

Malt Maniacs E-pistle #2010-05

By Joe Barry, South Africa



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MANIACAL WHISKY AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORLD CUP SOCCER

In 2004 FIFA decided the next World Cup must be held on the African continent and South Africa was awarded the draw. Now after months of massive publicity, hype, excitement and of course controversy, such as can we really afford this, the time has finally arrived. At the outset let me please make it clear I am not a soccer fan, being a rugger bugger (like Johannes) I barely understand the rules, in fact I just don't get the offside story and hardly ever watch soccer on TV. I am of the school which is convinced soccer is a game for gentlemen played by hooligans whilst rugby is a game for hooligans played by gentlemen. However so big is World Cup Soccer that one cannot but help being drawn into the whole experience, I mean I even have a small SA flag attached to the aerial of my car like everyone else seems to have, something I never ever thought I would do!

There is now no doubt in my mind that soccer (and I will call it that as rugby is also called football in this country) must be the biggest sport on the planet, it is HUGE! I have seen rugby and cricket world cup competitions and they pale into insignificance compared to this, it even seems to me at the moment FIFA is actually running this country!

The first game took place in Johannesburg after the opening ceremony which was not in the highly choreographed European or in the impressive Australian fireworks display style but rather a very colorful and happy African dance theme which included a giant dung beetle rolling a large soccer ball! The game, SA vs Mexico was not the win we were hoping for but was an acceptable 1-1 draw and I watched it with a crowd of people at a friend's house on a big screen so there was a good party atmosphere with a "potjie-kos" supper provided by the host. (The word means "pot food" and is a meat

stew, in this case lamb, cooked in a 3 legged black metal pot over a fire, an alternative to our braai or barbeque). After a starter of 90 shillings ale (the Brits will know what that is) from a microbrewery the whisky I took along for the evening was Whyte & Mackay Special.

The next SA game was against Uruguay in Pretoria and what a disaster. We ended after a very poor game losing 0-3 and even had our goalie red carded, the first time I had ever seen that happen! (who paid off that obviously biased and despicable Swiss referee?). We now need France and Mexico to draw for us to stay in contention and if that does happen we will then have to beat France. This game I watched at home and my "nail biting" whiskies were J&B Jet followed by Laphroaig Quarter Cask.

Oh dear oh dear what happened to France, Serge and Olivier, they tumbled off the tequila tightrope and were swamped under the Mexican wave 0-2 which of course now means SA have to beat your chaps by a huge number of goals to stay in the competition when they meet in Bloemfontein next Tuesday. But I think the biggest shock will be if France goes out in the first round, after all we are really only there by default being the host nation team, I don't think we would ever have qualified in the normal way. Started the evening with Bells and graduated to a few excellent drams of vatted 2007 MM Awards non-Islay 21 years and older (my last remaining bottle).



Well, well, the unthinkable has happened, David has vanquished Goliath in an epic battle - last night South Africa beat France at the Bloemfontein stadium 2-1 in a very exciting game where, for the first time in this tournament I felt SA played as they should have all along, attacking football. France is an unhappy team, our papers have been full of the problems besetting the French and rumor here has it that the French President or sports minister personally phoned the team to tell them to stop fighting! That may or may not be true but the result must have been a shock to the Gallic nation, last tournament's finalists beaten by this one's minnows, I hate to think what the French press had to say about it. The teams reward is that they are returning to France in economy class and to these primadonna superbrats this is probably the ultimate indignity! (The Irish of course think this is Poetic Justice as they were kept away from here by a loss in the prelims to France from a goal that turned out to be a handball.) Both teams are now out of the tournament but I am not unhappy as nobody really expected SA to go any further than the first round. When you consider we are ranked 83 in the world but we drew with no. 17, lost to no. 16 and beat no. 9 our record is not too bad. This win for Bafana

Bafana was celebrated with Johnnie Walker Black Label complemented by a delightful Dalmore 12 yo single malt.

