

Lyric Hero And Sports In Uzbek Poetry: Football As A Literary Motif

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Abstract: This article analyzes the development of the theme of football in contemporary Uzbek poetry, examining the relationship between the lyric hero and football through examples from 20th–21st century poets. The study focuses on the poetic works on football by Anvar Obidjon, Usmon Azim, Sirojiddin Sayyid, Khurshid Abdurashid, and Mansur Jumayev.

Keywords: Football, Anvar Obidjon, Usmon Azim, Sirojiddin Sayyid, Khurshid Abdurashid, Mansur Jumayev.

Introduction: No other sport embodies national character as significantly as football, which explains why it rightly earns the title of “the game of millions.” Viewing football as a literary motif opens the way to multiple interpretations. In Uzbek poetry, there are works in which the lyric hero either directly engages with football or contemplates it. In these poems, the lyric hero assumes a fully aesthetic form, while the poet captures their personal lyrical experiences.

Anvar Obidjon, “PIDBO’L”

The first football team in Uzbekistan was established in 1912 in the city of Kokand. However, few know how the process actually unfolded. Russian military garrisons stationed in the Fergana Valley organized football matches during soldiers’ free time. Local Kokand youth observed these games and learned the rules. While arranging a field posed no problem, obtaining a ball was challenging, as buying one from the Russian soldiers was very expensive. The Kokand youth therefore managed to craft a leather ball themselves. Since inflating it with air was impossible, they stuffed it with rags. Later, a real ball was purchased from the military. Thus, football began to spread across the region.

This historical process prompted the question: has it been reflected in poetry? Indeed, we encountered a

poem from that period. Anvar Obidjon’s satirical collection *Kambag’albop Gulmatiy*, written from the perspective of a poet named Gulmat who lived in the early 20th century, presents this story as if republishing his *divan* in a new script. The 37th *ghazal*, “*Pidbo’l*,” indicates it was restored in 1984, suggesting the poem was written that year. The poet depicts the origin of football and its introduction to Russian lands as follows:

Ingliz otlig’ bir orolcha tarqatibdur, qarang, pidbo’l.

O’ynar ermish emdi qo’rqmay Ro’siyo-la Farang pidbo’l.

Yaraslo’vda sotib pashmak tutildim bu tamoshshoga,
Kangul ochmoq edi ahdim, mani qildi tajang pidbo’l...

It should be noted that the first Uzbek football team was founded in Kokand. This team is distinct from the modern “Kokand-1912” club currently active in the city. The first Uzbek football club was called “*Muskomanda*,” meaning “Muslim team,” as it consisted of local Muslim youth. They primarily played against Russian garrison teams.

Here, one important point emerges: football is valued differently across regions. For example, in Brazil, it has become a national treasure, while in Africa, it is viewed as the quickest path out of poverty. The rivalry of the two Spanish clubs, known as “*El Clasico*,” goes deeper than football alone. The competition between Real Madrid, under the patronage of the Spanish royal

family, and the Barcelona team from the autonomous Catalonia region, embodies a struggle between rulers and the people, between dominance and the quest for freedom.

Similarly, the “classic” competitions were not alien to Uzbek football. The first football matches represented conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims, oppressors and the oppressed, and ordinary people versus invading soldiers.

The successful performance of Muslim youth contributed to the popularization of football, which in turn increased the demand for balls and football shoes (modern boots). Members of Muskomanda, brothers Ro‘zimat and Ismoil Niyozov, who had experience as shoemakers, soon started producing balls locally. The localization of football balls was highly successful, and orders were even placed from Russia for 400 balls.

Anvar Obidjon evaluates football from the perspective of people of that era, concluding:

Tarqasa biz taraflarg‘a, qo‘rqamanki, ayo Gulmat,
O‘shni Shoshga raqib aylab qilur elni garang pidbo‘l.

