Name of the game

To mark FIFA's extravaganza in South Africa, EMBO *reports* considers how scientific publishing might develop, if it were to come more under the influence of the rules of football. The increasing professionalization of soccer is a warning to those who believe that science is a game for amateurs. Future guidelines to authors might end up looking a bit like the following.

Pitch: Should be as 'green' as possible, with a minimum of muddying detail.

Referees: As in football, the referee's mistake is final.

Handling offences: These are inevitable, but sometimes come to light only after a manuscript is rejected (or accepted). Nevertheless, the result stands.

Scoring: Science, similarly to football, is a beautiful game. However, in the end the only thing that counts is the score. Authors should be aware that their manuscript will be judged solely on how many citations it generates.

Security and terrorism: Manuscripts are handled by editors in an orderly queue. Unruly behaviour or demands for immediate access to the VIP box will not be tolerated. The journal cannot be held responsible for acts of hooliganism following publication—for example, against the animal house or GM crop trials.

Doping: Articles that simply report the results of drug testing cannot be accepted for publication.

Author names: Authors with common names such as Li, Park, Smith and Johansson should follow the example of Brazilian footballers and adopt a unique nickname by which they can be identified in PubMed; otherwise, they are unlikely to receive proper credit for their work. Names already used for *Drosophila* mutants (for example, *legless* and *runt*) should be avoided.

Hispanic authors should avoid extensive lists of surnames—for example, Jimenez Gonzalez Rodriguez Hernandez—which are far too long to print on a football jersey and are invariably misparsed in PubMed.

Multi-ethnic teams: The USA is well-recognized for its strength, even though the public pays no more attention to science than it does to soccer, especially in Texas (Bhattacharjee (2009) *Science* **324**: 25). This applies even to some senior politicians (Rutherford (2008) *The Guardian* 27 Oct). As in football, the strongest players in US research often come from other parts of the world. Perhaps their affiliations should reflect this?

Racist or obscene chanting: Authors should refrain from rebuttal comments that question the honesty, parentage or sexual preference of referees.

Commentary: As in any spectator sport, the casual reader is always certain that he knows more than the real expert. Commentaries should be relevant, balanced and accurate, and avoid long-windedness.

Discussion: As on the field, discussion should be kept to a bare minimum.

Balls: The editors reserve the right to excise unwarranted speculation.

Short-format papers: Nobody wants to watch a tedious goalless draw for 90 min plus extra-time. Only the penalties at the end are interesting. Edited match highlights are far more entertaining, as there is less risk that the viewer will fall asleep and miss a goal. Authors should be aware that their contributions will be edited according to the same principle.

Headers: Although permitted, these should be used sparingly, as they can disrupt the flow of play.

Set-pieces: Similarly to corners or free-kicks, reports and features commissioned by

the editor must conform to strict rules. If this is not respected, possession might be lost to an opposing team.

Transfer fees: Unlike football players, authors are not free agents and are not paid for their services. Instead, they pay the publisher. Final acceptance of an article thus requires payment of all associated fees and waiving of all rights.

Professional fouls: Deliberate misquoting and misinterpretation of a competitor's data is unsporting, and will be automatically penalized.

Strip: A uniform style is expected for all artwork. There are no restrictions on colours, but everything except black and white must be paid for.

Man of the match: The first author has made the most important contribution. The order of other authors carries no significance, although the offside rule still applies. Senior authorship is reserved for the team captain; top-level directors and financiers (for example, Russian oligarchs) not involved in day-to-day work should be listed only under Acknowledgements.

Late substitutions: Adding a distinguished co-author from a top laboratory is only allowed where the person is identifiable as a key player in the work.

Corrigenda: Two yellow cards are equivalent to a suspension. Please make sure your manuscript is accurate from the start.

Ethical issues in research: Alcohol may not be brought inside football grounds. Similarly, it should never be removed from the lab.

World Cup: The next EMBO Meeting is in Barcelona, 4–7 September 2010.

Howy Jacobs
(Full-back, EMBO reports)

EMBO reports (2010) **11**, 487. doi:10.1038/embor.2010.89