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# FIFA World Cup. An analysis from the sport's history and geography perspective

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**Abstract:** Relying on data provided by the sport's history, the authors address the evolution of FIFA World Cup final tournaments, using in the analysis and presentation of data, along with the methods specific to the sport's domain, methods of geography. After motivating and presenting the importance of the subject, the work refers to the conditions and key events that helped organize the first edition of the competition. The qualifications, venues, participation of the teams in the tournaments, final ranking in the latter stages, medals that were obtained, are presented and analyzed by associating the map with different ways of graphic representation.

**Keywords:** football, World Cup

## Introduction

FIFA World Cup, seen from the interest the point of view that arouses among sports lovers, the number of spectators and of those watching the matches on television transmissions, represents, after the Olympic Games, the most extensive sport competition. Therefore, the FIFA World Cup's different aspects of are studied by the specialists in various fields. Some papers analyze the world championships

competitions along with other worldwide competitions, (Antal, 1974; Áros, 1980), others refer to all the editions till the date (Vándor, 1986) or to a single edition (\*\*\*) 1958; Chirilă, 1966).

The complexity of this sport makes it to be studied, besides the researchers in the field, also by the researchers from other fields of science, within some multidisciplinary researches. Among these, there are some collaboration among the specialists in geography and sport. In this direction, we mention studies that examine, explain and show different aspects of the competition by associating the methods specific to the sports field with those characteristic to geography (Grama et al., 2015; Herman et al., 2016; Ilieș et al., 2015, 2016). By this approach, it can be presented, among other things, the relationships that are established among the spatial variations of distribution, structure, dynamics of the sports phenomenon, and its geographical framework (Ilieș et al., 2015). The association of the map with the diagram on columns, the frequency polygon, the static relief etc., it offers the possibility of presenting, analyzing and understanding the phenomenon, that is studied from another perspective than the usual one for those, who approach it only from the specialist's point of view in physical education and sports.

We believe that a paper, that studies the final tournaments of the FIFA World Cups from the historical and geographical point of view, is timely, it interests, and it contributes to a better knowledge of the phenomenon that is being studied. The cartographic representation and the analysis made together with the geographer complements the vision of the sports' specialist, providing a plus of information.

### **The events that led to the organization of the World Cup**

Since its founding, on 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1904 (Moises, 1969) Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Association Football -FIFA) has proposed that in 1906 to be organized the world championship. With all the enthusiasm showed, the low level of the development of football in the world at that time, the small number of national federations members, the lack of support for this project from their part, the low level of infrastructure and competition system in many member federations, the lack of determination of the international body governing football, its limited organizational capacity, the pressures from the British federations, headed by England, made the transposition into practice of this goal to wait for a quarter of a century.

In contrast to the representatives of the world body governing football, the members of the International Olympic Committee understood that the inclusion of the sport in the Olympic program, organizing a competition with a worldwide character can have a positive influence for guiding and developing this sport and the Olympic movement, and they acted for this purpose. Football has become an Olympic sport, and it has been included in the Olympic Games since 1908 (Wallechinsky, 1996).

After the First World War, at the Fédération Internationale de Football Association Congress, held in 1920 in Paris, the representatives of football resumed the efforts to organize a world championship. The contradictions among the members and the financial difficulties delayed the implementation of President's

Jules Rimet proposal (Áros, 1994). The decision<sup>1</sup> of the International Olympic Committee Session in Amsterdam, 1928, to prohibit the participation of the professional players in the Olympic football tournaments left this sport discipline without a world competition in which athletes can participate regardless of their status (\*\*\*, 1996). This situation forced the members of FIFA to act without delay. The Congress in Amsterdam, 1928, after the preliminary talks conducted by FIFA with the federations from Central Europe, Mamusich Mihály, the representative of Hungary, presented the draft of the World Championships, which were to be held in the even years between two editions of the Olympic Games, with the participation of both professional players and amateurs (...). The collective, appointed to develop the Regulations of the FIFA World Cup presented at the Congress in Geneva, 1929, establishing that the first edition to be held in 1930. At the Congress in Barcelona, the right to organize the championship was assigned to Uruguay<sup>2</sup>. Thus, FIFA was the fourteenth world governing forum that has managed to organize a world championship (Kun, 1984).

### **The evolution of qualifications for the final tournament of the FIFA World Cup**

The survey on the number of the teams that participated in the qualification stage for the final tournaments of this competition provides information regarding the extent of this sport around the world; the popularity it enjoys world widely, the recognition it has at international level, the value achieved by this sport over time, the ratio of forces at a certain time etc.

