

THEFT OF THE WORLD CUP

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Competition begins June 11 in the 2026 FIFA World Cup, regarded as the world's most widely followed sporting event.

This year's championship tournament will be hosted by 16 cities in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Security will be tight. We all want the competitors and our international guests to be safe.

And we'll want the World Cup trophy itself to stay safe as well ...

THE 1966 THEFT OF THE WORLD CUP

The original World Cup consisted of a 12-inch-tall, 10-sided cup supported by Nike, the winged Greek goddess of victory. And that's what they called it: "Victory."

The Victory cup was first awarded to Uruguay, the host and the winner of the 1930 World Cup tournament. At each subsequent tournament, held every four years except during World War II, the previous winners would return the cup so it could be passed on to the next winners. Each winner would be inscribed into the base of the trophy.

In 1946, the trophy was renamed the Jules Rimet Trophy, in honor of the first FIFA president, the man who started the World Cup competition.

The 1966 World Cup was held in England. The 1962 winners, Brazil, brought the cup with them to London so it could be displayed — under heavy guard, of course — in London's Westminster Central Hall.

Two uniformed guards stood near the Rimet Trophy around the clock, with two more plainclothes officers joining them during the day. On Sundays, however, the Central Hall was closed for Methodist church services, so there were no guards posted.

On March 20, 1966, guards making their midday rounds discovered the trophy was missing: Someone had forced open the display from behind and forced open a lock.

The theft was widely publicized. A number of companies realized how much good press they might get for contributing to a reward for finding the Rimet Trophy.

The next day, the British Football Association received a ransom note demanding £15,000 in used bills and including a small piece of the base of the trophy. Police inspectors carefully assembled bundles of scrap newspaper with real bills at the top and bottom of each bundle.

On March 24, officials met the supposed thief at the appointed time, showed him what appeared to be the ransom and demanded to see the trophy. The man then fled. Police chased him on foot, captured him and identified him as a frequent offending petty thief.

The man told police he was only the middleman and could recover the trophy for them if they'd grant him bail. Not surprisingly, police didn't believe him.

It wasn't until March 27 — a week after the theft — that a Thames dock worker walking his dog, Pickles, in his southeast London neighborhood, spotted a strange package under a nearby bush.

"I looked down and saw the parcel," David Corbett told the London Guardian. "It was wrapped in newspaper. I picked it up, it was very weighty.

"I tore one end off; a base. I tore the other end off: a gold figure! I still didn't realize what it was. I went back to the base and turned it round. It said Brazil 1962, and it suddenly all came to me."

Pickles was hailed as a national hero. He was given a number of rewards, including a silver platter, a year's supply of dog food and a cameo appearance in a comic spy movie. Corbett was eventually given a £6,000 reward.

A year later, Pickles was killed when he choked on his lead while trying to chase a cat.



DAN'S PET CARE

The hero of the 1966 theft: Pickles the pooch.



AND THEN, IN 1983, IT HAPPENED AGAIN

Soccer fans and officials were outraged by the 1966 theft incident. Abraim Tebel of the Brazilian Sports Confederation said — *irony alert!* — "It would never have happened in Brazil. Even Brazilian thieves love football and would never commit this sacrilege."

One of the original 1930 FIFA rules specified that any nation winning the World Cup three times would be given the trophy for keeps. That finally happened in 1970, when Brazil defeated Italy in the World Cup final in Mexico.

FIFA commissioned a new World Cup trophy, which has been used since. The Jules Rimet Trophy — the same one that Pickles had found four years before — was presented to the Brazilian Sports Confederation and put on display on the third floor of the Confederation's offices in Rio de Janeiro.

There it sat for 13 years. Until the night of Dec. 19, 1983, when the Confederation's night watchman was overpowered by two or three thieves — depending on whose testimony you believe— intent on stealing the trophy.

They tied up the guard, pried open the bulletproof display case and took the trophy. There was also a replica trophy on display, too. But the thieves let that one be.

As it had eight years before, news of the theft spread rapidly. The Rio de Janeiro State Bank offered a reward for the trophy.

Police concentrated on the night watchman, noticing he kept changing his story. The day after the theft, police arrested two men who had previously worked at the Federation as janitors.

But no evidence was found. Neither man was charged. In 1989, one of those suspects was found dead after being shot seven times.

The Jules Rimet Trophy was never found. Legend has it that it was melted down and sold for about £8,000, but soccer experts say that's not likely: The trophy wasn't *made* of solid gold — instead, it had been made of silver and then *coated* with gold.

THE NEW — AND CURRENT — WORLD CUP TROPHY

Following the presentation of the Jules Rimet Trophy to Brazil in 1970, a new trophy was introduced at the 1974 World Cup in West Germany.

The trophy — called, simply, the FIFA World Cup — is made of 18 karat gold and is worth an estimated quarter-million dollars. The trophy, which is 14½ inches tall and weighs a little more than 13½ pounds, depicts two human figures holding up the Earth.



FIFA

And by "holding up," we mean "holding it aloft." By now, you might assume otherwise.

Only certain people are allowed to even *touch* the new trophy: winning players, their coaches and managers, heads of state and FIFA officials.



NATIONAL FOOTBALL MUSEUM



ADIDAS

THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

■ Competition among the 48 teams that qualified for the 2026 World Cup begins Thursday, June 11. Matches will be held in 16 cities in the U.S., Mexico and Canada. The final will be held July 19 in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

■ This is the first World Cup tournament consisting of that many teams. The previous seven tournaments, going back to 1998, had only 32 teams. Of the 48 participating teams, 26 also played in the 2022 World Cup.

■ FIFA doesn't permit game venues to use corporate sponsored names. Therefore, MetLife Stadium will be called "New York New Jersey Stadium" and Lumen Field will be called "Seattle Stadium" and so on. All signage with the corporate branded names will have to be removed or hidden during the tournament.

■ In addition to 16 stadiums in North America, teams will use various sports facilities as temporary homes and training sites. The Egyptian team will be based at Gonzaga University.