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# Tibetan Football: Perspectives From the 2016 Gyalyum Chenmo Memorial Gold Cup

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Tibetan Football:  
**Perspectives From the 2016 Gyalyum Chenmo Memorial Gold Cup**



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### ***Abstract***

This project uses a narrative account of the 2016 Gyalyum Chenmo Memorial Gold Cup, as a springboard into the multifaceted world of Tibetan sports in exile society, both past and present. As Tibetan exile society started to grow, the combination of growing settlement football clubs and a desire to honor the passing of HH the Dalai Lama's mother, led to the founding of this club tournament. As football became more popular, the creation of an international Tibetan team came to be an important expression of national identity, and a useful method of raising awareness for the Tibetan cause. Despite this proliferation, Tibetan football still exists at the margins of the international football community and at the domestic level, is still only in the beginning stages of developing the women's game. With aid from the perspectives of officials, players and coaches at the 2016 GCM and elsewhere, a narrative account of the tournament, and additional discussion of the socio-political implications that inevitably arose from these interviews and this event, herein lies a summative project on the realm of Tibetan football.

\* Cover photo by Tenzin Yonten.

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A relatively new cement road winds its way north from SH6, one of those slightly too narrow south Indian highways, through the Tibetan Doeguling Settlement. Ganden Monastery's sprawl of buildings line both sides of the road, and a stream of monks in their saffron and maroon multihued robes trickle down both sides of the settlement's only main road. Just before camp six is a football pitch. It is a rocky, trashy, dusty, most definitely not grassy, but still flat ground, and appears to be within regulation size<sup>1</sup>. The goalposts have been freshly painted, but the lines have not been chalked. The field is bordered on one sideline by a small green cement grandstand, which is shaded. Each goal line is lined by colorful, frilled shade-covers to protect the overflow crowd from the sun as well. In the officials' box sandwiched by the grandstand bleachers at midfield, two volunteers from Dharamsala are engaged in a common struggle, trying to put in sync a series of laptops, microphones, and cameras. "This is the first time we will have a live-stream of matches," says Norbu, one of the volunteers. Norbu's confidence was endearing, but his partner, Pinzoe, was aggressively clapping in front of a microphone, and waiting expectantly for some sort of response in his earphones, which he never received.

The occasion of this newly built football ground and Norbu and Pinzoe's preparation is the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Gyalyum Chenmo Memorial Gold Cup. This Tibetan football tournament was born from the deep reverence Tibetans have for their political and spiritual icon Tenzin Gyaltso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, and imbues the event with particular cultural meaning and purpose.

The Dalai Lama's mother passed away in 1981, and soon after a TCV official, Joe Tsering, felt that some form of tribute to her life was necessary. The official name of the tournament, Gyalyum Chenmo, is translated as "The Dalai Lama's mother" or "Great Mother". Later that year, the first official GCM took place between a small group of local Dharamsala teams, including the one from the local TCV school, which won the inaugural event. An elaborate trophy was created for the winners by Pema Dorjee, a sculptor at the Norbulinka Institute in Dharamsala, using real silver and gold, as well as jewels donated by the Dalai Lama himself<sup>2</sup>.

There are two prerequisites for hosting an annual football tournament; one is having a breadth of clubs available to compete, and the other is a central governing body to oversee arrangements. Tibetans had neither in the 80's and 90's, and as such the occurrence of the GCM was sporadic. Tibetan settlements had yet to develop well-established clubs, so there simply weren't enough teams to hold a competitive event. The organizing committee for the GCM during this time consisted of representatives from six other Tibetan organizations, the Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibetan Women's Association among them. Its management was piecemeal, at best. From 1981-2002, the tournament was held just 10 times<sup>1</sup>.

2002 marked the formation of the Tibetan National Sports Association, and the beginning of what I will herein refer to as the modern era of Tibetan football. After one institution became in charge of organizing the tournament, the GCM became an annual occurrence starting in 2003. In the thirteen<sup>3</sup> subsequent tournaments held since 2003, there have been five different host-sites, and seven different winning clubs. This is the third time in the modern era that the GCM has

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<sup>1</sup> A regulation field, as stipulated by FIFA, must be between 100-110 meters long, and 64-73 meters wide.

<sup>2</sup> This same trophy is still used today, although the actual cup was not brought to the DTS for the tournament, as it is considered too valuable to transport. The official cup is presented to the winners when the tournament is held in Dharamsala.

<sup>3</sup> If you are following my math, you are right in observing a discrepancy. The GCM was not held in 2006, perhaps because of the bevy of international matches Tibet played that year (see below, and Appendix V).

been hosted by the Doeguling Tibetan Settlement in Mundgod, Karnataka, having been previously held here in 2008 and 2011<sup>4</sup>.

Pinzoe receives a call, alerting him to the beginning of a team photo shoot. At the Ganden Jangtse Monastery, there are no teams dressed in uniform preparing for photographs, but instead a collection of players and team managers in the midst of determining the draw for the upcoming tournament<sup>5</sup>. DYSA Mundgod A, one of the two Mundgod teams entered in the tournament, is placed in group A first. The rest of the eighteen teams are quickly allotted their spot, based on a simple, blind paper draw by a representative from each team. Two teams, Dickeyling RTYC of Utrakhand, and Shimla of Himachal, have already been eliminated from the tournament by Dhondupling Clement Town of Utrakhand and Kullu Manali of Himachal, respectively, in playoffs that took place prior to play in Mundgod. This was a result of limitations on the number of teams eligible for the tournament per region, a new rule promulgated by the TNSA this year. The draw being complete, and the preliminary schedule haphazardly transmitted orally to the teams by TNSA officials, the players and managers disperse, the photo shoot either forgotten or disregarded by participants, and Norbu is left standing uncertainly with his camera.

### ***The Doeguling Tibetan Settlement***

In 1959 the Chinese occupation of Tibet came to a head. The Chinese flexed their muscles, violence ensued, and thousands of Tibetans fled their homeland moving south over the Himalayas into Bhutan, India, and Nepal. HH the Dalai Lama was among the many to leave in 1959, and under his guidance Tibet quickly began to establish a system of exile governance to aid the displaced and impoverished Tibetans, retain a degree of Tibetan autonomy, and preserve Tibetan culture and heritage. The Central Tibetan Administration was christened in 1959, its headquarters established at the abandoned British outpost of McLeod Ganj in Himachal Pradesh, India. Despite its geographical location, the CTA operates independently as an autonomous government that presides over the displaced population of Tibetans.

The Doeguling Tibetan Settlement was one of the many resultant settlements established in India. The DTS came into existence in 1966, making this year the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its creation. A settlement-wide gathering took place in March, both to celebrate its inception and remember the somber reasons for its coming-into-being. Having the opportunity to host the GCM at this half-century mark is particularly special for DTS residents as well.

Indian travel websites<sup>11</sup> have dubbed the DTS a ‘mini Tibet’. Whether or not that is a tourist slogan targeting Indians with wanderlust, it is quite accurate. The DTS is spread across 4045.29 acres, all donated by the Indian state of Karnataka to the CTA. The main entrance to the camp lies four kilometers west of the small Indian town Mundgod, and a couple hundred miles

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<sup>4</sup> For a full list of GCM Champions, see Appendix III.

<sup>5</sup> The tournament structure follows the traditional format of international football tournaments, with a slight twist. There are 18 teams, divided into 4 groups, two groups of 4 (A and C) and two groups of 5 (B and D). The top two teams from each group advance to the quarterfinals. Teams earn 3 points for a win, 1 for a draw, and 0 for a loss. Goal Differential is used as the primary tiebreaker, if needed. In the case of the two groups of 5, Groups B and D, each team will still only play 3 matches instead of 4. The twist is that in order to accommodate for certain teams not playing each other in their respective groups, there is one random crossover match between groups B and D<sup>5</sup>. The group stage games have 35-minute halves, the quarterfinals and semifinals 40-minute halves, and the final 45-minute halves. From the quarterfinals onward, should it be needed, two 10-minute overtime periods will be played (no golden goal), and if the match is still tied, a shootout. Each team is allotted 4 substitutions per match.

northwest of Karnataka's metropolis, Bangalore. The DTS is home to ten different Buddhist sects<sup>6</sup>, nine monasteries and one nunnery. Tenzin Lungtok Thinley Choephak, the seventh incarnation of the Ling Rinpoche and the leader of the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism, calls the DTS home. It has eleven different camps, nine of which are occupied by lay-Tibetans, and two which consist only of the Drepung and Ganden monasteries. Camp no. 3 is at the heart of the DTS, just a couple hundred yards up the road from the football field. It is here that the DTS main offices are located, and where Thinley Gyaltso, a DTS official who is currently the interim office secretary, is providing me with all this important information<sup>iii</sup>.

Thinley says that at one point the DTS was below the Bylakuppe Settlement in terms of population, another Tibetan settlement also located in Karnataka, but now it is the single largest Tibetan settlement in exile. Online research (from the aforementioned travel blog) yielded a 2001 census statistic that put the DTS's total population at 16,171, but Thinley says that number has dipped to 15,800 as of 2016<sup>7</sup>. The DTS, like many other Tibetan settlements throughout South Asia, is experiencing outmigration. As younger people are getting college degrees, they are leaving for urban centers or other countries in pursuit of employment. They are leaving for a certain class of job that can only find elsewhere, the kind of jobs that are made available by society to those with a degree, and that you certainly won't find in the DTS. The DTS was started as an agricultural settlement, and according to Thinley is now making efforts to shift away from chemical/industrial farming to more organic/horticultural practices. This is certainly an important shift, but either way young 21<sup>st</sup> century Tibetans who go to university are not likely to entertain the notion of coming home and working the fields if they can go work in Bangalore or America for a significantly larger sum of money. One such young person is Pema, a Camp no. 3 resident. Pema is an exception to this outmigration rule. He graduated from the Central School for Tibetans in the DTS in 2005 and went on to get his degree in computer programming, but has returned to the DTS to take care of his aging mother. He runs a shop in Camp no. 3 fixing phone screens. As he puts it, his "skill set isn't needed here", and he is right<sup>8</sup>.

My conversation with Thinley is cut short, due to do a quickly forming queue of monks at his office door. They all are here to receive Thinley's signature on an application for renewal their Indian Registration Cards, in order to stay in India. This is a glaring reminder that, as novel as the DTS and its hosting of the GCM seems to me, there are realities that come with simply being 'registered' by a government that is not your own instead of a citizen in your country which I don't come close to experiencing, and the realities of which Tibetans live with each and every day.

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<sup>6</sup> Through observations and fieldwork I have gathered that, these nine are, in no particular order, Ganden Jangtse, Ganden Shartse, Drepung Gomang, Drepung Loseling, Nyingma, Kagyu (Karma Shedrup Ling Bokar Temple), Sakya, Ratoe, Tholing, and Jangchub Choeling (nunnery). All four of the main Tibetan schools of Buddhism are represented here at the DTS (the Ganden and Drepung monasteries are of the Gelug school, along with the Kagyu, Nyingma, and Sakya monasteries).

<sup>7</sup> Thinley also puts the breakdown between monks/nuns and lay people at 10,400 and 5,400, respectively, a quite incredible ratio when you take a minute and think about it.

<sup>8</sup> I mention to him that he has heard GCM officials are trying to program an app for the tournament that will include statistics, fixtures, and results, and that maybe he, Pema, could possibly help with that, to which Pema replies that he has forgotten all his programming skills, that even if he did remember them his knowledge was likely outdated, and then promptly dove into a subject-changing monologue about his love for house music and David Guetta specifically. Throughout the tournament when I stop by his shop to say hi, he is regularly sitting behind the counter watching music videos with the speakers blaring.

I arrive at the ground the next day around 12:30 PM. It costs 1,000 IC for the full, two week, GCM pass. Inside the arena, the grandstand is already full of spectators (80% monks by my estimation)<sup>9</sup>. The nets have been fastened to the goalposts, the lines have been freshly chalked, and the field has been groomed, a seemingly impossible task, and yet the pitch looks remarkably better than the day prior. Red chairs, a slightly lighter shade than maroon robes of the monks sitting in them, have been set up under the colorful frilled shade-coverings, and in front of the grandstand behind a newly setup fence of green and orange flagging tape. The first match of the day is scheduled for 2:00 PM, but opening ceremonies are scheduled for 1:30, hence the early crowd. I am seated in the third row of the grandstand, even with the south end's 18-yard box. There is upbeat Tibetan music playing over the loudspeaker, but it is already beginning to be drowned out by the droning of noisemakers being hastily sold by young Indian vendors. The monks absolutely love them, and the feeling at the ground here in the DTS is slowly being transformed into that of a 2010 World Cup match<sup>10</sup>. Annoying and incessant as these noisemakers might be, they aptly channel the buzz (pun intended) of energy emanating from the robed monks in the stands. They are all *stoked* to watch football. If "The Cup"<sup>11</sup> started a revolution, than the 2016 GCM is its realized ideal. There are thousands of monks in attendance, and there are over 30 football matches to be played over the course of two weeks, right in their back yard.



Fans fill the concourse in anticipation of the opening ceremonies. Photo by James Karsten.

The opening ceremonies of any major sporting event are always incredible proceedings to witness, and the ones here at the 2016 GCM<sup>12</sup> are no different. They begin with two automobiles

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<sup>9</sup> A conversation later with a young monk named Tenzin Sangpo (who loves football) reveals to me that the monks, at least from Drepung Gomang Monastery where Tenzin studies, have a holiday, both for the opening ceremonies and the day of the final. Their weekly day off is Monday and the tournament spans two weeks, the monks have four total days free to watch football.

<sup>10</sup> The 2010 World Cup in South Africa will always be remembered for the omnipresent buzz of the Vuvuzela, a long, narrow, plastic horn which fans monotonously blew during the matches. It led to the widespread popularity of using noisemakers at football matches (e.g. the 2016 GCM), and, due either to their impossibly loud collective drone or poor television producing, redefined noise pollution as we know it, making it possible to now be experienced in your living room through your television.

<sup>11</sup> A 1999 film about a young monk's efforts to watch the World Cup, much to the chagrin of his elders in the Monastery. More below.

<sup>12</sup> Brought to you by Adityaa Milk Ice Cream from Norbu's Ice Cream Parlor, which your researcher can confirm is some of the best ice cream ever made. Norbu's Ice Cream Parlor dominates the paltry advertising here at the 2016 GCM, with two large banners next to the pitch opposite the grandstand. I'm told later on during the tournament by a Doeguling Youth Sports Association official that Norbu donated 30,000 IC to help fund the hosting of the

driving onto the field and dropping off the resident seventh Ling Rinpoche, an apparently esteemed guest for the opening days' events, as the entire crowd stands and claps at his arrival. Once he is seated in the official's box at midfield, flowers are thrown on the pathway in front of the grandstand before a procession of monks and officials, bearing incense and a picture of HH the Dalai Lama, a limpid reminder of this tournament's origin and purpose. This parade is followed by puja, performed by the monks in the procession who are now also seated in the official's box. At 1:55 PM, five minutes prior to the supposed scheduled start time for match number one, a marching band begins the parade of participating teams from the northwest corner of the field (think Olympic opening ceremonies, with the U.S. flaunting their 500 athlete battalion, and the Maldives their lone swimmer). The marching band consists of teenage Tibetan boys wearing blue slacks, white shoes and shirts, and brown cowboy hats, all playing some form of drum, and teenage Tibetan girls, wearing blue slacks, white shoes, shirts, and hats all playing a recorder.

