London Calling:

A Semester in the World’s Sporting Capital

Keywords: soccer; British sport; study abroad; sport media; gambling
Abstract

The case follows four American college students from a small, Liberal Arts institution during a semester-long faculty-led study abroad trip to London, England. The case presents the experiences of these students as they integrate into London society. Mainly viewed through the lens of sport, the students encounter many differences to their preconceived notion of how sports work, providing an obvious platform for discussion and comparison of how sport is organized in different parts of the world. Specifically, the case offers students the opportunity to learn about new sports they may not have encountered before, evaluate the U.S. system of sport management and suggest ways to improve sports both at home and abroad. The international aspect of this case also provides an added cultural element, by focusing on specific events in the United Kingdom (U.K.) sporting calendar that can be used to teach students about another country's sporting identity.
“Mary, can I get your thoughts on something?” Dr. Morris asked his colleague while leaning in her office door.

Dr. Mary Villareal, the senior sport management faculty member and past chair of the Association of American Colleges & Universities’ (AAC&U) Global Engagement Conference planning committee, could tell from the sizable stack of papers in his arms that this would be a long one. She leaned back in her chair and nodded while replying, "Sure Dom. What’s up?"

Dr. Morris took a seat and set the stack of papers on her desk.

"I've just finished looking through the students’ reflective papers from our past semester in London." His face lit up, "There is some really amazing stuff here!"

It was hard not to be caught up in the enthusiasm Dr. Morris brought to his work.

"I structured the trip so each student would have plenty of un-programmed time to make the experience their own. It seemed that some . . ." he stopped and tried to find the right words.

"One or two of them . . .” He started again, "Change was there . . . but,” he stopped again, and then finally said, "Really only their own words can hope to do justice to their experiences.”

Mary knew that she would have to wait until, through reading the reflections, she traveled to London with them. Then, maybe Dr. Morris would get around to asking his question.

Jake

The long flight was over, and Jake was happy to stretch his legs walking through Heathrow Airport with his class of 16 fellow students. Already he could tell that things would be very different from Kalamazoo, Michigan. He grew up there and was surrounded by his parents’ passion for the Michigan State Spartans. Already a huge sports fan, lately he had developed a
keen interest in European soccer. His knowledge came through playing computer games like FIFA and watching the Champions League on TNT. He had deliberately not chosen a team to support, so he could enjoy every game without a one-sided emotional investment.

Walking through Terminal 5, the students were greeted with various Welcome to London billboards, but the largest of them all was an advertisement with an athletic looking man wearing a blue and white striped sports jersey with the tagline “London. I’m home.” One of the other students, Carly, looked confused by this. She had obviously never seen this man before.

“That’s Ebere Eze,” Jake said, “he’s one of Queens Park Rangers best and now plays for the England U21 team.”

Carly looked bemused. “So why is he welcoming me to London?”

Jake laughed. “Well, QPR are a London team who are struggling in the league. They got him from their rivals and have brought him in to help them stay up.”

“What do you mean ‘stay up’?” Carly queried.

“Well,” Jake began to explain, “If you finish in the bottom three places of the Premier League, you get relegated to the league below. It’s like instead of getting the number #1 draft pick if you have the worst record in the NFL, here you get punished by dropping out of the league and playing against smaller teams until you’re good enough to win that league and come back up! It’s a bit confusing if you’ve never heard of it before, I’m still learning about it all.” As Jake continued on to explain the transfer window, he realized that although he knew a great deal, he still had more to learn about the system of sports in Europe.

They were transported by bus (though the driver kept calling it a “coach,” confusing the students) to their student accommodation in Shoreditch, East London. That afternoon their only obligation was to get unpacked and have dinner together, which left a few hours for a quick
public transportation ride into central London and back. Although it was short trip and a chilly 570 Celsius, the students were blown away by the sheer size and age of the buildings like the Houses 71 of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, and the Tower of London, and surprised to learn that “Big 73 Ben” was actually the bell inside the famous clock tower, rather than the building itself. Any 74 hesitation Jake had about diving headfirst into this new city quickly faded.

