

A hero's journey: the monomythical narrative of Diego Maradona's World Cup appearances

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Abstract

A genius and cultural figure who transcended the sport he played, Diego Maradona is one of the most important icons of popular football culture. The 'Pibe de Oro' attracted attention each time he graced the pitch, perhaps none more so than on the international stage at four World Cup tournaments between 1982-1994. Whilst social science research has failed to unequivocally define the notion of sports heroism, this paper aims to build upon this concept through the lens of a mythical narrative. We will trace Maradona's World Cup appearances using Joseph Campbell's narratological theory, the hero's journey, through the monomyth template of three significant acts: the departure, the initiation and the return. This paper will provide a detailed enquiry into Maradona's extraordinary skill and achievements, addressing both his World Cup highlights and lowlights for Argentina in an international journey that is unlikely to be replicated.

Keywords: Diego Maradona; Soccer; Hero; World Cup; Argentina

Introduction

Diego Armando Maradona may well be one of the most complex characters, not just in football, but in sports history. The Pibe de Oro, or golden boy, is frequently hailed as the greatest footballer of all time and the protagonist of many iconic moments for the Argentinian national team. A hero in his native country, compared by some to legendary South American liberator General San Martín (Carlin, 1999), Maradona's genius charmed audiences whilst simultaneously petrifying opposing defences. A product of one of the poorest areas in Buenos Aires, Maradona's imagery exemplified his role as a cultural icon which, in many ways, exceeded the limits of both his nationality and his sport. In a traditional sense we might look for our heroes to be wholesome, respectful characters who overcome challenges and evil to succeed. Arguably, Maradona achieved this throughout his international career, certainly from the perspective of his fellow countrymen. Yet his life was tainted with scandal through volatile actions and statements, not only on the playing field but also in his unstable private life, which made him a contentious individual who defies clear characterisation. Stories of drug taking,

illegitimate children and dubious links to the Italian mafia increase his ambiguity as a hero.

The heroic narrative is articulated around the individual who stands above others based on their own merits (Alabarces and Rodríguez, 2007). Though on its own, skill is not enough for a hero to be truly defined as such; a triumphant outcome must also occur. For Maradona, this culminated in Argentina's successful 1986 World Cup campaign. However, this was one of four World Cup tournament appearances for the player. His journey through the competitions between 1982-1994 did not come without obstacles and contention. This paper will not only explore the highs of Maradona's World Cup appearances, but also note the lows, some of which question the theory behind the hero's journey. That said, here we will not challenge the concept of Maradona as a mythical hero, since that in itself is largely indisputable. Instead, we seek to trace his World Cup appearances through a monomythical narrative, a hero's journey that became a symbol of the South American nation and their love for the sport. Whilst the focus of this paper is Maradona at the World Cup, context will be added by discussing his career more widely to offer a fuller narrative to the concept of him as a hero.

The hero's journey and the notion of the sporting hero

The hero is one of the most consistent figures in mythology and there exists a recurring template for the hero's journey or, as American professor Joseph Campbell termed it, the monomyth. Campbell's seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2012, first published in 1949) introduced this concept as a consistent narrative which he described through a series of 17 stages. These stages can be organised into three components, or acts - the departure, the initiation and the return. Whilst Campbell does not suggest that all journeys encounter each of the stages, the three acts remain relatively consistent for the archetypal hero. Building upon Campbell's work, scholars Williams (1994) and Lule (2001) both introduced their own perspective on the hero narrative, although a degree of commonality exists within all three approaches. For the purposes of this paper we will focus our attention specifically on Campbell's work as the instigator of the concept. Campbell's theory has been subject to criticism from academics who suggest that it suffers from source selection bias. Nonetheless, Campbell's work has resonated with storytellers and is especially evident in film (McMullen, 2017). The issue here, of course, is that Campbell's work has been largely theoretically applied to fiction. However, we suggest that there is little subject which involves more drama, conflict and direct opposition than that of sport. The fact that Maradona resonates as both a hero and villain depending on football and national allegiances only reinforces why this subject is worthy of such investigation. Little research exists whereby scholars apply Campbell's theory to a real-life individual and therefore this innovative approach of tracking Maradona's career through the conceptual eye of the hero's journey will assess its applicability to factual events.

