

Jonathan Agnew



I might have an unusual take on the World Cup biting incident by Luis Suárez, but I am going to share it with you anyway. Make no mistake, the Uruguay striker's actions were absolutely disgraceful and his explanation that he simply lost his balance and fell onto his opponent is nothing short of risible. The worldwide

condemnation was instant and deserved while, at the same time, FIFA was challenged to come up with a suitable punishment.

In banning Suárez from nine Uruguay matches and from all football-related activity for four months, FIFA discharged its duty both admirably and fairly. All too often high-profile sportsmen get away with poor behaviour and in biting an opponent – which is just about as bad as it gets – Suárez is a repeat offender.

So what possessed the victim, the Italian, Giorgio Chiellini, to criticise FIFA for imposing a punishment that he described as ‘too excessive’? Surely all footballers need protection from such on-field thuggery, but especially those who make a living from the sport. In criticising FIFA as he did, I believe Chiellini did football a disservice.

It would not be a World Cup without a measure of controversy and this tournament has been full of excitement, too. It is impossible ever to tire of the Argentinian genius Lionel Messi while, for pressure, it is difficult to beat the Brazilian striker Neymar, who carried the hopes of his football-

crazy country on his shoulders when he had to score from the deciding fifth penalty in their shoot-out with Chile.

But to be regarded as a classic World Cup, there must be romance, too. The goal of the World Cup so far probably goes to the lesser-known talent of Columbia's James Rodríguez while Greece and Costa Rica have demonstrated that you do not need a domestic league bursting with stellar names in order to succeed at international level.

It will be fascinating to see what impact America's qualification for the last 16 has on the popularity of football in the States, while closer to home, the inquests into the failures by England, Spain, Italy and Portugal will

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already be under way.

The World Cup has also been a triumph for Brazil, and for Rio de Janeiro in particular.

Faced in advance with the usual doubts about its preparedness, Rio has confounded its doubters and returning journalists I have spoken to are in no doubt that the 2016 Olympics there will be spectacular.

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