The bus back to East London was packed. Rowdy foreign tourists - Jake couldn’t 75 distinguish which language they were speaking - were drunkenly singing chants while poorly 76 attempting to conceal their open beers. It turned out they were heading to the BDO Darts World 77 Championships final, at Alexandra Palace in North London.

“I don’t understand why people travel to watch DARTS?!” exclaimed Sally, utterly astounded. 79 “It’s a game for old men in bars, isn’t it?” Carly asked one of the men standing near her. 80 “Not in Europe. It’s one of the most popular events to attend live, and the world 81 championships get international TV coverage. Being world class at darts is one of the hardest 82 things to do in the world of sports. Think about the level of precision involved. It’s an incredible 83 skill.” He appeared to be one of the few darts fans who was actually sober.

The students were astounded at the size of the crowd of fans going to watch darts. 85 “This would never happen in the U.S.,” muttered Sally.

Later, after the entire class met for their first welcome session and dinner at Nando’s, 87 Jake and his three new friends went for a walk to explore the neighborhood. They came across a 89 large and noisy venue with people drinking beer outside of it. The red sign out front read, The 90 Flying Horse. Chaz instantly tried to get the group over there.

Sally seemed reluctant. “We’re not 21,” she argued. “We shouldn’t be drinking!” 91 Chaz retorted “Sally, the drinking age here is 18. Surely we should take advantage.”
The worry faded from Sally’s face and with a growing smile said, “Oh… well then…” and began crossing the street toward the pub.

“That place looks packed. It must be good,” Jake chimed in as the group followed along.

The pub was a sea of red and standing room only. There was a huge projector screen showing a soccer match. Everyone was huddled in a mass of humanity trying to both see the game and not spill their drinks. Strangely, despite the fact they were all the fans wore red, it looked as though some were cheering for the team in red and some for the team in white.

Jake read the confusion on his friends’ faces, “It’s Manchester United versus Liverpool and they both have red colored home jerseys. And in soccer you say nil-nil for the score now.”

“Soccer? You Yanks are a long way from home. It’s football here” a man said from behind them, “and not that padded rugby nonsense you guys have.”

Chaz was about to reply when Jake cut him off, “Is this Champions League?”

Alan laughed. “No, son, this is the Premier League. Champions League is on a break until February, besides, Man Utd aren’t in it this year! It’s fantastic. I’m Alan. Welcome to London and no offence intended,” he said to Chaz, “I know how hard American Football is.”

Sally looked confused. “There are multiple tournaments at the same time?” she asked.

Alan smiled. “You’ve got the Premier League. That’s your biggest English competition with 38 league games, one against each team at home and one away.”

“That means on the road,” Chaz said, so low that Jake barely heard it. Chaz’s face showed that he also didn’t approve of the strange words Alan was using to describe sports.

“That’s the biggest prize in England,” Alan continued. “The FA Cup is a big knockout competition involving every club in the country, more than 700 this year.”

“How can there be 700 teams in this country? It’s so small!” said Carly.
“Well, each local area is fiercely proud, and they all have teams. There’s more than 20 in London alone. And then you have the EFL Cup too. That’s a less important tournament that only includes the 92 professional teams in the country. And then you have continental competitions in Europe, like the Champions League and Europa League.” Alan’s explanations were very clear.

“Wait . . . So there’s like four different competitions all going on at the same time, don’t you get confused?” asked Carly, clearly trying to wrap her head around it all.

Alan had a wry smile on his face. “No I can keep up with all of that, but truly, I’m a fan of the mighty Hammers, West Ham United. They’ve been my club since I was a lad. As he said this, he tugged at the claret and blue scarf around his neck, which Jake noticed had a hammer emblem on it. “Tell you what, let me make up for the padded rugby comments and at the same time show you what all the fuss is about. I’ve just spoken to a friend of mine this afternoon, and he won’t be using his tickets for the game on Saturday. We’ve got Fulham at home in the 3rd Round of the FA Cup. It’s a London derby - Fulham are from West London, so it’s a bit of a rivalry game. Would you kids wanna come with me and see a game?”

