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London's first plastic-free takeaway business

- 1 Like so many of us, Anshu Ahuja used to get home from work on a Friday night, collapse in front of the television and order a takeaway. Every time, though, it would come with a hefty helping of guilt. 'It would arrive on a noisy scooter in a puff of smoke, packaged in a pile of plastic,' she says. 'The damage to the planet was so obvious.'
- 
- 2 During her childhood in Mumbai, the dabbawalas system delivered food by bicycle in reusable tiffin tins known as dabbas. 'I thought, there must be a way of taking this centuries-old system and using technology to modernise it for London,' she says. The result is DabbaDrop, London's first plastic-free and emissions-free takeaway service, which delivers South Asian food including dals and vibrant curries to Londoners in dabba tins, with sides such as ginger jam and roti packaged in compostable pots and paper bags.
 - 3 DabbaDrop works on a subscription basis, allowing customers the option to book one regularly changing menu each week. 'All our meals are cooked according to how many people we'll be feeding that week, which means nothing goes to waste,' says Anshu. 'We also try to use as much of the ingredients as possible, so if we're doing a pumpkin curry we'll include the skin, for example. Any waste we do have we compost.'
 - 4 The company uses its own fleet of cyclists, as well as low-impact delivery companies such as Ecofleet and Pedal Me. The DabbaDrop team has calculated that on average each of their mains (a curry, salad and dal) has a 75 per cent lower carbon footprint than a standard Indian takeaway. 3 The business has expanded rapidly from its east London origins, spreading to parts of north London and recently starting to deliver in south-east London, too. 'There's definitely a growing audience of people who want a delicious takeaway without feeling guilty,' says Anshu.

adapted from *standard.co.uk*, 2021



Tunnel vision: 'Mole Man' home bags elite award



A house that once had local planners tearing out their hair because of the owner's penchant for digging illegal underground tunnels has won Best Dwelling at this year's New London Architecture Awards.

The late William Lyttle, nicknamed the Hackney Mole Man, spent 40 years hollowing out a network of tunnels that reached a depth of 26 feet and stretched out 65 feet in all directions.

Lyttle was evicted in 2006, and the property has now been turned into a three-storey home and art studio. Judges praised architects Adjaye Associates for paying homage to the home's history with underground living areas.

Hackney Citizen, 2021



Charitable billionaires

Pascale Hughes's report on altruism (*i weekend*, 1 June) was excellent and balanced. It exposes the hypocrisy of the '1 per cent'. I remember writing a letter to another national newspaper in 2010 in response to the Giving Pledge¹⁾ announced by Bill Gates and Warren Buffet and a number of multibillionaires, asking them two simple questions: what is the hourly rate of workers in your company; and how much tax do you pay in the country where you make your profit?

I am pleased to see that the article states the shameful fact that inequality widens in tandem with corporate profits. Simple changes to our tax system, such as financial transaction tax and enforcing regulations for tax collection more rigorously, would have an immediate impact.

Christina Kadir

Brighton,
East Sussex

i newspaper, 2019

noot 1 the Giving Pledge = een campagne om extreem rijke mensen aan te moedigen om een groot deel van hun rijkdom aan goede doelen te geven



The rise of y'all

by Thomas Moore Devlin

- 1 Have y'all heard? "Y'all" is in the mainstream now. While historically associated with the southern United States, "y'all" is becoming a popular choice for people who want to address multiple people. The rise of "y'all" fills a lexical hole in English that's been around for a long time: the lack of a second-person plural pronoun.
- 2 Whether you've embraced "y'all" or prefer a different way of referring to a group of people, it's worth knowing about the history of the second-person plural in English. It combines Old English, regional dialects, African American Vernacular English (AAVE¹) and gendered language all into a single story. So yes, "y'all" really has it all.
- 3 Pronouns are a closed class of words. That means it is very, very rare for new pronouns to arise (compare that to open class words like verbs and nouns – new ones are added to our lexicon all the time). Creating a new second-person plural pronoun that everyone would use, then, is difficult. What's happened instead is that many different pronouns have appeared in various parts of the world.
- 4 The two most popular second-person plural pronouns (at least in the United States) are "y'all" and "you guys". As of right now, "you guys" is a far more popular choice than "y'all," but it's facing a reckoning at the moment. There's disagreement as to whether "you guys" is a gendered term or not. On the one hand, at this point people refer to other people as "guys" no matter the gender. On the other, "guys" explicitly originated as a term referring to men, and so it joins a pattern of terms originally meaning "men" that are now used to refer to all people.
- 5 The argument against "you guys" is still mainly made by the minority, and as far as language usage goes it can seem like a minor point. But as people make the argument for a more inclusive term, they turn to one other option: "y'all".