Usmon Azim, “GARRINCHA”

For older generations, the name Garrincha is well-known. His real name was Manuel Francisco dos Santos, a Brazilian national team footballer considered the second most talented player in the country after Pelé. Yet his tragic fate undoubtedly shook football fans worldwide. This resonance is reflected in Usmon Azim’s poetic work:

Qarsaklar yog‘ildi mening sha‘nimga,
Zarb... Zarb... Darvozabon tosh kabi qotdi.
Bir surur haqdirib kirdi tanimga,
Stadion o‘zin falakka otdi...

The poem begins with an artistic depiction of Garrincha’s goal-scoring process. The poet describes the aftermath of his goals, the net shaking awkwardly, a fan tossing his hat in excitement, the defender glancing anxiously, and the frustrated footballer being congratulated by his friends Pelé and Didi. The stadium scene unfolds as follows:

Raqib yecholmagay xayolida ham
Mening aldashlarim kalavalarin.
Dahoning o‘yini hamisha ulkan,

San’atdir dahoning g‘alabalari...

In this section, the author elevates the football field into an artistic space. The word itself merges with art. Garrincha, with his congenital short leg, performs almost magical feats on the field, dodging the referee’s whistle. Though Garrincha falls, the ball seems to declare: “Garrincha does not die easily.” However, injuries and a chaotic life lead to the decline of this football genius, leaving him in Pelé’s shadow.

The lyric hero in the poem need not be a footballer; he can represent any artist. Football becomes a metaphor throughout Usmon Azim’s poem. For the poet, the poem is paramount; for Garrincha, football holds the same significance:

Futbol! Meni asra shu futbol haqqi!
Nahot, xatolarga kunlarim bog‘liq?
Umrim – yuzga nogoh tushgan tarsaki,
Yam-yashil maydonda qoldi daholik!

Garrincha, unable to control his own destiny, becomes a symbol of unrealized genius. How many “Garrinchas” has the literary world witnessed? He can no longer enter the stadium, and spectators who once watched his matches now bid him farewell.

The life story of Garrincha inspired Usmon Azim, allowing him to transform a football genius performing on the other side of the world into a literary figure, fully integrated into Uzbek poetry. The poet is not speaking about the vice-king of Brazilian football, but rather a poet whose life and creativity have been tragically affected, yet whose artistry continues to resonate. He moves around the stadium — a metaphor for the literary process — feeling the field will no longer recognize him.

The combination “Garrincha – football” can be interpreted as “poet – literature” or “human – life,” and every stanza of the poem confirms this analogy. Garrincha senses his companions Pelé and Didi even more than the stadium itself. Usmon Azim’s literary generation entered Uzbek literature during the same period when Pelé and Garrinchas shone in football, thus successfully establishing the associative link between football and literature, engaging readers’ sensibilities. The poem concludes in a way accessible to both football and literature enthusiasts:

Meni tanimaysan, qilmaysan parvo,

Qo'y meni... tegrangda biroz kezaman.
Axir, seni ko'rsam, yelkamda nogoh
Pele va Didining qo'lin sezaman.

Sirojiddin Sayyid, "CHEMPION"

Sirojiddin Sayyid's poem differs from the previous works due to its autobiographical nature. The theme of football is narrated alongside childhood memories. Nevertheless, football carries metaphorical significance. The poem conveys that children who could not become champions on the field often fail to become "champions" in life as well:

Bizlardan bo'lmadi hech kim chempion,
Sportni tark etdi bolalar ko'pi.

Hanuz meni qiynar u stadion,
Hanuz meni qiynar u futbol to'pi.

For the lyric hero, the emotions and memories evoked by football are more valuable than football itself. Football is intertwined with longing and nostalgia. Memories of football extend beyond the field:

Hanuz men qo'msayman maydon chetida
Chempion bo'lishim istagan qizni.

After these lines, the poet reflects on the fate of former teammates. Children who ran tirelessly to become champions sometimes win, sometimes lose, yet true championship remains out of reach:

Hayqirdi radio, televizorlar,
Ko'klarga ko'tarib Pelelarini.