Jake’s eyes lit up - he’d been dreaming of going to a soccer game in England since he first heard of this class, but didn’t think it would happen this quickly! He looked at the others, hoping for support, but Sally, ever the introvert, visibly shrank from the prospect of spending an afternoon with a stranger, and Chaz was clearly still a bit sore from Alan’s comments about American football. Carly however, broke their silence and leapt up in support of Jake.

“Oh yes please!” she exclaimed while beaming at Alan.

“Great!” He said, without really waiting for Chaz or Sally to respond positively. “Here,” he reached inside his coat and handed them a business card with his phone number on it. “Text
me tomorrow and we’ll arrange a place to meet! Nice to meet you all, looking forward to Saturday!” And with that, he shook their hands and walked out of the pub.

Sitting in the Flying Horse that night as the crowd dwindled with the end of the game, Jake felt comfortable, excited beyond belief, but also quite at home in this new world.

Carly

The orientation sessions began in earnest the following morning. Carly was pleasantly surprised that instead of campy, ice-breaker sessions, orientation meant even more trips around the city. As the group moved about the city, she noticed not only the historic landmarks, but the amount of diversity on nearly every street. Carly was sensitive to this given her own background in Placerville, California. Her mother grew up in San Francisco and was a proud member of the Muwekma Ohlnoe tribe, and her father emigrated from Thailand in the 1970s when he was still young. Carly inherited her mother’s strong sense of cultural identity, coupled with her dad’s natural athleticism and fierce competitiveness. The eclectic, sometimes confusing mix that resulted from London’s place in the world continued to surprise and enchant her throughout the semester. For her, the term “home team” grew to take on so many meanings in London.

That Saturday afternoon the four friends met Alan and boarded the 473 bus to the former Olympic Stadium, which was now the home of West Ham United Football Club.

“This was built for the 2012 games,” explained Alan. “The stadium was used for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics & Paralympics, plus all the track and field events. There was a big bidding war between various clubs and organizations about who would take over the stadium following the games. Eventually, it was West Ham who beat Tottenham Hotspur for the rights to call the Olympic Stadium home. Now they just call it the London Stadium, West Ham have played here since August 2016.”
As they got off the bus, they joined the masses of claret and blue clad fans walking towards the stadium. On the other side of the road, divided from the home fans by a police presence and some barricades, were the visiting fans from Fulham, who wore their white jerseys, yet had almost to a man covered them up with the coats and jackets they were wearing on top.

The stadium was electric for this “London derby,” as Alan had described it. The pre-match song *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles* was something that Carly and Sally found hilarious and enjoyable, while Chaz stated that it was very strange to have a fight-song equivalent about bubbles. The game was fast-paced. West Ham raced to an early 2-0 lead, and the crowd’s jubilation made the students feel right at home. The nearly full 60,000 all-seater stadium was bouncing with emotion. Fulham pulled a goal back before half time, but West Ham’s superiority and higher fitness levels told in the second half and they ran out eventual 4-1 winners and progressed to the next round. After the game, Carly could see it in the eyes that her classmates, except Chaz, were hooked as West Ham fans.

Alan was delighted. “What a great performance!” he exclaimed. “You guys picked a good first game!”

Alan bid them farewell, but made them promise they’d stay in touch beginning with a meetup at the pub the next Wednesday night, which, along with regular classes that began that Monday, was one appointment they ended up keeping throughout the whole semester.

Late January revealed another side of London’s personality to Carly as the Australian Open tennis tournament took place. Due to the 11-hour time difference between the U.K. and the land down under it was difficult to keep track of what was going on. Most matches were played while the students slept. Andy Murray, the current world number one and Scotland native was tipped to win the championship. While tennis wasn’t really any of the students go-to sport, they
were all interested in what was happening, hoping to see a patriotic celebration of victory in the U.K. if Murray came through. Murray went all the way to the semifinals, with a ground swell of homeland support behind him. Social media was buzzing. The expectations were high that the world number one would win another major tennis championship for Britain.