- 6 There are quite a few reasons for the rise of “y’all” over the past decade. As we mentioned earlier, it’s a gender-neutral option, and thus some linguists are advocating for its adoption by more people. Plus, the mainstream use of AAVE has become more and more common. Though “y’all” is not as obviously tied to AAVE as words like “woke” and “bae,” it’s certainly part of a lexicon used by African Americans that is being absorbed by a larger body of people. Social media is also a major contributor here, breaking down geographic boundaries. 11, this has allowed the word to flourish.
- 7 “Y’all” has a long way to go before becoming part of Standard English, or even Standard American English, but it’s not entirely far-fetched that it might. It’s an incredibly versatile term – it can also be used to address a single person, or you can use “all y’all” to widen the scope of who you’re talking to – and it’s more concise than most of the other second-person plural pronouns mentioned before.
- 8 If you’ve never used “y’all” before, give it a try. It might sound like you’re doing an imitation of a southerner at first, but after a while it becomes natural. We won’t tell you what to do with your life, but if y’all want to adopt a new way of addressing groups, don’t overlook “y’all.”

babbel.com, 2019

noot 1 AAVE = variëteit van het Engels die gesproken wordt door veel Afro-Amerikanen in met name stedelijke gemeenschappen in de Verenigde Staten en Canada



Het volgende fragment komt uit een roman geschreven door Marian Keyes. In dit fragment gaan Grace en haar vriend, Damien Stapleton, op kraambezoek bij zijn zus Christine.

This Charming Man

Christine, tall and elegant and astonishingly svelte for a woman who had given birth only five weeks ago, came to welcome us. 'Come in, come in. Sorry, I'm just in myself, it's all a bit ...' [...] 'Richard should be home soon.' Richard was Christine's husband. He had one of those mysterious jobs where he spent fourteen hours a day on the phone, making money. Damien and I joked privately that every day he was locked into his office and wasn't allowed to leave until he'd made another hundred million euro. ('Ninety-eight ... ninety-nine ... still ninety-nine ... ninety-nine – and a hundred! Well done, off you go home, Richard.')

We followed Christine into the enormous Colefax and Fowler kitchen, where a nervous-looking Polish girl was doing something at the microwave.

'This is Marta,' Christine said. 'Our new nanny.'

Marta nodded hello and promptly scarpered.

'And this ...' Christine gazed fondly into a bassinet, in which a tiny pink-skinned baby was asleep. '... is Maximillian.'

(Yes, Christine and Richard had named their four children after emperors. I know it makes them sound like grandiose nutters, but they're not.)

Damien and I stared politely at the sleeping child.

'Okay, you can stop admiring him now.' Christine reached for a corkscrew. 'Wine?'

'Yes. Can I do anything to help?'

It was a fake question. No one could ever help Christine. She did everything so much better and faster than everyone else that there was no point. Anyway, I didn't want to help. I was at someone's else's house for my dinner, why would I want to do stuff I'd have to do at home?

'All done,' Christine said. 'Did most of it last night. Just a few last-minute fiddly bits.'

'What's with your trouser suit?' I asked her. 'How come you're looking so clean? You're not back at work already?'

'Certainly not, I'm just popping in for a couple hours a day, to keep an eye on things.'

Christine was so clever and accomplished that she no longer did much actual scrubbed-up, green-gowned, hands-on surgery stuff. Instead she was Head of Surgery at Dublin's most expensive hospital, the first



woman to have ever held that post. (Or perhaps she was the youngest ever Head. It was hard to keep track because the Stapletons seemed to be always winning accolades. If, every time one of them got a promotion or won an award, we gave them the celebration they deserved, we'd all end up in the Priory.)

'So where's Augustina?' I looked around.

'At her Sanskrit lesson?' Damien asked.

'Haha. Mandarin, actually.'

