



La Roja: How Soccer Conquered Spain and How Spanish Soccer Conquered the World

Jimmy Burns

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"La Roja" is bestselling author Jimmy Burns tremendous opus on Spanish soccer. From its early beginnings when the first soccer on the shores of Bilbao and Buenos Aires was played by British sailors and engineers, through to the influx of South American stars, and similarly inspirational Italians, Dutchman and Scandinavians, Burns show how the engagement of foreigners with home-grown Spanish talent overcame political adversity and produced football of sublime skill and passion that intoxicates fans around the world. The book takes us on a journey through some of the extraordinary characters, classic matches, and brutal controversies that have defined Spanish football from the early days when a few enthusiasts developed their talent kicking a ball on a piece of industrial waste ground, to the emergence of rival giants, FC Barcelona and Real Madrid- the most powerful and successful football clubs in the world- to the Franco regime (that propped up the Madrid team) and democracy (where Barca has ruled), to and a national team that, encompassing all, became the world's champion.

La Roja: How Soccer Conquered Spain and How Spanish Soccer Conquered the World Details

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From Reader Review La Roja: How Soccer Conquered Spain and How Spanish Soccer Conquered the World for online ebook

Stephen says

Delving, as it does, into Spain, "La Roja," has as much to do with politics as with that country's world champion national soccer team.

Jimmy Burns has written an amenable yet substantive story about how Spain went from a bullfighting nation to kings of international football.

He goes way back to the 1880s and an English-owned mine in Huelva where the first games of football were played exclusively by Brits. The journalistic knitting continues as Basque teams assert primacy and then Argentines come to enliven the game with a quick passing style.

"La Roja" is about the places where such trends were born and the people who sowed them on Spanish soil.

Burns's chronicling of Barcelona F.C's role as an expression of Catalan culture and its rivalry with Real Madrid is deftly woven into discussion of the defeated Republic, the Monarchy, the Falange and, poignantly, the names of soccer players killed during the Spanish Civil War.

Noteworthy, too, is Burns's analysis of the Franco dictatorship's aggressive engagement with football as a tool to soothe tensions on the Iberian peninsula, as a propaganda weapon, and as diplomatic entry to worlds otherwise closed to the regime.

Burns suggests Franco made the Spanish national team a projection of homegrown fascism. A group possessing the "racial" qualities of true and pure Spaniards, and which brought to the playing field a particular "Spanish Fury." A sobriquet that stuck.

Like many people in Spain who had little time for the national selection over the years, Burns believes that the "The Spanish Fury" amounted to a whole lot of nothing, and that success in world-class tournaments would be elusive until a more modern and technical conception of Spanish soccer could be born.

Of course it happened. "La Roja" was released on the occasion of a repeat European Cup championship for the team of the same nickname. An unprecedented kind of success for such a national outfit.

Although his lead-up to the latest and most glorious chapter in Spanish soccer is first-rate, this reviewer did not find Burns very clear on why the ultimate transformation occurred.

Was it a special generation of players who learned how to transcend the rivalries carried over from the club level? Ditching Raul? Was it David Beckham's impact as a media and celebrity item on future Spanish stars? The Argentines?

Maybe it's in there, but in any case, "La Roja" remains an always engaging look at a sudden dynasty. Its author understands soccer as culture and an expression of collective identities without forgetting that it is still sport.

Niranjan M says

If you can survive the first couple of chapters that talk about the history of Spanish football, this is a speedy read. Unfortunately for me, that wasn't the case. I learned a LOT about Spanish football - its origins, its history, its struggles and finally, its triumph. This is not a dramatic book which tells a tale of a failure-to-overwhelming success story, but one that chronicles in detail the travails and triumphs over the last century or so.

The chapters are chronological, but there are a lot of gaps which needed to be filled, and towards the end, there is too much unnecessary information, in my opinion. I still enjoyed the book, though not as much as I would have liked to (blame it on the slow portions) and would like to read more by the same author in the near future.

Caleb says

A massively underwhelming effort. The review made it sound like an interesting take by a well-regarded newspaper columnist on soccer in Spain. The result starts out decently and then tails off. It skips around so much at times I wondered if my book was missing pages. Other stretches at the back started repeating anecdotes from 25 pages before. What's stranger, the whole point was about Spain finally triumphing in soccer at Euro 08, WC 10, and Euro 12. However, there is literally a page on Euro 08 and then it must have gotten rushed out in advance of Euro 12 so that's not even included. There were bright points analyzing soccer and politics and Spain, particularly after the Civil War, and I learned much about the Bilbaos and similar clubs of Spain. But, in the end, it was a frustrating and incomplete read.

Spiros says

A useful overview of Spanish futbol, and its influence on the cultures and history that make up the various regions of Spain. Looking at other reviews, I find criticisms of the author's Catalan orthography: for me, knowing neither Catalan nor Spanish, the problem was his English diction and punctuation, particularly his erratic use of commas, which made me reread passages to glean his meaning. It's that sort of thing that always drives a man to reading fiction.

