



Thirty-One Nil: On the Road With Football's Outsiders: A World Cup Odyssey

James Montague

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In a tiny, decaying aluminium smelting town in southern Tajikistan, a short drive from a raging war zone, Afghanistan take on Palestine in the first Asian qualifier for 2014's World Cup in Brazil. Every player on both teams is risking something by playing: their careers, their families, even their lives. Yet, along with thousands of other footballers backed by millions of supporters, they all dream of snatching one of the precious 32 places at the finals; and so begins a three-year epic struggle – long before the usual suspects start their higher-profile qualifying campaigns under the spotlight.

Named after the greatest victory (and defeat) that the World Cup qualifiers have ever seen (Australia's 31-0 victory over American Samoa), *Thirty-One Nil* is the story of how footballers from all corners of the globe begin their journey chasing a place at the World Cup Finals. It celebrates the part-time priests, princes and hopeless chancers who dream of making it to Brazil, in defiance of the staggering odds stacked against them. It tells the story of teams who have struggled for their very existence through political and social turmoil, from which they will very occasionally emerge into international stardom.

From the endlessly humiliated San Marino to lowly Haiti; from war-torn Lebanon to the oppressed and fleet-footed players of Eritrea, in *Thirty-One Nil* James Montague gets intimately and often dangerously close to some of the world's most extraordinary teams, and tells their exceptional stories.

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