AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN GAME: HOW THE 1994 WORLD CUP REVITALIZED U.S. INTEREST IN SOCCER

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by

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Abstract

Association Football, or ‘Soccer’ here in the US, has long been considered the World’s Game, and connects individuals from all over the world. Teams and players have international renown and some rivalries trace their back to before 1900. Despite this rich history, up until recently, the same did not hold true for the United States. This thesis aims to examine how and why soccer has exploded in popularity since 1994. I focused on 1994, the 1994 World Cup had record attendance, viewership numbers, as well as help lead to the founding of Major League Soccer (MLS) two years later in 1996. In a bid to help make my argument, I looked at the four aspects of sports popularity: Television Viewership, Stadium Attendance, Media Coverage, and Youth Involvement. Using figures dating back to the early sixties, newspaper articles, historical footage as well as multiple books covering American Soccer, this thesis paints a picture of how soccer’s popularity in the US has waxed and waned since 1967, with the 1994 World Cup as a spring board for the surge of popularity in the past two decades due to the exposure it brought to the sport here in the United States. Soccer continued to gain in popularity within the US especially amongst the 18-35 age group, as well as amongst the Hispanic population, the fastest growing demographic within the US. Should soccer go on to displace one of the traditional ‘Big Three’ of sports (Baseball, Basketball, and Football), the opening of a whole generation’s eyes and pocketbooks during and after the 1994 World Cup will be a key part of that story.
Introduction

Growing up in a Latino household, soccer or ‘Futból’ as we called it, was just as important to us as American Football was. Every year for my birthday I’d get a Pachuca kit from my grandparents, and we would stay up late watching them play in the Liga MX. I remember being in Mexico during the 2002 World Cup, where the US knocked out Mexico, I remember 2006, and I remember weeping in 2010 when Ghana eliminated the US. And as I’ve grown older, I’ve noticed more and more people seeming to be interested in the game, and have seen what I once considered to be largely a fringe sport morph into something that, while not a top sport in the United States, has a presence in the US market, and is largely making itself known to the uninformed American. And while many of these uninformed citizens aren’t aware of the illustrious, if somewhat spotty history of US Soccer, recent performances combined with the showcase put on in 1994 is slowly changing these opinions.

While soccer bashing has long been a popular affair for many Americans, (for example, see Ann Coulter’s lovely pieces that demonstrate her ignorance and xenophobia) for much of the country, the sport has become more than a passing fad, and is growing steadily in popularity in the United States.

For example, the United States has some of the highest levels of youth participation in the world, with over 3 million kids officially registered with US soccer, and is third in overall participation at 24 million players.¹ Combined with an increasing number of kids stating that soccer is their favorite sport, soccer is

ingraining itself within US culture. The US also now has Major League Soccer, the Tier 1 Soccer division, first kicking off in 1996,\(^2\) which while initially losing money, has cemented itself in the US, having outlasted every other professional league in the country. The MLS averages 21,690 people per match, and has a consistent viewership of 200,000\(^3\) plus per game, with many games being made available on ESPN and Fox, something the NASL failed to achieve twenty years earlier. And the MLS is not even the most watched league in the US. That honor belongs to Mexico’s Liga MX, who average almost 1.1 million\(^4\) viewers, and major games, such as Club America versus Chivas drawing in 2-3 million viewers. While much of this is tied to the fact that many of the Liga MX game are broadcast on the free-to-receive Univision, the large number of Mexican/Mexican descended people living in the US (35 million as of 2015)\(^5\) will continue to help drive the market of growth of Liga MX and soccer. This figure is also somewhat significant because it shows that while English broadcasts struggle to pull major amounts of viewers, the Spanish language broadcasts have no such issue, yet they are largely ignored when discussing the sports popularity in the US.


Combined Liga MX and MLS viewers with a growing number of viewers for major European leagues, specifically the English Premier League, (which actually outdraws the MLS at 514,000 viewers a game) being shown on TV, we’re seeing an increased footprint for soccer to reach American fans, and all three leagues are seeing growth in their ratings each season. The same cannot be said for the NFL or MLB, both of which have recorded viewership numbers falling this year.