The term which sits at the heart of this paper, hero, originates from the Greek *heros*, or demi-god, one who transcends the mortal and the mundane (Boon, 2005). Whether

athletes should be considered heroes has long been questioned (Wagg, 2007). The rise of the 'sporting hero' has produced a significant source of debate with Boorstin (1992) suggesting that war provided the only source of heroes throughout the twentieth century. Conversely, Wann, Melnick, Russell and Pease (2001) and Parry (2009) propose that, in fact, sport provides one of most significant platforms for people to identify their heroes. Archetti (2001) suggests that the sports hero belongs to a specific time. We would challenge this belief in relation to Maradona; there is little doubt that he transcended the sport to become something considerably more to millions across the globe, even following his death in 2020.

Act 1: the departure

The opening narrative of a hero's journey is the departure, in which the hero leaves their familiar world behind after receiving the 'call to adventure'. Growing up in Villa Fiorito, a violent slum on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Maradona was exposed to the world of football in the *potreros*, the empty spaces on small, hard and crowded pitches where no coaches or teachers would interject when tempers flared. Young Argentines played with a streetwise mentality and tight, technical ability. By eight years old Maradona's successful trial for the youth side of Argentinos Juniors led to widespread acclaim and by 11 he was noticed by the national press. Ten days before his 16th birthday Maradona became the youngest player to appear in the Argentine *Primera División* (since usurped by Sergio Agüero). It soon became clear that he would embark on an adventure that would take him to international stardom. However, this would not occur at the 1978 World Cup hosted in Argentina. Seventeen-year-old Maradona had already made three international appearances prior to the World Cup, but in a contentious decision on the eve of the tournament he was one of three players dropped by head coach César Menotti. The conclusion that Maradona was too young to cope with the pressure of performing for his country on home soil struck him hard, weeping for three days. Menotti's action proved to be decisive as Argentina went on to win their first World Cup. As Campbell (2012) suggests, the call to adventure can begin with a blunder that may amount to the opening of a destiny. In Maradona's case, not being selected for the 1978 squad was deeply influential and supports Campbell's assertion that «even though the hero returns for a while to his familiar occupations, they may be found unfruitful» (Campbell, 2012, p.46). In his autobiography Maradona described it as the saddest day of his career and the biggest disappointment of his life (Maradona, 2004).

Events the following year saw Maradona experience the next step of his hero's journey, the 'supernatural aid'. Once committed to a call the hero's guide appears; for Maradona this was the familiar face of Argentina coach, Menotti, the protective figure in Campbells' theory. Following the disappointment of 1978, Maradona gained the opportunity to impress on the world stage at the 1979 Youth World Cup in Japan. Menotti, now a World Cup winner, specifically requested to coach the youth side preparing a new generation of players to be ready for the 1982 World Cup. Maradona emerged at the start of the tournament, helping Argentina to lift the trophy by contributing six goals in six matches.

He later described Menotti as the «architect of the team» (Maradona, 2004, p.25) and according to Campbell (2012) this figure represents the benign, protecting power of destiny. Menotti was aware of the precocious talent he had in Maradona but claimed that the prodigy was too young to shoulder the weight of expectation from the home nation in 1978 and instead protected him until a more suitable opportunity arose.

As Maradona progresses towards the end of Act 1, two further stages of the hero's journey can be explored which focus on his experiences at his maiden World Cup, the 1982 tournament held in Spain. Following prolific spells with Argentinos Juniors and Boca Juniors, Maradona agreed to join Barcelona for a world-record transfer fee prior to the competition. Argentina's sporting icon was set to depart from his homeland and embark on the next step in his journey, the 'crossing of the first threshold'. According to Campbell (2012) in this stage the hero leaves his known world (Argentina) and ventures into the unknown (life in Spain). Unlike today, where it is entirely natural for South American footballers to compete for domestic European clubs, only three members of Argentina's 1982 squad played outside their homeland. The tournament itself was challenging for Maradona and symbolises the final stage of the departure, the 'belly of the whale', where the hero shows a willingness to undergo a metamorphosis but, instead of conquering, is swallowed into the unknown. After the devastation of missing out on a home tournament in 1978, Maradona was desperate to make an impression in Europe and the Catalan supporters were not left waiting long for a sample of their new investment as Argentina kicked off the tournament against Belgium at Barcelona's Camp Nou.