The teams follow the band, and it is quite a spectacle. The clubs all represent certain Tibetan Settlements, sixteen in India, and two in Nepal. The limitations mentioned above mean that with the exception of Mundgod, the hosts, and Bylakuppe, the second largest Tibetan settlement, each one is only allowed a single team to be entered in the tournament. The players are an interesting mix. There are young, secondary school kids who received the nod to compete for their settlement to middle-aged team members, and everything in between. There are almost no professional Tibetan football players. Most of these men are students or have jobs, and are here playing for the pride and honor of their settlement. Many of the players fill out the common Tibetan athletic body type; on the shorter, stockier side, with slightly bowed legs, an appearance which is not overly intimidating or athletically imposing, but gives the impression of toughness and resolve. Many of the players are quintessential examples of the virility that often accompanies male athletics, exuding the patented Bro Image. The components of the BI are as follows; a flat brim hat worn in any direction, a chic haircut<sup>13</sup>, a slightly off-kilter gait, sagged pants, an exposed tattoo, and sunglasses. These are the male footballers of Tibetan society, in all their glory.

A pretty young Tibetan woman in traditional Tibetan garb, holding a sign with each team's respective name, leads the competitors onto the field. The teams process across the grandstand, loop around, and then file into slots marked by cones facing the crowd. Everyone rises for the Tibetan national anthem, played over the loudspeaker but needn't be, as the crowd and players proffer a resounding rendition of their own and gives me the feeling for the first time that underneath the apolitical narrative of this tournament being only in remembrance of HH's mother, that this gathering, this tournament, is very political indeed. The national anthem is

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tournament. A small banner next to the small, hand-kept scoreboard between the two Adityaa ads states that PHAYUL.com is the official media partner of the 21<sup>st</sup> GCM Gold Cup (likely a reused banner from last year's tournament). There is a third, pale blue ad also next to the scoreboard, but it is too small to read from the grandstand. When I first entered through the main gate, I was informed that 'my sports store' was 'now in Hubli (a larger town 50 kilometers north of the DTS), and that there I could get the 'best value for money'. And that about rounds out the corporate marketing to be found here at the GCM.

<sup>13</sup> A footballer is or is not cool/professional/good if they do not have an exceedingly grandiose haircut. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, footballers are renowned for the way they crop their dome. Haircuts for GCM participants include fades, faux-hawks, mohawks, pompadours, regular buns, top-buns, dyed streaks, frosted tips, and any combination of the previous (yes, there is one player for Dhargyaling Tezu FC who has a mohawk, in a top bun, with the tips of the hairs in said top bun frosted). So in other words, all the classic cuts are present here at the 2016 GCM.

followed by the longest moment of silence I have ever been a part of, remembering the two recent Tibetans who have self-immolated<sup>14</sup>.

The moment of silence is followed by more puja, and a series of speeches from tournament officials, and then, as well-orchestrated the proceedings were, once they are over the teams haphazardly leave the field, the opening match fast approaching. However, in the window of time left between the team parade and the beginning of the opener, classic Tibetan music is played throughout the concourse and several Tibetans, most of which are elderly, stand up from their seats in the grandstand and make their way out onto the field to partake in a celebratory community dance. This is by far the highlight of the opening ceremonies, and is certainly the most unique part of these particular opening ceremonies. It is at once democratic and spontaneous, joyful and slapdash. Four or five songs play before the music stops and the dancers disperse, and I'm left wishing this were a dance competition instead of a football one.



The opening community dance. Photo by James Karsten.

The first match is between the hosts, DYSA Mundgod A, and Delhi FC. The Doeguling Youth Sports Association, the local voluntary association in charge of pulling this whole thing off, organized Mundgod's top club, which is playing in the opener. It was established in 2010, and serves as the administrative body for all things sports-related in the DTS. It is a voluntary association, so there are no paid employees. As of the 2016 GCM, all seven of the DYSA's members are Tibetan men, all native to the DTS. Tenzin Kunshe, one volunteer who returned from Toronto two months prior in order to help prepare for the GCM, says that their primary

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<sup>14</sup> Moments of silence at sporting events in the U.S. are typically marked by their brevity, as if the audience and emcee can't bear to dwell on the grievance being remembered any longer than they have to. This moment of silence created a palpable, somber mood throughout the entire concourse, and made the horns from the road behind the grandstand remarkable, despite their absence just a minute prior. This is an honest moment, when thousands of Tibetans are humbly meditating on the grief and heartbreak that comes with death and suffering.

goal is focusing the energy of young Tibetans<sup>15</sup> on athletic endeavors instead of less productive, more debilitating habits like abusing drugs or alcohol<sup>iv</sup>. It's clear football is the primary focus here, but as we talk he also points across the ground to the concrete foundation that will become a new basketball court in the clearing on the north side of the football field. These seven officials, in the months leading up to the GCM, were tasked with organizing and selecting the rosters for the two host teams, DYSA Mundgod A and B, along with overseeing the construction of the new grandstand, field preparation, fundraising, and all the other logistical particularities that come with hosting a football tournament.

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I was not sure what kind of football tournament the 2016 GCM would be, but I am quite impressed as the pre-match routines take place. It seems every effort has been made to give it the appearance of being the real deal. Everything mimics any major football tournament I have ever watched on television. DYSA Mundgod A, as the host club, play in the opening match. Seven to nine year old children accompany the players out onto the pitch (in all other major tournaments, this happens with the official FIFA song playing throughout the stadium, but not here at the official club tournament of an officially non-FIFA nation). The officials take the game ball, a white Nivia ball with blue stripes, from a thin, waist high holder as they lead the teams and their pre-pubescent cohorts out onto the field<sup>16</sup>. They form a line, halfway between midfield and the sideline, the referees at midfield and one team on either side. They wave collectively to the crowd, before the team on the North end moves across the line, first shaking the referees hands then their opponents. Once they have all past, the other team moves in the opposite direction, shaking the referees hands. After this, the captains of each side linger for the coin toss. Defending sides and who is kicking off is established, then each team poses for photographs, before taking their respective positions. It is nearly 3:30 PM, an hour and a half after the scheduled start time, before match number one kicks off, Delhi in neon yellow tops and black bottoms, DYSA Mundgod A in blue tops, white shorts, and blue socks.

The first thing that becomes apparent regarding the actual playing of football here at the Doeguling Settlement's pitch, is just how fast the field is. Fast isn't the right word. Fast, in football, is typically used to describe that incredibly pristine, the-grass-is-in-fact-greener-on-the-other-side kind of turf that has been greased up by the sprinkler system minutes before kickoff, and the weather conditions are just so that the water sticks around for slightly longer than expected, and as a result the ball slides instead of rolls, and skips instead of bounces, along the surface. This pitch is playing fast, but not in that sense. It is playing fast in the sense that the ball appears to have been aggressively pumped with air, the field hasn't seen water in months, and instead of being wet and smooth, the field is dry and hard, and as a result the ball is positively soaring off the ground every time it bounces, and instead of skipping across soft, wet grass, the ball ricochets at an equally fast, but qualitatively different pace.

Both sides are playing bullheaded, tough as nails football, straight from the get-go. What both lack in finesse, they make up for in effort and fire. Delhi plays a high back line early on, and catches Mundgod offsides three times in the opening minutes. There is not much flow to the game in the first half. Each side is content to play long balls, which are easily cleared by the

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<sup>15</sup> It is my impression that this really means young Tibetan men.

<sup>16</sup> These kids are wearing a diverse selection of European club jerseys, Chelsea FC, Barcelona FC, Manchester United, Manchester City, Borussia Dortmund, to name a few.

opposing backline, or, if they hit the ground, bounce nearly back to their original apex's height. The teams stubbornly expect new results, but none come in the first half<sup>17</sup>.

But alas, in the second half the stubbornness pays off for Delhi. 17 minutes into the second half, one of their long balls into the Mundgod 18-yard box finds a tame patch of dust untouched by Mundgod defenders, takes a reasonable bounce that the Delhi striker runs onto and toe-pokes into the far corner, catching the keeper in the paralyzing no-man's-land between his line and the ball. 1-0 to Delhi. Mundgod would later squander a few brilliant opportunities to equalize, including one brilliant pre-meditated set-piece play, but Delhi would hold on for the one-nil victory.

### ***History of Tibetan Football***

The history of Tibetan football leading all the way up to the outset of the 2016 GCM, can be traced, as is often the case with football, back to the British. The spread around the world of the two great games of England, cricket and football, can be closely connected to the spread of the British Empire throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Where the British went, so too, did their sporting competitions. The British invaded Tibet in 1903, But wasn't until 1937 that they first established a diplomatic mission in Lhasa. This group of Brits formed a football club, the Mission Marmots, which competed with locals in the first football matches that took place in Tibet. This journey was well documented by British photographers, and it is through them that these first traces of football in Tibet were recorded.

**The 'Lhasa United' Football Team**  
Frederick Spencer Chapman,  
1936-1937

*Members of the 'Lhasa United' football team. Spencer Chapman describes a match against 'Lhasa United' in October 1936: 'Together with a crowd of supporters, our opponents were already there, turned out in garish harlequin-coloured silk shirts with L.U. sewn on to the pockets. They were a remarkable looking team, and certainly needed to be "United"! There was a tough looking Nepali soldier, a Chinese tailor, three bearded Ladakhis wearing red fezes - the most hirsute being the goalkeeper, a Sikkimese clerk of Pangda-Tsang's, and five Tibetan officials, including our friends Yuto, Surkang-Se, and Taring Dzongpon. The latter still had their charm-boxes on top of their heads, so were precluded from heading the ball.'* (1938:269)  
PRM 1998.131.385.



<sup>17</sup> It is my opinion, according to the little tactical knowledge of football that I have, that the solution to a hard pitch like this one is not to avoid it by playing through the air, but instead an even more fervent dedication to passing on the ground. This style is still challenging on a pitch like this one, but it is far better than the alternative, both pragmatically and aesthetically.



**Game of Football outside Lhasa**

Frederick Spencer Chapman, 1936-1937

*A game of football between 'Lhasa United' and the 'Mission Maroons' in progress. The ground was ten miles beyond the Norbulingka in a sandy area surrounded by thorn thickets. Spencer Chapman remarks that 'Playing at 12,000 feet above sea-level is not as much of an ordeal as one would imagine, though sometimes one would rush down the field and find oneself quite unable to breathe. Then it was necessary to lie down for a few moments in the middle of the field until one's breath returned.' (1938:270) The match was apparently a 'good clean game'. RSM 1998.1.31.386.*

**The 'Mission Marmots' Football Team**

Frederick Spencer Chapman,  
1936-1937

*'The Mission Marmots' was the name given to the 1936 British Mission football team. The Mission established this team to play against various local groups (including 'Lhasa United') on a pitch beyond the Norbulingka. No goal was ever conceded by the British, perhaps because they wore army field boots. The football season came to an abrupt end when someone stole the goalposts to use for firewood and sandstorms became frequent. Team members (back row from left to right): Sonam, unknown person, Minglu; (middle row from left to right): Frederick Spencer Chapman, Sidney Dagg, Dr. William Morgan, Evan Nepean; (bottom row) unidentified Mission assistants.*

FRM 1998.131.384.



Tashi Choejor, a Tibetan university student in Bangalore, jokingly recalled a story to me (after the conclusion of the tournament) he heard as a child, about the first football match to be played in Lhasa. He says that local Tibetans thought the game was cursed, as the night after the first match was played, a large thunderstorm hit the city. This was taken as a sign that the gods were angry, and dubiously attributed to the arrival of football in Lhasa. This might be one explanation for a general lack of athletic competitions in Tibetan society prior to 1959, but a better one might be the nomadism of Tibetans throughout the country, prior to their exile and the ushering in of modernity by the Chinese.

Namkang is a sweet, old lady who runs a medical shop in Camp no. 3 of the DTS. She is a retired nurse, and has just moved here with her husband to the DTS from Dharamsala earlier this year. She, like many Tibetans her age, fled her homeland in 1959 as the Chinese occupation of Tibet came to a head. She was very young when she left and does not remember much from Tibet, but she does tell me that her family led a nomadic lifestyle, moving around from place to place in the northern parts of Tibet. For nomads, a source of fitness is not a choice or a public health concern as it is for contemporary society today, but rather an occupational and cultural necessity, particularly at the high elevations Tibet is famous for. Being in shape was simply an environmental and physiological reality, so the notable absence of widespread sports associations in Tibet prior to 1959 is not surprising. When I show her the photographs from Lhasa she is amazed, but unsurprisingly has no memory herself of football ever being played in Tibet during her childhood. The game was brought to Tibet in 1936, and just 23 years later the mass exodus of thousands of Tibetans upended the whole social milieu of Tibet, abruptly curbing any further development of the game.

After the seeds of the game were first planted in Tibet by the Mission Marmots, China threw any possible development of the game for a loop with their occupation of Tibet throughout the 1950's, and the course of Tibetan football followed the a new path: that of Exile society.

There is a lull in the records of Tibetan football from 1959-1981. This was a tenuous period for Tibetans, to say the least. The CTA was in its infancy, thousands of Tibetans had died in attempts to escape the Chinese, and many of those that survived were plunged into the dire living conditions that refugees often find themselves in, working on road gangs in India with little food or water. But through the leadership and guidance of HH the Dalai Lama, institutions began to grow, and the task of preserving Tibetan culture was taken up in earnest.

As the Tibetans started to recover, and their plight started to gain international notoriety, one proposition to help raise awareness that emerged in the late 1990's was to host an exhibition football match involving Tibetan players<sup>v</sup>. The idea came from an Italian rock band, Dynamo Rock, who had a heart for Tibet as they say, and reached out to TCV officials to see if this was a possibility. This was the incipient moment of Tibetan international football. Kasur Jetsun Pema, the elder sister of HH the Dalai Lama and the long time president of TCV, helped organize a selection tournament held in 1998 in the Tibetan Dickey Larsoe Settlement in Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India. An international team was selected by committee, and travelled to Italy to compete against a team of players fielded by Dynamo Rock, which consisted of band members and close friends. The subsequent match that was held on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1999 is still only considered an exhibition match<sup>18</sup>, as Tibet did not play another nation's official team, but a team singularly formed for the event. Tibet had yet to compete in an official match, but the groundwork of international football for Tibet had been laid.

Enter Michael Nybrant. Nybrant was a Danish man, who in the late 90's, travelled to Tibet and there had a dream of Tibet fielding an international football team in an official<sup>19</sup> friendly. He was well aware of the Tibetan situation, and knew it would be a challenge, but began reaching out to Tibetan officials to assess the possibility of Tibet fielding a full-fledged international side, in matches against some other nation. Being Danish, Nybrant reached out to the Danish province of Greenland, a perfect candidate for a Tibetan opponent as they were not FIFA members<sup>20</sup>, yet still had their own sports association. Greenland officials agreed to send a side to Denmark for a match against Tibet, and preparations began back in India to form a Tibetan team.