John says

A very detailed history of soccer in Spain both at the club and national team levels. I was impressed with Burns' research and even more impressed with his interviews. Over the course of the last decade he has interviewed nearly every important person in Spanish soccer who is still alive. What the book lacked for me was the verve and spice to add interest to the topic. The book is not badly written, just a little dull.

What surprised me most about the book was the down-playing of the political ties of Franco to Real Madrid. I had been under the impression that the ties were stronger. However, Burns leads the reader to believe that

Franco's ties to Madrid were deeper in the eyes of the fans (both for and against Real Madrid) than they were in reality.

The book focuses on people, coaches, players, politicians. It creates some interesting snapshots of the people who were instrumental in Spanish soccer through its history. These mini-biographies are interesting, but because of their focus, the book lacked cohesion. It jumped from person to person more than telling a smooth narrative.

A solid read for anyone looking to know more about Spain and its soccer history, but hard to recommend to the non-soccer fan.

Julie says

While I really enjoyed this book, I realize that it's not everyone's cup of tea. Burns offers a detailed account of Spanish national soccer, from its beginning by English colonials to the current World Cup-winning team. The short chapters make it pretty easy to read, and they cover a variety of political and social issues that have affected the development of Spanish soccer, from the underlying tensions between Basques, Catalans, and Castilians, and the meaning of what it is to be Spanish; the Spanish Civil War, Franco, and Spain's gradual emergence from isolationist policies; and the more recent pressures of club soccer and the international game. Some parts sagged and there were a number of sentences that suffered from lack of coordination of dependent clauses and subjects, making the meaning unclear, but overall I learned a lot from reading this.

Ty says

i love books about soccer and this one was a fascinating mix of soccer and the cultural/political dynamics of Spain from the time that soccer was introduced to the country by the Brits in the late 1800's to the current time of the Euro and World Cup winning Spanish national teams.

the book focuses, as any discussion of Spanish futbol inevitably will, on the enduring rivalry between Barcelona and Real Madrid, tracing the paths of each from founding through the Spanish Civil War, the Franco years, the restoration and then socialism and the recent economic collapse. Along the way, we get to learn a lot about the interactions between the various regions of the country, Basque, Catalan, etc. each with its own culture, language and interests. and, just to make sure that the soccer is properly covered, we get portraits of Di Stefano, Puskas, Maradona, Raul, Messi, Ronaldo, Zidane, Ronaldino, and all the greats that have made Spanish futbol the most fun to watch in the world. Viva Barca, mes que un club!

Josh Brown says

Burns provides a great deal of information regarding the history of Spanish players, rivalries, and clubs as well as an overall history and evolution of soccer on Spanish soil. He tends to skip around quite a bit, but I suppose that is to be expected in a book of this sort. He also repeats himself many times - and when I say "repeat", I mean essentially cut and paste his own words repeatedly to describe subjects in identical phrases over and over (sometimes even in the same chapter, as the case was with Vicente del Bosque towards the end of the book). I find this to be quite unprofessional and it tells me that not much editing went on between he

and the publisher. Overall, La Roja was highly informative but tended to drag and only skim the surface of a wide variety of subjects. Finally, the writing was not very engaging.

Hector A says

LA ROJA

The purpose of “La Roja” is to let know the reader more about a sport that took over Spain. It was a sport that many people from Spain enjoy playing. Their favorite sport was soccer, it changed many peoples life’s in a positive way. It says that “millions of people view the sport and many of them gather at the capital to welcome their team back.”(page 1) They welcomed Spain’s team back because they went to the 2010 World Cup. The people living in this country were very excited and happy to be recognized as one of the best teams to go to the world cup. It takes a lot for a team to get to this level. This book would get anyone interested and wanting to keep reading it. It teaches you a lot about the importance of soccer and the way people got popular through it.

This book will have a positive impact on the audience. It will have a positive impact on the audience because it talks about the important teams of Spain. It also talks about the teams that lead the country to the champion leagues and the world cups. One of Spain’s most important team is Barcelona. In the book the author talks about its rival real Madrid which is also part of Spain. These teams are both part of Spain but when it comes to soccer they are rivals. The book says that “no matter where they faced each other, the sport was always an intensely partisan.”(page 195) The people supported both team because they are both great teams but at the end the sport that they were playing is what matter. They loved to be entertained by 2 of the best teams in the world. Each year both teams had their records, but what matter was that they were both part of Spain. It can teach the audience about how important the sport was to the people in Spain.

The book was well written; it caught people’s attention to keep reading it. The people that are interested in the soccer are really going to enjoy this book. It takes people back to the time the sport was first played. It takes them back to the 1880’s and the people that were involved in the sport. It talks about the cities that the sport was played in. The cities that they played in were Madrid, Barcelona, Busque, Catalan and more. This book also talks about the way each city had its own country and their language. It also talks about the legends that made the sport very famous and exciting. I believe the books main focus was on the people that played the sport, politicians and mainly their fans. It gives interesting biographies about each good player. It lets the reader know about the amazing people that existed during this 80’s. The sport would’ve never been as famous if it wasn’t because of the fans. They are the ones that come out and support the players playing the beautiful sport.