However, Belgium, who had previously never progressed beyond the first round in a World Cup tournament, upset the titleholders with a solitary goal. Maradona's performance was largely ineffective, as described in *The New York Times* his «lackluster showing seemed to infect the entire Argentine side» (Markham, 1982). The behaviour towards Maradona by the Belgium defenders set the example for the strategy employed by each team who faced Argentina during the competition – stop Maradona and you stop the team. Argentina's second game saw a more cohesive performance, with Maradona scoring twice against Hungary in a 4-1 victory. A steady 2-0 win in the final group game versus El Salvador saw Argentina progress into the next round.

Tied against Brazil and Italy for a place in the semi-finals, the three nations held a collective six World Cup titles between them. In the group's opening game, Maradona was targeted by the Italians in what one senior football writer would later describe as «probably the nearest I would come to witnessing a public assault» (Horsfield, 2017). Marked out the game by Italy's Claudio Gentile, Maradona could do little to prevent a 2-1 loss to the Azzurri. Gentile performing his role expertly with meticulous attention to Maradona was testament to the emerging genius of the Argentinian. If Maradona serves as the hero of this paper, Gentile certainly plays the role of archetypal villain. Occasionally brutal, Gentile harassed Maradona, committing 23 fouls against him throughout the match. Fortunes failed to improve three days later for Argentina in their encounter with the imperious Brazil. The reigning champions would fall to a 3-1 defeat, consigning them to an early exit from the competition. Maradona's influence on

proceedings was peripheral at best. One glimmer of skill came in the second half as Maradona skipped past left-back Júnior into the penalty area. The Brazilian recovered only to lunge at Maradona with little hope of getting the ball. When the referee pointed for a corner an incredulous Maradona screamed at the official. Frustration at what he considered to be ineptitude from officials throughout the tournament for their lack of protection boiled over with five minutes remaining. Following a high challenge on a teammate, Maradona retaliated with a dangerous looking kick to his opponent's waist and was immediately dismissed. His first World Cup, featuring a competition's worth of bitterness, frustration and youthful insolence, represented by a single moment of petulance, was over. Three matches in Barcelona brought three defeats for Argentina, an omen of his time to come with the Catalan club. Nevertheless, Maradona's 1982 World Cup performance introduced him to the world stage and established the groundings for one of the greatest tournament performances four years later in Mexico, as he progressed to the next act of the hero's journey.

Act 2: the initiation

Through the four intervening years between tournaments Maradona went on a challenging journey. Successes were more sporadic than had been anticipated when he joined Barcelona. Despite an admirable 38 goals in 58 appearances a bout of hepatitis, a broken ankle and a violent on-field brawl during the 1984 Copa del Rey final against Athletic Bilbao which saw Maradona headbutt one opponent and elbow another, knocking him out, characterised his turbulent employment in Catalonia. Campbell believes that Maradona's time in Spain illustrates the first stage of the initiation, the 'road of trials', where the hero is repeatedly tested, and whilst he doesn't pass every test, proves himself by building will and skill throughout. Here, Maradona embarks on what Campbell outlines as the beginning of a long and perilous path of conquests and moments of illumination. The next stage would prove to be pivotal in the lore of Maradona.

In summer 1984, in a move to Italian club, Napoli, Maradona became the first player to break the world transfer record twice. Southern Italy was hardly an obvious destination for Maradona with the club narrowly avoiding relegation to Serie B the previous season. The Neapolitans were lifted by the arrival of their new superstar, with one local newspaper writing that despite the lack of a «mayor, houses, schools, buses, employment and sanitation, none of this matters because we have Maradona» (Carter, 2012, p.?). It was in Naples where Maradona would experience the next steps of his journey. 'Meeting with the goddess' centres on the hero experiencing unconditional love, the female playing a metaphorical role. Maradona was revered by the Napoli fans immediately with 85,000 fans cramming into the Stadio San Paolo to mark his arrival and this became the stage whereby he would be nourished into the world's top footballer. Campbell suggests that at this point the hero is purged of his infantility and resentments, with his mind opened to an inscrutable presence that exists in this new realm. In Maradona's case this was partly true; he certainly became aware of his own legend in Italy, but also succumbed to the

many temptations in front of him, leading onto the 'woman as the temptress' stage. Maradona remained committed to his pursuit of football immortality, yet often became distracted by the attention and adoration that followed. His personal life became the main temptress for him, living in the public eye where private parties were broadcast live, chat shows were dedicated to rumours of illegitimate children, and disputes with partners filmed and leaked. He existed with constant distractions and a cocaine habit that would ultimately cost him several years of his career.