There is a documentary called "The Forbidden Team", produced by Danish filmmakers, that beautifully tells the story of how this 2001 Tibetan team came together, in anticipation of their first friendly in Denmark with Greenland, and the following account is largely drawn from this film. A selection tournament was held in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India, where Nybrant assisted Kelsang Dhondup, the current TNSA executive secretary who is in attendance here at the 2016 GCM, and Karma Ngodup a schoolteacher and initial manager of the Tibetan national team, in evaluating players. The side that was selected travelled to Dharamsala to train with a Danish coach, Jens Espensen, before travelling to Denmark for the match.

Upon the Tibetan teams arrival, there were a myriad of efforts made by the Chinese Embassy in Denmark to cancel the match. China, as a member of FIFA, appealed to the Danish Football Association, another FIFA member, to cancel the match. However the DFA was powerless to do anything as the match, despite being held in Denmark, was being played on a

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<sup>18</sup> According to Will Bromley's account, which is the go to resource on this period of Tibetan international football's history, the match was really a glorified Dynamo Rock concert where a football match broke out (Tibet won 5-3).

<sup>19</sup> I'm defining an 'official match' here as one that takes place between the football teams of two provincial, ethnic, or geopolitical populations, which I loosely refer to throughout this paper as nations. This definition qualifies the match with Greenland, and disqualifies the exhibition against Dynamo Rock's team.

<sup>20</sup> Section 83.1 of FIFA's 2012 Statutes precludes any member nation from competing with non-member nations without express approval from FIFA.

pitch outside the control of the DFA and FIFA, and between two football associations that were not FIFA members. China threatened economic sanctions on Greenland's sizable fishing exports to China, but this bluff was snuffed out, and the Sports Confederation of Greenland stated they would still play. China, in the midst of bidding for the 2008 Olympics during this time<sup>21</sup>, did not want to appear in any way antagonistic towards the spirit of competition, and ultimately backed off. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, 2001, Greenland defeated Tibet 4-1<sup>22</sup>, in Tibet's first international friendly.

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It's Day 3 of the GCM, the only day of the tournament with four matches scheduled, which means that instead of the first match beginning at 2:00 PM, it starts at 12:30 PM, and it is HOT. Have I mentioned the heat yet? It is absolutely scalding here at the 2016 GCM<sup>23</sup>. These are the kind of conditions that can only be slightly tempered, really, with a swimming pool<sup>24</sup>. Tibetans, having spent thousands of years at high elevation on the Tibetan Plateau and in the Himalayas, are genetically programmed with strong cardiovascular systems, an evolutionary product of such an environment. That is why the Tibetan Exile, and the subsequent establishment of settlements in South India, the antithesis of Tibetan climate/elevation, seems so incongruous. Tibetans have the capacity to be quite fit, yes, but living, much less playing football, in the 97 degree heat of Karnataka, on a rugged, dusty pitch is a whole new ballgame. These guys are flat out tough as nails

After significantly smaller crowds on day two, the grandstands are back to full capacity, as it's Monday and most of the monks in the DTS have their 2<sup>nd</sup> of four days off during the tournament. They have filled out the grandstand and the chairs in the surrounding shade-covers, and also sit cross-legged in front of the grandstand as well; inching closer and closer to the pitch as the shadows lengthen, and they can get closer to the action w/o burning their shaved heads. I need to pause here and comment on the pure strangeness of watching four straight football matches, on a sweltering south Indian afternoon, surrounded by Tibetan monks. Monks redefine a 'raucous crowd'. They have a particular way of cheering. It can only be described as somewhere between a high-pitched whoop and a gleeful squall. This same ejaculation is used in all different moments during the match. When players make an ambitious run, embarrass themselves, or are angry with the referee and/or another player, in which case their whooping is to egg on the frustrated player. One particular occasion when the robed rooters let loose, which happens a few times a match, is when the nurses of the tournament, dutiful members of the RTWA dressed in full traditional Tibetan garb, run onto the field to aid an injured player. I am not sure if these moments are condescendingly patriarchal, all in good fun, or a little bit of both.

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<sup>21</sup> An augury of the Tibetan Uprising in 2008.

<sup>22</sup> In a beautiful and deliriously hopeful moment, remarkably well captured on film by the Danish film crew in "The Forbidden Team" (it brought tears to my eyes), Tibet scored first and held a 1-0 advantage for most of the 1<sup>st</sup> half, before eventually falling 4-1. Tibet would go on to play 2 more matches during their European tour, one against Monaco, and one against another Tibetan squad in Switzerland. See Appendix V for a full list of international fixtures and results.

<sup>23</sup> Or as Malik, the Indian cameraman working with Norbu and Pinzoe on the all things tech at the 2016 GCM said, "It's f\*\*\*ing hot, man."

<sup>24</sup> I am drinking liters of water at an alarming rate, one that will most certainly break the budget I've established for this project.

This rambunctious behavior is seemingly unbecoming of a monk, but perhaps a little ritualized conflict is precisely what someone trying to live a rigorous and spiritually disciplined life needs. Religion begets legalism. Many people, monks included, will tell you that Buddhism is not a religion it is a philosophy, which is certainly true. But on its own, the monastic way of life is very much religious in its routines, rituals, and rules. This is the greatest challenge of religious/spiritual life, to navigate the haziness that lies between inspired action and obedient rule-following, the spirit of the law and its letter.

The aforementioned film, “The Cup” captures this tension beautifully. A young monk, Orgyen, is crazy about football. He describes the elaborate collection of football photos on his wall as his shrine. He vigorously proselytizes his conviction that the monks are duty bound to sneak out of the monastery at night and watch the matches of the 1998 World Cup in France. Upon returning from one such adventure, Orgyen and his accomplices are caught, and duly punished with additional chores for their deviousness. After considerable thought, Orgyen becomes convinced that the only way he and his fellow football-crazed friends can watch the final, is if they rent a satellite dish and television, and watch the match at the monastery, a request which the older monks grudgingly grant.

Orgyen is elated, however in order to rent the dish, he coerces a newly arrived young monk from Tibet named Nyima to use his watch, the young boy’s lone possession from his mother, as collateral with the Indian business man selling dishes. During the final Orgyen is stricken with compassion for his new friend, and stops watching to go and find his prized football cleats, which he plans to sell in order to safely return the watch to his friend. The authority figure, Geko, finds Orgyen in his moment of concern, and affectionately says, “You’re so bad at business, you’ll make a good monk,” and says he and the abbot will pay for the watch.

It is a beautiful message, especially from a monk-made film. Orgyen learns the meaning of true kindness and compassion as a result of his industrious, if rebellious, actions in a way that a legalistic method of teaching couldn’t.

One monk who is as elated about the GCM being in Mundgod, as Orgyen was about the 1998 World Cup, is Pemba Tsering. Pemba has been a monk at Ganden Monastery since he was 7 years old, coming here from Shillong, India, and he loves football. He tells me he plans to come the matches almost every day of the tournament; a privilege no doubt afforded him by his longevity at Ganden. As I sit and watch with him, his attentiveness (he points out all the talented players to me, and explains that his favorite part of the game is the passing of center-midfielders, an appreciation that only cerebral football fans can have) is complemented by his rowdy heckling of the players on the field, much to the entertainment of those around him. He delights in the conflict of the match, while simultaneously having an intellectual appreciation for the talent of the players in the pitch. To Pemba, it seems that the revelation of the cup and the opportunity for the monks to derive joy from this tournament are welcome changes indeed.

The volunteer referees from day one have been replaced with a team of seven Indian referees. Whether they arrived late, couldn’t find referees until the last minute, or realized they desperately needed them, this is good news for tournament officials. Because the GCM is a Tibetan tournament, and the players on the clubs are all Tibetan, having third party referees is critical<sup>25</sup>. This is common sense, putting someone capable of being a fair arbiter in a position to do so, and the matches of day three compared to day one are remarkably more controlled and orderly.

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<sup>25</sup> This is a huge aspect of football worldwide. FIFA takes painstaking measures during the World Cup each year to ensure that each matches referees are from countries least likely to carry bias against the two countries competing.

The second match of the day features Rabgyeling Hunsur against DYSA Mundgod B, both teams' first game in group B. DYSA Mundgod B is the DTS's second team, consisting mostly of youngsters who didn't make the cut for DYSA Mundgod A. Rabgyeling Hunsur is the club representing the Hunsur Tibetan Settlement, also in the Indian state of Karnataka, south of the DTS, and near Mysore. Hunsur is one of the few clubs so far in the GCM that has been able to (mostly) overcome the challenging conditions of the pitch, and possess the ball on the ground<sup>26</sup>. One reason for this is steady, controlled play by one of their strikers, Lakpa Dhondup.

Lakpa is a 24 year-old university student, studying public management in Gujarat, India. He grew up in the Hunsur Settlement, and attended a TCV secondary school in Bangalore, where he first started playing football. This is his first, and he thinks last, time representing Hunsur at the GCM. "There are so many young stars" he says, which to me seems ironic considering that a 24 year-old player of Lakpa's caliber would be considered in many footballing circles as, a 'young star'. Hunsur has only ever made it to the semifinals of the GCM, and when I quip that this might be their year, Lakpa just smiles and laughs.

On the pitch Lakpa is lightning-quick. He wears white cleats, and, the cliché certainly seems to hold true watching him play, that they make him appear even faster and quicker than he actually is. He jogs around on his toes with a slightly open gait, his torso leaning forward, before unleashing a flurry of steps in pursuit of the ball or another player. On the ball his quickness transfers from his linear capacity to travel, into the mobility of his ankles, taking short, quick touches before sending the ball to its next logical place. The genius of this style is that while it is incredibly swift, it is even more controlled. This is what makes the great footballers so talented. The old adage is 'the game slows down for them', but what this really means is they are able to move with near unimaginable speed and athleticism, and do so with an impeccable degree of control over their bodies and the ball. This ability lends itself to all the other requisite components of a complete footballer; vision, positioning, defending, communicating etc.

Early on in the first half, Lakpa and his striking partner at the top of the Hunsur formation combine for a quality goal to open the scoring. Lakpa's counterpart completes a perfect duo; a tall, physical player who relies on power instead of finesse. #10 receives a ball through towards the corner flag on the left wing, and cuts back across his defender towards the corner of the 18-yard box. Using brute force, he muscled his way past, the hapless defender left on the ground grabbing #10's shorts, which would have warranted a yellow card if not for the impending result of the play. He turns towards the goal, breaking free of his defender's clutches, and dribbles in towards the near post. His run, and the clear threat of a behemoth bearing down, draws both center-backs away from the middle of the goal. #10 slots the ball with the outside of his right foot, just between the keeper and the rotating defenders, to an unmarked, and perfectly positioned Lakpa, who one-times the ball home for Hunsur's first goal. Lakpa's celebration is joyous and humble, and in no way self-aggrandizing. He finds his teammates, a smile on his face, and slowly jogs back to midfield<sup>27</sup>. Hunsur coasts to an easy 4-0 victory, with Lakpa tapping in a 2<sup>nd</sup> goal after a goalkeeping error late in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, and match two of day three is in the books.

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<sup>26</sup> Others include TDL Bylakuppe and Dhondupling Clementown, all of whom I predict will make it through to the qualifying rounds within five minutes of watching them play.

<sup>27</sup> His size, his style, his humility, and even his gait, are all rather Messi-esque. I don't purport here that Lakpa, one Tibetan footballer for one particular side here at the GCM is as good as, or could compete with, the world's greatest players. I am only observing a few, qualitative similarities between the two.

At this point in the tournament, I have made a few observations regarding the way in which these Tibetan footballers carry themselves on the pitch. There are certainly some clubs who behave professionally, that have a been-here-before attitude. But there are many who evince their amateurism by open and shameless efforts to emulate the world-class professionals they watch online and on TV. Some players jump to head imaginary crosses as they enter the field. Many give their teammates a thumbs up after a good pass which they have missed or failed to make any effort to receive. Still more have become expert divers, faking injuries to draw a penalty or waste time. The goal celebrations<sup>28</sup> are grandiose, if not original. And I already mentioned the haircuts. These matches, despite their seeming insularity at the DTS, are not free of the powerful influences the televised game has on young players.

And yet for all these aggrandizing ways that many of the players conduct themselves, many of these games are marked by, pardon my French, bad football. Many teams do not have a good first touch (the pitch certainly isn't helping them though), throw-ins are frequently penalized for bad form, often players will perform exciting, but completely impractical bicycle kicks<sup>29</sup>, teams' defensive backs and wingers don't play wide when they are attacking. Whatever the perceived standards of professionalism are by these Tibetan football players, the reality is that doing one's job well, and doing it in a manner that is becoming of something equivalent to virtue, will always be the measure one's professionalism.

### ***The Economics of the 2016 GCM***

The whole enterprise of hosting the 2016 GCM could be a case study in community-based economics. Although the DTS has hosted the tournament in the past (2008 and 2011) this year, perhaps because of the significance that comes with their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, or perhaps because of the growing popularity of the tournament, the grandstand was newly built for this year's edition of the GCM. Pema, our phone screen-fixing shopkeeper, says that each household in the DTS donated 1,000 IC to fund the project. Thinley, the DTS official, confirms that these contributions, combined with different sponsorships from abroad and other organizations, helped make building the new grandstand a reality. He says those families that could not proffer 1,000 IC have contributed in other ways. Volunteering as a ticket collector is one. The entrance fee goes to the TNSA, not as a profit but simply to cover the expenses for prize money, maintenance of the ground, and other GCM expenses. The DYSA is organizing a 50/50 raffle in order to help cover the cost of building the grandstand. Even the monasteries have helped, housing the visiting players in vacant hostel rooms.

Right behind the grandstand there is an area for food stands, a staple at any sporting event. There are Tibetans selling sha pale, alo pale, laping, cold drinks, and hot tea<sup>30</sup>. There are Indian stands as well, selling slices of pineapple and watermelon, fried rice, roasted corn-on-the-cob, fruit juice, snacks, and cold drinks. Norbu's Ice Cream parlor has its own special spot, right next to one of the main entrances. The Regional Tibetan Women's Association and the Tibetan Youth Congress, who have compiled the largest collection of bottled water I have ever seen in

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<sup>28</sup> A list of celebrations I have seen thus far at the 2016 GCM: the Dab (ironically made famous by an American football player, Cam Newton), the Ronaldo, flips, salutes, jumping fist-pumps, running and pointing into the camera, thumb-sucking, tucking the ball under your jersey. All celebrations you can witness being performed by players at the world cup or in the Champions League.

<sup>29</sup> Much to the delight of the monks in attendance.

<sup>30</sup> There is one stand selling nondescript clothing, which, as far as I can tell, has nothing to do with football, the clubs, or the GCM in any way.

one place before, have employed the services of several young Indian boys, all bearing *GCM Hotel Gate Pass* pins, to vend their Flomo bottled water throughout the concourse<sup>31</sup>.

But what is fascinating is that for the ten days of the tournament when the monks are not on holiday and come watch, the consumers at the GCM are all more or less DTS community members. This event and its hosts are unique because it is an event put on by a large group of people, for that same large group of people. Take the World Cup, as a counterexample. FIFA picks one country to host the tournament every four years, and for one month in the summer, this country welcomes the privileged/football-crazed fan-bases of 31 other countries. This is not the case at the GCM. As far as I can tell, the club members themselves and I are the only people who have travelled any significant distance to attend this event. This makes the grass-roots fundraising effort to cover the transaction costs of building the grandstand and organizing the tournament all the more interesting, because it makes common delineations between public and private money/capital/raw materials less clear. The TNSA is a de facto institution under the CTA, which means that in a strange<sup>32</sup> way, this tournament is officially a government-sponsored event. Furthermore, in practice it is the local DYSA that has been doing most of the legwork in preparation for the GCM, making this event even more communally organized than if it *was* completely done by a branch of the far away CTA. It is in this way that the 2016 GCM, and the robust community effort to get the tournament off the ground, is marked by a certain Marxist quality, the kind that is often quietly, almost unconsciously realized by small, insular communities like the DTS, and to me seems ultimately like a rather dark irony indeed.

