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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the impact of the Trinidad and Tobago National Football team on Trinbagonian society as a result of its performance in the 2006 Football World Cup. It focuses on the team's performances in the tournament itself, including the qualification process. It also explores the aftermath, highlighting the effect it had on the nation. It also focuses on the legacy of the team to the present day, compared to what it was nearly 20 years ago. The work establishes the impact the team made, while also acknowledging how outside factors and a lack of qualification since, has coloured the international impressions of Trinidad and Tobago football.

Keywords: Trinidad and Tobago, History, Football, World Cup, International

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## **Introduction**

### **Title**

The title of this research paper is "The Soca Warriors at the 2006 FIFA World Cup: An Examination of the team's impact on the country and the issues of the aftermath".

### **Thesis Statement**

The Trinidad and Tobago National Football team's qualification for the 2006 FIFA World Cup brought the nation together in a way and to an extent not previously seen. However, the team's early elimination irreparably damaged its reputation.

### **Literature Review**

One scholar who has paid attention to the history of football in Trinidad and Tobago is Valentino Singh. He notes that Trinbagonian football has its roots in Scotland, through the arrival of one Scottish born Thomas Boyd towards the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the British empire still at its zenith, it was not uncommon to see citizens from across the United Kingdom make their way towards the colonies to access a better life. Boyd was no different. Valentino Singh wrote in his piece, *The Story of Football in Trinidad and Tobago 1893 -2000*, that Boyd left Scotland in the 1890s to take control of the dry goods trade and the management of sugar estates in the country. Boyd had been an avid football lover back at his old home and hoped to continue his passion in his new home. According to Singh, however,

He reasoned that the vastness of the savannah provided enough space to play some ball. But he had a problem. There was not a single football in the colony. And he was further doubtful that even if he somehow managed to find one, there would not be enough people interested in joining him for a game (Singh, 2006).

Football as a concept did not exist for people in Trinidad, up to that point, having predominantly been exposed to cricket which had been introduced years earlier. However, Boyd persisted and in 1927, after receiving a ball he had sent for abroad, he managed to procure enough people to play. While a number of people did leave, there were still 12 people who stayed to play, including one man who had played with Boyd in Scotland, according to Singh. While not an extravagant beginning, this first game led to near a century's worth of football history, covered extensively by Valentino Singh.

Roy McCree, another among the few scholars who have researched and published works on football in Trinidad and Tobago found that there could have been several professional leagues in the country between the early 1970s and early 1980s that were prevented from being started. Some of these include the Paramount Internationals in the Eddie Hart Football League (EHFL), the Caribbean Professional Football League (CPFL), the Professional Sports Promotions (PSP) and the Premier Soccer League (PSL). These leagues did have other issues that prevented them from being developed but the common denominator was interference from the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association (Now the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation). McCree stated that one of the main proponents of these TTFA preventions was its secretary at the time. McCree does well to highlight the slow start of professional football in Trinidad and Tobago. He noted that:

The data suggest that a great measure of dissatisfaction with the ruling TTFA was the principal factor which led to the formation of the PSL. This dissatisfaction stemmed from several sources which included: the perceived low standard of the game nationally, the lack of benefits and incentives for players, the absence of a business-like approach to the game and the lack of participation afforded in the decision-making process of the ruling body (McCree, 2000).

Fans from Caribbean nations tend to take their personalities and their lifestyles abroad when they travel overseas for an international tournament. Alan Tomlinson highlights this when writing about football in the Caribbean with particular reference to Jamaica going to the World Cup in 1998. He mentions that the large group of traveling fans were able to stage mini carnivals in the streets before the games. Jamaica was able to take the energy and passion they were known for and bring it to a new situation that they weren't accustomed to. Trinidad and Tobago faced a similar scenario in their sole World Cup outing in 2006.

Tomlinson states that:

At its games in Germany in 2006, Trinidad and Tobago fans recreated this Caribbean carnival atmosphere. In both cases, much was made of the playful public culture of the fans in their support of diasporic configurations of cosmopolitan players (Tomlinson, 2007).

He recognizes the part the fans play in the memories of teams at international tournaments such as the World Cup, especially for smaller nations in the Caribbean. They use their rare opportunity to be on the world stage to give the world an example of who they are.

While Tomlinson does well to highlight Trinidad and Tobago in his piece, it is one of merely a few pieces that represent Trinidad and Tobago football as the main subject. Many publications feature Trinidad and Tobago football as a mere footnote to build a bigger point. David Goldblatt in his book, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Soccer*, does mention Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago's World Cup qualifications in 1998 and 2006 respectively but it is to illustrate a point about the effects of regional diasporas. He stated that:

Jamaica and Trinidad's remarkable achievements in qualifying for World Cup finals in 1998 and 2006 respectively were not primarily a consequence of the strength of their domestic football. Rather, both squads were staffed by children of the Caribbean

diasporas, many of them born in Britain and playing in the lower leagues of English professional football, but taking Caribbean football citizenship (Goldblatt, 2007).

Christopher A.D Charles' book, *Perspectives on Caribbean Football*, does well to examine football's relationship with the Caribbean as a whole, but Trinidad and Tobago is presented as just a footnote in the history of Caribbean football. The state of the literature on the twin-island state in regard to football is surprisingly lackluster. One other publication that attempts to examine the history of football in Trinidad and Tobago is Singh's *The Story of Football in Trinidad and Tobago 1893 -2000*, which is quickly reaching its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in a couple of years. The triumph of the 2006 World Cup, however, is not sufficiently examined in Singh's book or any other for that matter. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to fill an obvious gap. It is to cover a period in Trinidad and Tobago footballing history that is severely underdeveloped by academics. Trinidad and Tobago has a rich footballing history that should be celebrated and explored much more than it currently is.