But why has this started now? 25 years ago, the United States had no outdoor professional league, and soccer was almost impossible to find on TV save for expensive cable packages and the occasional Spanish language broadcast. Even youth involvement was low, at just over a million youth players registered. As someone who has grown up watching and discussing soccer, I asked myself what factor has helped lead to the game that growing up was called, “The Mexican Sport” or “For girls” to slowly but steadily work it’s way into US culture.

In the end, I settled on the event I, as well as many journalists and US players, cite as the watershed for soccer in the US: the 1994 World Cup hosted by the United States.

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6 Harris, “Most popular leagues in US, Ranked”
The 1994 World Cup is extremely important for the US for multiple reasons. One, it directly led to the foundation of the Major League Soccer (MLS), which has been a major actor in the growth of US Soccer’s success as well as popularity within the United States. Secondly, it exposed an entire generation of American’s to the world’s game, when before it was arguably a niche sport. This exposure has not only influenced many of the current players on both National teams, but also is likely responsible for a large spike in youth involvement.

Regarding exposure, the 1994 World Cup also has set attendance records for the tournament, averaging over 69,000 people a game, and having 96% capacity at each match.10

As such, the question I asked was this: How did the 1994 World Cup help kick start the rise in soccer's popularity in the United States. This thesis is based on a chronological timeline that starts with the rise of the NASL in 1968, and extends to the present day, and analyzes the popularity of the sport prior to, during and after the 1994 World Cup.

As this thesis is specifically looking at how the 1994 has been the major driver for Soccer’s growing success in the US, I won’t be going in depth on how the US women’s team nor the 2002 World Cup run have affected the popularity of soccer in the United States. While both are important, both can arguably trace the origin of their success to 1994, (though in the women’s case, their success is largely their own merit). Nevertheless, while both of these are significant for US Soccer, in a bid to keep this thesis concise and on point, they will not be the focus.

10 Baxter, “World Cup in 1994 gave U.S. Soccer kick in pants it needed
Chapter I: Soccer Invasion

Before I jump into the meat of my research and my analysis, I wanted to focus somewhat on the historical background of soccer in the US, as moving straight into the formation leaves a large gap in US Soccer history that is important for the understanding of the sport and to help move past the belief that soccer has never been a part of American culture.

It’s worth noting that the idea that soccer has never been a major part of American Culture is patently false. Going back into the early 19th century, there are references to the sport, though the game would not see a massive growth until the influx of European and South American migrants looking to join in on the opportunities in industry. In the end, many of these workers helped to grow the sport, as many teams were formed along local and class lines, with neighborhoods each having their own clubs. This is not unlike the development of the sport within Sweden, where many clubs often represented a neighborhood or enclave. And much like the derby day between the two Milan teams, or the Revier Derby of Schalke and Dortmund, the local rivalries were often the most heated games. In the end, there were enough teams to form a “semi-pro” American league, which became known as the American Football Association (AFA), and was founded in 1884, though by the modern definition, it was far from a professional league. The AFA is also important, as it was the first

12 Goldblatt, The Ball is Round: The Global History of Soccer, 125
organization to attempt to bring a standard of play to all groups involved, similar to how the English Football Association had done in 1863. Players bounced around teams, essentially playing whenever or wherever they could. Although wages were almost nonexistent, the players did receive some compensation, and there was competitive poaching between teams for talented players. This was similar to the progression of baseball in the US\textsuperscript{14}, but is also important to note that this was by no mean exceptional to the rest of the world. All around the globe, soccer was being picked up in the same way, with many clubs such FC Barcelona in Spain being founded in 1899 by a mix of Swiss, English and Catalan members, some of whom plated for multiple clubs that were in the city.\textsuperscript{15}

By 1906, the AFA had been an institution of American soccer for a little over thirty years, with little to no real competition, though it’s refusal to move outside of the New England region would eventually be it’s downfall. However, this would change with the rise of the American Amateur Football Association (or AAFA), a coalition of teams from New York and the surrounding areas. The AAFA emphasized amateur athletes as well as attempting to grow the sport throughout the nation, something the AFA had not particularly encouraged. Both of these entities regarded themselves as being completely separate from the other and had very different goals in mind. At the FIFA world conference in 1912, both leagues sent representatives to Zurich in a bid for FIFA recognition. FIFA, in a rather surprising choice, simply told both organizations to consolidate into one. By 1913 (after many turf wars and debates) the organizations had been replaced