But things didn’t go to plan. Murray was defeated by the Japanese sensation Kei Nishikori. Carly was stunned to see the next morning’s papers portraying him as a “Scottish Failure.” She gleaned that there was a significant disconnect between being “British” and being “Scottish.” Apparently, this was a common thing with athletes in the U.K., the cultural identity between the four countries within the Kingdom being so varied and spread.

“It’s like us calling a failed Olympian from Arizona ‘an Arizonan’ as opposed to an American - and picking on them for not winning.” Carly was particularly perturbed by this.

“Why does the entire country not cheer for everyone inside it?” she thought, strangely unsettled.

Later that semester, Carly decided to go exploring and took a different route through a local park. She’d been unable to find a volleyball team to play on here, so needed some exercise.

She passed the basketball hoops, and the dangerous looking metal soccer goal frames that were set into the hard concrete. She wondered how kids were allowed to play soccer on such an unforgiving surface. Surely that led to injuries galore? As she continued, she noticed a group of women wearing two different colored bibs. A few of the women on each team also wore a hijab.

They appeared to be throwing a ball to each other and then shooting it into a tall hoop, similar to basketball, yet there was no backboard, and nobody was bouncing the ball.

One of the subs noticed Carly watching inquisitively and walked over to her and through a thick Indian accent asked, “Do you want to join in?”
“Oh!” Carly was surprised, “No, I’ve just never seen this before and was interested to see how it works,” she explained.

“Aha, your accent gives away why you’ve never seen this before. This is Netball. It’s played in quite a few former-British Empire countries. Where in America are you from?” said the friendly netballer.

“California. And we all play volleyball out there.”

“Oh wow, you’ll be fantastic at this. It’s all hand-eye coordination and movement. Why don’t you join in? We’ll teach you! I’m Darsha by the way . . . and this is Annabel.”

And so Carly joined in. And she loved it. The rules were strange and she doubted she’d ever been this confused in her life. But Carly had a blast. England had proven again to be a complicated place. The divisions that had shaken her were wiped away while she played this new, strenuous game with this group of women from around the world.

Chaz

February came and suddenly it was Super Bowl Sunday. While this surprise was explainable for the other students, Chaz was the embodiment of the South Texas football sporting experience. In high school he was a starting quarterback and seemed destined for an NCAA Division I (DI) team when a knee injury slowed him down and landed him in a DIII program. The changes in his athletic career allowed time for his naturally outgoing personality to make him a significant figure at Rim Rock. He was elected President of the Black Student Union and now worked as a tour guide for the university’s admissions department. There should have been no way the single biggest date in the American sporting calendar should have snuck up on him, but with minimal advertisement on only a few TV channels, it had. Chaz had to use Google
to find a place to watch the game. However, the game didn’t start until almost midnight in London!

Jake, Carli, and Sally knew they had a 9:00am class the next day. Without giving it much thought, they all quickly decided that the Super Bowl, while significant in the U.S. wasn’t worth the late night. Chaz; however, wouldn’t hear it and headed out to see the game. He returned just before the sun came up the next morning. Unsurprisingly, it was a few days before the Chaz fully recovered from his late night spent watching the Super Bowl, but eventually he settled back into the usual routine.

It was a bit of a nothing Wednesday afternoon, and Sally and Chaz were walking back towards their accommodation when suddenly Sally stopped in front of a peculiar looking shop. The two unlikely friends had been hanging out a lot in the recent weeks, leading Jake and Carly to hypothesize that they were almost certainly dating. The shop’s blue logo said William Hill and the posters in the window read, “West Ham to win 2-0, 12/1. £10 wins you £130.” Chaz recalled the locals called these bookies. Sally grabbed Chaz’s hand and pulled him inside, proceeding straight to the booth at the back like she’d been in this environment her entire life.

Sally smiled and waved to the attendant sitting in the booth. “Hi Dave!” she beamed.