### **Parameters**

This work will focus on the timeframe of 2005 to the present day, with specific focus on 2006. Its geography is limited to the twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago, as its national football team is the main topic being discussed. This work will examine the impact of the team on the county during the tournament and will consider its successes and failures since 2006. It will focus on eight people in different age groups with varied experiences of playing the game at the World Cup and at the national level.

### **Objectives**

The aim of the work is to assess the factors responsible for the qualification of the team to the 2006 World Cup and will evaluate the team's performance in that competition. Additionally, the paper seeks to examine the aftermath of the nation's early elimination from the 2006

World Cup and the scandal that came with it and underscore the manner in which the team is perceived in current times.

## **Rationale**

This study is a necessary addition to the sparse documentation in the coverage of the Soca Warriors, the national football team of Trinidad and Tobago, at the 2006 World Cup. It was a great shock to see how little there was in research about this special moment in Trinbagonian history, in terms of its aftermath and how the players were treated. It is therefore necessary to research and interrogate this event paying attention to its context within the wider football history of Trinidad and Tobago and its significance in terms of its impact upon the nation.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

The sources that are used to support the conclusions reached in the paper are primary documentary sources which include newspaper clippings from the time period being examined, which cover various aspects of the tournament. Secondary sources will also be used. In addition, there are also online news stories about the aftermath of the tournament, which cover the issues that stemmed from the fallout. These sources will be collected via the National Archives and several online websites, particularly socawarriors.net. These sources will be used to offer evidence for the research done and enhance the analysis. The genre of this study is social history. A mixed method approach is employed consisting both of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Information will be gathered via a survey. The sample of the survey focused on six persons, taking note of their ages in 2006. The age brackets were 20-40 and 40+.

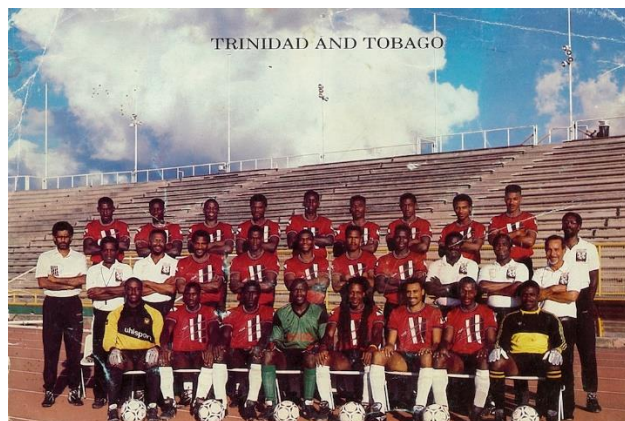
## **Chapter Outline**

This study consists of three chapters. Chapter one examines the team's qualification for the 2006 World Cup and the reactions that it spurred from the entire country and the government. Chapter two will focus on the tournament itself, the team's performance, and the reaction of the country during and after the team's performance. Chapter three will analyze the subsequent years after the tournament focusing on the treatment of the team of 2006, the failure to qualify since then and the reactions of the public to the team in the present day.

## Chapter One

In Trinidad and Tobago, sports play a large role in recreation and entertainment. Even before its independence in 1962, the twin-island state has been involved in athletic contests. One noteworthy sport amongst them is football. A game which could be traced back to the Americas, football has been a beloved pastime for the country, which continues to this day. Hundreds of clubs take part in the local leagues throughout the islands and nonlocal football remains a vested interest especially around the World Cup. It is this international tournament that provides the context for this study and the examination that will stem from it.

As a colony of Britain, Trinidad and Tobago did not even enter the first seven editions of the tournament, from 1930 to 1962. Once the country obtained independence, that competitive drought continued as the decades rolled on. The twin-island state came most agonizingly close in 1989 in their attempts to qualify for the World Cup the next year.



**Figure 1**

**Image of the 1989 Trinidad and Tobago Men's National Football Team posing for a photo**

Source: *Trinidad and Tobago Express Newspaper*

With a draw or a win allowing qualification, all the team needed to do was to defeat the United States in order to seal its success. The team would concede an insane goal in the 30<sup>th</sup> minute of the game and despite an attempt to push for a goal, the team would come up empty. The USA would go on to win, leaving Trinidad and Tobago heartbroken and at home for another tournament. Three more successive tournaments would follow, all with the same unfortunate ending. From February 2000 to March 2005, the Trinidad and Tobago national team had eight national team coaches, including having the same manager for two different stints, in Bertille St. Clair (“Trinidad and Tobago - Current and Former Staff,” n.d.). Eight coaches in five years is simply unacceptable for a national team to function. It does not allow any kind of stability or continuity and brings different ideologies to the players. In a landscape where national team coaches usually stay for upwards of four years, Trinidad and Tobago were already set up to fail.

Former Trinidad and Tobago national team player Cornell Glen spoke of conditions under Hannibal Najjar, coach of the team from November 1, 2002, to April 1 2003, stating:

The conditions were rough then. They were offering about US\$200 a game and we were eating bread and cheese after practice. Literally! A few of the senior players spoke to us and we decided to stand up for what was right.

But then someone from within the team went back and told the coach and word got out. And, the day before the game, they brought in a whole new team with mostly players from the Army (who are forbidden from industrial action) and blacklisted everyone who was going to strike... (Liburd 2015)

So as the qualification process for the 2006 edition of the World Cup began, hopes were not necessarily high, particularly as the team was found at the bottom of the group in the final round of qualifying.

A change was needed and needed soon. While Bertille St. Clair had brought some stability after staying in the post for over a year compared to the five previous coaches, he did not have the skill to bring Trinidad and Tobago to success.

In late March of 2005, the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation finalized the hiring of Leo Beenhakker, a former manager of top European clubs like Real Madrid.