Ta'zirin berardi ota-onalar
Futbol, deb yugurgan bolalarini.

The lyric hero withdraws from memories to consider his present life. The shoes that once enabled him to fly like a bird are replaced by the heavy footwear of adulthood. What about the others? Those children who dreamed of becoming champions are now navigating life. Football has become forgotten for some, one lost in the struggles of livelihood, another achieving "championship" in first love. In short, everyone reconciles with fate, and the competition for championship transforms into the pursuit of money:

Changlarga belangan komandam, qani
Chempion bo'lmagan futbolchilaring?

The poem juxtaposes memory and the present, and this

contrast shapes its rhythm. Football represents childhood, innocence, and pure emotions, while life serves as its counterpoint. For the lyric hero, the regret of not becoming a champion in football outweighs the hardships of adult life. As he observes his former team through the lens of memories, one question haunts him:

Birov puldor bo'lib yashay boshladi,
Birovning baxtiga yetmay qoldi pul.

This question unites the emotional trajectory of the poem. In reality, the eleven boys desired to become champions only to impress that one girl, and now that girl is absent from the field of life. The poem's final lines reveal that football embodies unrealized love and longing. The "girl at the edge of the field" drives the poem's central motif, shaping the artistic success of the work.

Xurshid Abdurashid, "KRISHTIANU RONALDUNING LEONEL MESSIGA YOZGAN MAKTUBI"

Every era has its football legends. While older poets celebrated Garrincha, Pelé, and Maradona, contemporary poetry reflects Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. When these two "otherworldly" players retire, our generation, having watched them grow, will undoubtedly continue to write about them. Xurshid Abdurashid was quicker to respond, writing "Cristiano Ronaldo's Letter to Lionel Messi." In a world divided by these two stars, their private correspondence evokes curiosity in the reader. The poem reflects the author's admiration for Ronaldo and even defends certain criticized aspects:

Balki, rostdir muxlislar gapi,
San'atimga kerilishim bor.

Ammo ona vatan sha'ni deb
Sal ko'z yoshga berilishim bor.

Ronaldo's reflections on football in relation to Messi take on philosophical depth. He observes that rivalry, struggle, and competition exist solely on the football field; life extends beyond it:

O'yla, axir, maydonda mangu
Yulduz bo'lib qololamizmi?

The author emphasizes that football matches are transient; players come and go, but the field remains. The field represents the world itself, unchanging and

eternal. Poets depict this eternal secret through footballers turned lyric heroes, each bringing their unique interpretation:

Kel, qo'lni ber, to'p tepaverib

Zaxa bo'ldi shundog'am poshna.

Biz shunchaki o'tkinchi, qolsa

Faqat maydon qoladi, oshna...

Mansur Jumayev, "FUTBOL"

Mansur Jumayev was unafraid of literary experiments, though they were not always published. This poem demonstrates his ability to create musicality from the names of footballers, leaving a strong impression on the reader. The work, as the poet described, is "self-explanatory" and consists of an assemblage of football personalities. Each name carries its own fate. To those unfamiliar with football, it may appear as a random collection of words, but for fans, the names evoke national teams, club colors, unforgettable goals, and moves.

The experimental poem begins with Italian legends:

Totti, Vardi, Ian, Veà, Marta, Rio,

Omar, Igor, Lotar, Kaka, Eysebio,

Di Stefano!

Subsequent lines follow a similar pattern, highlighting footballers' names. Readers are drawn into the world of football, and even if they become momentarily lost among the names, they begin to reflect on the miraculous feats of these players. If a text can evoke lyric sentiment in readers, it possesses artistic value; therefore, this work can indeed be considered a poem.

Summary of poetic analysis

1. While football is not a primary theme in Uzbek poetry, it has been addressed in various periods and continues to be explored.
2. Lyric heroes appear in poems as fans, anti-fans, footballers, or the poet's lyrical "I."
3. The footballer as a lyric hero serves the poet's artistic purpose.
4. Associations of football, the stadium, and footballers often acquire metaphorical meaning.

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