I would recommend this book to many of my friends. They enjoy playing soccer and they also have their favorite players. One of my closes friend favorite players is Beckham. In the book they talk about Beckham going to play at Spain. He is one the best players in the world and also the highest pay. Real Madrid was willing to pay for as much money as he asked. They talk about Beckham going to play in Spain. It says “one question is if Beckham would ever be part of Real Madrid.”(page 295) I’m sure my friend would enjoy seen Beckham play for Real Madrid. That is his favorite team and his favorite player. Beckham been part of Spain made history. He helped Real Madrid and he also helped Spain become more famous.

I enjoy this book, especially because it was soccer and that’s my favorite sport. It talked about how Spain made history in soccer and so many of soccer’s good players. It gives you history of every important game that Spain was part of and the games that were won by them. It would’ve been better if the book had more pictures so I could see the people and the teams. I was still able to visualize what happen during certain events and I also visualize the players. I knew half of the ones mentioned in the book and that helped me more. It was a very interesting and great book about the way soccer was spread all over the world. I enjoyed it and I know whoever else reads the book will enjoy it too.

Cesar says

Really great read on the history of the Spanish game.

Some editing errors and I thought it swerved here and there at times. Lost focus.

For ex., weird anecdote about Capello and Beckham both liking jamon serrano.

But overall, an eye opening, wonderful journey through Spain and the history of Spanish football.

Highly recommended.

Brian says

Fantastic! If I wasn't a fan of the team before, I am now. (Not my fave, but a healthy respect and admiration).

Can't wait for the World Cup!

Chris says

It was interesting, and there are plenty of good stories here, but I sometimes found the style distractingly uneven.

For example, several times I had to re-read a passage in order to parse the meaning, and the author occasionally interrupted the third-person narrative with first-person anecdotes. Those issues aside, if you're interested in the history of soccer in Spain through the World Cup win in 2010, this book has you covered.

Chris says

If you don't know anything about Spanish soccer prepare to be bombarded with the names of many Spaniards and Englishmen you will soon forget. This is a very comprehensive look at the growth of soccer in Spain, at times enthralling and at other times sleep inducing. I wish there were more pictures of some of the characters described in this book and by characters I really mean characters. The coach who brought two national rivals together for the World Cup win in 2010, Vicente Del Bosque, lots of kudos to him but no picture. I wanted to read more about the cultural and political aspects of the game vis a vis Franco and that is there too. Burns is a good observer and chronicler of the game as we go from the English mining companies who brought it to Spain through the Civil War and ultimately a democratic Spain. This is a book that doesn't stimulate one to race through it but to attack it slowly.

Fiona says

I never thought I would enjoy that has sport as it's main theme, however this book is well written and researched and has a lot of historical facts about Spain woven into the sports stories.

Raul says

That a book like this exists is a good thing. Unfortunately, the author fails in weaving the history of Spanish soccer into a cohesive narrative and instead reduces the subject to a laundry list of anecdotes and soccer celebrities: "There was this coach who did this and that. Oh, there was also this other player that...And that reminds me of this story where..." As proof of the meandering, incohesive style of this book, there are literally paragraphs in this book that begin with the phrase: "But back to [the topic I was talking about]..."

But the biggest problem with this book are the myriad of typos, misspellings and grammatical errors in the Spanish names and phrases used within. You cannot claim to be an authority on any Spanish subject if you cannot spell correctly the names of people and places. "Bonanova", a district in Barcelona, is not the same as "Bovavona"; and it's not "La Campa" but "El Campo"; and, as anyone who speaks Spanish knows, accents are important, yet in this book the accents on the names of some people are altogether missing, and when correctly spelled, some times the accent on a name shows up only to disappear later in the next few pages...

This leads me to the biggest gripe I have with this book: you cannot write a book that has F.C. Barcelona as one of its major subjects and misspell the club's affectionate nickname, "Barça", for the entire 300+ pages of the book and refer to the team as "Barca". That little "ç" is very important grammatically, phonetically and culturally.

"Barça" is an affectionate, Catalan abbreviation of "Barcelona" that fans use to refer to the soccer team. It uses a special Catalan language symbol, the "broken c", which symbolizes the cultural identity of the Catalan language and culture much in the same way that the "ñ" has come to symbolize all things Spanish.

To ignore this and simply refer to "Barça" as "Barca" is an insult to all Catalans and Barcelona fans. And, well, it shows the ignorance and hurts the credibility of the author who cannot be bothered to refer to the soccer team by its correct name, which is, on top of it all, spelled out correctly in all the team's official soccer merchandise! All the author had to do was read the name on a track jacket or on a uniform...

"Barca" without the "broken c" just means row boat. To read 300+ where (arguably) the world's best soccer team is referred to as a row boat is just annoying...Ugh