Prior to the 1986 World Cup the Argentina side was in internal disarray, emphasised by criticism of coach Carlos Bilardo when he controversially awarded Maradona with the captaincy at the expense of more experienced teammates. Despite the uproar, Bilardo later revealed that he had decided Maradona would be his captain some three years before the tournament: «In 1983 I went to see Diego when he was playing in Barcelona. I started talking to him about the way I wanted Argentina to play in Mexico. I told him that at that stage he was the only starting player in my team and that he was also the captain» (FIFA, 2009).

Thus, Maradona experienced 'atonement with the father', a central point of the hero's journey with all previous stages having worked towards this vital point and all subsequent stages being influenced by it. Maradona's relationship with Bilardo proved crucial in achieving «hope and assurance from the helpful figure» (Campbell, 2012, p.110), none more so than when Bilardo told him a «You are a symbol, the most important player of your generation» (Maradona, 2004, p.106).

The necessity for a World Cup saviour was never more evident than at Mexico '86. The competition should have been held in Columbia, but civil war and extensive brutality forced the Colombian government to withdraw as hosts and Mexico was unanimously voted by FIFA as their replacement. Nine months before the World Cup was due to start a devastating earthquake hit Mexico City, with over 5,000 casualties and the region's infrastructure severely impacted. Grahame Jones (1985) of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote «...there were those...who said that holding international soccer's quadrennial world championship here was now even more imperative». Maradona arrived at the tournament in the 'apotheosis' stage, whereby the hero's position (in this case as captain and star player) is resolved and he is ready for more difficult challenges within the adventure.

Asserting his dominance from the start, Maradona provided three assists for Argentina's goal in their opening match against South Korea and scored the equaliser in an ill-tempered group stage draw against Italy - a semblance of revenge for the Azzurri's bludgeoning in Barcelona. This was a more experienced Maradona from four years before, no doubt the two years playing in Serie A, influencing the player. Argentina topped their group with a straightforward 2-0 victory over Bulgaria, in which Maradona provided another assist. The early uncertainty that hindered their preparation was gone; the side had transformed into a solid unit ready to fight for one another, Maradona serving as the leading talisman.

Following a second-round victory over Uruguay it was Argentina's quarter final battle against England that cemented both Maradona's legend and infamy in one of the most unforgettable and controversial matches in World Cup history. The game, played against a

backdrop of the Falklands War, was billed as the ultimate grudge match. Six minutes into the second half Maradona, despite conceding seven inches in height, outjumped goalkeeper Peter Shilton, fisting the ball into the back of the net. Replays showed the Argentine's handball but the referee saw no infringement and the goal stood. Shortly after the match Maradona coyly described the goal as being «a little of the hand of God, and a little of the head of Maradona». Minutes later, in a scene diametrically opposed to the previous goal, Maradona picked up the ball inside his own half and independently took on England, slaloming past every white shirt that dared to approach, before bearing down on a helpless Shilton, and calmly slotting the ball into the net: 44 strides and 12 touches was all it took. Unlike the contentious first goal, there was no disputing that this was pure majesty from a hero writing his own World Cup adventure. The goal was later voted Goal of the Century in a poll conducted by FIFA. Argentina secured a 2-1 victory over England, setting up a semi-final against Belgium in a further opportunity for Maradona to exact retribution on another of his tormentors four year earlier. This time Maradona scored both goals in Argentina's 2-0 victory, the latter of which was another skilful solo strike akin to his second against England.

The only nation stood that between Maradona and permanent hero status in his homeland was two-time winners, West Germany. The world's media played up Maradona's role in the match, «never before in more than half a century of World Cups has the talent of a single footballer loomed so pervasively over everybody's thinking about the final» (McIlvanney, 1986); «few would complain if tomorrow's game completes the apotheosis of Diego Maradona» (Lacey, 1986) – the latter quote making direct reference to the relevant stage of the hero's journey. In the match, Argentina went two goals ahead before the resurgent opposition scored twice late on. Double-marked for much of the final, Maradona was afforded little opportunity to showcase his skills. Nevertheless, in the 85th minute he punished his opponents with a perfectly lofted through pass to teammate Jorge Burruchaga for the winning goal. In front of nearly 115,000 fans at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City Maradona lifted the World Cup trophy as captain, his childhood dream coming true.