Beenhakker was a proven winner, having won a large collection of titles for Ajax and Real Madrid in the 1980s. Having coached some of the game's greatest in his long coaching career, Beenhakker would have no trouble commanding respect from the players. His pedigree alone put him head and shoulders above all other coaches who had managed the Trinidad and Tobago National team before ("Leo Beenhakker - Manager Profile" n.d.).

Having spent the last five years mostly as a technical director for teams in the Netherlands, it remained to be seen if he could rediscover his coaching form. Nevertheless, it was a coup for Trinidad and Tobago to get such a legend of the game as their coach.

The federation was very fortunate in making the signing, helped greatly by the special advisor to the TTFF, Jack Warner. Beenhakker saw the issues at the time as a challenge to be overcome, stating:

"It's a difficult situation after the first three matches, but it's not hopeless, and I think there is still a lot of possibility to qualify for Germany 2006. And if I didn't have the confidence to do the job, I would not (be) here. It's as simple as that" (Freitas, 2005).



**Figure 2**

**Image of Leo Beenhakker working with some of the Soca Warriors in training.**

**Source: *Trinidad and Tobago Express Newspaper***

While he was beginning to arrange the overall team and squad his way, the rest of the country rallied behind the national team. In May of 2005, the Federation was granted 1.6 million dollars to support the team's preparation for qualification. Shawn Fuentes of TTF Media at the time wrote that:

This contribution, according to TTF President Oliver Camps who accepted the presentation from Boynes, will go towards the Warriors' "Journey to Germany" campaign as well as other needs of the Federation regarding the development of the sport (Fuentes, 2005).

Another factor that assisted the national football team in its success in the World Cup qualification was the return of a few notable national team veterans who were successful overseas. These players would be the key to Beenhakker and the national team's success due to their experience and overall skill. Dwight Yorke returned from Sydney FC in Australia. Stern John, Hector Sam, Carlos Edwards and Dennis Lawence alongside Kenwyne Jones,

Russel Latapy and Shaka Hislop came in from the UK, while players like Avery John, Marlon Rojas and Cornell Glenn arrived from the US.

These players had experience playing in some of the biggest leagues in the world at the time.

Most notably, Dwight Yorke had been a valued player at Manchester United. Yorke's goals creating much success and bringing them several trophies in his five years there, including three in one season in 1999 ("Dwight Yorke - Titles & Achievements" n.d.). Stern John had become a reliable goal scorer for several English teams in a decade, specifically Nottingham Forest, Birmingham City and Coventry City ("Stern John - Detailed Stats" n.d.). Meanwhile Russel Latapy had spent most of his early career playing in Portugal with teams like Académica, Porto and Boavista from 1990 to 1998 ("Russell Latapy - Player Profile" n.d.).

The second of those teams made him the first Trinidadian to play in the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League. He also became a household name in Scotland in the years leading up to the World Cup, winning several individual awards including the Scottish Football League's player of the year while at Dundee United. Shaka Hislop had been a stalwart goalkeeper in the English Premier League for almost a decade and was coming into the tournament with a Football Association (FA) Cup runner's up medal, an achievement only bested by Dwight Yorke ("Shaka Hislop - Titles & Achievements" n.d.).

While not quite at the peak of their powers, those four in particular brought a winning mentality to the team that hadn't been seen in some time. Latapy and Yorke in particular, while both young, had been a part of the Strike Squad team in 1989, which helped them bring a fire to the team that was sorely needed. With their experience and the younger players bringing youth and desire, the team was finally ready.

As the group developed together and the coach was able to instil his philosophy, the results began to improve for the national team. Where at one point, qualification seemed like an

impossibility, Trinidad and Tobago soon found itself managing to place fourth in the group (“FIFA World Cup Qualification (CONCACAF) 2006, Football - Table and Standings, Match Results, Schedule, Stats, Videos, News” n.d.). Automatic qualification was far gone, but there was still a chance to get in via a playoff against a country from another region. The World Cup qualification process made it so that the fourth-place team in Confederation of North, Central America, and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) qualifying had to play the fifth-place team in Asian Football Confederation (AFC) qualifying. The match would be played over two legs in both countries and the winner would book its spot in the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals.

However, amid this historic possibility, there were issues in the avenues above the actual play on the field. Jack Warner, a FIFA vice-president, and special advisor seemed to accuse the government of not financially supporting the team enough. An article written in the *Trinidad and Tobago Express* stated:

A day after Trinidad and Tobago beat Mexico 2-1 and earned a chance to reach the World Cup via a home and away playoff with Bahrain, Warner, a FIFA vice-president, seemed to indicate that Government's input to the qualifying campaign was minimal and grossly inadequate.

Warner said while he had pumped \$17 million of his own money into the campaign, Government had put up just \$1.1 million.

"That is not true," Boynes insisted. "The Government has been supportive of football in many areas."

The Minister told the *Express* that, specifically, the "Warriors" had received a \$2 million cheque from the Ministry of Sport and they had also been assisting wherever possible (Prescott, 2005).

The money matter was a distraction from the real goal and unfortunately, would not be the only issues the Federation would run into with money in the near future. Nevertheless, the team had to focus on its first game at Haseley Crawford Stadium on 12 November 2005. With a capacity of 22,575, the stadium was packed with supporters from the home team, alongside the away opponent, bringing its total to 24, 991. Unfortunately for both sides, the game would produce a 1-1 draw, meaning that the next leg in Bahrain had it all to play for. On the 16 November 2005, Bahrain and Trinidad and Tobago would compete to see which nation would qualify for its first ever FIFA World Cup.

Jelani Beckles of the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* wrote in 2022:

Everyone was glued to the TV for the historic moment and celebrations erupted when TT sealed its place. The match against Bahrain was held around lunchtime in TT, but everyone took time from work and school to witness the moment. People lined the streets waving flags and honking their car horns in jubilation (Beckles, 2022).