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The fourth and final match of Day 3 pits DYSA Mundgod A against TCV United, in a must win contest for the hosts. The host nation or club of any tournament always has to navigate the challenge of at the same time being afforded the intangible, hard-to-pin-down ‘home-field advantage’, and being under immense pressure to advance from their group<sup>33</sup>. DYSA Mundgod A rebounds nicely, handily defeating TCV, who are one of the few unlucky teams forced to play on back to back days, 3-0. The result eliminates TCV (the first team out of the 2016 GCM finals) and puts Mundgod back into a good position to advance<sup>34</sup>. Upon the conclusion of the game, as the Indian officials are preparing to leave, they are confronted by an angered spectator. A crowd quickly gathers (several monks, who I am certain have no clue what’s going on and simply want to rabble-rouse, escalate the situation, what have you), but it is still unclear to me what the complaint is. I am sitting with Lakpa, who mentions something about the unfair

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<sup>31</sup> All profits of which support these two important civil associations of Tibetan exile society.

<sup>32</sup> This is only strange by my own American sports experiences standards, where the NFL, MLB, NBA etc. are all private, all organized sports club tournaments, and at the end of the day, are large corporations aimed at exploiting markets and making loads of cash instead of organizing a small community event like the GCM. But the capitalist tint of sports in America becomes even more apparent when you consider the fact that in all of these examples, not only is the league facilitating multi-billion dollar industries, but *teams themselves* (in a way that none of the Tibetan clubs here could come close to doing back at their settlements) have paid for multi-million dollar complexes, usher hundreds of thousands of people in and out of their gates each season, bombard them with advertisements and loads of entertainment extraneous to the competition in question (football, baseball, basketball, take your pick), and exploit their penchant for a cold libation with 8\$ beers.

<sup>33</sup> Using the World Cup as an indicator, the host country has advanced past the group stage in 21 of the 22 World Cups, and won the competition 6 of the 22.

<sup>34</sup> The GCM Facebook page has dubbed Group A (Jampaling Pokhara, Delhi FC, Mundgod A, and TCV United) the group of death, a hallmark assignment of any football tournament.

carding or lack of carding, for one of the players during the match. He watches abjectly, and remarks that “this is why Indian officials won’t referee our matches.”

This comment seems to imply that there has been a history of Tibetans disrespecting Indian officials, but I don’t press Lakpa for any further explanation, and the eventful, long, and particularly sweaty day three of the 2016 GCM has concluded.

### ***The Tibetan National Sports Association***

The Tibetan National Sports Association, the organization primarily in charge of organizing the 2016 GCM, was officially established as an NGO in 2002, under the Indian Societies Act of XXI of 1860. The bills’ stated purpose is as follows:

Whereas it is expedient the provision should be made for improving the legal condition or societies established for the promotion of literature, science, or the fine arts, or for the diffusion of useful knowledge [the diffusion of political education], or for charitable purposes;

There is a comment included in this piece of legislation regarding ‘charitable purposes’. It reads:

Charitable purposes... could be grouped into four heads, (i) relief of poverty, (ii) education, (iii) advancement of religion and (iv) other purposes beneficial to the community not coming under any of the preceding heads.

It is under this charitable purposes section, as well as perhaps, from the Tibetan point of view, the ‘diffusion of useful knowledge’ that many Tibetan organizations, under the de facto administration of the Central Tibetan Administration, are actually technically registered Indian Societies. Along with the TNSA, Tibetan civil associations like Tibetan Children’s Village and the Tibetan Women’s Association are also registered Tibetan societies under this act.

The TNSA was established under the auspices of TCV, at the behest of its president, the aforementioned Kasur Jetsun Pema. In 2001, the Kashag, the CTA’s cabinet, approved the formation of a Tibetan sports organization, and in 2002 after Kasur Jetsun Pema helped consolidate some of TCV’s financial and human capital to aid in its beginning, the TNSA became officially registered under the Indian Societies Act, and began its work.

The Indian Societies Act stipulates that each registered organization have a governing body. The TNSA consists of an 8 member governing body, as well as a 10 member executive committee, each of which meet monthly to manage the TNSA’s affairs. Kelsang Dhondup, the executive secretary since the TNSA’s inception in 2002, and his assistant Nawang Namdul, are the only full-time TNSA employees. On its website, the TNSA lists as its goals, “To promote Tibetan Football at the International Level... awareness of Tibetan cause and issues... football in particular and in general other games and sports opportunities for Tibetan children and youth at all levels within the exile Tibetan community, India and abroad” among others.



Choelsum United and Ghangjong Shillong in action on Day 4 of the tournament. Photo by Tenzin Yonten.

I have mentioned him a few times previously, but the man behind the scenes, running around ensuring everything is going smoothly here at the 2016 GCM, and the executive secretary of the TNSA, is Kelsang Dhondup. Dhondup has been the executive secretary of the TNSA since its inception in 2002, and has pioneered the GCM as an annual event during Tibetan football's modern era. Dhondup, like so many others, fled Tibet when he was a young child in 1959. He attended university in Himachal Pradesh, India, and studied to become a physical education teacher, and it was through this work that instilled in him a love for the game of football.

Dhondup, like most PE teachers, appears very fit, despite his old age. Each day he is wearing a white scarf with a blue adidas hat or a full-brimmed safari hat, doing everything from orchestrating the pre-match routines to making announcements through the loudspeaker. It's clear he has an incredible work-ethic and a passion for Tibetan football, but when it comes to discussing Tibet's prospects of international play, Dhondup sees the barriers in front of Tibet as political realities instead of temporary impediments, an altogether somber, if realistic, outlook. He refers simply to the fact that most Tibetans don't have passports as a stateless population, and because of this the logistical hurdles that come with international competition and its requisite travel are magnified, when any other nation would barely have to bat an eyelash. He says that "people look down" on Tibet, and that "they always have China in the back of their mind" (it seems the 'they' he is referring to is FIFA and its member nations). These hurdles aside, there is no question Dhondup has something to be proud of in the GCM.

His greatest moment of the tournament comes on Day 7, in match 20 of the 2016 GCM. Gulladhalla and Choelsum United played to a 0-0 draw, which eliminated Choelsum and secured

Gulladhalla a spot in the quarters. Late in the second half, one of Gulladhalla's defenders commits a harsh foul. The referee, reaching for his yellow card, has it slapped out of his hands in disgust by the guilty Gulladhalla player. This is a violation of sacred football etiquette. One *never* touches the referee, much less in a borderline pugilistic manner, as was the case here. Football has its critics when it comes to players whining and protesting, but the game is rarely lawless. Gulladhalla's defender is shown red, and he is restrained by a few of his coaches, and led off the field in a near uncontrollable rage. It is clear from his gesticulations in the officials' box that Dhondup is livid. The Gulladhalla player's infraction is compounded by the already delicate fact that the referees are local Indians, giving the transgression an added layer of disrespect. At the conclusion of the match, Dhondup goes to the Gulladhalla locker room and escorts the entire Gulladhalla side to the referees' table, where they apologize, first to the referees and then to the crowd, which gives them a forgiving round of applause. It's a wonderful moment of reconciliation that didn't have to happen, but which illustrates the underlying character of Dhondup, and the values he imbues upon this tournament.

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Day 7 of the 2016 GCM also features a moment of football brilliance. These moments are few and far between, particularly at a tournament with the quality of play like the GCM, but there have certainly been a few so far. It is my humble opinion that the sport nicknamed the 'beautiful game' is in fact the most beautiful sport on the globe, for a myriad of reasons. Here are a few. Football can demonstrate beauty on multiple metaphysical planes. Three to be exact, at least in my way of thinking about it. The first is singular beauty. A sport like tennis is a perfect example of sports artistry at the individual level, but it can happen in football as well. This is the kind of beauty that players like Ronaldinho, Pele, Beckenbauer, Maradona, Ronaldo (both of them), Messi etc. exude. They all were endowed with God-given talents to do near divine things on the pitch. And they also have devoted their entire lives to a certain athletic craft, spending thousands of hours obsessively refining their skill. Not many people are able, or willing, to make such sacrifices. It's why moments of athletic individual beauty are much more rare, in any sport. Sublime free kicks, dribbling through multiple defenders effortlessly, and absolute fire-cracking strikes, are all examples of individual beauty in football. This kind of beauty is rare to non-existent at the 2016 GCM. There simply aren't players of that caliber competing here.

The second metaphysical plane of beauty on the pitch is, what I here will call team beauty. This kind of beauty is much more democratic. It certainly happens more often in games where those capable of individual acts of beauty are playing, but it can be found on any pitch anywhere: from a U12 tournament in the Midwest, to the Champions League, to the GCM. This kind of beauty is on display when a team, or members of a team, connect in such a way as to approach perfect synchronization. This is the type of beauty at hand in the moment of brilliance on Day 7.

Delhi is playing TCV United in the final match of the day, which is also the final match of Group A. The sun is setting, it's about 5:30 PM, and the temperature has dropped a few degrees to almost bearable. Delhi has already secured a spot in the quarters winning their first two matches, and need a win or a draw to finish in the top spot of the group, and have jumped out to a 2-0 lead, midway through the first half.

TCV restarts the action, kicking off at midfield. After the short pass from one striker to the other, the ball is sent on the ground back to their center-midfielder. The two TCV strikers start to move up the field, but one slants to the left side and shows for the ball, to receive it back from the center-midfielder. The midfielder plays him the ball, just on the Delhi side of the midfield circle. As the ball is rolling, the left-winger begins his run down the sideline, moving from right to left in front of the grandstand. The TCV striker receives the ball and turns aggressively up field, facing the left side where the winger is making his run. The aggressive turn into open space, where Delhi's center-midfielders have failed to slide over and apply the necessary pressure, draws the right defensive-back for Delhi forward just a few steps. TCV's striker, with the outside of his left foot, sends a searching, curving ball in between the right-center-back and the right-defensive back of Delhi, perfectly into the space created by the right-back's errant movement forward. The streaking left-winger of TCV runs onto the ball in stride (immaculate timing), bringing it down after one (large) bounce with his chest, directing it at a perfect angle which allows him to turn ever so slightly in towards the goal instead of continuing his run straight towards the end line. He stays onside because the left defensive back, way on the other side of the field and completely out of the action, has stayed deep. The right back, scrambling to recover, is one step behind the winger, and cut off from a play at the ball by the finesse of the winger's first touch with his chest. The winger drives the (still bouncing) ball with the laces of his left foot towards the far post of the goal. The keeper is in good position, and makes a good diving effort, but this daisy-cutter is perfectly placed and paced, and it skips past his fingertips, hitting the inside part of the post where it connects with the netting, and sliding into the back of the net. Goal TCV.

These moments, when they happen on a grander stage, with players of higher quality than the GCM, happen at a quantitatively faster clip. They also might be more complex, involving up to 20 passes instead of just four. But the criterion fundamentally changes when assessing team beauty. It becomes less about sheer athletic ability, and more about a team playing to its capacity, and connecting with each other in a seamless, coherent way. The brilliance of this moment is that four TCV players, connected on a series of four passes, over the span of five or six seconds, in a way that perfectly met the conditions of the defense in front of them, and required each player to play to the best of their ability on each touch. It is the timing of these moments that is hard to capture, and yet it is just this quality of these moments that is at the essence of their beauty. There are multiple variables at play that must cohere perfectly through time and space, for this TCV goal to be scored. If the left-back is one step farther up field the winger is off-sides, or if the through-ball bounces a few inches farther or shorter, the timing of the run is thrown off, and all the following touches become exponentially more challenging to perform. It is poetry in motion, a kind of phenomenon that words struggle to describe and science or physics utterly fails to capture.

The third facet of beauty that football can proffer is community beauty. This kind of beauty isn't transcendent of the observed game in the way that the first two are, but moves beyond the observed game altogether, out into the social context within which football matches take place. This is the beauty of a community pulling together to do something special and meaningful. It's a kind of beauty that binds people together in meaningful, purpose-driven relationships. You might find it in a parent-child coaching relationship, in the sacrifices of a parents driving to practices and games each week, or in the kindred spirit of teammates. It's the

kind of beauty that the money of football club owners in Europe won't ever be able to buy<sup>35</sup>. Here at the GCM it is found in the brotherhood of the clubs, who are brought together by their common Tibetan ethnicity and their home settlements, not by contracts or money; in the cackling laughter of the TWA members as they garrulously sell their cold drinks; in the fact that ultimately, this tournament is an act of reverence and respect, to commemorate HH the Dalai Lama's mother and her passing; in the pride on Thinley Gyaltso's face as he describes the community effort that has made this tournament possible, and the joy they have reaped from what they have sewn.

### ***Football and Society***

This beauty arises from a fascinating, interwoven relationship, between football and society, and the 2016 GCM is a perfect case study in the reciprocating and multi-layered influence between the two. As I have already described, the organization and participation in this tournament is a grassroots, community driven effort. The DTS has joined together to host an exciting event, just as the various Tibetan settlements represented here have democratically selected their coaches and players to represent them in the tournament. It is well documented<sup>vi</sup> that governments and NGO's alike often use sport as an agent of social change, development, and empowerment, and the TNSA and DYSA's efforts here certainly indicate that to be the case<sup>36</sup>. Players, managers, DYSA officials, and DTS officials have all described to me the importance of organized sport in Tibetan society as an alternative to drug and alcohol abuse. April 7<sup>th</sup>, Day 6 of the tournament is world health day and the RTWA members are out in full force, wearing their traditional Tibetan garb and handing out flyers describing the importance of fitness and the health risks of diabetes and hypertension for Tibetans. One section of the flyer reads as follows:

In Tibet, people are involved in moderate to heavy agricultural or nomadic activities but in India they are increasingly adopting sedentary lifestyles because of the shift in the nature of their occupation and availability of modern transport system both at public and individual level. Also the Tibetans in India have maintained their distinct culture and food habit which include among others drinking a salted tea (sic).

In my time here so far at the DTS, just by my simple observations and impressions of people's health, this is all too true. Chewing tobacco use/abuse is rampant (among the men), and I have seen no one except the players in the tournament exercising. I'm sure a public health analysis of the DTS members would yield dire results, and the attribution of these health problems to the environmental and social changes Tibetans have undergone since leaving Tibet would be found to play a significant role, as the TWA flyers suggests. All of which is to say, that the implementation of sport in Tibetan society as a tool, perhaps not needed at one time in Tibet's history, is now a critical necessity to the health of the next generation.

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<sup>35</sup> It might be helpful here to think of individual and community beauty as being inversely related to the size and quantity of money involved in the game. Individual beauty occurs most frequently on the grandest stages, where money can buy the most talented, sacrificial players. Community beauty occurs most frequently on the smaller stages, where the corporate influence and monetization of the game is less apparent/existent and the social context of the game comes into focus as more particular and meaningful.