Ending the tournament with five goals and five assists tells only a subplot in the story of Maradona's dominance. He was awarded the Golden Ball as the best player at the tournament by a unanimous vote and widely regarded as single-handedly winning the competition for Argentina. «For players on opposing teams, he has left them with the unforgettable sensation that they were playing against - and were beaten by - one man» wrote Riding (1986), whilst Chad (1986) stated «For the past 10 days, "Diegomania" headlines have dominated the sports pages as Maradona showed the dazzling possibilities of the gifted, motivated athlete in command of his game». We acknowledge this tournament as the 'ultimate boon' in Campbell's theory, the breaking of Maradona's personal limitations in the development of his spiritual growth. Consistent with Campbell's philosophy Maradona crossed threshold after threshold, conquering 'dragon after dragon' (his opponents) to achieve what he held most divine (the Jules Rimet Trophy), concluding in a realisation that surpasses all previous experiences, «a dream turned to reality» (Maradona, 2004, p.134).

Maradona had transformed into a mythical Argentinean sport hero and if this analysis into his World Cup journey had been penned by Hollywood scriptwriters, we would likely end the paper here, closing with his triumphant return to Buenos Aires to celebrate with the hundreds of thousands of fans who poured onto the streets. However, at the age of 25 and with the world at his feet, the hero's World Cup journey would continue for a further two competitions.

Act 3: the return

It is within this act that the lines between Campbell's theory and Maradona's trajectory become less consistent. The act traditionally begins with the 'refusal of the return' whereby the hero would be reluctant to return to normal life following his achievements and will, occasionally, experience the 'magic flight', the stage by which the hero must escape with his *boon* intact. These stages were removed from Maradona's journey, which saw his return to Italy following the World Cup in Mexico. In the years between the 1986 and 1990 World Cups Maradona dethroned the domination enjoyed by the northern powerhouses of Italian football, Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan, leading Napoli to two Serie A titles, a UEFA Cup and a Coppa Italia. Coming into the 1990 World Cup Maradona was set to lead Argentina in the same country where he earned his living. He may have been the darling of Naples, but such admiration was not reciprocated across the rest of Italy where he was regularly characterised as a drug addict and criticised for alleged affiliations with the *Camorra*, a criminal Mafia-type organisation.

Popular opinion was that Argentina had little chance of retaining their title at Italia '90 and injuries, including one to Maradona's foot which required painkilling injections, affected *La Albicelestes*. The Milanese crowd gave Argentina a vicious reception during the opening match against Cameroon with their National Anthem roundly booed inside the San Siro – an indication of what would be a disastrous afternoon as the Africans secured a 1-0 victory, their first ever win in a World Cup tournament. Maradona was jeered and whistled by fans throughout and the fouls committed against him were met with loud approval. The Italian crowd basked in schadenfreude at Argentina's expense, especially Maradona's humiliation. Following the game, Maradona made the first of several provocative comments about the residents of his current home, «...thanks to me the people of Milan have stopped being racist. Today, for the first time, they supported the Africans» (Maradona, 2004, p.155).

A must-win match against the Soviet Union saw the Argentines victorious, notwithstanding controversy when a goal bound Soviet header was stopped by the right hand of Maradona – a less heralded handball by the captain. A 1-1 draw against Romania, who had failed to qualify for the previous four tournaments, allowed Argentina to progress as one of the best third-placed teams.

A repeat of the infamous 1982 fixture, saw Argentina meet Brazil, in the round of 16. With ten minutes remaining Maradona picked up the ball in the centre circle, ploughing past three midfielders before masterfully threading it through three more defenders to teammate Claudio Caniggia: Argentina one, Brazil nil. Following a penalty shootout

victory against Yugoslavia in the quarterfinals, Argentina would face the hosts for a place in the final. Maradona had his own vendetta to pursue against Italy and the setting was his adopted home at the Stadio San Paolo in Naples.