If at the first editions of the FIFA World Cup the number of teams participating in the qualification tournaments was reduced, after a while, the participation in this stage grew in amplex, reaching for the 2018 edition to enroll 208 teams<sup>3</sup>. The increase of the number of participants in the qualifying rounds for the final tournaments was influenced by the development that football has seen around the world's countries, the growing interest it enjoyed among the young people, the increase in the number of the affiliated national federations, the support this sport enjoyed nationally, especially in the newly established states. In the new independent states, participating and achieving some performances in official international competitions, among them the FIFA World Cup, proved to be a way of mobilizing the masses, forming the national affection, a binder in achieving national unity national, an effective instrument of affirmation on international level, and a projection the country's image abroad (Simri, 1982). Thus, after a decade in which many former colonies declared their independence from the state, the number of national representatives belonging to the confederations from Africa, Asia and Oceania participants in the qualifications for the final tournament grew from one edition to another<sup>4</sup>. Another important period, which led to a significant increase of

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1928\\_Summer\\_Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1928_Summer_Olympics)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/fifa-congress/history/congress-barcelona-1929/index.html>;  
<http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/history/first-fifa-world-cup.html>, vizitat la 21 februarie 2016

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018\\_FIFA\\_World\\_Cup\\_qualification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_FIFA_World_Cup_qualification)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup)

national teams that signed up to participate in the qualifying rounds for the final tournament of the FIFA World Cup, was the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the apparition of the states member of the former Yugoslavia.

**Participation in the final tournaments of the FIFA World Cup**

Between 1930 and 2014, twenty final tournaments of the World Cup were played. They were hosted by sixteen countries. Nineteen editions were hosted by one country, and the right to organize the 2002 edition was awarded to South Korea and Japan. Mexico, Italy, France, Germany and Brazil organized two editions of the final tournament<sup>5</sup>. The distribution by continent shows that ten of them were played in European countries, five in South America, three in North America, one in Asia and Africa (fig. 1).



Figure 1. The repartition on continents of the countries in which the final tournaments were played<sup>6</sup>

In the history of the final tournaments, the number of teams participating in one edition has undergone many changes. If in 1930 their number was not brought under regulation, for the period 1934 to 1978 their number was set at sixteen, for that to grow to twenty-four between 1982-1994, reaching to thirty-two teams from 1998 until present<sup>7</sup>. Starting with the 1934 edition, the number of teams

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup\\_hosts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup_hosts)  
<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup\\_hosts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup_hosts)  
<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup)

participating in the final tournaments of the World Championship and their affiliation to geographical areas has been influenced by the decisions regarding the seats assigned to each confederation. The disputing format of the preliminaries for the qualifications of teams is regulated by each confederation.

Table 1. The number of teams participating in the final tournaments of The World Cup

Number of participations	Team/Country
20	Brazil
18	Germany*, Italy
16	Argentina
15	Mexico
14	Spain, England, France
12	Belgium, Uruguay
11	Yugoslavia, Russia**, Sweden
10	United States of America, Switzerland, Netherlands
9	South Korea, Hungary, Czechoslovakia***, Chile
8	Scotland, Paraguay
7	Cameroon, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Austria
6	Portugal
5	Japan, Nigeria, Columbia
4	Saudi Arabia, Australia, Croatia, Tunisia, Algeria, Costa Rica, Peru, Morocco, Denmark, Iran
3	Ghana, Ivory Coast, Honduras, Greece, Ecuador, Norway, Northern Ireland, Ireland, South Africa, Bolivia
2	Egypt, Turkey, North Korea, El Salvador, New Zealand, Slovenia
1	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cuba, Indonesia, Wales, Israel, DR Congo, East Germany, Haiti, Kuwait, Canada, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Jamaica, China, Senegal, Angola, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, Slovakia

\*It includes the participation of West Germany;

\*\*it includes the participation of USSR;

\*\*\* it includes the participation of Czechoslovakia

Analyzing the participation in the final tournaments of world football championships, it results that the four hundred twenty five qualifications were achieved by seventy-seven representative teams<sup>8</sup>. The distribution by continent (table 2) shows that Europe has the largest share, 54.35%, followed by South America, 18.82%, North America, 9.17%, Africa, 9.17%, Asia, 7.52%, and Australia/Oceania, 0.94%. Brazil is the only team that was present in all twenty editions. It is followed by Germany and Italy, each of them with eighteen attendences, and Argentina with sixteen attendences. The countries and their number of attendences to the final tournaments are presented in the Table (table 1).

