



## BACK IN TIME

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### Golden Goals

Heber Pinto was a radio personality in Uruguay in the 1960s. He was a fast-talking soccer broadcaster on CX12 Radio Oriental, known as “the narrator who televises with his words.” Television was still in its infancy at that time, and people listened to games on the radio wherever they happened to be: in cafés, restaurants, taxis, everywhere. The bar up the street from our house in Pocitos had a radio and whenever a goal was scored, we could hear Heber yelling “Gooooooool!” at the top of his voice half a block away. Soccer was a local obsession and Heber was a local hero. He made a record, an LP, with audio clips of his coverage of “Golden Goals” scored by *Peñarol*, the top team in 1964. CX12 used it as a promotional gimmick and it became a highly prized souvenir among his *hinchas*, the Uruguayan word for fans.

In 1966 Uruguay sent a team to the World Cup, played in England that year, and did very well, holding the English to a 0-0 draw in Group 1. Sadly, that’s as far as *La Celeste* got, while England went on to the final, beating West Germany 4-2 in extra time and winning the Cup. Radio Oriental, of course, dispatched Pinto to cover the event. I was living in London in those days and some friends at CX12 asked if I would help Heber and his entourage while they were in town and, more importantly, escort them to the game. My roommate Keith Yorston, an all-round sportsman who, like me, grew up in Uruguay, joined me and we watched some historic soccer from the comfort of Wembley Stadium’s VIP section. After the game Heber invited us to dinner and some after-hours clubbing in Soho. At one point in the evening he raised a glass and proposed a toast: “To the English, who gave us soccer, which we made ours!”

He was spot-on. British immigrants started coming to Uruguay in the mid-nineteenth century, mainly to farm and raise cattle, but also as entrepreneurs and adventurers. In need of recreation and a chance to socialize with their fellow *ingleses* they started the Montevideo Cricket Club (MVCC) in 1861 and imported soccer, among other sports, from “home.” The club played its maiden game against a team fielded by a visiting British ship in 1878, the first organized soccer match ever played on Uruguayan

soil. The MVCC is the oldest sports club in Uruguay; it was at La Blanqueada for years before moving to Sayago in 1945, then to Carrasco in 1956.

Sayago was one of those pretty towns—like Bella Vista, Las Piedras, Peñarol, Pueblo Ferrocarril, all very close to Montevideo—where English families started settling in the 1870s to work for the railways. The British, flush with capital and expertise, funded and ran the Uruguayan railways for about seventy years until they were nationalized in 1949. Laid off English employees, by then mostly born in Uruguay, found other work and stayed on in communities that blended into the larger population but never forgot their roots. To this day in those towns there are families with English names who pause in the afternoon for a cup of tea.

Of the five original rail systems, the Central Uruguay Railway (CUR) was the largest and employed most people. At one point the company bought a piece of land in Villa Peñarol for their maintenance workshops, which provided some space for recreation and sporting events. Following the example set by the MVCC, railway workers formed the Central Uruguay



Railway Cricket Club (CURCC) in 1891 “for the purpose of stimulating the practice of cricket, football and other male sports.” The club—also known as the *Carboneros* in a nod to the stokers who shovelled coal to keep the trains running—survives to this day as *Peñarol*, named for its original hometown. The CURCC played a huge role in bringing soccer to Uruguay and was one of the founding members of the Uruguayan Football Association in 1900. One of the other founders was the Albion Football Club, started by students at the English High School in Montevideo, also in 1891, which eventually evolved into *Peñarol*’s arch-rival, *Nacional*.

When Keith and I delivered Heber and his crew back to their hotel in the wee small hours of the morning, he said he had something for us and asked us up to his room. There he presented us with an autographed copy of his record, a priceless gift. We sometimes listened to it on the weekend, to be transported by the familiar sound of that televising voice shouting, over and over again: “Gooooooool! Gooooooool! Gooooooool!”