It took me a moment to realize that Christine was serious.

'We don't make her go,' Christine said, as I tried to hide my astonishment – well, actually distress, if I'm to be honest. 'She *asked* to go to lessons.'

Too weird. What nine-year-old would *ask* to learn Mandarin?

'And we keep an eye on her,' Christine said.

'On her work-life balance?' Damien suggested.

'If your tongue could get any further into your cheek...' Christine said.

'Anyway, cheers.' She held up her glass. 'It's lovely to see you both.'



The Matrix: is this really happening?

by Brian Raftery

- 1 It was early 1999, and people were freaking out about the future. A new millennium was on the way, carrying with it the promise – or threat – of massive change. Would the next century guide us toward a tech-enabled utopia? Or, as some feared, would it plunge the world into a full-on apocalypse? These were strange days, marked by equal parts anxiety and anticipation. Which made it the perfect moment for a sleek, cerebral movie called The Matrix.
- 2 Created by a pair of mostly unknown filmmakers (Lana and Lilly Wachowski), and headlined by a commercially iffy star (Keanu Reeves), the \$60m cyber-thriller became an instant hit. Some viewers were sucked in by the film's mind-melting storyline – about a hacker named Neo who discovers that mankind is enslaved in a computer-made simulation. Others were simply turned on by the film's *whoa*-inducing fight scenes. By the end of 1999, it was clear that The Matrix was The One: the first true digital-era blockbuster, one that foretold the ways technology would reshape not only filmmaking, but also our daily lives, both for better and for worse.
- 3 The pop-cultural impact of the film was clear within months of its release. The Wachowskis had incorporated new digital effects that let characters freeze in mid-air, or dodge hails of gunfire, while cameras circled the action in a near-360-degree swirl. As a result, The Matrix didn't quite look like any movie that had come before, and its slowed-down, hyper-detailed visual style was soon being satirised and adapted by other filmmakers. Not since 1977, when Star Wars was released, had a movie so quickly rebooted the look and feel of mainstream moviemaking.
- 4 But these were all surface-level aftershocks. The deeper legacy of The Matrix wouldn't be revealed for years. A DVD release broke sales records at the time, allowing for multiple repeat viewings. But it was the internet that really let Matrix fans go down the rabbit hole. The Wachowskis' script had been kicking around since the mid-90s, a time when the mainstream web was in its infancy. But by 1999, millions of Americans were chatting, ranting, and shopping online. At the same time, the spectre of a possibly destructive "millennium bug" hung over everything.



- 5 It was a tense, transformative period – one that was encapsulated by The Matrix. If you were suspicious of all this new technology, the film served as a cautionary tale about our devices overpowering our lives. But if you were already very online, The Matrix was proof that the internet was full of possibility – and that if things went bad, people had the power to rise up and reclaim their own humanity.
- 6 These were big ideas and they led to big conversations, many of which percolated online, where debates and deep-dives carried on day and night, and around the globe. Some of the questions moviegoers were asking at the time: “Are we being controlled by our computers?” “If The Matrix is real, what can you do about it?” Also, “where can I get some of those cool Matrix sunglasses?” The Wachowskis had made a film that seemed to speak directly to the internet, and the internet couldn’t stop speaking back.
- 7 Neo and his partner, Trinity (played by Carrie-Anne Moss), treat each other with a level of mutual respect that’s rarely seen in male-female big-screen relationships, even to this day. And they work alongside a multi-gender, multi-racial team of rebels. 21 its grim shoot-’em-up scenes and killer machines, The Matrix is a deeply hopeful film: one that pushes the value of caring for one another, and the freedom that comes from defining who you really are.
- 8 Still, the ultimate sign of The Matrix’s ongoing importance, as well as its predictive powers, is the fact that, more than two decades after its release, it’s becoming harder to tell if we’re living with The Matrix, or within it. The internet has become so overloaded with 22, it’s now possible for everyone to generate their own immersive reality (or realities). You can now opt in to whatever set of facts you like, knowing your beliefs – no matter how damaged, or even dangerous – will be supported by a vast digital machine, one more terrifying than anything the Wachowskis could have imagined.
- 9 It’s a grim situation, one that undercuts the message of hope that was hardwired into The Matrix. Perhaps we’ll get a brighter glimpse of our next future this month, when The Matrix Resurrections arrives in cinemas. But no matter where Neo and Trinity go next, the message of the original landmark film will continue to ring truer than ever: we’re all increasingly stuck in our own versions of The Matrix – but we still have the power to rage against the machines and free ourselves.