A criterion, which we took in consideration in analyzing under the qualitative aspect the results achieved by the teams participating in the final tournaments was the qualification in quarter-finals (table 3). Of the total of 147 qualifications at this stage of the competition, there were carried out by European teams, 68.7% (101 ratings), 23.8% (35 qualifications) from South America, 4, 1%

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup)

(101 ratings) from North America, 2% from Africa, and 1.4% Asia, with 3 or 2 qualifications. None of the teams of the Oceania confederation succeeded to rank among the top eight teams at the final tournament of the FIFA World Cup<sup>9</sup>.

Table 2. The distribution on confederations of the number of teams participating in the final tournaments of the FIFA World Cup<sup>10</sup>

Conf. Year	Africa	North America	South America	Asia	Europe	Oceania	Total
1930	-	2	7	-	4	-	13
1934	1	1	2	-	12	-	16
1938	-	1	1	1	12	-	15
1950	-	2	5	-	6	-	13
1954	-	1	2	1	12	-	16
1958	-	1	3	-	12	-	16
1962	-	1	5	-	10	-	16
1966	-	1	4	1	10	-	16
1970	1	2	3	1	9	-	16
1974	1	1	4	-	9	1	16
1978	1	1	3	1	10	-	16
1982	2	2	4	1	14	1	24
1986	2	2	4	2	14	-	24
1990	2	2	4	2	14	-	24
1994	3	2	4	2	13	-	24
1998	5	3	5	4	15	-	32
2002	5	3	5	4	15	-	32
2006	5	4	4	4	14	1	32
2010	6	3	5	3	13	2	32
2014	5	4	6	3	13	1	32
Total	39	39	80	30	231	6	425

Table 3. Records on continents according to the performances<sup>11</sup>

		Continent/Confederation					
		Africa	North America	South America	Asia	Europe	Oceania
First Place I	nr.	0	0	9	0	11	0
	%	0	0	45	0	55	0
Second Place II	nr.	0	0	5	0	15	0
	%	0	0	25	0	75	0
Third Place III	nr.	0	1	3	0	16	0
	%	0	5	15	0	80	0
Fourth Place IV	nr.	0	0	5	1	14	0
	%	0	0	25	5	70	0
Place V - VIII	nr.	3	5	13	1	45	0
	%	4.5	7.5	19.4	1.5	67.1	0

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup)

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup)

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup)

For the ranking among the first four teams, the situation is similar: 70% of these were achieved by teams from Europe (Germany, Italy, France, England, Spain, Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Sweden, Poland, Austria, Portugal, Croatia, Turkey, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, Belgium, Bulgaria), 27.5% by those from South America (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile), and only one qualification for the representatives of the confederations from Asia (South Korea), and North America (USA), representing 1,25%<sup>12</sup>.

The most important criterion for setting the value of a team participating in the FIFA World Cup is the number of medals that it had obtained. The sixty medals were awarded to the representatives from nineteen countries, 24.67% of the total number of participating countries. In the unofficial ranking on medals, first place is occupied by Brazil - five gold, two silver and two bronze medals, followed by Germany - four gold, four silver and four bronze medals, Italy, four gold, two silver medals and one bronze medals etc. (table 4).

Table 4. The national teams that were awarded medals at FIFA World Cup<sup>13</sup>

Edition	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1930	Uruguay	Argentina	USA
1934	Italy	Czechoslovakia	Germany
1938	Italy	Hungary	Brazil
1950	Uruguay	Brazil	Sweden
1954	Germany	Hungary	Austria
1958	Brazil	Sweden	France
1962	Brazil	Czechoslovakia	Chile
1966	England	West Germany	Portugal
1970	Brazil	Italy	West Germany
1974	RFG	Netherlands	Poland
1978	Argentina	Netherlands	Brazil
1982	Italy	West Germany	Poland
1986	Argentina	West Germany	France
1990	West Germany	Argentina	Italy
1994	Brazil	Italy	Sweden
1998	France	Brazil	Croatia
2002	Brazil	Germany	Turkey
2006	Italy	France	Germany
2010	Spain	Netherlands	Germany
2014	Germany	Argentina	Netherlands

70% of medals were awarded to fourteen national teams from Europe, 21% to three representatives from South America, and 9% to one national team from North America. The teams from the Oceania, Asia and Africa confederations have failed to obtain medals in the final tournament of the World Football Championship. In terms of gold medals, 55% was awarded to athletes from the

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup#Teams\\_reaching\\_the\\_top\\_four](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup#Teams_reaching_the_top_four)

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA\\_World\\_Cup#Teams\\_reaching\\_the\\_top\\_four](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup#Teams_reaching_the_top_four)

European national teams (Germany, Italy, France, England and Spain), and 45% to national teams from South America (Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay) (fig. 2).