\textsuperscript{14} Markovits and Hellerman, \textit{Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism}, 42
\textsuperscript{15} Goldblatt, \textit{The Ball is Round: The Global History of Soccer}, 149
by the United States Football Association (USFA). Unfortunately for the USFA and the overall development of soccer in America, their president, Dr. Randolph Manning, emphasized the international aspect of soccer and strove to keep a European flavor to the game. The fact the league answered to an international organization – something no other professional American league has done, though the rest of the world’s Footballing associations all did the same. While the USFA was poorly run, it still endured throughout the twentieth century, and some of its creations, such as the US Open Cup still endure to this day. The Open Cup is likely the most democratic Cup competition in the US as all levels of teams are able to compete, and have the ability to succeed. This is the equivalent of a competition where a local football team could enter, and potentially play or defeat NFL teams.

Soccer would continue to see success leading into the 1920’s as professional leagues that not only paid players, but also drew sizeable crowds began to dominate the soccer culture within the United States. This in time, led to more disputes between the American Soccer League, and the USFA over which organization would be the premier US soccer organization. In the end, the USFA won out, and by 1930, largely in part due the Great Depression, the ASL has disappeared.

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17 Ibid, 102.
18 Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: The Global History of Soccer*, 134
The 1920’s would also see the rise of international competitions, starting with the Olympics, before Jules Rimet and FIFA devised their own tournament, the FIFA World Cup.\(^1\) The United State team would be a part of the very first tournament and during the inaugural World Cup in 1930, the United States National team, composed of veterans of the American Soccer League would land in Uruguay and make World Cup history\(^2\). The US team, who had a poor showing at the 1928 Olympics\(^3\) arrived in Uruguay with low expectations, but would come out of the gate firing on all cylinders, beating Belgium 3-0 and securing the first World Cup clean sheet, as well as Bert Patenaude recording the first hat trick in World Cup history against Paraguay.\(^4\) The US would go on to the semifinal, and would lose to Argentina 6-1\(^5\), though the Americans would defeat Yugoslavia to secure third place. This is the highest finish ever for the US men’s team, and as of the 2014 World Cup, the US is also the only member of CONCACAF to reach the semifinals of the World Cup.

Following this success, the US team would go onto qualify for the 1934 World Cup, only to routed 7-1 by eventual winners Italy\(^6\), and withdrew from the 1938 tournament refusing to travel to Europe. Following the 1938 Cup, and the

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\(^3\) Ibid.


\(^5\) Ed Farnsworth, “The US at the 1930 World Cup”

\(^6\) Ibid.
Second World War, the next World Cup would be held in 1950. It would be here that a squad of American amateurs would shock the World, defeating tournament favorites England 1-0 in Brazil.\textsuperscript{25} While the US would again fail to advance out if the group stage, it was considered a major upset around the world. Unfortunately, Americans back home would not hear about the victory, as US News organizations had not sent a single representative to the tournament, with Dent McSkimming\textsuperscript{26}, who was not even their officially, being the only American to report the victory. Following the 1950 tournament the United States would fail to qualify for the next nine World Cups (a span of 40 years), until the tournament in 1990.


\textsuperscript{26} Ed Farnsworth, “The US and the 1950 World Cup”
Chapter II: The Fragile Dominance of the NASL

As the crux of this thesis is arguing that the 1994 World Cup hosted in the US is the biggest contributor to the growing popularity of Soccer in the United States, a metric for this increase is required. Popularity, of course, is a somewhat subjective term, that has different meanings for different peoples and groups, so defining an objective meaning is difficult. For the purpose of this subject, I intend to break popularity down into four subcategories: viewership, stadium attendance, youth involvement and news coverage. This allows for analysis of multiple factors that back up the assertion that since 1994, Soccer has grown in popularity amongst Americans, as there is ample data on viewership numbers and stadium attendance dating back to the founding of the NASL in 1967. Sports coverage is little more difficult to gauge, but is still available for many publications. Coverage of the sport itself is important, as it is a fantastic way to look at how the Americans as a whole felt about the sport, and how attitudes have shifted since 1994. Finally, youth involvement within the sport is vital in determining how likely it is that Soccer will continue to grow within the US as well as demonstrating that soccer has reached a level of exposure it has never had before.