theguardian.com, 2021



Hydroelectric dams and big cats

by Tara Pirie, Postdoctoral Researcher and Wildlife Research Group,
University of Reading

- 1 Big cats are among the most widespread top predators on Earth. As with many large carnivores, big cats are under threat from habitat loss, which leaves them with less to eat. Their spread-out populations and slow reproductive rates make them particularly vulnerable. While the habitats in which big cats live range from boreal forests at high latitudes to tropical rainforests at the equator, the causes of habitat loss are largely the same: logging for wood and fuel, plantations, farming and urbanisation. Forest loss also contributes to climate change. 23 that hydroelectricity, which is being developed worldwide as an alternative energy source to fossil fuels, is a big cause of deforestation.
- 2 Building hydroelectric dams has caused extinctions and spread diseases in rivers globally, but the threat to ecosystems on land has largely been overlooked. In a recent study, researchers from China and Portugal investigated how existing and planned hydroelectric dams might affect two carnivores: the near-threatened jaguar (with an estimated global population of 173,000) and the endangered tiger (thought to number between 3,200 and 3,500 worldwide). The distribution of jaguars and tigers has shrunk 50% and 93% respectively, but the researchers found that hydroelectric plants pose a substantial risk of further declines. They found 164 dams that already intersect the jaguar range and 421 dams that do the same for tigers. 28-1
- 3 Large expanses of land are flooded to create reservoirs when building hydroelectric plants in low-lying, relatively flat areas. Although tigers and jaguars can and do swim, they mainly hunt species such as deer that live on land. Sites chosen for dams typically incorporate floodplains and areas along rivers that are important for both species, since they tend to contain lots of prey. The flooded area will force both predators and prey into surrounding areas. 28-2 But if it cannot, the predators may be forced further afield in search of food, potentially drawing them into conflict with people who may kill them.



- 4 26, additional hydroelectric dams can increase the presence of people in remote areas. Roads built to access new dam sites consequently open up areas that were previously impenetrable. Roads can be a barrier to some species and kill those that try to cross. Roads can also encourage new towns and villages, which divide the territory even further. So any new dams, especially in conservation areas or areas where top predators prowl, should be avoided. Sadly, most of the dams planned in Asia overlap with significant portions of the tiger's range.
- 5 One way to mitigate the damage from building new hydroelectric plants may be to do it on slopes outside of areas that are crucial for conserving tigers and jaguars. The amount of flooded area needed to produce electricity from these plants when they're on a slope is smaller compared to those built on lower ground, reducing the overall damage to the surrounding habitat. 28-3 Alternative sources of energy are important for a sustainable future, but their benefits should not come at a substantial cost to species already under threat.

theconversation.com, 2021



Therapist to the super-rich

adapted from an article by Clay Cockrell



- 1 If I had a dollar for every time I've heard the term "first world problems", my bank account would look similar to those of my clients. I work as a psychotherapist and my specialism is ultra-high net worth individuals. Over the years, I have developed a great deal of empathy for those who have far too much. The television programme *Succession*¹⁾ does such a good job of exploring the kinds of toxic excess my clients struggle with that when my wife is watching it, I have to leave the room; it just feels like work.
- 2 What could possibly be challenging about being a billionaire, you might ask. Well, what would it be like if you couldn't trust those close to you? Or if you looked at any new person in your life with deep suspicion? I hear this from my clients all the time: "What do they want from me?"; or "How are they going to manipulate me?"; or "They are probably only friends with me because of my money."
- 3 Then there are the struggles with purpose – the depression that sets in when you feel like you have no reason to get out of bed. Why bother going to work when the business you have built or inherited runs itself without you now? If all your necessities and much more were covered for the rest of your life – you might struggle with a lack of meaning and ambition too. My clients are often bored with life and too many times this leads to them chasing the next high – chemically or otherwise – to fill that void.
- 4 Most of the people I see are much more willing to talk about their sex lives or substance-misuse problems than their bank accounts. Money is seen as dirty and secret. Money is awkward to talk about. Money is wrapped up in guilt, shame, and fear. There is a perception that money can immunise you against mental-health problems when actually, I believe that wealth can make you – and the people closest to you – much more susceptible to them.