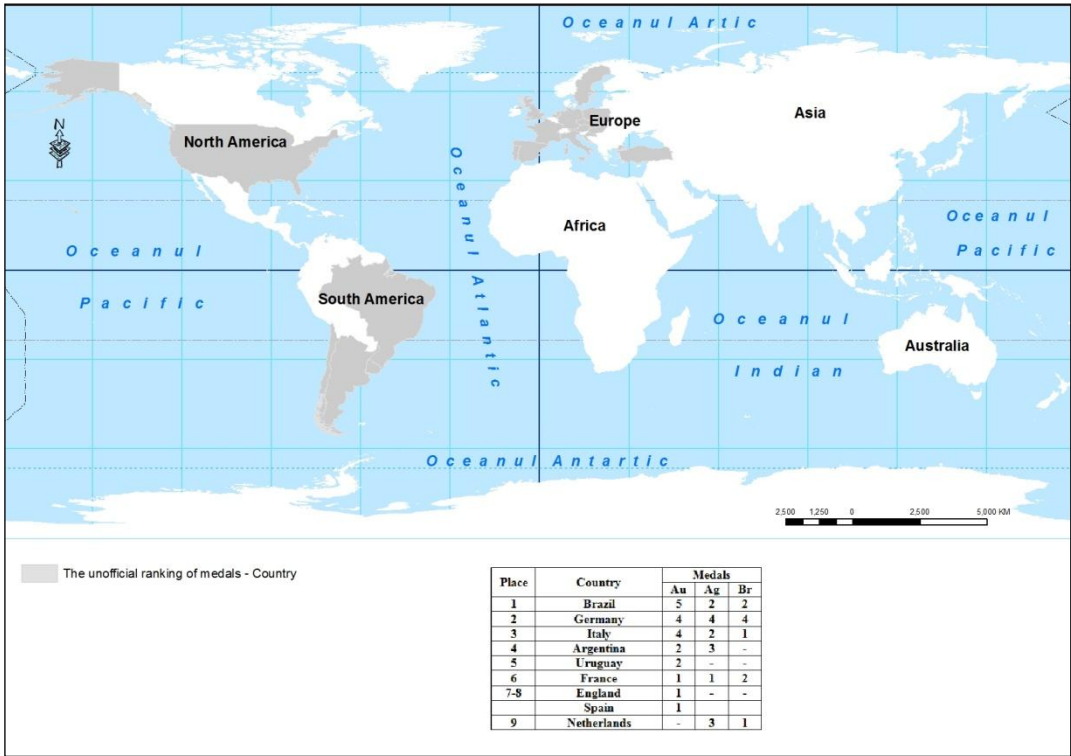


Figure 2. The unofficial ranking of medals

### Conclusions

Football is, chronologically, the second team sport game that its world leading forum managed to organize a world championship. With the two hundred and eight teams registered to take part in the qualifying rounds for the last final tournament, by audience this competition enjoys among the viewers, the World Cup has become one of the most watched sporting events.

Seventy-seven national representatives attended at the twenty final tournaments of the World Cup, for a total of four hundred twenty-four qualifications. The teams with the most appearances were Brazil, the only team that was present at all the final tournaments, followed by Germany and Italy with eighteen attendances, and Argentina with sixteen attendances.

The distribution by continents shows that the teams from Europe have had the most appearances at the final tournaments, 54.35%, followed by those from South America with 18.82%, from North America with 9.17%, from Africa with 9.17%, from Asia with 7.52%, and from Australia/Oceania with 0.94%. Apart from one bronze medal, all the other medals, twenty gold, twenty silver and nineteen bronze, were won by European and South American teams.



In the unofficial ranking of countries by medals, the podium is occupied by Brazil, with five gold medals, two silver medals and two bronze medals, followed by Germany, with four gold medals, four silver medals and four bronze medals, and Italy, with four gold medals, two silver medals and one bronze medal.

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