In the summer of 2014, 17,234,000 (including Univision’s broadcast, the number jumps up to 27,314534) Americans tuned in to watch the World Cup final between Argentina and Germany.27 In the following summer, over 25 million

Americans watched the US Women’s National Team take on Japan in a 5-2 rout that would give the United States it’s third World Cup trophy. But thirty years ago, such numbers would have been unheard of, even in the heyday of the NASL with the likes of Pele and Beckenbauer playing for the New York Cosmos.

While many soccer fanatics in the US would argue that that the sport was never popular or talked about until recently, they would be incorrect. The North American Soccer League or NASL, was founded in 1968 as the brainchild of Lamar Hunt, along with Jack Kent Cooke, and Roy Hofheinz, both other major sports moguls who wanted to see soccer succeed in the US. Originally set to be broadcast by CBS following the 10 million views for the 1966 World Cup Final, the league was dropped by CBS at the end of the first season, as poor attendance, high player wage cost, and a lack of overall growth caused concern for investors and networks a like. Ironically, during the 1968 season, CBS forced ads to be played during the game, with one referee admitting he allowed players to fake injuries simply to ensure that no gameplay was missed by the audience at home, though American’s lack of understanding of the rules and abysmal play contributed to the leagues lack of success. Looking at attendance figure, it was clear that soccer held little attraction to the average American, with the opening season of the NASL failing to draw more than an 5,000 spectators for regular

30 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 128.
31 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 165.
season games, and only 15,000 people attending the finals held in Atlanta\textsuperscript{32}, which compared to Super Bowl II that year (75,746), was abysmal, but for a brand new league, the numbers were encouraging.\textsuperscript{33}

This lack of support led to twelve out of the seventeen team were forced to fold, and it seemed that once again, critics would prove correct: Top tier soccer would never make it in the US.\textsuperscript{34}

But the NASL would soldier on, adding two teams to it’s roster the next year from the American Soccer League (ASL) a semi pro league that had been in operation for over forty years.\textsuperscript{35} These teams would be the Rochester Lancers and the Washington Darts, and while expectations were low, the two teams went on to have best records, and playing in the two legged final.\textsuperscript{36} Thus, the NASL continued to exist, though attendance numbers were not spectacular, with not a single team breaking 10,000 attendees.\textsuperscript{37}

1971 would be something of a standout for the NASL, with three more teams being added to the league’s roster: the New York Cosmos, Montreal Olympique, and the Toronto Metros.\textsuperscript{38} The 25,000-dollar expansion fees for each

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34 & Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 153. \\
36 & Litterer, “NASL Standings 1967-1984” \\
37 & Litterer, ‘NASL Standings 1967-1984”  \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
team would help fund the league, and the NASL opted to ‘Americanize’ the game, hoping that if the game was more accessible to Americans, they would more willing to attend games. The lack of network coverage would still continue, with no games shown on television, especially considering that the league was largely still a semiprofessional league.\textsuperscript{39} 1972 would be much of the same, though attendance figures would continue to climb, and by 1974, the NASL would have an average of 7,700 attendees per game and four teams having over 10,000 a game (Philadelphia Atom, San Jose Earthquake, Vancouver Whitecaps, and the Seattle Sounders).\textsuperscript{40} This was an almost 250\% increase from 1969, which saw crowds averaging around 2,930.

1974 became a turning point for the NASL. The league finally returned to national television. CBS would once again take up the mantle of the sole soccer broadcaster in the US, showcasing the leagues final between the Miami Toros and the Los Angeles Aztecs.\textsuperscript{41} While viewership numbers are difficult to come by, it was progress, as 1968 had been the last time a professional soccer match had been broadcast on national television.