- 5 I see family situations like those in *Succession* all the time. People like the series' lead character, Logan Roy, who came from humble beginnings to create an incredibly successful media empire. However, it is evident that he has failed miserably at raising fully functioning children. Too many of my clients want to indulge their children so "they never have to suffer what I had to suffer" while growing up. But the result is that they prevent their children from experiencing the very things that made them successful: sacrifice, hard work, overcoming failure and developing resilience.
- 6 *Succession* is built on the idea of a group of wealthy children vying for who will take the mantle from their father – none of them are able to convince him that they can do it. And that is because they have reached adulthood completely unprepared to take on any responsibility. The wealthy parents I see, often because of their own guilt and shame, are not preparing their children for the challenges of managing their wealth. On numerous occasions the child of a wealthy family has said to me: "We never talked about money. I don't know how much there is or what I'm supposed to do with it. I don't know how to take care of it. It's all so secret and dirty."
- 7 I was raised in a small town in rural Kentucky, solidly in the middle class. And it can be very difficult to watch these individuals struggle with the toxicity of excess, isolation and deep mistrust. *Succession* is a dramatised version of the world they operate in – it is made for television and part of its purpose is to give audiences the pleasure of watching the wealthy struggle. 33

theguardian.com, 2021

noot 1 *Succession* = een Amerikaanse dramaserie die draait om de fictieve familie Roy, eigenaren van een wereldwijd mediabedrijf



Granta scoops Buckingham's new book

by Heloise Wood

- 1 Granta Books will publish “a powerful antidote to our atomised world” from author and academic Will Buckingham: *Hello, Stranger*.
- 2 Anne Meadows, senior commissioning editor at Granta, acquired world English language rights from Emma Finn at C&W Agency. *Hello, Stranger* is billed as “an exploration of how welcoming strangers into our homes and our cities might improve our lives and change the world.”
- 3 *Hello, Stranger* explores how different cultures – from governors in Ancient Rome to festival goers in the outer islands of Indonesia – welcome strangers as guests, enemies and migrants, the publisher said. The book explores “how opening our doors could cure the loneliness epidemic, alleviate the migrant crisis and enrich us all.”
- 4 Buckingham is the author of several books and has a PhD in philosophy and an MA in social anthropology, and lectures at The Parami Institute in Myanmar.
- 5 “*Hello, Stranger* not only made me feel wiser, and fascinated me with its brilliant stories, it made me want to be a better, warmer, kinder, more welcoming person,” Meadows said. “In this era of walls and borders, loneliness and isolation, I am so glad we’ll be publishing Will on the Granta Books list, and so excited to bring his sparkling, heart-warming book into the world.”



For US rights enquiries email Angela Rose on arose@granta.com, for any other rights questions, contact emma@cwagency.co.uk.

thebookseller.com, 2019



Rewatching classic films

by Andrew Miller

- 1 Risky business, re-watching old movies. You may decide that a film you loved in your youth is dross – and that your youthful self was a dolt. Worse, it might seem offensive, which all those years ago you failed to notice.
- 2 Happily, that wasn't my experience with "Raiders of the Lost Ark". "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny", the finale of the franchise, is released this week, and I tease out the saga's hidden meanings in my Back Story column (concluding that Indy is more like us than he appears). "Raiders" remains a great, great movie: a stunt and gag a minute, a hero brilliantly conceived from whip to theme-tune, and a star, Harrison Ford, in his rugged pomp. The latest adventure has enough creepy-crawlies and cadavers to satisfy the faithful.
- 3 Besides regret and affection, reconsidering classics can 37. The optimism of the original "Top Gun" contrasts tellingly with the nostalgia of its sequel. Today the avoidable calamity in "Titanic" feels to me like a parable of climate change. Dive into early James Bond and you realise how much he has evolved; radically recasting 007 might only be in character. Beneath its screwball antics, 38, "Some Like it Hot", my favourite film, now seems way ahead of its time.