“Hey there Sally,” he answered in kind. She slid a white piece of paper underneath the Perspex window. Dave took the paper, scanned it into his machine and said “another winner! Have you lost one bet yet!?”

Sally laughed, “Yes I have Dave! A few, but I’ve just had some good results too!”

“Here you go love,” said Dave, counting out what must’ve been ten to fifteen £20 notes.
“I’ll see you tomorrow, have to do my research on this weekend’s games!” And with that, and a wave, Sally turned on her heel and strolled back past Chaz and out of the store. He was incredulous and chased her down the street.

“Sally! What are you doing?!” Chaz was apoplectic.

“Blending in with the local culture. I’m not guessing. I’m using my analytics. It’s just a little bit of fun.” Sally said with a smile.

“But gambling is illegal! And it can ruin your life.”

“It’s not illegal here.” She said, then added, “Surely we should take advantage.” And with that she turned and strolled away.

Chaz just stared at her as she walked down the street. He thought, “Wow, this woman is full of all kinds of surprises.”

Besides spending time with Sally, Chaz had been staying busy. He had rounded up a group of other Americans studying in London for flag-football games and even some intense practice sessions. He enjoyed throwing the football around with some guys who shared his passion for the game. After one practice, the group headed to The World’s End pub near Finsbury Park, to have a couple of drinks together. On the TV was a game of rugby. Chaz looked up at the screen and saw the display said “ITA 7 - 14 FRA.”

“Italy vs France?!” questioned Chaz. “Why is anyone here watching these two teams?”

“Well, this is part of the 6 Nations tournament. It’s England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France, and Italy all competing to be champions. The outcome of the match might influence England’s chances of winning. Also, with how diverse London is, you’ve got a ton of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh people here too cheering for their own nations,” explained Chad, one of the group who was working in London for nearly two years.
“And you like this?” Chaz asked curiously.

“Absolutely!” beamed Chad. “Don’t knock rugby. These guys are tough as nails too.

They only wear minimal padding under their shirts, which means almost all their hits are body
on body. No helmets either. American football and rugby are actually quite different in how
they’re played, but here you find a decent correlation between fans of both.”

Chad continued to explain how rugby was one of the biggest sports in the U.K. and
around the world too “There’s also a Premiership Rugby league, though it’s not as popular as
Premier League soccer is. Rugby is the real deal.”

Chaz had thought that life in Europe couldn’t possibly match the U.S., but with his
growing appreciation for rugby, and a woman like Sally around, Europe was feeling pretty good.

Jake

Late March brought a particularly special proposition for the students from Alan.

“Listen, he said excitedly, as they drank their pints in The Flying Horse, “how would you
guys feel about a trip to the seaside this weekend? It’s the FA Cup quarterfinals, and we’ve got
Brighton away. I’ve got some spare tickets. Fancy a trip to the beach and seeing another game?”

As Chaz scoffed, everyone else’s eyes lit up. The students had really taken supporting
West Ham seriously ever since their first game with Alan, and another opportunity to watch them
live, especially an away game, was not something they were going to pass up. Immediately, Alan
pulled out his phone and booked them all train tickets to Brighton and back on Saturday.

They arrived early in the morning at Brighton, to give them a chance to explore before
the 5:15pm kick-off at the Amex Stadium. They had fish and chips for lunch at Brighton pier -
something Jake loved and Carly was a little hesitant about, citing how everything was fried.

They then played some retro arcade games and left clutching a number of strange prizes. The sea
air and the difference between the Brighton and London style of life really struck the students, as they realized that not all of England was like London.

The game itself was a fairly hot-tempered affair. An early red card for Brighton led to two West Ham first half goals. Eventually, the Hammers ran out 3-1 winners.

When the group left the grounds, everything changed. Not only was the police presence huge during the game, but after the game, they received an escort all the way back through the town to the train station. The Brighton fans were incensed, feeling as though they’d been robbed of their own semi-final dreams by the questionable refereeing decisions, and were attempting to take their frustrations out on the away fans.