<sup>36</sup> Despite the TNSA's official status as an Indian NGO, it still very much operates as a state sponsored organization, dedicated to the development of sport in Tibetan society.

This, along with the important social capital that indirectly arises from community-based events like this, all demonstrate the ways in which football is having a positive effect, and will continue to play an important role, in Tibetan society.



Team flags lining the far side of the pitch. Photo by James Karsten.

But these influences work in the other direction as well. Football has been one of the agents of globalization during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and the influence of the global footballing world on the players here at the 2016 GCM is evident, as I articulated above. Many of the teams wear the jerseys of famous European clubs<sup>37</sup> as their own. Just as the global football world has an influence on Tibetans, one of the primary hopes of the TNSA is to assert the Tibetan football identity in this international community, and raise awareness for the Tibetan cause. Tibet is not the first nation to try and use football as a tool for independence. The classic example is Algeria, which in 1958 started to field its own national team as a form of protest against France's colonial presence in the country<sup>vii</sup>.

It is easy to understand football as an agent of important social development, and it can be, but this line of thinking often precipitates the belief that when aggregated out to the wider international stage, football always functions as an agent of peace and community-building between nations. Is this the case? In a fascinating study<sup>viii</sup> done to test that exact hypothesis, it was found that countries which qualified for the world cup were more likely to enter into Militarized Interstate Disputes than those that did not, suggesting that the prospect of a country's national team competing on the world stage heightened nationalist sentiments, and led to

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<sup>37</sup> Barcelona, Arsenal, Borussia Dortmund and AS Roma, to name a few.

increased state violence. To the idealistic football romantic that I am, these were crippling results to read. However while football may antagonize nations, there is anecdotal evidence, acknowledged by the author of this study, that proponent football as an agent of domestic, if not international, peace. The 2002 world cup was co-hosted by Japan and South Korea, an inconceivable combination 50 years prior. In 2005, when the Cote d'Ivoire qualified for the 2006 world cup, a cease-fire was declared in the nations bloody civil war.

So the short answer is football is a microcosm of the human condition. It has a dualistic nature, inclined towards good by fostering cohesiveness, national identity, and an exhilarating emotional community, but as it stabilizes the Us, it inevitably defines the Us relative to a Them, fostering antagonism bordering on hatred towards other teams and nations.

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The marathon of group play is over, and as Jampa, the player manager for Delhi FC tells me, "The real GCM starts now"<sup>ix</sup>. I talk with Jampa in the Rooftop Refreshment Café in Camp no. 3. He is wearing Mercedes-Benz sunglasses, and is sipping a fresh lemon soda. He has his long black hair up in a bun. Jampa explains to me that he lived in France for 14 years working in the film industry, and tells me that the Tibetan Youth Congress in Belgium has organized Tibetan club football tournaments for European Tibetan clubs in the past, which he has competed in with a group of Tibetans from France<sup>38</sup>. He moved to Delhi, and now runs the Himalayan Café, the name of which is stamped across the Delhi FC jerseys. He says that football is his passion, and it's not hard to tell that this is true. He is quite old compared to the other players in the tournament, but he says that he still plays frequently. I get the impression that Jampa is rather well off, and this was confirmed on Day 9 of the GCM, after Delhi had secured their spot in the quarters. During Delhi's morning practice I ran into him and he told me, in full managerial mode, that he is taking his players swimming and to get a good meal, to "relax their minds" before their quarterfinal tilt with Dhondupling.

Day 10's quarterfinals are set to begin at 3:15, but I arrive at 2:55 and Delhi FC vs. Dhondupling Clementown is already underway. Delhi navigated the preliminary group play round effectively, upsetting the hosts in the opener, dispatching Jampaling Pokhara handily, and securing the draw they needed against TCV to finish atop Group A. Dhondupling followed a similar path, also finishing with 7 points in Group B, securing easy victories over DYSA Mundgod B and Phendeling Mainpat, while playing Goa FC to a draw. This put them in second behind Hunsur, who went through their Group B schedule undefeated. Dhondupling Clement Town, from what I have gathered, is the dynasty of Tibetan club football. In the modern era of the tournament Dhondupling has hoisted the Gold Cup five times in twelve competitions, and are perennially expected to compete for the trophy.

The field has not only been freshly chalked, but has been groomed with some sort of roller, and looks about as well manicured a solely dirt pitch can look. Delhi FC is in their neon jerseys with black shorts and socks. Dhondupling is playing in their blue kit. There is an abnormal breeze, which tempers the afternoon heat ever so slightly. Jampa has started the match on the bench, wearing a neon orange penny over his neon yellow jersey. I can spot his man-bun on the Delhi FC bench, all the way from the south end line, where I have hunkered down to

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<sup>38</sup> The international presence of Tibetan football is growing. Last year, a team from Canada and from Europe came to Dharamsala and competed in the GCM, and just recently the TNSA announced the organization of a GCM tournament in Toronto, celebrating HH the Dalai Lama's birthday this summer.

watch the days matches. Because I arrived late, and because the monks are back in full-force (it's Monday), there is standing room only. There is a fresh string of advertisements spanning the length of the field opposite the grandstand, and a large, corrective "22<sup>nd</sup> GCM 2016 Mundgod Media Partner PHAYUL.COM, News and Views on Tibet" banner has appeared as well.

This match has a different feel, especially compared to the series of blowouts that concluded group play on Day 9<sup>39</sup>. The win-or-go-home stakes of the quarterfinals has each team playing with just a little bit more fervor, and the crowd is intent upon every scoring opportunity and every penalty, the monks unleashing their delirious whoops. The first half is a brilliant stretch of football. Delhi's physicality paired with Dhondupling's patient possession game is a perfect matchup of clashing styles. Each side has an opportune moment on well placed through balls, but miss the net and the half ends scoreless.

The second half is action packed. Dhondupling gets a quick goal on a string of crisp passes down the left side, followed by a beautiful volleyed finish, but Delhi responds late in the half with a tap in goal after Dhondupling's keeper is caught off his line, making overtime seem inevitable. Just after Delhi equalizes, play is stopped due to a small dust twister forming near the northwest corner flag, and moving down the entire sideline in front of the grandstand, before dissipating in the neighboring field. No one was hurt and play resumed presently, but the small whirlwind hurled a few plastic chairs from the teams' benches, and kicked up all sorts of trash strewn around the ground. I was shocked by this anomaly, but to the rest of the crowd it was just a footnote to an exciting match<sup>40</sup>.

The two 10-minute overtime periods were listless, and the 2016 GCM, in its first quarterfinal, has its first penalty shootout. Shootouts, in my opinion, are incredibly exciting, and uniquely quintessential to football. The flow of a game is beautiful and fair, and often times very evenly matched, resulting in lots of draws<sup>41</sup>. But football is a contest, and when it comes down to it in tournaments like this, a winner must be decided, somehow, somehow, and penalty kicks are the ultimate arbiter of victory and defeat.

The SOP for a shootout is as follows. The referees, once the 2<sup>nd</sup> overtime period has concluded, immediately shepherd the eleven players from each team on the pitch into a group, in order to ensure that neither manager attempts to pull a fast one and slip one of their bench players, who might be a penalty kick specialist, onto the field. The coach from each side is then obligated to provide an ordered list of their eleven players to the referee. The shootout is best of five shots, meaning only the first five in the ordered list are required to take a shot, but if the tally is still even after five, then the shooting continues, round by round until one pairing consists of a make from one team and a miss from the other.

Here, this is precisely what the Indian team of referees does. After a few DYSA officials hurry on to the field to re-chalk the penalty spot, the shootout commences. Delhi shoots first and in a surprising turn of events, Dhondupling's captain and center-back pulls on goalkeeping

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendix I for a full list of results.

<sup>40</sup> There have been quite a few anomalies at the 2016 GCM thus far. Day 4 featured a gigantic swarm of large bugs that interrupted play, forcing the players and referees to lie flat on the ground until it passed. On Day 5 a lightning storm rolled in that was so powerful it literally blew the top off the south end of the grandstand, lifting the apparently weakly attached shade covering, and bending it back over the grandstand (no one was hurt and a new temporary shade covering was quickly fashioned). It is SOP to at least once a day have stray dog wander onto the field, before being shooed away with small rocks thrown by referees or players.

<sup>41</sup> My youth football (soccer) coach said drawing is like kissing your sister, an apt, if incestuous, analogy.

gloves, and takes the place of their keeper for the shootout<sup>42</sup>. He promptly saves<sup>43</sup> the first Delhi attempt, and, after eight straight conversions by both sides, he steps up and scores the 5th and final Dhondupling penalty, securing a 5-4 victory for his side, and a spot in the semifinals.

The second quarterfinal of the day features Rabgyeling Hunsur against Jampaling Pokhara. I would be remiss without disclosing the fact that I have become a full-fledged Hunsur supporter during the course of my research at the 2016 GCM. Lakpa and his teammates have befriended me, provided me with important information and insights into the tournament, and have proved more than competent on the pitch. They are one of the younger teams in the tournament, and play with a combination of class and swagger that is exciting and attractive to witness. In their group stage victory against Goa FC, they demonstrated real fortitude, holding on for a tough 2-1 victory. Their manager, Tenzin Norgyal, also happens to be the first person from any of the teams I talked with at the GCM.

Norgyal served in the Tibetan Army, as a bodyguard for HH the Dalai Lama. Now in retirement, the Hunsur Settlement voted him as their appointed sports authority, which includes managing their settlement's football club. This is his first year at the GCM as a manager, and is "crazy" for his team to compete this week. In our conversation the day before the GCM began, he effused a love for the game that is not uncommon in the football world, but nevertheless was warm and exciting. Norgyal repeatedly emphasized that this tournament is not political. Any international Tibetan football team would be part of opposing China "honestly", as he described it, but this tournament, the GCM, is solely about honoring HH the Dalai Lama's mother. That's it. There are no politics involved in this tournament<sup>44</sup>.

This is one of the key insights, I think, into the world of Tibetan football; that it is conceived of, by community members like Norgyal, as a two-level game, so to speak. While domestically, the pinnacle of Tibetan football is an apolitical memorial tournament, one of its important functions is it gives TNSA officials the opportunity to evaluate and select Tibetan players for Tibet's men's international football team, a very political prospect indeed.

### ***The Politics of International Football***

Since the 2001 match with Greenland, Tibet has played in a series of international matches. Some have been in the context of competitions organized by non-FIFA international football organizations, while many have been exhibitions with clubs, to help raise awareness for the Tibetan cause<sup>45</sup>. Tibet's status as a stateless population puts any international football team it fields in murky waters when it comes to international recognition, but its international side, as

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<sup>42</sup> This particular player has celebrity status amongst the fans here. His nickname is Lambu, a variation on the Hindi word *lamba*, which means tall.

<sup>43</sup> The art of saving a penalty kick is a fascinating blend of skill, intuition, and dumb-luck. There are a myriad of approaches, but for the services of staying moderately topical, I will only describe Lambu's apparent strategy. He opts to pick a third of the net (right, middle, or left) and guess that that is where the ball will go. Right before the ball is struck, he will shuffle to either side, or stay firmly put in the middle. What is unique about this approach is that Lambu doesn't leave his feet. Many goalkeepers will dive to either side, fully committing to their guessed location, but Lambu simply slides laterally along the goal-line, giving him the chance to back track to middle if the ball is reachable, and this is precisely what happens on his initial save. He guesses to his right the shooter's left, and the ball is struck down the middle, slightly (shooter's) left of center. Lambu, as his momentum is carrying him to his right, is able to reach his hands back behind him and above his head, firmly deflecting the ball up and away.

<sup>44</sup> This is a charming and honorable charge, but it seems that the very fact the tournament exists, regardless of its origins, makes it a political phenomenon.

<sup>45</sup> See Appendix V for a complete list of Tibet's international team's fixtures and results.

they often are, is nevertheless inevitably an extension of the nation itself. Despite Norgyal's insistence, and my focus on the GCM, the fact that it serves as a showcase of Tibetan football players, and aids in the formation of a Tibetan national team, occasions an expatiation of the international football's politics, along with questions of sovereignty and justice for Tibet.

FIFA is the global hegemon of international football. It was created in 1904, held the first world cup in 1930, which has now become the most popular sporting event on the globe. With 209 members, it has 16 more than the United Nations<sup>46</sup>, but the member-lists of these two international institutions are remarkably similar, given their scope. Membership in intergovernmental organizations like FIFA and the UN is determined by what in international law is known as the constitutive theory of sovereignty. The constitutive theory says that a nation exists or has sovereignty if it is recognized by other nations. This presents a fascinating paradox. Sovereignty relies upon mutual international relationships and acts of recognition, not on some predetermined criteria. Membership in the UN ultimately requires the approval of the member nation assembly. The UN itself does not approve membership; the international community the UN facilitates ultimately decides it. Similarly, section 10.1 of FIFA's statutes state that

Any Association which is responsible for organising and supervising football in its country may become a Member of FIFA. In this context, the expression "country" shall refer to an independent state recognised by the international community<sup>47</sup>...only one Association shall be recognised in each country.

FIFA's Congress, its equivalent to the UN's General Assembly, is tasked with voting on the admission of new members, and determining whether they are sufficiently 'recognized' by the international community, thus using the constitutive theory's approach to determine membership<sup>48</sup>.

But we still have an unsolved paradox. How can sovereignty come from other nations, who, by the same theoretical approach, also require the approval of still other nations, or, in theory, from those very same entities that are hoping to attain sovereignty? Does the mere aggregation of a collection of nations into a group, dubbed the 'international community', grant them such authority? From whence does this power come? Would not serious problems of power and hegemony come into focus if we were to apply a critical lens to this theory, and the person or persons who came up with it? In order for this to work, there must be some generally agreed upon criteria that a nation or nations refer to in their evaluation of a nation's status before deeming it 'recognized' in the international community, because a legalistic constitutive approach would allow countries to determine the aforementioned criteria for themselves indiscriminately.

Another philosophical approach to sovereignty is declarative theory. Declarative theory stipulates that nationhood can exist independent of recognition from other nations, if the country

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<sup>46</sup> There are 23 member nations in FIFA that are not in the UN, while there are 6 nations that are members in the UN, but not of FIFA (One of these 6, Monaco, is also a ConIFA member. See Below.).

<sup>47</sup> As I mentioned in footnote 46, there are 23 member nations in FIFA that are not recognized by the UN. This is a combination of FIFA refusing to retroactively disband members that never gained UN recognition or lost it, the unique situation of the UK (which is represented as one entity in the UN, but 5(Scotland, England, Wales, Ireland, Northern Ireland) different countries in FIFA, and arbitrary approval on their behalf that is diametric to this established criteria, calling into question the rigidity and traditional definition of 'independent', as stipulated in section 10.1.

<sup>48</sup> In FIFA's congress, the one country one vote principle applies.

in question meets certain pre-established criteria. The traditional criteria, outlined in Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention of 1933, are that a nation has 1) a permanent population, 2) a defined territory, 3) a government, and 4) the capacity to enter into relations with other states. This theoretical approach can augment the constitutive approach<sup>49</sup>, giving countries expedient criteria by which they can determine whether or not they should recognize a nation, or it can stand on its own, viewing “The recognition of a state as merely signifying that the state which recognizes it accepts the personality of the other with all the rights and duties determined by international law”<sup>x</sup> and that “the recognition of a state may be express or tacit. The latter results from any act which implies the intention of recognizing the new state.”<sup>xi</sup> So the philosophical difference in these two approaches comes down to whether or not international recognition should carry weight in the determination of sovereignty<sup>50</sup>.

