Can ‘the other’ represent the country?

A historical perspective on foreign born players in national football teams, 1930-2014

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Club football vs. National football teams

Brazil 2014: Visualising ancestral and international connections between teams

From: The Telegraph (2015)
Henry Winter and
Tom Shiel (graphic)
French squad without migrants

Steve Mandanda
Paul Pogba
Rod Fanni
Samir Nasri
Moussa Sissoko

Not Pictured: Eliaquin Mangala, Rio Mavuba, Bacary Sanga
Foreign born football players

- Increase of foreign born football players representing national teams in FIFA World Cup → A new phenomenon?

- “How, and why, has the number of foreign born football players in FIFA World Cup changed between 1930-2014?”

- Database on international football players
  - Historical overview on nationality changes is lacking
  - Qualified teams for FIFA World Cups 1930-2014
Database

1) Setting up a database: searching data
   - Biographical data & information on parental heritage
   - Scraping data from Wikipedia

2) Classifying data
   - Who counts as a foreign born football player?
   - ‘Foreign born’ versus ‘(foreign) national’

3) Generating output
   - 10,000 cases (not all unique)
   - Relate to international migration trends
Who counts as ‘foreign born’?

• Mostly used in international migration studies
  “All people who have ever migrated from their country of birth to their current country of residence” (OECD, 2017)

• Useful, but lacking (historical) context
  – Territorial changes of borders
  – Colonial relations

• Three perspectives on ‘foreign born’
  1) Using current state borders (anno 2014)
  2) Borders at the time of FIFA World Cups
  3) Colonial relationships related to players’ date of birth
Perspective 1: 2014 Borders

PERCENTAGE FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS 1930-2014,
PERSPECTIVE 1 [#CASES: 913]
2014: French foreign born players

**The France that Never Was**

There are 25 French-born players representing other countries at this year's World Cup. That would be enough to field a full second squad for France—and have some emergency spare players to boot. Here's where those players have gone.

- **Sofiane Feghouli**
  In Algeria’s first match of the tournament, Feghouli scored the country’s first World Cup goal in 28 years on a penalty kick.

- **Andrew Ayew**
  American fans saw striker Ayew equalize against the US during its group stage match against Ghana. He plays for French club Marseille.

- **Benoit Assou-Ekotto**
  The outspoken and controversial left back has said he’s surprised his black teammates at Tottenham feel accepted by English society.

- **Jean-Daniel Akpa-Akpro**
  A versatile defender, Akpa-Akpro has played every back-four position for Toulouse, his club team. He’s been linked with English giants Arsenal this summer.

- **Gonzalo Higuain**
  Though born in France, the ex-Real Madrid star grew up solely in Argentina. He’s scored 20 times for the World Cup challengers.
Perspective 2: Border changes

PERCENTAGE FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS 1930-2014, PERSPECTIVE 2 [#CASES: 623]
Disintegrated States - Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia: World Youth Champions 1987
Perspective 3: Colonial Ties

PERCENTAGE FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS 1930-2014,
PERSPECTIVE 3 [#CASES: 578]
Foreign / Colonial Nationals

Dutch international Bep Bakhuys (1934)

Portuguese national football team in 1966
A quick interpretation

PERSPECTIVES FOREIGN-BORN FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS

Foreign Born P1
Foreign Born P2
Foreign Born P3
Migrants