Well, that's the end of the first round and the following Maniac's teams are out – Craig, Luca, Olivier, Patrick, Serge and of course yours truly. Martine you don't live in France so you count as Scottish together with Charlie!



Sunday was a big one, England vs Germany and what a game it was. Much to England's (and their supporters) shock they were blitzkrieg'd 0-4 and forced to catch the next plane home (hopefully not economy) to face their bosses, fans and media which was probably a bit worse than losing the war. The one thing this game highlighted however is it is now time soccer begins to use the goal-line technology available that tennis, rugby and cricket have been using for years and Blatter's banal remark "human error is part of the game" is so much codswallop when you consider the amount of prestige and money involved nowadays. This English tragedy was mellowed by cask strength Glenfarclas 105.

With the second round over out goes USA and with them David, Louis, Mark, Peter and Tim. With England Dave and Lex exit and with Japan goes Chris. The only Maniacs who have teams left are Johannes, Michel and Pit so we wait a few days now to see what unfolds.

Amazing, Holland beats Brazil and then the heartbreak of the evening for African supporters, Ghana goes down to Uruguay on a penalty shootout that should not have been necessary if a stupid crossbar hadn't got in the way just before the end of the game! Germany then saw off Argentina and with the quarter finals over our three intrepid remaining maniacs are still there with only four teams left. My sorrow -drowning malt was Caol Ila Cask Strength at 55% vol.

Holland into the final – great! And now a small admission, my grandmother's family came from Holland in the late 1800s so with a tenuous connection to that country I must support them now thereby still giving me an interest in the outcome. But who "we" are going to play will only be known later tonight. (That famous octopus Paul predicts a Spanish win.)

The final is HOLLAND vs SPAIN!! With Germany, out goes Pit although he might still win bronze in the playoff. I also think the now infamous Paul should be very careful he is not summarily turned into calamari! My semifinal whiskies were Hankey Bannister and an 8yo Glendower pure malt.

Germany sort of avenges the Battle of the River Plate and scuttles Uruguay in the playoff and Pit is the first Maniac to win a medal, the bronze. Now for the final!

“THE REIGN IN SPAIN” was our local newspaper headline! After an impressive closing ceremony (and I don't think Nelson Mandela should have been there, he is getting too old for this sort of thing) the game itself turned out to be quite boring with a whole pack of yellow cards being produced. Then in extra time the Spanish Armada sank the House of Orange whose team became paella for the Inquisition to feast upon (was Paul included as an ingredient?) and massive celebrations for Spain, the new World Champions. So Johannes and Michel, you win silver medals but unfortunately there is no gold for the Malt Maniacs. My “final” whiskies were JW Black followed by a few drams of superb Aberlour a'bunadh Batch 27 at 60.1% vol.

Now afterwards, here are my personal conclusions. After watching the SA vs NZ rugby game and seeing the players after heavy physical contact immediately get back up, shake their heads and carry on playing and then at the end of the game coming off the field bruised, sore and some bloodied all shaking each other's hands I realize I cannot admire the overpaid Oscar winning playact-diving wimps that soccer produces or the lack of excitement. Secondly refereeing must be more consistent which will be helped by the introduction of technology. So is soccer “the beautiful game”? In my humble opinion the answer is no but then I am biased anyway, however it can be improved for the viewer who is fortunate enough to have a few drams of their favorite single malt to accompany the game. Having said that it was still an amazing tournament which I thoroughly enjoyed and without doubt South Africa confounded their many critics and produced one of the most successful World Cups. **Ayoba!!**



Joe Barry was born in Cape Town and after school joined the Insurance industry in which he is still involved as the owner of an independent insurance broking company. His involvement with single malts started in 1972 when he tasted a Glenfiddich brought out from Scotland by a friend but his real interest surfaced in the 1990's. His first distillery visit was to Glenturret in 1996 on the first of a number of visits to Scotland. He has tasted almost 1000 different whiskies and has visited 40 distilleries as well as a number of independent bottlers. He is also the founder chairman of Uisgebeatha Whisky Club in East London South Africa.