The horrors of 1989 were still very fresh in the minds of the country 16 years later, with the generation of men and women who were young at the time, now becoming grown adults. They had not gathered together for something like this in a long time. They all united together under one common goal of willing the national team on to the World Cup. It would prove a successful moment, as Trinidad dominated the match and scored early in the second half. BBC sport covered the game, noting:

“Bahrain had secured a 1-1 draw in the Caribbean on Saturday but were outplayed in the play-off's second leg. Wrexham's giant defender Dennis Lawrence scored the goal, outjumping the Bahrain defence to powerfully head in a Dwight Yorke corner on 49 minutes” (BBC Sport, 2005).

It only took one goal but what seemed impossible was now a reality. After over 30 years of failure and heartbreak, Trinidad and Tobago was going to its first ever FIFA World Cup Finals in 2006.



**Figure 3**

**Image of the Trinbagonian players celebrating Dennis Lawrence’s goal that sent them to the World Cup**

**Source: *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday Newspaper***

There was much jubilation all over the entire country, as cars honked relentlessly in the streets and flags were waved non-stop after the final whistle. In order to celebrate such a momentous occasion, the prime minister at the time, the Right Honourable Patrick Manning, announced that the government had officially declared the day after the game a public holiday.

When interviewed about the victory, Brent Sancho, a player on the now iconic team, told the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* in 2022 that:

“I think I am as Trini as any Trinbagonian there is, and I don’t think I have ever seen that level of unity, that level of pride and that level of love for country in my life ever. “Everywhere you walked...there was a hug, there was a flag flying. It was just a moment where everybody felt proud to be a Trinbagonian” (Beckles 2022).



Figure 4

Image of the front page of the Trinidad and Tobago Express highlighting celebrations after Trinidad and Tobago’s World Cup qualification.

Source: *Trinidad and Tobago Express Newspaper*

There was no denying how special and how memorable this moment was to such a small nation. In fact, Trinidad and Tobago became the smallest nation in FIFA World Cup history to qualify for the tournament. They were only bested in 2018 by Iceland who had a smaller population. (Mehrish 2024)

The tournament itself, however, was nowhere near as fruitful as the country or team would have hoped and the aftermath of such a huge achievement became marred with corruption and controversy.

## Chapter Two

To say that the Soca Warriors had a long shot in winning the World Cup would be an understatement. An article from the *Trinidad Express* in December 2005 reported:

Capsule reports yesterday from *The Associated Press* (AP) of the 32 countries playing in next year's finals gave the breakdown on the chances of each team securing the most sought-after prize in world football and the T&T Soca Warriors are at the bottom of the heap at 750-1, according to odds posted by British bookmakers William Hill (Trinidad Express, 2005).

Going in as the smallest nation to qualify at the time brought a lot of attention and interest from media locally, regionally, and internationally. For instance, various local newspapers covered the build-up daily. The English newspaper, *the Independent*, covered the team's rise and success through Carlos Edwards, a player in the lower leagues of England at the time. Edwards in particular spoke on the reception of the team on its return to the country after qualification:

The memory of returning from the Middle East and stepping out of the team's aeroplane at Piarco International Airport in Port of Spain is equally vivid.

"Unbelievable," says Edwards, chuckling again, "I was just not expecting anything like that. It was like 4 July, Independence Day, in America. The whole place was there. On a normal day it takes 30 minutes maximum to get to any destination from the airport. It took us six hours to get to the hotel - that's how many people were on the streets. It showed that the whole country was proud. The street parties continued for days (Burt, 2006).

Support was not lacking for the twin-island state in the slightest. But it was up to the team to take that support and make good use of it at the tournament. Still, the issues of money persisted. Jack Warner in particular kept the pressure on the government to provide for the national team in its journey to the tournament. While he was appreciative of the support the

team had been given so far, it wasn't what he felt was most important for success. Kayode James of the *Trinidad and Tobago Express* wrote in November 2005 that speaking at the T&TEC General Sports and Cultural Club Awards ceremony on Saturday evening, Warner said that the Soca Warriors would need US\$15 million to take part in next year's World Cup. The figure, he said, is a conservative estimate, and would still be the lowest budget of any team in the competition. However, Warner said that only three corporations had contributed to the venture, and that the financial support from the general public was even less significant. Warner said that he was grateful for the widespread praise and recognition that the Soca Warriors had received, but feels that the national community needs to step up to the ball and offer more financial aid to the team.

This is not a Jack Warner affair. It's a national affair, so I'm asking that everyone put a hand, he said (James, 2005).

Meanwhile, the team had to focus on the incoming tournament. The players and their coach would learn very quickly that it would not be an easy experience. The team was drawn in a group with Paraguay, Sweden, and tournament favourites England ("World Cup 2006 - Groups & Matchdays" n.d.). The latter was the most interesting. England were not only the sole team in the group to not face Trinidad and Tobago in an official competitive fixture, but there was a much closer relationship between them.

Of course, 44 years prior, the British gave the twin-island state its independence in 1962, and then allowed them to become a republic in 1976. Most notably, this was the first meeting of the two countries with both being independent nations.

If they needed any extra motivation and or pressure, however, they got it in the form of the appearance of members of former Trinidad and Tobago teams who failed in this pursuit,

more specifically the 1973 and 1989 teams. Ian Prescott of the *Trinidad and Tobago Express* wrote that:

Members of both the "Classic 1973 national football team and the 1989 "Strike Squad" will be in Germany this summer to support the 2006 Soca Warriors, who became the first T&T team to qualify for a World Cup Finals when they edged Bahrain 2-1 on aggregate in a play-off last November.....The package is the inspiration of businessman Bede Wells, an ex-St Benedict's College footballer, Wells, an ex-teammate of several members of the "Classic" 1973 team says it was his dream to have his football friends join him in Germany. And in recognition of the impact they made, members of the "Strike Squad" have also been invited to make the trip. An emotional Wells said he expected great things from Trinidad and Tobago at the World Cup Finals (Prescott, 2006).

