-carded out of major pitches 14 times in his career, some quite harsh. For example, in the 1998 WC, he stomped on a prone Saudi Arabian player and was banned from the next two matches.

Several players in the NFL, NBA and MLB are known to have such hot spots, and rest assured, opposing players will go after that weakness with everything they have.

It is especially common in football (real football, not the other crap), where, for example, a cornerback is up close to a WR. One or the other, or both will talk some smack before the ball is snapped, hoping to get an edge on the opponent.

One example was from my era, former Raiders' WR Fred Belinikoff.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Just before the snap, he was known to say to his defender, “Your wife (or girlfriend or mother) bl..s dead bears.” It often worked, at least the first time.

Another case, same team, was a friend of mine, Hall-of-Fame cornerback Lester “The Molester” Hayes. For his era, he was a large CB, about 6’3” and 220 lbs, and he could sling the s..t with the best of them.

He would jaw long and loud before the snap, and after the play, if he had been instrumental in even the slightest way, the invectives would fly like HOs to a limo.

I went fishing with him a number of times, and he really had some great tales.

One involved a WR who had a reputation for really getting rattled. Hayes had been on him all day and he went to an official just before the next play and told him that said WR was kicking him, and to watch for it.

At the end of the play, in which Hayes had knocked the snot out of the WR, he had some very personal and choice words, after which the WR immediately lashed out with his foot at Hayes. 15 yards and a star wide out was gone for the rest of the game.

And if you watched any of the NBA finals, you not only could clearly see the trash going on, you could at times pick up on the audible.

Thus, as mentioned, the object is to get an edge on your opponent, to get him to lose concentration, whatever.

And believe me, teams know which players can be “had” by talking trash, and they will go after them like a wild animal on wounded prey.

Thus, Zidane’s reputation was well known, and Italy’s players went after him. Call that what you will, but the onus was on Butt Head. He knew the opponents would do everything they could to get him to lose his temper, so it was up to him to control himself, regardless of what was said or shirt-holding or whatever.

He, and he alone, was responsible to keeping himself in check, and he failed.

Miserably.

And in so doing, he, at the least, was a factor in his team’s loss in the most important game of their lives.

Zidane did not respond for three days, and then he said, “I apologize to all the children”.....

But he added that he felt no regret for his act, “because that would mean (Materazzi) was right to say all that.”

He should have apologized greatly to his teammates, for they are the ones that suffered the most.

However, his outburst did one thing for soccer. Had it not occurred, I can assure you that Americans would not even be able to tell you who won in a couple of weeks from now.

But they will always remember Butt Head.

Sad, sad, sad.