

Publishing Editor's column

FOR the four weeks prior to writing these words the attention of the world has been directed upon one thing, the football World Cup. Its only rival in the sporting calendar is the Olympic Games, both taking place over a number of weeks every four years. Each time one of these major sporting occasions occurs media coverage increases considerably over the previous occasion. When a country's team does well, there are wild scenes of delirious excitement; when a key match is played, the streets are virtually deserted. (Of all the major countries in the world, only the USA seems to have been exempt from this frenzy; there is apparently very little interest in soccer there, an indication of the lone furrow which the world's greatest power ploughs these days.) If the Lord remains away and further such tournaments take place, one wonders just how much more things can be hyped up.

These sporting occasions are but the culmination of a year-round calendar of sporting events; at the time of writing the Wimbledon tennis tournament has replaced the World Cup as the number one sporting event. People so enthuse over these occasions that they will queue all night for tickets. This is a stark contrast to the interest in the Word of God, and our minds go to what the Apostle Paul said about "the last days" being characterised by people being "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4).

I noted recently, driving past our local football ground, immense queues encircling the ground for tickets for a key promotion match, with people taking many hours to get to the front. And all for a game which lasts ninety minutes and took many hours of travelling to get to see. I thought of the children of Israel who, after grumbling at the manna which was by their tent door each morning, were sent immense flocks of quails to satisfy their desire for flesh, and were prepared to spend two days and a night gathering them up (Num. 11:32). How does our enthusiasm for getting to ecclesial meetings compare with the efforts of those in the world to attend a sporting event that is important to them?

For every person who attends a sporting event, many more watch it on television. The figures quoted for the total numbers watching the World Cup on television were phenomenal—many billions in total over the four weeks, equating to an average of several matches for each person on the planet. If the words, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him", are intended to refer literally to the Second Coming of Christ, then these viewing figures show how they can apply, especially considering the fact that in the recent Israeli/Palestinian conflict the greatest concentration of media people in the world was to be found at Jerusalem. Though the world does not realise it, this coming of Jesus will put an end for good to World Cups and Olympic Games. It will be the worship of the one true God, and His Son enthroned in Zion, that will draw the world together, rather than sporting events, with the Feast of Tabernacles being the highlight of the year for everyone (Zech. 14:16).

Tony Benson

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