In my view, Tibet, as it stands now, meets three of these four criteria. It’s population, while spread across several different countries around the world today, has, at the diligent leadership of HH the Dalai Lama and many, many others, maintained an incredible sense of cultural identity, and rather than fully assimilating into the cultures of the places in which they live, continue to live in small Tibetan communities and settlements. The CTA routinely keeps tabs on the exile population of Tibetans, and there are still Tibetans who reside in geographical Tibet, so understanding Tibet as having a permanent population is certainly within reason. Tibet certainly has a full-fledged, operational government in the CTA that has a constitution, holds frequent elections, and handles itself in a robustly democratic way. As for its ability to enter into relations with other states, HH the Dalai Lama has perhaps been the most popular, most energetic head of state the world has seen in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, travelling all around the world raising money and awareness for the Tibetan cause. It’s a lack of defined territory that outs Tibet from filling out a perfect score on the declarative theory’s criteria.

Questions of recognition aside, FIFA’s statute still stipulates that the country to be recognized must be ‘independent’<sup>51</sup>. This assessment of the Tibetan situation using the declarative theory raises another important question here; what happens when a country does not meet the territorial standard, but this failure is the result of another country’s flagrant violation of one of international law’s most cherished principles, that of self-determination?

The principle of self-determination can be traced all the way back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, a treaty which ended the 30-Years War, and is considered to be the genesis of the sovereign nation-state, as we know it today. Self-determination essentially means that a government has a fundamental right to govern its territory and affairs as it sees fit, without the interference of other countries. Now, I should not be understood as saying that the principle of self-determination was established in 1648, and promptly followed by every country happily ever after. That would be an ignorant, and inaccurate claim. Self-determination here, should instead be thought of as an ideal to be strived for in the global community, an ideal whose nascent moment was in 1648, continues today as a moral imperative, and can be appealed to in situations like that of Tibet.

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<sup>49</sup> This happens to be my own personal perspective here.

<sup>50</sup> Several questions arise at this point, that, perhaps in another paper someday, I will address. Does this distinction even matter? Isn’t international recognition ultimately what any international sovereignty-pursuing state wants, and thus, isn’t any declaration of international sovereignty nominal and useless if a nation is not interacted with by its peers? Shouldn’t we just prescribe to realism and accept the fact that none of this actually matters and it’s all just a power grab, regardless of what the American countries present in Uruguay said almost 100 years ago?

Tibet's right to self-determination is well documented by the Tibet Justice Center, an NGO dedicated to analyzing and assessing the Tibetan situation from a legal perspective, and advocating on its behalf in the global community. Their collection and assessment of several important historical documents, ranging from the Sino-Tibetan treaty of 821/823 AD, and an affirmation of Tibet's independence by the thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1913, to a treaty between the Mongolian and Tibetan governments in the same year, all point to Tibet's right to self-determination<sup>xii</sup>, and the necessary reparations from China that follow.

Reparations are one answer, and, by following the middle-way and the principle of non-violence, HH the Dalai Lama and many Tibetans desire them in the form of autonomy over geographical Tibet. But in the meantime, in the context of international football, is Tibet's current status as only meeting three of the four declarative theory's criteria something to be held against them in the pursuit for international recognition from FIFA? Is this even something to be desired by Tibet and the TNSA? No (but it likely will anyway), and I'm not sure, nor do I think, I am one to say.

By the logic I have just articulated above regarding Tibet's status as a nation, it seems to me that their lack of a current defined territory should in no way inhibit them from being considered sovereign, and the fact that they have a very legitimate claim to one should do nothing but enable this consideration. The reality that their independence was violated by Chinese occupation, as well as the precedent However the constitutive nature of FIFA's procedures would necessitate Tibet attaining the necessary resources to apply for membership, for one member of the Congress to bring their application to a vote, and then 105 FIFA members voting for Tibet as a nation 'recognised by the international community', a daunting task to say the least<sup>52</sup>. The institutional hurdles, and the effective dissemination of information would be gargantuan. Add into this whole conversation that, by the letter of the law, the TNSA, were it to be the association recognized by FIFA, is technically a registered NGO under the government of India, making these questions of sovereignty even more dizzying. This, combined with the glaring lack of a clearly defined territory, makes Tibet's recognition from the international football community an unlikelihood, but that doesn't mean the case for it isn't sound or just.

As for the second question, that is one that should really be answered by Tibetans themselves. Many of the folks I have talked with here at the GCM are not familiar or well versed with the particularities of international football and Tibet's situation regarding it. What many have said, time and time again, is that Tibet fielding an international team is good for raising awareness of Tibet's cause, and peacefully protesting the Chinese occupation in an act of national identity. I can imagine that, if Tibet's membership in FIFA was a possibility, and it could be a way of enabling and continuing that activism, that Tibetans would fervently support it, far and wide.

Another avenue of possible international recognition, certainly more feasible, is the creation of a Tibetan National Olympic Committee. This would require tilting sports development in Tibetan society towards the various Olympic competitions, of which football is one, along with the hypothetical TNOC's full compliance with the International Olympic Committee's Olympic Charter. Unlike FIFA and the UN's constitutive procedures, the requirements for the formation of an NOC are less stringent, requiring only the approval and recognition of the IOC. Section 3.2 of the Olympic Charter states, "All NOCs and associations of NOCs shall have, where possible, the status of legal persons. They must comply with the

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<sup>52</sup> Not to mention the hell-raising, and veritable shit-storm that China would incur at the annual FIFA Congress were Tibet's application for membership ever to make it that far.

Olympic Charter. Their statutes are subject to the approval of the IOC.” This criteria, marked most notably by the ‘where possible’ exception, makes the prospect of a TNOC seem a reachable goal.

A question that serves as a corollary to these conclusions, is, were Tibet to regain full autonomy of Tibet proper, would the opportunity for Tibet to become a member of FIFA be possible? Article 10.6 of the FIFA statutes states that “An Association in a region which has not yet gained independence may, with the authorization of the Association in the country on which it is dependent, also apply for admission to FIFA.” This is a rather confusing stipulation. It seems to imply that a region, in the process of attempting to gain independence from a dependent/oppressing nation, can kindly ask them for authorization to apply for independent admission to FIFA. I can’t see any scenario where this plays out in the asking party’s favor.

This clause would not necessarily apply to an autonomous Tibet, but there are certain members of FIFA that are territories of other countries, and yet have still been recognized. By my count, there are 19 members of FIFA, which are considered territories, unincorporated unorganized territories, constituent countries, associated states, special administrative regions, or overseas collectivities, a reality that is entirely antithetical to their requirement that members be ‘independent’ and ‘internationally recognised’. Two of these nineteen are under the control of China, Hong Kong and Macau, so it is not entirely farcical to think that should Tibet ever regain autonomy, that it could eventually become a FIFA member as well<sup>53</sup>.

### ***ConIFA***

An international football organization (which you have probably never heard of), that Tibet *is* a member of, is ConIFA (Confederation for Independent Football Associations). Padania, Ellan Vannin, Felvidek, Abkhazia, Szekely Land, and Franconia are the names of just a few of Tibet’s obscure fellow ConIFA members, thirty-three in total. ConIFA, established in 2013 by a man named Per Anders Blind from Sápmi (The northern reaches of Scandinavia), is the successor of international football outside the realm of FIFA, following the disintegration of the NFB in 2013.

The NFB (New Federation Board) was first created in 2003, in order to support the proliferation of international football for nations not recognized by FIFA. However prior to the NFB hosting international events, in 2006 the FIFI world cup took place Hamburg, Germany, coinciding with the location and time of the FIFA World Cup that year. An online gambling company<sup>xiii</sup>, seeking potential profits in a fascinating alternative market, organized the tournament. Later that year, the NFB attempted to organize its first VIVA (acronym unknown) World Cup in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. After a falling out with the local government, the event was moved to Hyères, France, where just three teams competed<sup>54</sup>. The TRNC, in an act of subversion to the efforts of the NFB, acquired funding and hosted their own alternative World Cup, the ELF Cup (Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity) in Northern Cyprus, an

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<sup>53</sup> FIFA also administrates the six primary Continental Confederations, which regionally organize international football. There is precedent for countries to obtain membership in these more localized organizations, as an end in itself or as a stepping-stone to eventual FIFA membership. Currently the island states of Saint-Martin, Sint Maarten, Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Bonaire are all members of CONCACAF, the regional body of North/Central America and the Caribbean, but are not full-fledged FIFA members.

<sup>54</sup> Sápmi, Padania, and Monaco.

event Tibet competed in, likely because of the funding made available by the TRNC<sup>55</sup>. This event also coincided with the timing of the VIVA World Cup in France. This decision of the TRNC, at odds with the fledgling NFB, was, as one journalist described, an effort “to use the tournament to bolster it’s own national identity<sup>xiv</sup>.” NFB would recover from its spat with the TRNC. And host a series of successful VIVA tournaments from 2008-2012<sup>56</sup> in which the TRNC would compete, before ConIFA took the stage as the primary player in non-FIFA international football. Tibet did not compete in any of these events.

ConIFA’s motto is “Freedom to Play Football”, and its website states the goal of the Sweden based non-profit is “to build bridges between people, nations, minorities and isolated regions all over the world through friendship, culture and the joy of playing football. ConIFA works for the development of affiliated members and is committed to fair play and the eradication of racism.” In 2014 ConIFA hosted its first World Cup, in its founder’s home region of Sápmi, in Ostersund, Sweden. The 2016 World Cup is set to take place from May 28<sup>th</sup> - June 5<sup>th</sup> in Abkhazia, an ‘autonomous republic’ in northwest Georgia<sup>xv</sup>. Twelve ConIFA members will compete<sup>57</sup>. ConIFA’s existence is helpful in the support of all non-FIFA nations in facilitating international football, but as is often the case with drastic disparities like that between FIFA and ConIFA, the largest hurdles for ConIFA’s increased international presence and the development of football in its member’s nations, is in the pocketbook. FIFA members are eligible to apply for large quantities of money each year through FIFA’s Financial Assistance Program; average assistance is 250,000 USD per nation, a seemingly small amount of money, but vast compared to ConIFA’s financial capabilities, which preclude them from even supporting member nations in travelling to their biennial World Cup.

The emergence of the NFB and now ConIFA is a fascinating turn of events for international football. Nations like Tibet now have an international governing football body that is not FIFA, which is organizing and recognizing matches, and pushing back ever so slightly on FIFA’s long-time singularity.

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Tenzin Norgyal and his Hunsur side breezed through group play, winning all three of their matches, and, in my already biased opinion, are in great position to make a run to the final but unfortunately, Jampaling Pokhara proved to be tougher than expected. The squad from western Nepal, who needed to defeat the hosts in their final group-play match just to secure a spot in the quarters, capitalizes on a tough own-goal from Hunsur capping off what had been a largely nondescript first half. After the break, Hunsur comes out rejuvenated, and score a beautiful headed goal off a corner kick, But Pokhara remains composed, and their striker puts together a hat trick over the next 30 minutes, sending his side through, and Hunsur home, with a 4-1 result in favor of the team from Nepal. And then, just as dusk is descending on Day 10 of the GCM, there were six.

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<sup>55</sup> The note regarding funding is unverified. I know the TRNC did in fact have sponsorship to help support nations coming to their tournament, but it is still conjecture that this is one of the reasons Tibet was able to compete.

<sup>56</sup> 2008 (Sápmi, Sweden), 2009 (Padania, Italy), 2010 (Gozo, Maltese Island), 2012 (Kurdistan)

<sup>57</sup> In my conversation with Kelsang, I inquired as to whether or not the TNSA had had any aspirations to compete in the tournament. He told me they had hoped to compete, but based on the ConIFA rankings, Tibet, as the third ranked Asian team, was ineligible due to only two Asian teams being eligible for the competition. ConIFA’s ranking system includes not just its members but also all (by their account) 103 national teams outside of FIFA. The top 5 ConIFA members are awarded a certificate at the annual general meeting of members.

## *Tibetan Women's Football*

A question that might have occurred to you at some point in your reading thus far; is there a women's equivalent in Tibetan society to the 2016 GCM? This project is largely focused on the 2016 GCM, so it follows that a narrative account of this tournament is the predominant strand of my writing, but I am duty bound to expound upon the notable fact that there is not, in fact, a women's equivalent to this annual tournament.

Football has historically been a men's game. The first men's world cup was in 1930, the first women's in 1991. FIFA has 209 member nations<sup>58</sup>, but only 181 of them field women's teams, and only 136 are currently active<sup>59</sup>. The inequality of female access to opportunities and resources regarding football, and their treatment by existing football institutions both domestic and international persists today, marked most recently by the wage-discrimination complaint filed by the 2015 World Cup winning American women's team against the United States Soccer Federation<sup>xvi</sup>. Tibet is not remiss from this history, or from these problems today. The Mission Marmots were a group of men who brought the game to Tibet, and organized matches with other men, in true Western patriarchal form. It wasn't until 2011 that an American woman, Cassie Childers, brought about the institutional framework for supporting Tibetan women's football programs.

Childers first travelled to Dharamsala at 23 to study Buddhist meditation, but quickly became interested in the political situation of Tibet, and started to volunteer. In 2010 she attended an exhibition held by the TNSA on the subject of Tibetan football, and noticed the lack of women's football discussed, as well as in attendance, at the event. This led her to the conviction that the contribution she could make to the Tibetan cause was in the form of female advocacy through football. She submitted a proposal to the TNSA, outlining what she describes in an email to me as a "women's empowerment program using football as the tool." The proposal was approved, and in 2011 Childers moved permanently to Dharamsala to continue her work.

Fast-forward to spring, 2015. After a group of Tibetan women, nicknamed the Snow Lionesses, competed in three exhibition matches with female clubs in Delhi, Childers' program defected from the TNSA, and established a new headquarters for the new NGO, Tibetan Women's Soccer, in the Dhondupling Settlement of Clement Town, Utrakhand, India. Soon thereafter, TWS was presented with the opportunity to send a delegation of female footballers to Germany, for an interesting event organized by the NGO Discover Football, called the Discover Football International Women's Football Cultural Festival, in Berlin, Germany. Among other things, the festival organized a small tournament, where the teams were made up of the intermixed delegations. Not only did this mark the first time that Tibetan women represented Tibet internationally at a sporting event, but the tournament saw Tibetan and Chinese women compete with and against each other, the ultimate moment of sports diplomacy. As I write, another group of Tibetan women football players are training in the Dhondupling Settlement in Utrakhand, in preparation for a series of friendlies to be played in Goa this month.

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<sup>58</sup> And what this really means is 209 member football associations that are affiliated with a country, and these football associations are under no explicit obligation from FIFA to support women's football in addition to men's, although FIFA's new president has proposed an impressive plan to develop women's football across the globe.

<sup>59</sup> The 45 teams that are inactive are considered so if they have failed to play 5 matches against other FIFA member nations, or if they have not competed in an international match in over 18 months.



Tibetan Women's Soccer delegation in Berlin, Germany. Photo from TWS's Facebook page.