Maradona was the messiah in the eyes of the Napoli faithful, yet for the rest of Italy he was the devil, an adversary with the intention to knock them out of their own tournament. The affection between Maradona and Napoli had always run deeper than football. Growing up in an impoverished region of Argentina, he understood from a young age how it felt to be ridiculed and discriminated by other classes of society. Upon arriving in Naples in 1984 the perceived racism, suffered by the southern club at the hands of their northern neighbours, resonated strongly with him. Maradona would incense most Italians with his pre-match comments: «I don't like the fact that now everyone is asking the Neapolitans to be Italian and to support their national team. Naples has always been marginalised by the rest of Italy. It is a city that suffers the most unfair racism» (Maradona, 2004, p.165).

The fact that he could demand allegiance from the people of Naples above their own nation was testament to the impact Maradona had on the city. The incendiary statements enraged the Italian press and were even rejected by Napoli Mayor Pietro Lezzi (Vecsey, 1990). The media termed Maradona as «public enemy number 1» (Hersh, 1990) and as the teams walked onto the pitch, a banner read: “Maradona, Naples loves you, but Italy is our homeland”. Following a 1-1 draw, Argentina were taken to penalties for a second successive match. Maradona calmly dispatched his kick, rolling it beyond the Italian goalkeeper. Two misses from the hosts saw Argentina progress and for a second successive tournament they would face West Germany in the final. Whilst the Neapolitan crowd may have been devastated, they applauded Maradona off the pitch. Some years later he said: «I think that penalty was the one I suffered the most in my whole life, I was telling myself ‘If you fail, you are an idiot’...It was me who eliminated Italy. I knocked the Italians out of the World Cup» (FIFA, 2020).

Five days later the Stadio Olimpico in Rome exploded in taunts as Argentina emerged from the tunnel for the final. Their National Anthem was barely heard over the boos and a fuming Maradona could be seen scornfully looking around the stadium, repeatedly mouthing “*hijos de puta, hijos de puta*” (sons of whores) to the antagonistic crowd. A poor final saw an 85th minute German penalty, enough for a measure of retribution for events in Mexico City. At the final whistle the victors were expectedly elated, but there, in the middle of all the activity, stood a tearful and devastated Maradona, struggling to understand that his body and his talent had failed him on the grandest of stages. He had played every minute of every game for Argentina throughout Italia '90 and fouled a tournament record of 50 times. He did everything he could to secure a second World Cup medal, but it was not quite enough.

Maradona's journey at Italia '90 provides an irregularity in Campbell's theory and, if anything, would be better suited as part of his journey during the latter stages of Act 1 or the early stages of Act 2, chiefly the 'belly of the whale' and the 'road of trials'. Nonetheless, we can pick up the hero's journey in the build up to the 1994 World Cup. After announcing his retirement from international football three months after the 1990

final Maradona's career was soon under threat when he tested positive for cocaine following a Serie A match in 1991. A 15-month FIFA imposed ban ended his time in Italy and following his return to football Maradona reunited with his World-Cup winning manager Carlos Bilardo at Sevilla, where he remained for one season before returning home to sign for Argentinian club Newell's Old Boys.

Argentina's campaign to qualify for the 1994 World Cup was under threat, highlighted by a 5-0 loss to Colombia in Buenos Aires. Following coach Coco Basile's decision to remain with the squad that won previous two Copa Américas, Maradona was a helpless spectator in the stands. The loss meant that Argentina had to qualify through an intercontinental play-off against Australia and Campbell's 'rescue from without' stage of the journey can be illustrated here, albeit with an asterisk accompanying it. Campbell (2012) suggests that it is within this stage that the hero is brought back from his supernatural adventure with assistance from the world. We flip this notion and express a belief that when football experts, supporters and, naturally, Argentina came calling for Maradona's return, this was the rescue – the prodigal son returning to the realm where he felt most cherished. Following a two-legged victory over Australia, Argentina qualified with their talisman leading the charge.

Maradona entered USA '94 intending to recapture past triumph. Consistent with our approach of reversing the last stage, we assert that rather than the hero returning to the human world when 'crossing of the return threshold' as Campbell suggests, Maradona actually returned to the divine world that he held in such reverence and where he was always most content. However, on this occasion the golden boy would serve as the fallen angel, in a twist that fails to follow the traditional narrative of a hero's journey.

Despite contributing 173 minutes of play during USA '94, the real narrative of Maradona's involvement at the tournament lies in both the build-up and aftermath of those minutes. Between Italia '90 and USA '94 the sport was transforming into a global phenomenon, personified by the initiator of globalisation, the United States, hosting the 1994 competition, despite having qualified for just one of the previous ten tournaments. For Maradona, the tournament offered a chance of redemption after years of controversy over drugs, run-ins with the police and health issues. Before leaving for the United States, he had told the Argentine news media: «I am tired of all those who said I was fat and no longer the great Maradona. They will see the real Diego at the World Cup» (Verhovek, 1994).