The Economist, July 2023



Trick or Eat

adapted from an article by Jamie Ducharme

- 1 For people who typically hoard Halloween candy past Thanksgiving, here's some surprising advice: some dentists actually condone eating the candy all at once, rather than rationing it out over weeks.
- 2 After you eat sweets, bacteria feed on the sugars and starches left on your teeth and form plaque. Eventually, the acid in plaque begins to wear away at the enamel coating your teeth, forming tiny holes, also known as cavities, that grow larger and larger over time.
- 3 Anna Berik, a dentist in Newton, Massachusetts, says it doesn't really matter, at least from a cavity-forming perspective, how much you eat at a time. "At some point, there's a threshold where the bacteria can't really work any harder. They can only make the acid so fast," she says. For that reason, feasting on sweets, then brushing your teeth right after, is actually less cavity-causing than spreading that candy out over the next three months and having sugar in your mouth day after day after day."
- 4 Chris Kammer, a dentist in Madison, Wisconsin, also favors the one-and-done approach, so much so, in fact, that he started a Halloween candy buyback program, with the goal of preventing kids from dipping into their trick-or-treating bag over and over again. Kammer encourages kids to select a few favorite pieces of candy, then bring the rest of their haul to one of his 2,400 buyback sites around the country, where they can be traded in for cash before being shipped out to troops overseas.



Time, 2017



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Football match? We can predict the outcome!

adapted from an article by Taha Yasseri, Associate Professor, School of Sociology; University College Dublin

The legendary German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer once said: “You can plan, but what happens on a football field cannot be predicted.” This sentiment goes a long way to explaining why football is the most popular sport worldwide. Anything can happen on the field, and the more surprising the outcome of a match, the more memorable it will be.



But our new study suggests the results of football matches are becoming more predictable.

Data comparison

We developed a computer model to predict the results of football matches based on data from almost 88,000 matches played over 26 years (1993-2019) across 11 major European leagues. Our model tried to predict whether the home or away team would win by looking at their performance in a certain number of previous matches. Our model is simpler than the state-of-the-art predictive models used by betting houses today. Its simplicity means our model is going to be less accurate than the more complex predictive models. Even so, our model predicted the results correctly roughly 75% of the time.

Increasingly correct

We found it has become progressively easier to predict the results of football matches over the years. For instance, our model could correctly predict the winner of a Bundesliga (German league) match in 60% of matches in 1993, whereas its performance was as high as 80% in 2019. Finding that football results have become more predictable initially surprised us. We thought more money and higher stakes must have made the game more competitive over time, and therefore we should expect more excitement and less predictability in recent years. Examining the data more closely helps us understand why this isn't the case.

A widening divide

When we looked at teams in the same league in a given season, we observed that in more recent years, the points have been distributed among teams much less evenly: overall the stronger teams have become more successful, while the weaker teams have become less successful.



This echoes the notion that “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”. This widening gap could be the result of a cycle where stronger teams end up making more money, which makes them even more powerful in the players market, which then leads to an even stronger squad.

Home-field advantage

One other trend in our results helped us understand why football matches could be becoming more predictable. As football fans will know, many of the most exciting games take place when a strong team plays away in the field of a weaker team, and the weaker home team, relying on often epic support from their fans, ends up winning. We observed an initial home-field advantage of 30% in the early 1990s – which means on average a team playing at home was 30% more likely to win compared to a team playing away. The home-field advantage has gradually shrunk to only 15% during the most recent seasons. In other words, it has halved over the past two-and-a-half decades.

The strong are getting stronger

So there's less and less chance for the weaker teams to benefit from playing at home. It seems, in general, that stronger teams will win anyway, no matter where they play. This could be in part because transportation and training have significantly improved over the past few years, minimising the logistical challenges of playing away, and making it easier for the players to adapt. But more importantly, this seems to be further evidence of the increasing strength of the stronger teams.

The (future) success of the sport

There are some limitations to our study. We only looked at the 11 largest European men's leagues, and our analysis didn't go further back than 1993. Nevertheless, the results of our work are robust, particularly for bigger leagues such as the ones in England, Spain and Germany. Our findings highlight the need for stronger regulations around club incomes, expenditures and player salaries, including, perhaps, the introduction of more effective caps. Otherwise, the success of the sport might become the very reason for its decline. A game that's easy to predict is not one that will necessarily keep bringing crowds to the stadiums.

theconversation.com, 2021