These are the facts regarding Tibetan women's football which I have gleaned from two diametrically opposed accounts, namely that of Kelsang Dhondup the head of the TNSA, and Childers, the head of TWS. Childers described the TNSA in her email to me as "corrupt, sexist and disorganized", along with accusations of the organization funneling money fundraised for the women's side to the men's, and attempting to "completely shut down" the women's program. Dhondup, who throughout the GCM has been hesitant to interact with me, an American, he says because of his experience with Childers, tells a story of Childers hijacking the TNSA's area of work, ostracizing TCV secondary school women's coaches, and putting up more roadblocks to the development of football in Tibetan society than aiding it.

These competing narratives are challenging for me to unpack, but using some of the language of critical theory, I'm going to give it my best shot.

Tibetans are a marginalized group. They are refugees, displaced from their homeland, and in many ways rely on the charity and support of other people, institutions, and countries to support their existence, all of which is very good, and very important. Any marginalized group's situation, especially Tibetans who have captured the hearts of many in the West, can bring about the occurrence of the White Savior Complex, which is the phenomenon that happens when a white person becomes convinced that it is only by their good works that a marginalized group (typically of color) can overcome their challenges, and instantly their charity becomes less about

the importance of the cause, and more about themselves. If Dhondup and his assistant Nawang had the White Savior Complex in their vocabulary, I would not have been surprised if they had used it, as this was more or less the narrative they presented to me, citing one specific instance when Cassie felt entitled to explain the history of Tibet and its story of exile to a crowd at a women's exhibition match, instead of allowing a Tibetan do so.

However Childers herself is indeed is a woman, and she has likely experienced problems if gender inequality and patriarchy in American society as well, where we certainly have our fair share of masculinity problems. If domestic violence and gender oppression exist in Tibetan society, something that Childers described in her experience in Dharamsala as "rampant", then it certainly should be addressed both from within and without the community. Given their femininity, Childers and the women she works with have a significant amount in common, and her choosing to work on their behalf is an important and necessary endeavor. Implicit in this discussion is the important moral question of whether or not one culture has the right, or even any substantial grounds, to judge the customs and actions of another. I happen to be of the personal persuasion that people and cultures can in fact do this, which is why I describe Childers' work as an 'important endeavor'. I will however state that there is a very, very, fine line between the introduction of ideas like 'gender equality' and 'female empowerment' to another, perhaps more conservative society, and cultural imperialism or the White Savior Complex.

In any social justice movement, thinking critically about the source of empowerment is always important. In an ideal world, each marginalized group would find their source of empowerment from within their group, but the very fact that a group is marginalized by some more powerful group or institution is a reminder that we don't live in an ideal world, and often times marginalized groups have to sleep with devil, so to speak, in order to achieve their goals. African Americans using Standard Written English (a form of speaking and writing largely established and determined by white people) instead of Ebonics in order to command the attention of their white oppressors is one example. But in other cases, this doesn't present itself necessarily as a moral quandary. A man advocating for women's reproductive rights or standing against sexual violence is a wonderful and important thing because in the case of both these issues, it is the minds and tendencies of men that desperately need to be changed! It's killing two birds with one stone and it is downright foolish, in my view, for someone to critique such a masculine advocate on the grounds of 'he is part of the problem' or 'this is a women's only movement'. It would be fallacious, and detrimental, and in no way compromising of the movements ideals.

However sometimes it can be good for a marginalized group to defect from the constraining institutions, in favor of more autonomy and freedom, but this approach requires a reevaluation of the marginalized groups agenda. Often times the institution that can be easily left is precisely the institution that needs to be changed, that needs members of the marginalized group present, raising important subjects for debate and pushing for tangible change and progress. Often times, ultimately, it is the existing institution that the marginalized group wants and needs changed. Childers says in her email to me that "we cannot grow within that environment" and that it is in need of "reform", and my knee-jerk reaction to this is *she* is the person best-poised to change that environment and enact the reform within the TNSA she wishes to see, and that her leaving will only *prolong* any existing problems. The other side of the coin here is that Tibetan Women's Football is still in its infancy, and in its early stages, defection might have been the correct decision, if the alternative was the eventual dissolution of TWS.

In her email to me Childers states that one of her goals for TWS is to gain FIFA and IOC recognition. Article 10.1 of FIFA's Statutes states that "only one association shall be recognized from each country", which means that were Tibet ever to gain recognition from FIFA, the football association that attains it would have to preside over both Tibet's women's and men's teams<sup>60</sup>. It would be downright foolish, in this albeit unlikely scenario, for either the TNSA or TWS to independently lobby for the membership of only the men's or women's teams. It would be the ultimate self-destructing act. ConIFA lists on their website the organization and development of women's football in member nations, and the eventual holding of a ConIFA women's world cup, as part of its future goals. As TNSA is the listed member from Tibet, and the membership in ConIFA of two independent organizations from Tibet representing men's and women's football teams would be inexpedient and rather silly<sup>61</sup>, it seems necessary here as well that were Tibet ever to send an international women's side to compete in a future ConIFA world cup, some increased degree of unity and coherence domestically would be necessary.

Lob into the all of the complexities I have just outlined the fact that your author is a white male from America, and a hint of irony begins to accompany this discussion, but there are ultimately a few simple conclusions that I have drawn from these antithetical perspectives on the same series of events, and my extrapolations on them. Female empowerment through football, and the ideals being striven for by TWS are important, and should be continued. If Tibetan society, broadly speaking, is going to embrace the proliferation of the women's game, there are going to have to be more men who simultaneously advocate for female access to football, and allow Tibetan women to speak and organize for themselves. Eventually, the TNSA and TWS will have to remerge, in order to cohere the Tibetan voice in the international football community, but do so in a way that concurrently aids each organizations hopes and goals as they stand now.

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It's Day 13, the day of the final, and GCM officials and fans<sup>62</sup> could not have asked for a better matchup. The Dynasty from Dhondupling, the Perennial Powerhouse, dispatched Jampaling Pokhara 3-0 in the semifinals, TDL Bylakuppe handled Gulladhalla 2-0 in the quarters, and beat Phuntsokling Odisha, 2-1 in double-overtime in the semifinals yesterday<sup>63</sup> to

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<sup>60</sup> Again this stipulation is likely perpetuating the inequality of female access to football in the world, as any organization like TWS which defects from the predominant football association in a country cannot independently become recognized by FIFA, unless it were to take on institutional control of the men's team as well. As messy and non-idealistic as it can be, activism always requires the assessment and effective navigation of the extant institutions and their procedures.

<sup>61</sup> Although given ConIFA's incredibly alternative, seemingly fly-by-the-seat-of-their-pants organizational style, this might not be entirely out of the question.

<sup>62</sup> And those monetizing TV producers were the GCM a high-profile televisual enterprise like virtually all other club championships in the world. Alas there is only the live-feed, free of advertising and commercialism, and watched only by the Bylakuppe and Dhondupling fan-bases, and any other football-crazed Tibetans with a computer.

<sup>63</sup> This was, in my view, easily the match of the tournament, and it's a shame that it need be relegated to a mere footnote in this project. TDL had dismantled Phuntsokling in their opening group play match, 3-0, but Phuntsokling absolutely trounced Kullu Manali and DYSA Mundgod B by a combined total of 18 goals to 0. After a fortuitous shootout victory in the quarters over Ghangjong Shillong, Phuntsokling netted an early goal on a penalty kick to take a 1-0 advantage over the clearly superior TDL Bylakuppe side in the semifinal. TDL dominated play throughout the match, but after taking the lead, Phuntsokling dropped anywhere between 9 to 11 players behind the ball, clogging the box and frustrating TDL's efforts. This is a common tactic deployed by teams less skilled than their opponents.

set the stage for a matchup between what in my opinion are the two best and most professional teams here at the 2016 GCM. Both have played a steady possession game and defended well<sup>64</sup> throughout the tournament. Their celebrations are not grandiose and each side carries themselves in a business-like manner, but today will not be a test of their talent and professionalism so much as it will be of their fitness. The final will feature 45-minute halves, and Dhondupling and TDL are playing their 4<sup>th</sup> match in 5 and 6 days, respectively.

The field has been freshly chalked, and the crowds have arrived exceptionally early to get a good seat. Just as the tournament started, it concludes with another community dance; a pleasant surprise for me as it was easily my favorite part of the opening ceremonies nearly two weeks ago. This dance is much longer, and several of the TWA members have to come on the field and pass out water bottles to the dedicated dancers. The dance concludes and, the teams appear for pre-pre-match formalities, which include additional photographs with the seventh Ling Rinpoche, who has returned for the final, Kelsang, and other TNSA and DYSA officials. After warm-ups and the usual routine, match 34 kicks off.

A fresh Nivia ball has been procured for the final, reminding me just how dusty this pitch is considering how clean this new ball is compared to the ones being used previously. The ground is absolutely packed with DTS community members and monks, and they are all treated to an early surprise from TDL. 6 minutes in, TDL's striker breaks through the heart of the Dhondupling backline, running on to a brilliantly timed through ball. Dhondupling defenders appeal for an offside call and stop defending, but no call comes, and the bright new ball is slotted past the keeper into the side netting, giving TDL an early lead. The crowd erupts. Dhondupling is playing without their stalwart center-back and captain due to two successive yellow cards in the quarters and semis, and it showed on their early concession, and subsequent play throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> half. Dhondupling, the mighty Dhondupling, are on their heels, not only because of the loss of their suspended captain, but in large part due to a 1<sup>st</sup> class effort from TDL. They are possessing well, but their defensive pressure is what stands out. Dhondupling's center-midfielders, who have dominated their opponents in the middle of the field all tournament, are being chased incessantly by their counterparts from TDL.

The second half<sup>65</sup> begins and TDL continues their onslaught, but Dhondupling plays tough, and does not concede another goal. Slowly, the tides begin to turn, and Dhondupling begins to create a few chances. Then, in the 77<sup>th</sup> minute (remember, 90 minute match), Dhondupling's striker scores a goal similar to the one he netted against Delhi in the quarters,

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It's often known as a counter-attacking style of play, where the less talented team defends well by virtue of their organization and sheer numbers, and waits for opportune moments to foray forward and steal a goal against the run of play. In this case, Phuntsokling got their goal early, and as a result barely even mustered any counter-attacking efforts. They simply defended, and did so well.

But this match had that intuitive, hard-to-describe-or-explain-certainty, that TDL was going to equalize, and indeed they did. TDL broke through late in the second half, scoring a brilliant goal off a high floating cross from their right-back at the far post. The end-of-regulation whistle blew, shortly thereafter, sending the match to overtime. In the second extra period, TDL netted the game-winner, a scrum goal in front of the net, well-deserved for the eventual victors. It was an inspired effort by Phuntsokling, who almost held on and would have likely had the edge in a shootout, but it was even more resilient effort by TDL Bylakuppe, who stayed patient and composed despite the irksome yet effective tactics of Phuntsokling.

<sup>64</sup> Through 5 matches thus far, Dhondupling and TDL have only conceded 2 and 3 goals, respectively.

<sup>65</sup> Halftime featured the drawing of the 50/50 lottery organized by the DYSA to help fund the construction of the grandstand. Some part of me, perhaps the miserly part that has frugally budgeted for this project, thinks that I am going to win one of the prizes. I don't, but some young monk wins first place (50,000 IC), and elatedly receives his prize from the DYSA officials.

shedding two defenders and volleying a bouncing through ball to the far post, an absolute firecracker of a strike to bring Dhondupling level. The crowd goes nuts. It's a fitting equalizer, a testament to the toughness and experience of Dhondupling, despite being having been outplayed for most of the match.

From here, it seemed only a matter of time before the final would need to be decided by penalties. The remainder of regular time, and both overtime periods are nondescript<sup>66</sup>. The head referee blows his whistle, signaling the conclusion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> overtime period, and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> shootout of the tournament. The 2016 GCM champion will be decided from the penalty spot.



The final shootout. Photo by James Karsten.

It's easily the most unique shootout I have ever witnessed or been a part of. Because this is such an intimate, community-based event, and because this shootout is its climax, fans (mostly monks) after a brief moment of hesitation, all scramble to the very edge of the field, including right next to the goalposts of the goal being used for the shootout. Some monks even move onto the pitch, just outside the 18-yard box. This would ordinarily be a referees nightmare, and it's the reason why high-profile football matches elsewhere in the world have a bevy of security officers who are not there to watch the match but rather the fans, and to ensure they come no where close to the pitch. But all the team of Indian referees does is make sure no one enters the 18-yard box, and everyone crowds closer to the pitch<sup>67</sup>.

Unable to put Lambu in goal as they did in the quarters due to his suspension, Dhondupling sticks with their regular keeper. TDL shoots first, and nets the opening penalty. Dhondupling converts their first shot in return, and its 1-1, but in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> rounds TDL converts, and their keeper makes two spectacular saves, guessing correctly and deflecting each shot away, giving his teams 4<sup>th</sup> penalty taker the opportunity to win the shootout, which he promptly does, burying a right footed shot into the right side netting. TDL wins, 1-1(4-1). The crowd roars, TDL dog piles at the penalty spot, a group of school girls wearing the TDL alternate jerseys runs onto the field to join the celebration, along with a few scattered monks who seem to just be looking for something conniving to do, but above the din, the head referees whistle can be

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<sup>66</sup> And by nondescript, I really mean there simply were no goals scored. Both sides were playing their hearts out, but it was very equally matched, and as a result there were not many goal-scoring opportunities.

<sup>67</sup> I had a hunch the final would go to penalties, so I made sure to get a seat right behind the goal the referees had used for the previous two shootouts, and as a result I too am right in the middle of the chaos as the throng of people pushed forward to sit right on the endline.

heard, three prolonged (the last, slightly longer than the first two) bursts signifying that the match, and the tournament, are over.

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The 2016 GCM is over, but for Kelsang and the TNSA and Cassie and TWS, the work of expanding football in Tibetan society, fielding a regular international side, and gaining international recognition for their team and the plight of Tibet, is not. Whether Tibet, and the many other provincial and ethnic groups affirmed and recognized by ConIFA will ever gain membership in the wider international football community is at best unclear, and at worst unlikely. The role Tibetan international football can play in the nonviolent philosophy of the middle way approach seems significant, but here too, the future of Tibetans regaining autonomy of their homeland seems unclear, if not bleak.

There is a scene, in the Cup, when the monks are watching the World Cup final and the power goes out. Realizing it is the whole town, they know it will soon return. One monk, using a flashlight to make shadows on the wall, begins to tell a story about a rabbit before the power abruptly comes back on and they then continue to watch the match, the story forgotten. In the movie's final scene, Nyima, the young monk who has become fast friends with Orgyen, and is happily back in possession of his mother's watch, asks the elder monk how the story ends, and the final dialogue of the movie is as follows:

“How does the story end?”

“Which story?”

“The one about the rabbit.”

“Guess.”

“I don't know, just tell me.”

“Who cares about the end??

“What?”

“All this fuss about endings. All this fuss...”

The end of the Tibetan story is unknown, but if you pause for a moment and look closely, you will find a community that gathers together each year, bonded by a common identity and a love of this beautiful game, cheering for their team and much, much, more.

