



Ardavan Mobasher: The World Cup's lessons on international trade

By Ardavan Mobasher
For The Richmond Times-Dispatch
July 29, 2018

It was the summer of 1966 in America. While we were proudly consumed by the accomplishments of our young Gemini astronauts, we were also enjoying a growing economy, low unemployment, and a booming manufacturing sector that was employing more than a quarter of all workers. What we built and produced, we consumed, with barely 10 percent of goods sent or brought in from overseas.

America was also largely homogeneous: 95 percent were native-born, 95 percent identified themselves as Christians, 82 percent were white, and our college campuses and labor force were dominated by men.

But this was also the age of civil and equal rights, and Vietnam. Protests and riots were increasingly consuming our attention as well as that of our leaders.

It was with this backdrop that a 20-year-old Donald J. Trump entered the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. But the world around this young man was about to change and change profoundly.

While it barely touched the radar screens of Americans, the world's attention that summer was glued to England, the host of the eighth edition of FIFA's World Cup of soccer. For 20 days, 352 players from 16 countries representing four continents battled it out for the ultimate reward: the Jules Rimet Trophy.

Despite the lack of attention from our side of the ocean, there was something about these teams that would have been very familiar to Americans and to the young Donald Trump.

As the players proudly ran onto the fields to represent their countries, in a sense their countries also represented them — where they were born, where they lived, and where they worked. Only 10 of the 352 players were born outside of the country they played for. Of the 16 teams, only two had coaches who were foreigners. And only eight players from three countries played for professional clubs located outside of the country they represented.

Fast forward to 2018 and Russia's hosting of the 21st edition of the World Cup. Out of the 736 players, 82 of them were born outside of the country they represented. Only 10 countries came to the tournament with an all-native-born squad. Seventeen of Morocco's 23 players were born outside of the country. Only one team — England — was made up completely of players from its domestic league. Senegal and Sweden came to the tournament with their entire squads made up of players who played outside of the countries' domestic leagues. And 12 out of the 32 teams were coached by foreigners.

When France and Belgium met each other in the semifinals, 10 of the 22 players in the starting lineups were either born outside of the country or had immigrant parents.

The globalization effect on soccer has significantly increased the overall level of play. It has allowed a rapid convergence in the competitiveness of the national teams and it has allowed a more productive allocation of talent across clubs.

The results have been faster-growing and wealthier professional clubs and leagues — and a significantly improved level of quality in the games, teams, and leagues. While a total of 69 Englishmen, Spaniards, and Germans played in the World Cup tournament, nearly twice as many World Cup players — 129 — came from teams in the English Premier League alone. In addition, 81 players came from the Spanish La Liga, and 67 from the German Bundesliga. Professional soccer in Europe is truly an international game.

Donald Trump's America has also changed over the past half a century. America's foreign-born share of the population is now 13 percent, nearly 60 million Americans are employed in sectors that relate directly to international trade — and imports and exports now account for well over 20 percent of overall economic activity. The services sector now employs 10 times as many workers as does manufacturing, and women and minorities are now a significant component of the labor force.

The English players who lifted the Jules Rimet trophy on the evening of July 30, 1966, at Wembley Stadium probably had little clue how their world and profession were about to change. Neither did that young man who was headed to business school in Philadelphia later that summer.

But their world did change, and it did so for the better, thanks to globalization and inclusion.

The world of soccer knows it and knows it well. Does President Trump?

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