The competition started well for Argentina, who were seeking their third consecutive final. The 4-0 victory over Greece is best remembered for Maradona's remarkable goal celebration as he ran towards a camera on the sidelines in menacing fashion shouting undeterminable words with his eyes bulging. The scene became as synonymous with Maradona as his iconic exploits against England eight years before. It would be his last goal for *La Albiceleste* and four days later he played his final match for the national side in a 2-1 victory over Nigeria. In an unusual scene, Maradona was escorted off the pitch by a medical nurse to undertake an immediate drug test. Shortly after it was announced that he had tested positive for ephedrine, a weight loss stimulant. Protesting his innocence, Maradona attributed blame to his personal training and later wrote in his autobiography:

«I didn't even know I'd taken ephedrine: I played with my soul, with my heart» (Maradona, 2004, p. 201). Argentina, fearing sanctions from FIFA, quickly distanced themselves from the captain, removing him from the squad before the decision was taken out of their hands. Argentina were subsequently eliminated in the last 16 by Romania, and Maradona received a 15 month ban from football. According to one American newspaper, «Maradona's suspension stunned the soccer world and prompted havoc in Buenos Aires, where one television newscaster called the development “total madness, an absolute disaster”» (Verhovek, 1994). *Clarín*, Argentina's largest newspaper, led with a picture of Maradona and a single word: pain (Archetti, 2001). Meanwhile Britain's *The Independent* termed it «The most sensational scandal in the history of the tournament» (Shaw, 1994). The situation certainly fails to follow the path set out by Campbell and instead belongs to another facet of human heroes, their decline and decadence.

The hero's journey should, according to Campbell, conclude with the 'master of the two worlds' and 'freedom to live' stages, neither of which Maradona truly achieved. He never became comfortable and competent in both worlds and displayed problems accepting boundaries and control throughout his career, with a lifestyle that was as devastating to him personally as his performances were to rivals. His death following a heart attack at the age of 60 was met with an outpouring of grief throughout Argentina, Naples and the football world. National mourning was declared in his home nation where many newscasters were unable to hold back the tears, whilst Napoli renamed their ground 'Stadio Diego Armando Maradona'. Maradona may have been a complicated hero whose World Cup journey ended in disgrace, but his superhuman ability with a ball no doubt made him a genius by any definition of the word.

Conclusion

The real-life journey of Maradona is more convoluted and intricate than the confines of any theory. Never before or since has a player been so adored and vilified in equal measure. Maradona was an inconsistent hero with a thirst for self-destruction off the pitch. The opportunity for a glorious comeback story was there for the taking during USA '94, but Maradona's life had always been precariously balanced and this is why tracing a theory aimed largely at fiction conjures up challenges when relating it to a real life individual, especially one as divisive as Diego Maradona. Had we focused purely on events at the four World Cup tournaments, Maradona's hero journey would be lacking in context as many of the stages occurred outside of the international competition. Thus, whilst this paper served to track Maradona's World Cup appearances, it was unrealistic to omit the intricacies of his wider world. Undoubtedly there are elements of Campbell's approach that failed to resonate with Maradona's journey. For example, during the first act a hero may refuse the call to adventure. For Maradona this was not the case, he never refused to play, especially for his one true love – the Argentinian national team. Furthermore, whilst Campbell's theory acknowledges the personal challenges faced by heroes in their journeys, it fails to recognise the very human characteristics that many real-life 'heroes' represent. We use inverted commas here to acknowledge that we are not

referring to heroes who save lives, protect us from harm and such like, but the notion of a hero who brings us joy in their artistry. Maradona balanced an extraordinary gift with wavering morality, resulting in endless conflicts between desire and outcome. Adopting Campbell's theory here only offers a finite understanding of Maradona's stardom. He was the perfect representation of contradictory human ability to convey both beauty versus ugliness and good versus evil simultaneously. Thus, whilst the hero theory may successfully track the arc of more wholesome individuals, it did prove challenging to apply it fully to Maradona – an individual who was painfully human and yet a superstar at the same time.

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