These men had come so close to achieving what the current team were attempting and were relying on them to finish what they couldn't, emboldening the players. This was particularly true for Latapy and Yorke who played alongside some of them as part of the Strike Squad.

On 10 June 2006, the Soca Warriors opened up its first ever World Cup campaign against Sweden. Many expected this to be an easy win for the European nation which boasted a strong side. Despite Avery John's second half sending off reducing the Warriors to ten men, the twin-island state held firm. They were able to hold off the Swedish attack for the 90 minutes, and while they didn't score either, the result was still a monumental achievement for Trinbagonians and even Caribbean football. In 2019, Brent Sancho, a defender for the team, recalled two key moments before and after the Sweden game. One was an interview from a British journalist, and one was the reaction back home after the draw. He stated:

They said: ‘Seeing as cricket is a popular sport in Trinidad, do you expect to lose by a cricket score?’ I remember going back on the bus after, and the then prime minister (Patrick Manning) called us on speakerphone to congratulate us. You could hear all the pandemonium behind him, all the cabinet ministers celebrating (Fisher, 2019).



Figure 5

*Image of Chris Birchall of Trinidad and Tobago looking to strike the ball past a Swedish defender.*

*Source: TTFA Media*

For a team of its size and experience, it was the best possible start it could have, second only to a win. It gave the team much needed confidence going into its second game of the tournament which would be its biggest test; England.

England had just come off a rather unconvincing win vs Paraguay and so confidence wasn't high going in to facing the Soca Warriors. On June 15, the two nations lined up for a rare

battle between colonizer and former colony. It would be a memorable match, but not for the reasons either team wanted.

For the second straight time, England was not impressive against a less fancied team, and Trinidad and Tobago did well against a more powerful team. Despite a good early start, the English faltered and Trinidad and Tobago did well to keep going, not letting up the pressure. *BBC Sport* described it in their report on the match as:

It had looked like being a major embarrassment for England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson, with his team short on ideas and confidence. They created plenty of chances without ever being in total control of the match and can count themselves fortunate to have got out of jail (BBC Sport, 2006).

The twin-island state came close with chances of its own, but it couldn't convert either. It took the 83<sup>rd</sup> minute to get the game's first goal and it was a controversial one. After David Beckham put a cross into the box, Peter Crouch rose up to head the ball past Shaka Hislop. The only issue is that he avoided Brent Sancho's attempt to stop him by tugging on the Trinbagonian player's hair.



Figure 6 -

*Image of Peter Crouch pulling on Brent Sancho's hair to head pass Shaka Hislop*

*Source: Daily Mail Online*

Obviously an illegal gesture, the Trinbagonian players protested but were given no attention by the referee. The goal stood. Having been so close to obtaining another draw and possibly even a win, the players were visibly deflated and disappointed. This is what England would use as a springboard to score its second and the final goal of the game, the Soca Warriors' first loss of the tournament.

For Trinidad and Tobago to progress to the next round, it had to win its final match against Paraguay and hope that Sweden was beaten by England.

With the good performances against the two European sides, it was not out of the realm of possibility either. But after the loss against England, it was clear the fire had been burnt out of the team. Sweden's draw against England made it a forgone conclusion it was going out anyway, but the Soca Warriors crashed out of the tournament with a 2-0 loss vs Paraguay. The team hadn't scored a goal the entire tournament.

Despite the early exit, the team had nothing to be ashamed of in the eyes of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and FIFA itself. The Soca Warriors of 2006 are now enshrined in the hallowed halls of the FIFA museum. Ian Prescott of *the Trinidad and Tobago Express Newspaper* writes:

Along with Pele and Diego Maradona, guess who else is in FIFA's museum? Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), football's world governing body, has listed Trinidad and Tobago's achievement of qualifying for the 2006 FIFA World Cup and becoming the smallest nation at that time to do so. T&T's historic achievement is captured in three precious images in the FIFA museum, depicting the twin island republic's qualification for the 2006 Germany tourney. The opening image in the FIFA museum shows T&T's Soca Warriors proudly lining up for its opening World Cup match against Sweden (Prescott 2022).

The team returned to Trinidad and Tobago as heroes. It was a team who defied all odds even just to make it to the tournament in general. Any results it had at the tournament wasn't the main priority, but it could hold a lot of pride in the results it did achieve.



Figure 7

*Image of the front page of the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian showing the Trinidad and Tobago players returning home after their World Cup exit.*

*Source: Trinidad and Tobago Guardian Newspaper*

Cornell Glen, another player from the 2006 team detailed his experience at the tournament, stating that:

It is something you look back on and you can cherish it for the rest of your life. At least you know you showed up and you gave your best. Deep in my heart, I knew I could perform at that level and it was the highest level. I tell people that George Weah was my idol from ever since I was about 15 or 16 and he never got the chance to play on a World Cup stage. He is arguably one of the best strikers to ever play football and never got to play at a World Cup. And I did it (Liburd 2015).

With its summer dreams ending early, one would expect the Soca Warriors to be even hungrier for the next World Cup in four years' time that would take place in South Africa. But their World Cup dreams were dashed quickly. Leo Beenhakker had left the job a month after the World Cup had concluded and many of the star players of the tournament had retired from international duty, leaving a significant hole to be filled to achieve success. But in the years to come, the Trinidad and Tobago national team would suffer a continuous number of setbacks and failures on and off the field, including one that affected the heroes of 2006 directly.

### Chapter Three

The legacy of the Trinidad and Tobago national football team that competed at the 2006 FIFA World Cup remains a complicated one.

In a survey of six people of various ages in 2006 stemming from age 20 to age 40+, three of the participants remembered the tournament, while two others only remembered it slightly.

Two outright did not remember it at all.

