

TIM
VYNER

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

ENGLAND'S ROLLERCOASTER WORLD CUP RIDE CAME TO A HALT YESTERDAY WITH A 2-0 DEFEAT BY BELGIUM. TIM VYNER PAYS TRIBUTE TO GARETH SOUTHGATE'S LIONS, AND CAPTURES AN UNFORGETTABLE TOURNAMENT



How I will best remember this World Cup

Telegraph writers explain why this has been such a memorable tournament, on and off the pitch

The triumph of VAR
Jamie Carragher
Ex-Liverpool and England defender

No one thought the video-assistant-referee technology would be as successful as it has been. There was a lot of pre-tournament anxiety about VAR but reassurance soon arrived, particularly during the Portugal v Iran and Spain v Morocco matches, the technology intervening to ensure Iran were correctly awarded a penalty, while a Spain goal was allowed on review. Without VAR, these last-minute decisions would have stood incorrectly. The number of goals from set plays and penalties were a consequence of VAR. The next change I would make is to stop asking referees to watch a TV screen to change their mind. If it is an obvious error, make the decision for him.

A wedding night missed
Robert Mendick
Chief reporter

After a month, there are so many memories to bore the grandchildren: the young Russian in Moscow's M&S buying a waistcoat after seeing Gareth Southgate (right) on TV and liking his style; swimming in the Volga in Samara on the day England beat Sweden in a World Cup quarter-final; being at a World Cup semi-final involving England; the terrifying car journey out of Samara in a storm when the roads turned to rivers; the resourcefulness of England fans, including the one who used the dating app Tinder to secure a semi-final ticket; Southgate's humour; the warmth of ordinary Russians, including the groom on his wedding day who was so interested in meeting Britons that he ignored his own party



to buy England fans drinks. They ended up taking him to bed at 3am, carrying him up three flights of hotel stairs. The bride was not best pleased. Happy days.

Brazil nuts!
Oliver Brown
Chief sports feature writer

A feature of Spartak Moscow's press tribune was that reporters were so close to the pitch, they could almost have joined the coaches. When Neymar (right) performed his ludicrous barrel roll under minimal contact from Serbia's Adem Ljajic, I could even hear his feigned cries of anguish. The abiding memory of that evening, though, was not the cynicism of Brazil's superstar, but the irresistible exuberance of their supporters, who kept up their chants and conga lines for the entire metro ride home. While this World Cup yielded an all-European final four, it was set, in many ways, to the soundtrack of Latin America.

Mums know best
Sam Wallace
Chief football writer

Many of the England players came back out on to the pitch after the victorious shoot-out against Colombia to see their families in the stands of the Spartak Stadium. It was these mums and dads who, over the years, drove their children to training and to matches, who waited in car parks and washed kits, who got home late and had to get up early for work. Having a child who is an exceptional footballer is great, but the academy system takes over your life. It was moving to see that moment being shared together. Some of the young ones might not quite have grasped what they had achieved by finally laying the England penalty shoot-out ghost to bed. But Mum and Dad will have done.



The wonder of us
Matt Law
Football news correspondent

England had never won a World Cup penalty shoot-out, so it was understandable that everybody's hearts sank as the final whistle sounded at the end of extra time against Colombia. In the press box, we all knew the script and the intros could be written without too much thought. Jordan Henderson's failure to score served only to confirm what we feared would be the inevitable. But then Mateus Uribe hit the bar, Jordan Pickford saved from Carlos Bacca, Eric Dier scored and press-box etiquette went out of the window as English journalists celebrated like the fans (below). It felt wonderful.

The hand of friendship
Paul Hayward
Chief sports writer

In a bar, when I unknowingly took the chair of a large and hostile-looking Russian alpha male, his face told me he was going to thump me, especially as he had already worked out we were English. My instinct said: trouble ahead. He leaned in to me, extended a giant hand to shake and said: "You are my guest." Another preconception overturned.

How many eaps?
Jim White
Sports feature writer

This was the Google Translate World Cup. Divided by language, for many of the visitors pouring into Russia, the only point of communication with the locals was via an app on their mobile phones. And judging by the English responses that came back from our Russian hosts via their devices, it was not always the sharpest of linguistic tools. But that did not mean that Google Translate always got it wrong. Arriving late

at a station the evening Russia won a group game, I found a taxi driver keen to talk. When he discovered I had no Russian, he turned to his phone. And our conversation began. "You here for the World Cup?" his phone asked me. Yes, I said. The driver glanced in his mirror and caught me looking dishevelled, exhausted, past it in the back seat. And the phone added: "And which country do you play for?" Sometimes, technology can say just the right thing.



All hail Diego!
Jeremy Wilson
Deputy football correspondent

Moscow, and the opening weekend of the World Cup. All eyes are on Lionel Messi. And then suddenly they are not. Most of the fans inside the stadium have turned to look at the stand behind me. All of the photographers are now pointing their cameras in the same direction. What has happened? Some crowd disorder? A glance behind offers confirmation. Diego Maradona (above) has made his first public appearance of the tournament and, cigar in mouth, is lapping up the attention.

'Southgate, you're the one'
Alec Luhn
Russia correspondent

The day after England's semi-final defeat, I assumed it was Croatian fans singing near the Kremlin. But when I reached the source, it was a few dozen England fans wrapped in Cross of St George flags. "Southgate you're the one, you still turn me on, football's coming home again!" they sang, oblivious to the crushing defeat. Bemused Russians filmed it on their mobiles, taking selfies with the fans and hoisting children up on the tabletops to sing "Please don't take me

home" with the red-faced Englishmen. It had been the same at the stadium the night before, when the English stayed at the stadium for more than an hour after the game, until Southgate and the players finally came out and everyone sang "God Save the Queen".

180!
Jason Burt
Chief football correspondent

My favourite memory was symbolic of a huge shift in the way England treated the World Cup on and off the pitch. It was a daily three-dart challenge between a player and a journalist. At the Euros in 2016, such was the paranoia that, led by Joe Hart it seems, the players even refused to answer an innocuous question about who was the best darts player in the squad after it came out that they were playing the game. This time, they strode into the media centre and headed straight for the darts board. There was a bowling alley and players even sat and watched the TV rather than heading off at the earliest opportunity. And, yes, they won the darts competition. I was among those who lost, to Harry Maguire (left).

Keane's keen
Chris Bascombe
Football reporter

Not since Terence Stamp was General Zod in *Superman II* have we witnessed a stare so penetrating as that of Roy Keane. While England fans wept, Keane casually defied kinetics by refusing to blink during ITV's post-match analysis. In fact, it can be revealed Keane last blinked on June 13, just before the opening ceremony. His menacing gaze is still permanently fixed on Mark Pougatch in a hotel somewhere in Russia, head movement resisted for fear of having to look in the direction of Gary Neville and Ian Wright.

