

## Thoughts on World Cup 2006

St. Jean Baptiste and Canada Day festivities were in the air but for a loud and proud sector of our city, all that mattered was the fate of their soccer team. It was not a time for maple leaves and fleur de lys but an occasion to hang and wave the colours of Italy, Portugal, Brazil or of whatever tournament-country was still alive. I have never seen so many international flags on display for a month's entirety.



Even at the summit of Westmount, ethnicity was not concealed.

I love cycles. In 1970 Italy made it to the World Cup Final, and they have repeated the feat every 12 years. In every second appearance they have been victorious and gone beyond expectation. In 1982 they relied heavily on Paolo Rossi's scoring: in the last three games, he scored six consecutive goals until Marco Tardelli showed the world that another Italian could also wear a productive shoe. In contrast in 2006 we saw a total team effort with playoff winning goals being scored by three different players (Totti, Zambrotti, and Grosso), and the final game was decided by successful penalty kicks by five players, including four other Italians.



Overtime and penalty kicks had been anathema for Italy for the last 20 years, and yet in 2006 it was precisely by such means that they beat Germany and France. With overtime almost expired, Italy seemed doomed to repeat history and face hometown-Germany's flawless record in shootouts. But off a corner kick in the dying moments, Grosso scored a precisely kicked goal set up by the creative ball-handling of Andrea Pirlo. A minute later, on the game's last play, brilliant defense by Cannavaro and more beautiful dribbling set up Del Piero's clincher. Fortunate enough to have taped the game, I have replayed those last two goals at least six times, and I still feel my heart accelerating. It was a special moment in sports akin to the 0-3 comeback by the Red Sox in 2004.