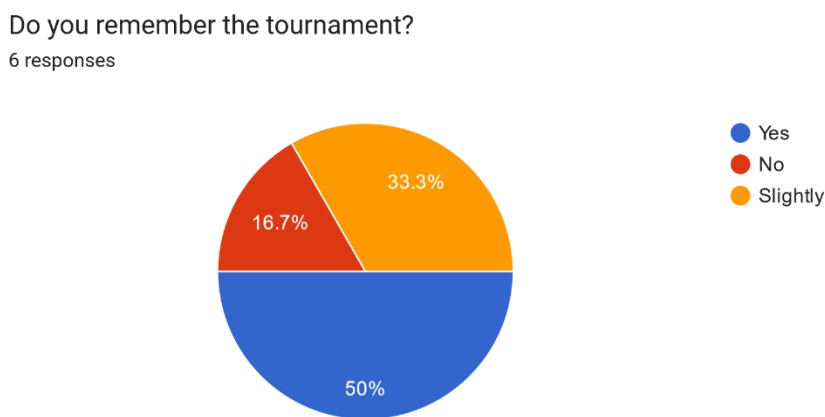


Figure 8

*Graph showing the results of the survey asking participants if they remembered the tournament.*

Nearly 20 years on from the tournament, it remains a subject that is sore to many people, for a variety of reasons. Most pertinently is the treatment of the players who achieved such a monumental feat despite their elimination. What should have been a reminder of what they accomplished is now stained with the issues stemming from the organization that should have protected them; the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation.

For their participation in the 2006 World Cup, the team was promised a bonus of 50% of all World Cup revenues of US\$3 million (\$19.23 million TT) by FIFA vice-president and T&T Football Federation special adviser Jack Warner. Having upheld their part of the arrangement, the players expected to receive their money forthwith, in accordance with the contract they signed. But as the years went on and on, the money never came. Four years after their momentous triumph, most of the team members had retired from international football, doing so months after the tournament, adding to need for the money. While the issue was far from easy to explain, Matt Scott of the *Guardian* newspaper in England wrote his own piece on the matter in 2010, obtaining quotes from goalkeeper, Shaka Hislop. Scott wrote:

That is also the view of the 2006 World Cup players, whose goalkeeper, Shaka Hislop, has led the fight for Warner's promises to be upheld. "Jack Warner, though not on the TTFA officially, makes every single decision: how much bonus should be paid, who is the right coach," said Hislop (Scott, 2010).

Warner would have his own corruption issues to deal with once he was implicated in the FIFA football scandal of 2015 that rocked the footballing world. In fact, as it was later discovered, Warner was implicated in decades of corruption, particularly around bribery for host tournaments.

So infuriated by the breach of contract, the team took the matter to court. The *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* reported on their struggle, writing that:

Warriors say they have not been paid. They made that claim after representing T&T in the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals in Germany four years ago. Led by attorney Michael Townley, who has been documenting the history of the dispute, they saw a promise of a 50/50 split in World Cup profits. He was speaking at news conference at

the Queen's Park Oval, Port-of-Spain, yesterday. The players say they were offered \$5,000. They disputed the amount and took the matter to court, Townley said. The arbitrator in 2008 ruled in their favour and so the TTFF had to reveal its accounts. It is being held up since the matter is in court, he said. Townley said they were promised a judgment since October 2009, but seven months later they were still waiting (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 2010).

As the year progressed, there was still no payment however, leaving the players even more increasingly frustrated. It would not be until May 2, 2011, that a breakthrough was found, albeit barely. The TTFF finally made an interim payment of \$US1.1 million (\$7 million TT). While it was appreciated that they managed to get at least some money for their performance, it was not what they desired.

The team was still missing another sum yet to be fully paid. The TTFF consistently maintained they did not have the funds to pay them. That deliberation from the federation would continue for another three years as Trinidad and Tobago failed to qualify for the 2014 World Cup, in addition to the 2010 World Cup four years prior. The failures on the field only brought more attention to the team that did qualify and their monetary plight. The matter was so important and had garnered so much attention that it captured the attention of the incumbent UNC government led by prime minister Kamala Persad-Bissessar.

Eight years after their successful trip to Germany, the 2006 Trinidad and Tobago national football team players were finally given the reward they were promised all those years ago.

The *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* wrote in 2014 that:

Former national football player Brent Sancho was brought to tears as Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar agreed to pay the Soca Warriors the outstanding US\$1.3 million for their role in the 2006 FIFA World Cup campaign in Germany. That figure

represented the sum owed to the players by the T&T Football Association. Some of the players accepted lower sums while Sancho and the others demanded the full payment. Yesterday, Persad-Bissessar, during a hastily arranged news conference at the Diplomatic Centre, St Ann's, promised the footballers the remaining money. She said the matter was discussed and approved by Cabinet (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 2014).

While receiving of the money was a great relief for the players, it also highlighted the issues plaguing the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation since that World Cup all those years ago. As the country fast approaches the 20th anniversary of the participation in the tournament alongside a 48-team tournament in 2026, it is not lost on the nation of the multiple failures that have been experiences since 2006. There have been four World Cups since 2006 and Trinidad and Tobago has not qualified for any. Of the 14 national team coaches since Beenhakker left the post in July 2006, only one has superintended 40 games (“Trinidad and Tobago - Current and Former Staff” n.d.).

Its record for the smallest nation to qualify was broken in 2018 by Iceland, even taking away that part of its legacy. It has become a forgone conclusion that the Soca Warriors will not qualify for the tournament.

In a survey of eight people of various ages stemming from age 20 to age 40+ all six participants did not believe that Trinidad and Tobago could make the next World Cup, despite the increased number of teams in the country. This is a damning indictment on the lack of development in the sport since the turn of the millennium.