## Appendices

### Appendix I – 2016 GCM Teams, Fixtures, and Results

#### Teams

<i>Club</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>State/Country</i>
Dhargyaling Sports Club	Tezu	Arunachal
Dhondupling FC	Clementown	Uttrakhand
Ghangjong Shillong	Shillong	Magalaya
Dhondenling Kallegal	Kallegal	Karnataka
Goa FC	Goa	Goa
TDL Bylakuppe	Bylakuppe	Karnataka
DYSA Mundgod (A)	Mundgod	Karnataka
DYSA Mundgod (B)	Mundgod	Karnataka
TCV United	Bangalore	Karnataka
Choelsum United	Kathmandu	Nepal
Phendeling Mainpat	Mainpat	Chhitisgarh
Gulladhalla Bylakuppe	Bylakuppe	Karnataka
Rabgyeling Hunsur	Hunsur	Karnataka
Phuntsokling Odisha	Odisha	Odisha
Tsam Chennai	Chennai	Tamil Nadu
Dickeyling RTYC*	Dickeyling	Uttrakhand
Jampaling	Pokhara	Nepal
Shimla*	Shimla	Himachal
Kullu Manali	Manali	Himachal
Delhi FC	Delhi	Delhi

\* Dhondupling FC and Dickeyling RTYC participated in a playoff, and Kullu Manali and Shimla participated in a playoff. Shimla and Dickeyling were eliminated prior to the official 2016 GCM tournament.

#### Fixtures and Results

<i>Team #1</i>	<i>Team #2</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Group/Stage</i>	<i>Match #</i>	<i>Date</i>
DYSA Mundgod A	Delhi FC	0-1	A	1	2-Apr
Choelsum Kathmandu	Dhargyaling Tezu	1-1	C	2	2-Apr
Phendeling Mainpat	Goa FC	0-5	B	3	3-Apr
Dhondenling Kallegal	Tsam Chennai	6-0	D	4	3-Apr
TCV United	Jampaling Pokhara	1-3	A	5	3-Apr
Ghangjong Shillong	Gulladhalla Bylakuppe	2-1	C	6	4-Apr
DYSA Mundgod B	Rabgyeling Hunsur	0-4	B	7	4-Apr
Phuntsokling Odisha	TDL Bylakuppe	0-3	D	8	4-Apr
DYSA Mundgod A	TCV United	3-0	A	9	4-Apr
Choelsum Kathmandu	Ghangjong Shillong	0-0	C	10	5-Apr
Goa FC	Dhondupling Clement Town	0-0	B	11	5-Apr

Tsam Chennai	Kullu Manali	3-1	D	12	5-Apr
Jampaling Pokhara	Delhi FC	2-3	A	13	6-Apr
Gulladhalla Bylakuppe	Dhargyaling Tezu	1-0	C	14	6-Apr
DYSA Mundgod B	Dhondupling Clement Town	1-6	B	15	6-Apr
Phuntsokling Orissa	Kullu Manali	8-0	D	16	7-Apr
Rabgyeling Hunsur	Goa FC	2-1	B	17	7-Apr
TDL Bylakuppe	Tsam Chennai	4-0	D	18	7-Apr
DYSA Mundgod A	Jampaling Pokhara	1-2	A	19	8-Apr
Choelsum Kathmandu	Gulladhalla Bylakuppe	0-0	C	20	8-Apr
Delhi FC	TCV United	3-3	A	21	8-Apr
TDL Bylakuppe	Dhondenling Kallegal	4-2	D	22	9-Apr
Rabgyeling Hunsur	Phendeling Mainpat	2-1	B	23	9-Apr
Dhargyaling Tezu	Ghangjong Shillong	0-2	C	24	9-Apr
Phuntsokling Orissa	DYSA Mundgod B	10-0	D/B*	25	10-Apr
Dhondupling Clement Town	Phendeling Mainpat	4-0	B	26	10-Apr
Kullu Manali	Dhondenling Kallegal	0-7	D	27	10-Apr
Delhi FC	Dhondupling Clement Town	1-1(4-5)	Quarterfinal	28	11-Apr
Rabgyeling Hunsur	Jampaling Pokhara	1-4	Quarterfinal	29	11-Apr
Ghangjong Shillong	Phuntsokling Odisha	1-1(4-5)	Quarterfinal	30	12-Apr
TDL Bylakuppe	Gulladhalla Bylakuppe	2-0	Quarterfinal	31	12-Apr
Dhondupling Clement Town	Jampaling Pokhara	3-0	Semifinal	32	13-Apr
Phuntsokling Orissa	TDL Bylakuppe	1-2 (2OT)	Semifinal	33	13-Apr
Dhondupling Clement Town	TDL Bylakuppe	1-1(1-4)	Final	34	14-Apr

\*Crossover match between groups B and D, due to the eighteen team total.

### Group Stage Final Standings

<i>Group A</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>GD</i>	<i>TP</i>
Delhi FC	2	1	0	2	7
Jampaling Pokhara	2	0	1	2	6
DYSA Mundgod A	1	0	2	1	3
TCV United	0	1	2	-5	1

<i>Group B</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>GD</i>	<i>TP</i>
Rabgyeling Hunsur	3	0	0	6	9
Dhondupling Clement Town	2	1	0	9	7
Goa Tibetan FC	1	1	1	4	4
Phendeling Mainpat	0	0	3	-10	0
DYSA Mundgod B	0	0	3	-19	0

<i>Group C</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>GD</i>	<i>TP</i>
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Ghangjong Shillong	2	1	0	3	7
Gulladhalla Bylakuppe	1	1	1	0	4
Choelsum Kathmandu	0	3	0	0	3
Dhargyaling Tezu	0	1	2	-3	1

<i>Group D</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>GD</i>	<i>TP</i>
TDL Bylakuppe	3	0	0	9	9
Phuntsokling Orissa	2	0	1	15	6
Dhondenling Kallegal	2	0	1	11	3
Tsam Chennai	1	0	2	-8	3
Kullu Manali	0	0	3	-17	0

## Appendix II – 2016 GCM Statistics

### Team Statistics

<i>Teams</i>	<i>TM</i>	<i>GF</i>	<i>GA</i>	<i>GD</i>	<i>GF per Match</i>	<i>GC per Match</i>
Dhargyaling Tezu	3	1	4	-3	0.333	1.333
Dhondupling Clement Town	6	15	3	12	2.5	0.5
Ghangjong Shillong	4	5	2	3	1.25	0.5
Dhondenling Kallegal	3	15	4	11	5	1.333
Goa FC	3	6	2	4	2	0.667
TDL Bylakuppe	6	16	4	12	2.667	0.667
DYSA Mundgod (A)	3	4	3	1	1.333	1
DYSA Mundgod (B)	3	1	20	-19	0.333	6.667
TCV United	3	4	9	-5	1.333	3
Choelsum United	3	1	1	0	0.333	0.333
Phendeling Mainpat	3	1	11	-10	0.333	3.667
Gulladhalla Bylakuppe	4	2	4	-2	0.5	1
Rabgyeling Hunsur	4	9	6	3	2.25	1.5
Phuntsokling Orissa	5	20	6	14	4	1.2
Tsam Chennai	3	3	11	-8	1	3.667
Jampaling	5	11	9	2	2.2	1.8
Kullu Manali	3	1	18	-17	0.333	6
Delhi FC	4	8	6	2	2	1.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3.618</b>	<b>3.618</b>

## Appendix III – List of previous GCM Champions

### GCM Champions

<i>Year</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Champion (Location)</i>
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1981	Dharamsala	TCV School (Dharamsala)
1982	Dharamsala	Est. 22 (Chakrata)
1983	Dharamsala	TCV School (Dharamsala)
1984	Dharamsala	Est. 22 (Chakrata)
1986	Dharamsala	RTYC (Kalimpong)
1988	Dharamsala	Tibetan United Club (Kalimpong)
1989	Dharamsala	Tibetan United Club (Kalimpong)
1997	Dharamsala	TIPA (Dharamsala)
1999	Dharamsala	Dhondupling FC (Clement Town)
2003	Dharamsala	Pokhara FC (Pokhara)
2004	Dharamsala	Kathmandu FC (Kathmandu)
2005	Dharamsala	Dhondupling FC (Clement Town)
2007	Clement Town	Bylakuppe FC (Bylakuppe)
2008	Mundgod	Dhondupling FC (Clement Town)
2009	Dharamsala	Potala FC (Mundgod)
2010	Bylakuppe	Dhondupling FC (Clement Town)
2011	Mundgod	Gulladhalla FC (Bylakuppe)
2012	Dharamsala	Phuntsokling FC (Orissa)
2013	Hunsur	Dhondupling FC (Clement Town)
2014	Clement Town	Tashiling Sports Club (Pokhara)
2015	Dharamsala	DYSA Mundgod (Mundgod)
2016	Mundgod	TDL Bylakuppe (Bylakuppe)

*Appendix IV – 2016 GCM Award Winners*

**GCMGC Champion** – TDL Bylakuppe (Awarded 100,000 IC by the TNSA)

**GCMGC Runner-up** – Dhondupling Clement Town (Awarded 70,000 IC by the TNSA)

**Golden Boot (Top Scorer)** – Tenzin Phuntsok #10, Phuntsokling Orissa (12 goals in 5 matches)

**Team Fair Play Award** - Phendeling Mainpat

*Appendix V – Tibetan International Football Fixtures, Results, and Locations*

TIF Fixtures and Results

<i>Tibet</i>	<i>Opponent</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Competition</i>	<i>Location</i>
Tibet	Dynamo Rock	5-3	12-Jun-99	Exhibition	Bologna, Italy
Tibet	Greenland	1-4	30-Jun-01	Friendly	Copenhagen, Denmark
Tibet	Monaco	1-2	14-Jul-01	Friendly	Freburg, Germany
Tibet	Swiss Tibetan Team (club)	3-1	2001	Exhibition	Horgin, Switzerland
Tibet	Hummel All-Stars	4-8	2003	Exhibition	Aarhus, Denmark
Tibet	Shastri FC	4-1	2003	Exhibition	New Delhi, India

Tibet	Sikkim	1-2	10-Oct-03	Sikkim Governor's Gold Cup	Gangtok, Sikkim
Tibet	Assam Electricity Board (club)	0-3	2004	Sikkim Governor's Gold Cup	Namchi, South Sikkim
Tibet	Republic of St. Pauli	0-7	30-May-06	FIFI World Cup	Hamburg, Germany
Tibet	Gibraltar	0-5	31-May-06	FIFI World Cup	Hamburg, Germany
Tibet	Sikkim Arms Force (club)	2-4	2006	Sikkim Governor's Gold Cup	Gangtok, Sikkim
Tibet	Tajikstan (futsal club)*	0-3	19-Nov-06	ELF Cup	Güzelyurt, North Cyprus
Tibet	Crimea	0-1	20-Nov-06	ELF Cup	Güzelyurt, North Cyprus
Tibet	North Cyprus	0-10	21-Nov-06	ELF Cup	Famagusta, North Cyprus
Tibet	Assam Oil (club)	0-1	2006	Chief Minister's Gold Cup	Namchi, South Sikkim
Tibet	Delhi XI (club)	6-0	4-Aug-07	Exhibition	New Delhi, India
Tibet	IWDFa Manipur (club)	1-0	29-Oct-07	Sikkim Governor's Gold Cup	Gangtok, Sikkim
Tibet	Bhutan**	0-3	2-Nov-07	Sikkim Governor's Gold Cup	Gangtok, Sikkim
Tibet	VDL Maassluis (club)	0-5	17-Apr-08	Exhibition	Maassluis, Netherlands
Tibet	Jeka Breda (club)	1-1	19-Apr-08	Exhibition	Breda, Netherlands
Tibet	Padania	2-13	7-May-08	Friendly	Milan, Italy
Tibet	MVV 27 (club)	3-4	2008	Exhibition	Maassluis, Netherlands
Tibet	Pontedera (club)	0-5	2008	Exhibition	Peccioli, Italy
Tibet	Reggio Team (club)	2-1	2008	Exhibition	Reggio, Italy
Tibet	Swiss Celebrities	9-2	2008	Exhibition	Jona, Switzerland
Tibet	Kultklub Wiener Victoria (club)	1-3	2008	Exhibition	Vienna, Austria
Tibet	FC Stadlau (club)	1-6	2008	Exhibition	Vienna, Austria
Tibet	Sports Journalisten Team (club)	0-0	2008	Exhibition	Vienna, Austria
Tibet	Army Team (club)	11-0	2010	Exhibition	Dharamsala, India
Tibet	Uttarakhand Police (club)	0-1	2010	Exhibition	Dharamsala, India
Tibet	Kangra District Football Team (club)	3-0	2010	Exhibition	Dharamsala, India
Tibet	Himachal State Team	3-0	2013	Exhibition	Dharamsala, India
Tibet	Garwal Football Academy (club)	0-0	2013	Exhibition	Dehradun, India
Tibet	Himachal State Team	0-3	2013	Exhibition	Dharamsala, India
Tibet	City Young of Dehradun (club)	5-0	2014	Exhibition	Dharamsala, India

\* As Tajikstan is a FIFA member, they were not allowed to send their top side, due to the FIFA rule stipulating that member nations cannot compete with non-member nations.

\*\* This friendly was exceptional, considering Bhutan's membership in FIFA, and it is unclear if the match took place with FIFA's express approval, or the match was simply too peripheral for FIFA to care.

\*\*\* There are additional matches played by a Tibetan junior team, but this chart only includes matches played by the first team.  
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Record to date, including all matches: 11-3-21

### *Appendix VI – Glossary of Tibetan Terms*

#### Wylie/English – Definition

Gyalyum Chenmo – The Dalai Lama’s mother, or the Great Mother.

Rkang Rtsed po lo/Football – the game of football.

Ru khag/Team – An athletic team.

Rtsed mkhan/Player – One who plays.

Phor pa/Cup – 1999 Tibetan film, “The Cup”, the story of a young Tibetan monk’s efforts to watch the 1998 World Cup.

Alo Pale/Potato Bread – One of the popular snacks sold by vendors at the 2016 GCM.

Sha Pale/Meat Bread – the non-veg version of Alo Pale.

### *Appendix VII – Glossary of Football Terms*

**Side** – Another name for team, specifically in football.

**Friendly** – A football match held between two nations that has no tournament implications.

**Striker** – The forward. This player typically plays closer to the opponents goal, and scores most frequently for their side.

**Winger** – An outside midfielder. These players typically play along either sideline, and do the most running of any player on the field.

**Equalize** – To score a goal that brings the match into a tie. n. Equalizer

**Level** – See above.

**Touch** – 1) The capacity to move the ball with one’s feet: to dribble. 2) A single instance when one touches the ball with one’s feet or foot.

**Side-netting** – The part of the goal’s netting perpendicular with the end line, directly behind each post.

**Daisy-cutter** – A ball which travels incredibly close to the ground, and struck with such pace so as to cut any wild daises growing on the field.

**Nil** – another word for zero.

**Toe-Poke** – Instead of striking the ball with the laces, or top, of one’s foot (traditionally considered proper technique when shooting), you strike it with your toe, giving the shot an errant quality, so much so that often times the striker isn’t sure where its going, a not-so-promising prospect if not for the fact that it can be even more debilitating for the goalkeeper tasked with attempting to save the shot.

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### ***Suggestions for Further Research***

In my view, upon completion of this project, the most glaring subject that could be researched in the future is the continued growth of women's football in Tibetan society. Travelling to Himachal Pradesh to research the TWS in Dehradun, the TNSA in Dharamsala, and the fascinating, if dramatic relationship between the two.

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### ***Endnotes***

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