I'd never planned to go to Maracanã. But my hosts, Zé and Yara, suggested we take in a soccer game after lunch that August afternoon, and I readily agreed. When traveling, what is the point of saying no?

Maracanã, Rio's huge soccer stadium, is located far from the city's tourist beaches in the old working-class district of Mangueira, famed for its prizewinning samba school. Frank Sinatra and other luminaries have appeared at the stadium, packing in as many as 200,000 roaring faithful. But Maracanã's primary role in Carioca life is as a soccer shrine—notably for bouts between Rio's arch-rival teams, Flamengo and Fluminense.

The teams we were about to take in lacked the star power of "Fla" and "Flu": lowly Fortaleza, from the northeastern state of Ceará, was playing hapless Botafogo, the favorite of Claudio, Zé and Yara's eight-year-old son who accompanied us to the game. ("Botafogo never wins," Zé confided to me, chuckling, out of Claudio's earshot.) We were part of a paltry crowd of 15,000—which under certain conditions could constitute a small city—but this mob was not without its fierce partisans, Claudio among them.

The battery of military police, to a man resembling mean whippets, would presumably maintain order.

We took our seats in the rear of the stadium's upper tier, at one end of the field. The concrete slab floor of the uppermost deck formed a stifling roof above us; I felt as though we were trapped in a dank echo chamber. But Yara assured me that ours was a fine location. During especially crowded or hotly contested matches, she informed me, rowdiness reached the point where men in the top deck would urinate on the fans below them. To quell the ardor of those in the lowlands, I wondered? Or just to infuriate them? Quickly I glanced overhead, saw the looming deck, and instead of feeling claustrophobic was flooded with relief.

Down on the field, I noticed, men in shorts were now intently swarming, signaling the start of the match. But I hadn't a clue what they were up to. My only connection with the game had been tenuous, through my former lover Rogerio, back in the San Francisco Bay Area. He was a one-time professional soccer player, and his thighs were unlike any I'd ever seen: massively muscled, built up from hours on end of dancing with the ball, teasing it mercilessly with kicks and blows.

Just a few minutes into the game, a band of about a dozen drummers and percussionists swarmed into our sparsely populated area of Maracanã. They took their places across the aisle from us, ten feet away, and with frightening intensity began to beat, pound, shake, rattle, whistle, and otherwise bedevil their instruments, setting up an intoxicating swirl of rhythms. Then they started to chant "Jogo," the Portuguese word for "fire" and apparently their nickname for the Botafogo team. But their bellowing chant sounded like a foghorn from Hades: Foooollllllhhhhhhhh-gooooooo0000! I felt my hair stand on end, the blood was pounding in my head. It was an electrifying display, as male as a phallus. I swore I was seeing red.

Suddenly the inexplicable dance out there on the field made some sort of physical sense: I was experiencing it under my skin through the relentless chanting and pounding of my neighbors. This impromptu drum corps/cheerleading squad provided the
game's soundtrack and pulse. I was in a state of near-ecstasy as the ritualistic rhythms continued to throb, more insistent than my own heart.

Claudio was likewise entranced, especially since his team had already scored a goal. Dark eyes flashing, he clutched Botafogo's black and white banner to his chest as his mother Yara beamed through her beer. She was chugging away, and offered me a sip, but I declined. Just a couple of hours earlier, we'd consumed large quantities of feijoada, the black bean stew that is Rio's traditional Saturday lunch and demands an accompaniment of cold beer. But all this talk of golden showers had turned me off to guzzling. I didn't care to make the acquaintance of Maracanã's pissoirs.

Dusk was falling as the game drew to a close. Botafogo had indeed won. Yara announced that she had to go xixi—not surprising, after all the beer she'd imbibed. She and I set out in search of a restroom, agreeing to meet Zé and Claudio at the stadium entrance. As we wandered through the maze of Maracanã, we saw many bathrooms for men. We found none for the ladies.

Yara grew increasingly panicky, then desperate. Her face was contorted. "I'm going to pee in my pants," she grimly predicted, her teeth clenched. Her entire body, in fact, was clenched as she ran, with me trailing helplessly, so thankful I hadn't been drinking beer.

Finally she lurched into one of the men's lavatories. "Desculpe," she cried, begging their pardon. The men were nonchalant: "Tudo bem." I waited just outside, my nose assaulted by the stench of a steaming ocean of piss.

Smiling, breathing deeply, Yara emerged a new woman. We managed to find Zé and Claudio, the boy in a state of transcendental joy over his team's victory. "What a wonderful night for him!" Yara marveled. She wagered that he would never be separated from his team's flag, now wrapped around him like a hero's cape.

It was already dark. The new moon shed little light on us and the seemingly improvised parking arrangements around the stadium. Cars were heaved up on the sidewalk, head first into a wall, like gleaming beached seals. Then one by one they slinked off into the winter night.

As we approached our Volkswagen, one of the few cars remaining, something caught my eye. Even in the dim illumination of the street lamp I could see a long row of dark wet spots staining the wall against which the cars had been parked. Then it dawned on me. Each paterfamilias had not-so-discreetly taken a leak before boarding his chariot for the ride home. Did organized sport provoke this mass outbreak of male marking behavior? Next time, I reminded myself, I would definitely take a seat in the tippy-top deck.

Terri Hinte also contributed "Argentino" in Part I.

Jackie and I are seated at a sidewalk café at the western end of Copacabana on a Sunday afternoon, only hours after our arrival. Four young troubadours are coaxing samba rhythms from drums, bongos, tambourines, even a used soft drink can half-filled with pebbles. Several women are singing, and one of them is dancing. She is a woman of a certain age, tightly ensnared in a red workout suit several sizes too small. From her look, one would guess that she was not born to good fortune and that her life has been a hard one. But none of that matters now. What matters is Sunday, this Sunday, the beat of those instruments, and the dancing, her body moving sinuously and her feet flying in a manner perfected through the centuries, passed on to her as a child, and practiced through the years. For several minutes she dances, oblivious to everything but the spirit that moves her. Then suddenly her eyes lock with Jackie's. She smiles broadly and
beckons Jackie to join her. It's an invitation not simply to dance but to share the understanding that this moment, once passed, is irretrievable.

—Leonard Gross, “Rio: Yes or No?” Condé Nast Traveler

ERIC SCIGLIANO

***

Aracaju Surprise

A family connection helps the author discover the funky charm of the far Northeast.

It's hardly a bracing start to your trip, to finally find the obscure South American destination you're bound for mentioned in a guidebook—and dismissed as “the Cleveland of the Northeast.” And it's even more discouraging to land in a famously arid, sunny region, amid hundreds of miles of tropical beach, and be hammered down by merciless, unending rain. I tried to tell myself that grim omens and bad beginnings were necessary preludes to pleasant surprises—and, to my surprise, I was right about a place called Aracaju.

The Northeast in question is Northeast Brazil, the poorest, most chaotic, but most heterogeneous and culturally fertile part of that mind-boggling country.

I was bound for Aracaju, the capital of Sergipe, the smallest and perhaps the most forgotten state in the country. “A poor capital... visually quite unattractive,” said my guidebook, and worked down from there.

To make matters even less auspicious, we were embarking in mid-May, just as the rainy season in Northeast Brazil would peak. But this was a trip too long-awaited and long-delayed, booked after too many battles with officious Brazilian airline officials, driven by