Do you think Trinidad and Tobago can make the next World Cup?  
6 responses

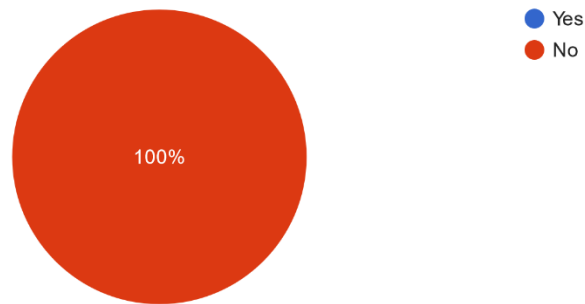


Figure 9

*Graph showing the results of the survey asking participants if they think Trinidad and Tobago can make the next World Cup*

In fact, its main highlight in the near two-decade period since then has been beating the United States to prevent them from qualifying in 2018, and even that was seen as a major embarrassment for the superpower rather than an achievement for the twin-island state.



Figure 10

*Image of Trinidad and Tobago players celebrating scoring against the US in 2017*

*Source: mlssoccer.com*

With the issue of the pay post tournament, the lack of success in qualifying since then and the corruption of the team's most famous supporter, the 2006 Soca Warriors team who captivated the nation is not seen in such a glowing light as they once were. While the achievement is still impressive and beloved, it's become purely an anomaly in what has been nearly six decades of failure. What should be a moment of triumph for Trinbagonians to forever dwell on has been marred by outside issues on and off the field.

## Conclusion

The Soca Warriors of the 2006 FIFA World Cup represents the best and worst of what Trinidad and Tobago has to offer. On the one hand, it represented success on a global stage with qualification. It represented a period of hope for the future and what more success could possibly follow in the time to come.

On the other hand, it also represented failure to progress past the major development achieved. It also represented false promises and a lack of faith in the major organizations to help when needed. It developed a mistrust in leading figures and what they offer. It represents a reputation once revered that is now sullied.

It is possible, however, that the reputation can be repaired. That success on the field once again may begin a revival in interest in the famous team for those generations who were born after the tournament. With qualifying for 2026 World Cup, generosity from CONCACAF has increased significantly and there may be a chance for Trinidad and Tobago yet.

But as it stands (and especially with failure once again), the 2006 Soca Warriors is a reminder of a time when the nation stood together in one mind, body, and soul to cheer on its boys aboard. But its aftermath has given the country a severe reminder of the corruption, scandal and failure that have been present back home for as long as can be recalled.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix A**

## 2006 World Cup Soca Warriors Questionnaire

Form description

Age in 2006

- 20-40
- 40+

How did you feel when Trinidad and Tobago qualified for the tournament?

- Happy
- Ambivalent

Do you remember the tournament?

- Yes
- No
- Slightly

Where were you at the time of the games? (June 20th, June 15th, June 10th)

- School
- Work
- Home
- Other

What were your feelings during the occasion?

- Pride
- Ambivalence
- Dislike

What are your feelings on it currently?

- Happiness
- Anger
- Sadness
- Ambivalence

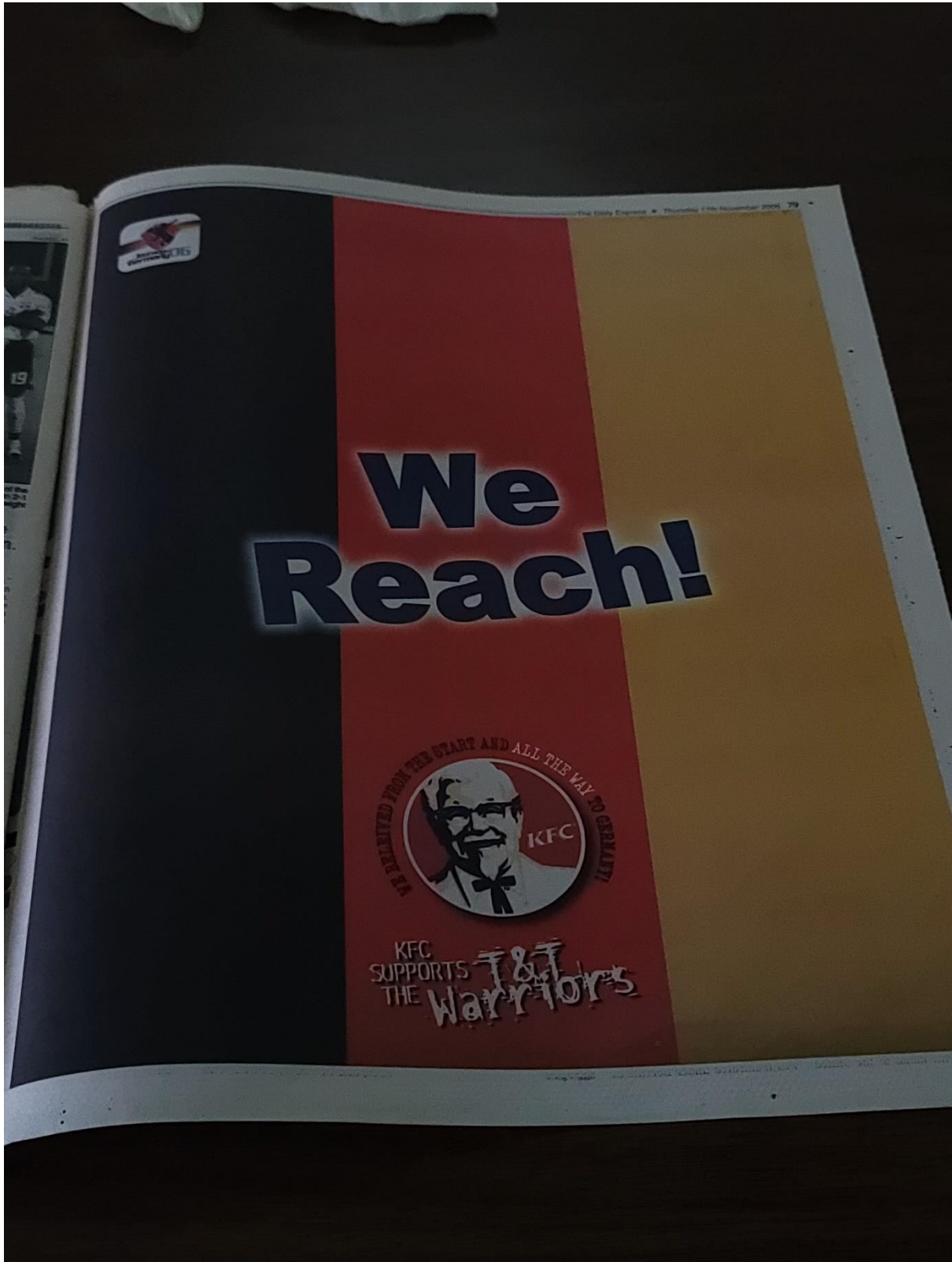
Do you think Trinidad and Tobago can make the next World Cup?