This was not without provocation, but Jake was unsettled by the numerous violent clashes between the two sets of fans. He thought about how rival fans would regularly sit next to each other in American sporting venues without incident. Why is it different here? he pondered.

On the train home, Alan found himself answering questions from Jake about the problems with the crowds. “It used to be far worse,” he began, “back in the 70s & 80s hooliganism was a huge problem. Violence goes hand in hand with fans here at times. I tell you what, you should watch Green Street Hooligans.” It’s a film about an American man coming to London to visit his family and ending up involved in a West Ham hooligan gang. Thankfully, it’s really not like that anymore, but it’s a great film and tells an interesting story.”

Jake seemed taken aback by this whole development. “Why would you fight other fans?” “Well I wouldn’t!” smiled Alan, “I’d get my head caved in! But football matters hugely to people here and local rivalries are fearsome. I’m sorry if today scared you guys, but trust me, that’s rare now. Just be glad you weren’t visiting in the 80s. And we weren’t playing Millwall!”
Jake’s appreciation for the European life became a little more complicated as he thought about its violent history around sport.

Sally

As April began, London started to get warmer, yet the rain didn’t let up. Thankfully, this particular weekend was sunny, which allowed Sally and Chaz to take a leisurely stroll while looking for a pub to eat lunch. Sally suddenly decided that she’d found the exact place she wanted to be. Although her curiosity to see the world had taken her first to Texas for school and now to the other side of the world, Sally was still very much the bookish, introverted person from Las Cruces, New Mexico. With Chaz, Carly, and Jake, she had seen and discussed more sport in the past few months than in years before that. Only weeks before the class had Sally seen “Moneyball” and immediately became intrigued by predicting performance based on cold, hard numbers. Sally wasn’t quite sure that her newly developed decisiveness would survive the trip back to the US but she was determined to enjoy it here in London.

“What is going on Sally? Why here?” Chaz asked.

“They have great food,” she responded quickly before pausing and saying, “and they’re showing the Grand National on a big screen!” Realization spread on Chaz’s face. Together they had seen a story on the news this morning about the Grand National, which was kind of like the U.K.’s Kentucky Derby. Even then Chaz had clearly shown no interest in horse racing.

“Why didn’t you just bring Carly with you?!” he asked.

“You are better company and she thinks animal racing is cruel,” Sally looked at him, making her eyes as big and beautiful as possible.

Chaz’s resistance faded, “Alright, let’s get some food and watch the race.”
Sally instantly whipped out what appeared to be a year’s worth of betting slips and quickly explained these were just her 15 single bets she had placed on today’s race. The pub was buzzing with excitement, as the biggest race of the calendar year was about to get underway. There were a few falls at the first two fences, including wiping out Sally’s favorite horse. In the end, One for Arthur won, which frustrated Sally to no end. He had not been tipped in any of her research. Sally thought, “Maybe numbers can’t predict everything.”

Later in the spring, Sally and Carly were out for lunch at a sandwich place in Regent’s Park. They paid for their food and turned around to look for somewhere to sit. The place was packed and the only real space was at a four person table where an older man was eating alone. He graciously asked them to join him.

“My name’s Jim,” he said. “I’m 84 years young” he chuckled with a much younger feel to him than his age. “The table is yours as I’ll be headed back to my cricket match after lunch.”

“Cricket?!” exclaimed Sally. She’d heard much about this strange sport that was mainly played in the old British Empire countries yet had absolutely no idea how it was played.

“Aren’t you missing the game by having lunch here?” asked Carly.

“Absolutely not!” he said. “They have a lunch break too! Also, this is only day two of five so there’s plenty more to see this week!”

Sally and Carly looked at each other with wild confusion in their eyes. “The game lasts five days?” asked Carly.

“Well, it depends on the format of the game, but international test series matches are five days long yes, though they might end early if both teams get out quicker than that!”
“Tell you what,” continued Jim, “I’ve got a lifetime membership at Lord’s. I’m sure we can get you two a couple of cheap tickets for the rest of the day. Would you be interested in accompanying me?”

