



The Matters of Life, Death, and More: Writing on Soccer (Kindle Single)

Aleksandar Hemon

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"The genius of Aleksandar Hemon's prose is a well-established, universally acknowledged fact. But his ability to read a soccer match—to really, deeply understand it—will strike readers with the force of pure, ecstatic revelation. His essays on the game are the very definition of pleasure." —**Franklin Foer, author of *How Soccer Explains the World***

"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that." —**Bill Shankly, legendary Liverpool F.C. manager**

As the world's eyes turn to Brazil for the kickoff of the 2014 World Cup, Aleksandar Hemon reminds us of a sad fact: "an average life seldom contains more than twenty World Cups—our games are tragically numbered." We need to pay attention, to absorb the joy, the skill, the agony, the triumph, the beauty—everything that soccer is. And soccer is, of course, everything.

In these pages, Hemon revisits memories of his first World Cup (1974), for which his then homeland, Yugoslavia, qualified in dramatic fashion—only to quickly lose their way out of the tournament. He takes us through the World Cups of the eighties, nineties, up through South Africa in 2010—and to the brink of the 2014 World Cup, which is a special one for Hemon: the first time in the country's history that Bosnia and Herzegovina has qualified.

Played out on the world stage—both in the World Cup and in soccer's international professional leagues—soccer is a high-stakes enterprise full of extreme passion, extreme talent, extreme money, and often extreme politics. But Hemon is also quick to point out that a game of soccer requires only a reasonably flat surface, a sufficiently round object, and someone to show up, and he regales us with stories of the heated games of his youth in Sarajevo's gravel courtyards, of the frozen pick-up games of his adulthood in Chicago, and now, of his daughter's slightly less intense soccer practices, replete with cones and shin guards.

Hemon has been celebrated far and wide for his fiction and essays, but here he takes on what is truly his lifelong, animating passion: soccer. It's more than a sport, it's certainly not "exercise," and it's not even enough to say soccer is life (as Shankly pointed out). Soccer is, in fact, the beautiful game—and never more so than in these pages. Even if, despite all of America's best efforts, Hemon still occasionally insists on calling it "football."

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