What the World Cup reminds us about investing…

By: Billy Pain

As England build towards another shot at ’66, it’s a reminder that great teams and great portfolios aren’t carried by one star, but by everyone playing their role through the ups and downs.

Soccer Kick Off Beginning - Free photo on Pixabay

The World Cup is finally here.

Like millions of others, I'll be watching and hoping England can achieve something they haven't managed since 1966. Football has a unique ability to unite people, create heroes overnight and spark debates that can last for decades.

But beyond the excitement, the World Cup offers a fascinating lesson about investing. Because football and investing have something important in common:

> *Both are often judged by short-term results,*
> *even though success is determined over the long term.*

FOOTBALL IS A GAME OF FINE MARGINS

Football is one of the lowest-scoring major sports in the world. A typical match might produce just two or three goals. One moment can decide everything. Compare that to other sports:

- Basketball regularly sees more than 200 points scored in a game.
- Rugby union matches often produce several tries and penalties, with totals commonly in the 30–60 point range.
- Cricket creates dozens of scoring events every innings, with runs accumulating ball by ball over long stretches of play.

In those sports, there are countless moments that contribute to the final result. In football, there are often only a handful. That means a single event can have an enormous impact.

A deflection.
A VAR decision.
A missed penalty.
A moment of brilliance.

One incident can completely change the outcome of a match.

A team can dominate possession, create more chances and still lose 1-0. That's not necessarily unfair, it's simply the nature of the game.

A LESSON FROM 1966

England's World Cup victory in 1966 is often remembered as one of the greatest achievements in our sporting history. And rightly so.

But when you look closer, it was not a story of complete domination. England began the tournament with a goalless draw. They progressed through several tight matches, including a 1-0 quarter-final victory over Argentina and a 2-1 semi-final win over Portugal.

Even the final was level after 90 minutes before extra time eventually settled the contest.

Today, we look back and see a famous triumph. At the time, however, the margins were incredibly small. One moment the other way and the story could have been very different.

History remembers the winners and it often forgets how close the outcome really was.

RESULTS DON'T ALWAYS TELL THE FULL STORY

Modern football analysis has evolved because people realised the scoreboard doesn't always reflect performance.

A team can play brilliantly and lose.
Another can produce very little and still win.
Over a single game, luck and randomness can have a significant influence.
Over a tournament, quality begins to emerge.
Over many years, the best teams usually rise to the top.
Investing works in much the same way.

INVESTING IS A LONG-TERM GAME

Markets are full of short-term noise. Headlines move prices. Political events create uncertainty. Investor sentiment changes by the day.

As a result, good portfolios can temporarily underperform. Poor decisions can appear successful and investments that look disappointing today can become tomorrow's strongest performers.

In the short term, outcomes can be heavily influenced by factors nobody can control.
Over the long term, however, fundamentals matter.

1. Quality businesses create value.
2. Disciplined investors are rewarded.
3. Compounding does the heavy lifting.

THE BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGE

One of the biggest mistakes football fans make is judging everything based on the latest result.

After one defeat:

"The manager isn't good enough."
"The system doesn't work."
"The tournament is over."

Investors often make exactly the same mistake, they abandon strategies after short-term losses, chase whatever has recently performed well.

UNDERSTANDING THE GAME, YOU'RE PLAYING

The best football teams understand that they cannot control every result.

They focus on preparation, performance and focus doing the right things consistently.
The best investors adopt the same mindset.
They accept that there will be periods of disappointment and understand that short-term outcomes are not always a reflection of long-term quality.

They remain focused on the process rather than the latest headline.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The World Cup will inevitably produce surprises.

Strong teams will be knocked out.
Underdogs will enjoy moments of glory.
Pundits and fans will rush to write narratives after every match.
That's part of what makes football so compelling.

But as England's triumph in 1966 reminds us, success is often built on narrow margins, patience and resilience rather than outright dominance.

The same is true in investing.

One result is not a trend.
One year is not a strategy.
One headline is not reality.

The best portfolios, like the best football teams, aren't built to win one game.

They're built to succeed over time.