They agreed and set off back to Lord’s Cricket Ground. The vibe of this sport was unlike anything Sally or Carly had ever encountered. England were playing Bangladesh. In the majority English crowd small pockets of Bangladeshi supporters made a good amount of noise. Carly hypothesized they were most definitely middle or upper class on average - applauding politely while continuing to drink their fruity alcoholic drinks. The two men holding bats ran back and forth, and seemed to continue to hit the ball until they were out. This could mean they were out there for two minutes or six hours. And every six balls they changed the end the ball was being thrown from.

“What a strange sport,” thought Sally who said, “It’s like an English baseball game.”

Jim thought for a moment and said “we don’t have the baseball thingy here. My grandkids play rounders at school, which is a bit similar. It’s played with a much shorter bat that you hold in one hand and the ball is always thrown underarm. Cricket, however, is the purest of sports in the U.K. It’s a massive throwback to the Empire and really takes over the country in the summer. Especially if England are playing Australia -- and even more so if they’re winning!”

They watched the rest of the day’s play intently, including staying through the tea break, and left at about 6:30 p.m., with the score apparently England 451, Bangladesh 207 for 9.

Sally and Carly were completely enthralled with a new favorite game; a game unlike any they had experienced, yet familiar at the same time.

The following Sunday afternoon meant one thing for the students. FA Cup semifinal day.

They met Alan in The Flying Horse and got their usual table right in front of the big screen. Sally
and the rest were all wearing their claret and blue scarves, despite it definitely being too hot to wear a scarf for any other reason. It was a revenge mission for West Ham, as they were facing Liverpool, the side who had defeated them in the final of 2006. There was a sizeable group of Liverpool fans in the pub, but the lack of a local rivalry between the two teams meant that both sets of fans seemed to be mingling together and getting on fairly well, despite the high stakes.

After 90-minutes, the game was still scoreless. Chances had been at a premium and it had actually been quite a boring match, perhaps due to neither team wanting to lose, as opposed to being willing to take the appropriate risks to win. The game went to penalties. Sally hadn’t ever seen a penalty shootout before, only knowing how a shootout worked in ice hockey. The drama and tension were unbelievable. She clutched Carly’s hand as they held their breath waiting for the final shots. The score was 3-3 with one penalty each left.

Liverpool’s Mo Salah would take its final penalty. A goal would leave West Ham needing to score to remain alive. A miss would mean West Ham were on the brink of the Cup final. The pub settled into almost silent tension. Prayers were said and fingers were crossed. Salah struck the ball with power, but it travelled upwards and hit the crossbar. He missed. This was now West Ham’s chance. Alan had his head buried in his lap and was visibly shaking with nerves. Sally looked at each of the others and noticed right away that each felt just as nervous.

The referee blew his whistle, and Marko Arnautovic blasted it straight down the middle. West Ham had won 4-3. They were in the FA Cup final. The pub was a sea of joy. Beer flew everywhere. Sally and the other students were soaked, but didn’t care in the slightest.

Before coming to London, it had been rare for Sally to express pure joy. Those moments were happening quite frequently this semester. She looked at her friends leaping around and hugging, droplets of beer flying off them. She never felt happier.
Alan was openly weeping. His Hammers were in the FA Cup final! At once he felt like a little boy and an old man; tired and boisterous at the same time. “We are going to Wembley!” He looked intently at each of them until they understood. “You four are West Ham’s lucky charms. I know it. We are all going to the Final.” Alan wouldn’t hear of any different plan.

And so that was that. When the day came, they arranged to meet at noon, and grabbed a quick lunch before making their way towards Wembley before kickoff. Sally had made her pregame ritual visit to William Hill and had her chat with Dave. “£10 on 2-1 to West Ham,” she’d cheerfully told Dave behind the desk, “But that’s my heart talking and not my head!” she admitted.

West Ham were definitive outsiders against the powerhouse of North London football. With a 60,000 all-seater state-of-the-art stadium and millions of fans across the world, Arsenal were one of the most recognizable brands in the sports world.