- Yes
- No

**Appendix B**

**Newspaper Clippings taken from the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, in**

**Port of Spain**







# 'Strike Squad' skipper pleased with Warriors

By [Name]

AFTER a win that lasted some 20 years, Trinidadian footballers were back to enjoy a result that yesterday reflected our ability to move well into the semi-final stage of the World Cup.

The result created a feeling of change, new in the way the national team played on the football field in the future, and of a new era in our language. If you were anywhere in Port Antonio, in our language, the boys did not disappoint.

Former national captain of the 1980 Strike Squad Clayton Morris was also high in praise for the performance of the team.

He said, given the situation our players performed quite well and deserved the result they had set out to achieve yesterday.

But the ex-national defender pointed out that despite the result, the performance also showed that the "Soca Warriors" were not totally prepared for the Swedes and were more reacting to what their opponents had to offer in the match.

"You could have seen that the Swedish team was more prepared than us, the way they were building their attacks from the defence to when they entered the box," Morris said from Germany yesterday.

He said further, the Trinidad and Tobago team must beef up their preparations as they will next face England in their second match in Nuremberg.

Morris said he thought the Soca Warriors fitted into the game nicely, but unlike the Swedes, there was never that build-up as though we were responding to the attacks of our opponents.

The result has given the "Soca Warriors" one point and a chance to advance to the second round of the competition after the English in their opening game in the same group only managed to edge Paraguay 1-0 on an own-goal.

Manager of the national team Richard Braithwaite viewed the draw as a magnificent performance, one that mainly defied the odds.

"It was a great team performance and it proves that we can be at the World Cup," Braithwaite said.

Though it was difficult to heap praises on any one player, Braithwaite singled out goalkeeper Shaka Hislop, and captain Dwight Yorke worked as a general field marshal.

Yorke marshalled his troops from all parts of the field and led by example also in the match.



CLAYTON MORRIS... was high in praise of "Soca Warriors" performance yesterday.





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**WARRIORS SO NEAR, YET SO FAR**



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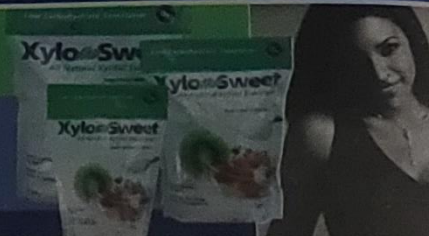
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# Poor? Soca warriors have wealth



...A PLAYER from Trinidad and Tobago, who plays for the national team in the bottom flight of the English football, and the answer is that he has more financial wealth and more fame than us," he said.

If you talk about love and money, that we've got from friends and family and the belief we have in ourselves, then we've about as much as the attitude England faced in the Frankfurt Stadium in Germany on June 15.

...a couple of days before the start of the tournament, always courted by the press, always focused boys from the Caribbean at their training camps in Kristianstad, it is obvious that there is no Jamaica.

...game, we expect gang-bro, game-bro, college football, even if it's from the smallest nation in the world. From the smallest nation in the world, from the smallest nation in the world, from each as part of the team, if they win.

This was a side which has been schooled in the corrugated iron areas of English and Scottish football. Players taught to harry and close down, to weigh every ounce of enthusiasm and shed buckets of sweat.

**FRUSTRATED SWEDEN**  
England knew that. They watched the way Trinidad frustrated Sweden, admittedly with good fortune but also with organisation which matched their spirit.

Leo Beenhakker, the silver-haired Dutchman, has done some coaching job on these boys, travelling places such as Port Vale and Gillingham and Dundee and Falkirk in "awful weather" to marry meagre talents and mould them into a side which proved it deserved its place among the biggest sports show on earth.

The task for England was obvious. They had to find a way to make superior technique and experience count.

After the unconvincing way in which they negoti-

ated Paraguay in the heat of Frankfurt, they also needed a per-ner momentum.

That meant playing football, not lumping long balls up to Peter Crouch in the hope that one would fall out of the sky in and around the danger area for Michael Owen or Frank Lampard.

It meant not giving the ball away by adopting the hurry-scurry tactics prominent in the Premiership, but which ultimately will not get the job done against the World Cup's better sides.

It meant not sitting back after scoring an early goal to "hold what we have" in an infuriating mirror image of Italian coaches of yesteryear.

It should not involve making defensive substitutions and then insisting Owen Hargreaves is one of England's most important players.

Surely in five years Sven-Goran Eriksson has given

English football more wit and resourcefulness than that.

Beenhakker has been dismissive of England's recent performances, in analytical rather than gratuitous fashion.

It has not gone unnoticed that five of England's last seven goals have come from dead-ball deliveries.


"They are struggling at beating opponents at playing football and creating chances," said Beenhakker.



THE SOCA WARRIORS team. TOP: Leo Beenhakker

...pitches at ...

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