

# Back of the nyet

**TIM  
VYNER**  
WORLD CUP  
DRAW  
No 6 MOSCOW

I am in Red Square outside St Basil's "Cup Cake" Cathedral, as my Moscow friend calls it. It is a long way from watching the opening game in a sleepy town square west of St Petersburg. Right now the global spotlight is focused on these exact coordinates.

The scaffold TV studios overlook the square to broadcast their rolling feeds. In front of the cathedral are fans from 32 nations who have come for selfies, to exchange hugs and chant. Germany are about to play Mexico, so green and white kits are all around. In Red Square you can feel the passionate tribalism alongside the upbeat spirit of a festival. It is unique.

It is a few hours before kick-off and the city is over-run with fans. As they come and go before heading out to the match I draw them posing for each other at this most celebrated of Russian backdrops.



**WORLD  
CUP  
DIARY**  
**JAMIE  
JOHNSON**

**Henderson huffs  
but does not puff**



The spirit of warmth and togetherness in the England camp extended to Jordan Henderson being presented with a cake on his 28th birthday yesterday.

But Liverpool team-mate Trent Alexander-Arnold was interrupted during his rendition of *Happy Birthday* by Henderson half-jokingly saying: "Why are the candles not lit? I want to blow them out. If you're going to do it, do it properly."

Alexander-Arnold offered the explanation: "health and safety".

**Fan puts £10k bet  
on Three Lions**

One England fan has put his faith in Gareth Southgate's men, putting £10,000 on them to win the tournament.

A man in his 40s walked into a Kent branch of Ladbrokes and placed the bet at 14-1. If Harry Kane lifts the trophy on July 15, the punter will collect £150,000.

**Xhaka's a sucker for  
Panini stickers**

Even if Granit Xhaka's Switzerland side do not give him many memories to savour from Russia, at least he has his stickers.

"I've always collected Panini stickers, even as a child. I used to buy them by the box and would have so many doubles. I'd swap them with my friends," said the Arsenal midfielder, conjuring images of "Got, got, need" conversations at training.

"As a kid, you'd want to get players like Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Zidane or Buffon."

Now, he says having his own sticker is special. "I'll often have kids telling me that they got my sticker. That's an amazing feeling."

**How VAR could have changed past World Cups**

*By Rob Bagchi*

**Harald Schumacher's foul on Patrick Battiston**

West Germany v France, 1982

Eleven minutes into the second half, with the score 1-1, Michel Platini clipped a glorious pass through the heart of the West Germany defence. Patrick Battiston met it on the half-volley a foot outside the box. With eyes only for the ball, he could not see "Toni" Schumacher

bounding off his line, launching himself like a lion felling a wildebeest. Before the shot had bobbed past a post, Battiston was unconscious, his head taking the full impact of Schumacher's forearm and hip. He lost three teeth, damaged vertebrae and Platini feared

for his life. Schumacher was spared punishment but, had VAR been in place, the referee's defence of being "unsighted" could not have excused inaction. As clear and obvious errors go this was up there. A penalty and dismissal would have followed.

**Argentina v England**

Round of 16, 1998

Which to pick: Diego Simeone finding a nest for his foot in David Seaman's jock-strap and falling for the penalty that put Argentina 1-0 up? The just deserts of Michael Owen's tumble after the faintest of contact from Roberto Ayala to even things up? David Beckham's red card for his



flick of the boot at Simeone? Or Sol Campbell's "golden goal" in extra-time that was ruled out for Alan Shearer's

foul on keeper Carlos Roa? Both penalties could have been overturned but it is hard to make a case for Beckham, who was provoked but still retaliated. Campbell "scoring" was legitimately disallowed because Shearer caught Roa with his elbow.

**Diego Maradona's 'Hand of God' goal**

Argentina v England, 1986

Maradona's handball to score past Peter Shilton and put Argentina 1-0 up in the quarter-final has become England's exemplar of sporting injustice, an act of cheating so blatant that we almost treasure it as

a token of the unfairness of a lousy world. It took a second or two, though, for TV viewers to grasp that Maradona had extended his left arm to glance the ball with a clenched fist beyond Shilton. On the replay



it is clear, and VAR would have ruled it out to leave the game poised at 0-0. Would we have had his second, magnificent goal without the inspiration of his first? Would England have been able to stop him had they not been stupefied? We shall never know.

**Luis Suarez's third bite**

Uruguay v Italy, 2014

A new regulation came into force on June 1, specifically for the World Cup, which empowers VARs to warn the on-field referee of any incident of violent conduct he may have missed – even in cases where play has restarted – and administer retrospective

punishment. It would have been usefully applied in Italy's favour in their final Group D game, against Uruguay, in 2014 when, in the 79th minute, Suarez bit Giorgio Chiellini on the shoulder. Two minutes after the unseen and unpunished incident, Uruguay scored what proved to be their

winner, a goal that put them through to the round of 16. It is not fanciful to suggest Italy could have held on for 10 minutes and secured the point that would have put them through on goal difference had Suarez's bite been spotted and he had been dismissed.