The beauty of Wembley Stadium took the students aback. Walking down the iconic Wembley Way, the arch on the roof of the stadium loomed large as the sun shone bright in the sky. The students had been surprised by how cheap their match tickets had been Kick off was at 3:00 p.m., the traditional kick off time for soccer in England, and yet the stadium was almost entirely full an hour before the start! The roar of the crowd that greeted the players when they jogged out to warm up could have signified a win in other sports. The passion was unlike anything Carly had ever seen before.

The game was a war from the first kick to the last. West Ham tried desperately to chase and harass their opponents into mistakes, but Arsenal were calm on the ball and maintained possession for much of the first half. The half ended with Arsenal leading 1-0. The West Ham fans tried to urge their team back into the game, and were rewarded just 8-minutes into the
second half. A West Ham corner was powered home for the equalizer! Pandemonium. The students themselves failed to control themselves with even typically timid Sally jumping up and down for joy, while Jake, Carly, and Alan were hugging everyone and waving their scarves in the air. The next half an hour or so was tense, as both sides sought a winning goal.

There were only 3-minutes to go when the referee awarded a corner to Arsenal. The ball rifled off the crossbar and in the confusion Arsenal’s number 14 went down at the penalty box over West Ham number 5’s outstretched leg. The Arsenal fans went wild, imploring the referee to make the decision; 90,000 eyes turned on one man in black. He blew his whistle. Penalty to Arsenal. Alan had his head in his hands. “Definite penalty,” he said. “I don’t believe it.”

Alexandre Lacazette, grabbed the ball, placed it on the spot, and strolled back, before turning to face the goal with his hands on his hips. He looked relaxed. The referee blew his whistle, as the stadium descended into a hushed silence. Lacazette struck the ball to the goalkeeper’s right and it looked destined for the bottom corner of the net. Until, at the last second, West Ham’s goalkeeper, stretched out his hand and palmed it away.

A West Ham defender swung his leg at the ball and cleared it out to the left, where the speedy West Ham number 3 raced into the Arsenal half. The counter attack was on. Number 3 chipped the ball to the back post, where Arnautovic was arriving. Arsenal’s goalkeeper flew out to meet him, but Arnautovic’s strike hit the back of the net.

The eruption of noise and joy was unlike anything the students had ever experienced. The

Wembley Roar, famous throughout the world of soccer, had rarely been this loud. Fans jumped and screamed like a rabid pack of animals; this was just unadulterated joy.

“And I won my bet! 2-1!” laughed Sally and she hugged Alan.
None of them could hide their delight. Alan was in tears. Full on, streaming down the cheek, sobbing uncontrollable tears. What a sight. West Ham were FA Cup winners. The stadium was awash with noise and color on one side, and absolute desolation and despair on the other. Arsenal fans, eyes filled with tears, began filing out before the final whistle had even sounded.

The trophy presentation was the final cherry on the top of the cake. As the West Ham captain lifted the trophy from the Wembley balcony, confetti cannons exploded all around the stadium. As the champagne began to spray, the students felt a strange sense of achievement. While they hadn’t done anything to win the trophy, it felt like a triumph for them nonetheless. It was almost an embodiment of their success in assimilating into the sporting culture of London so seamlessly.

When Dom finished reading the reflections, he stared at Mary, waiting for her reaction.

She asked, "So before I say anything, what is your question?"

Dr. Morris took a long, measured breath before he finally asked, "Was it worth it? Was the semester worth the time and money?"

He stood and began to pace again, "Was my hands-off design the right approach? Did the students get the most out of the experience?"

Dr. Villareal smiled as she opened her laptop. “Dom, your instincts are spot on. In fact, the Dean has those very same questions. I just spoke with him not five minutes before you came in and he has required that we defend the program’s structure and outcomes later this week. The future of your program will depend on it.” She paused a moment to let that sink in.

“I suggest that we start with the AAC&U Global Learning rubric.” She rotated the laptop so Dom could see the screen and continued, “Okay, let’s start by looking at how well you think your students demonstrated the ‘Cultural Diversity’ value.”