With national TV coverage, and the marquee signing of Pelé, ‘Football’s King’\textsuperscript{42}, soccer had a national audience. In Brazil, he had parades “Fit for a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{39} Wangerin, \textit{Soccer in a Football World} 152.
\bibitem{40} Litterer, “NASL Standings 1967-1984”

\end{thebibliography}
president” wherever he went. Widely regarded as the greatest soccer players of all time, the signing of Pelé was a feat by the NASL. One of the best players in the world (though very much past his prime) came out of retirement to play in the United States. In his debut on June 15, 1975, “The Black Pearl” as Pelé was known, started alongside the New York Cosmos before a sold out crowd of 48,000 in Downing Stadium, located in New York City with over five million viewers watching the game from home, a record that would not be broken for another twenty year until 1994. Pelé and the Cosmos tied Lamar Hunt’s Dallas team; but, Pele shaped both of the Cosmos’ goals, scoring one and assisting the second, much to the pleasure of the league and sponsors. Despite the success of Pelé’s debut, CBS only showed two more games the 1975 season, another Cosmos game and the Soccer Bowl, which was the NASL’s answer to the Super Bowl of the NFL. CBS signed a three year contract with the NASL, and with Franz Beckenbauer, ‘Der Kaiser’ also joining the Cosmos in 1976, the NASL looked to be in good shape. Attendance grew across the league with multiple teams averaging over 10,000 people a game, and a few teams, such as the Seattle Sounders, Portland Timbers, and San Jose Earthquake averaging over 15,000. All three of

43 Axthelm, ‘The Most Famous Athlete in the World”
44 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World 160.
46 Litterer, “NASL Standings 1967-1984”
these teams would go on to be part of the founding group of the MLS, and have consistently had some of the highest average attendance in the league.47

The 1976 season opened with 3.3 million viewers watching the Cosmos take on the Portland Timbers.48 Unfortunately, CBS decided to only show the 1976 Soccer Bowl. The second and third years of the television contract never materialized.49 Despite CBS’s decision to abandon the NASL, the league was sometimes broadcast on TV, albeit in a fragmented state. Local syndicates often picked up the game. The TVS network broadcast seven games during the 197. Still, many of the games were blacked out in some regions, or if shown, relegated to the 11:00 PM timeslot, long after the game had been played.50 But tape delayed games was better than no coverage at al. Al Sports Illustrated in 1976 had crowed “Soccer has a foothold in America”51, the game did little more than maintain its foothold, despite the global talent playing in the United States. Multiple teams had their own Pelé’s(who retired after only a year in 1977), that is, international stars headlining each team. This included Northern Ireland and British football legend George Best (Los Angeles) and Dutch footballer Johan Cruyff (Washington), who would eventually go on to become one of the most visible

48 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 177.
50 Tomasch, “NASL TV: A Short History”
advocates for the “Total Football” system that Barcelona FC so eloquently displays in the modern era

Soccer had still failed to eclipse the attendance of the ‘Big Three’ though the Cosmos, as well as the Minnesota Kicker’s had vibrant fan bases that numbered 30,000 plus, and the teams mentioned earlier continued to grow their own attendance, with the Sounders actually reaching close to 25,000 people a game for four years (’76-80’). From the MLS attendance perspective, the five years following Pelé’s arrival in the NASL became a golden age that the MLS did not reach for over twenty years, and some would argue still is not reflected in US culture.

Prior to the 1979 season, ABC signed the NASL, and promoted it as the ‘Sport of the 80’s. The NASL agreed to a three year, nine game a season contract with the NASL. The 1979 season had fairly large numbers for a sport with five years of national broadcast history numbers, with an average of two million viewers per game, which while far below what ABC executive expected, is more than what an average MLS game accrues (around 696,000). Following the unrealistically high expectations and decent audience support in 1979, ABC executives began to doubt the viability of soccer on national television, especially following another ‘dismal’ year of ratings, with once again only 2 million or so households tuning in for the six games ABC broadcast. By 1981, ABC had largely

52 Litterer, “NASL Standings 1967-1984”
53 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World 178!
55 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World 180.
dropped the NASL, though they did show the 1981 Soccer Bowl, albeit at a later
date that wasn’t even seen until the next day in New York.

The fledging USA network and ESPN picked up some of the games in the
following seasons, but by 1981, it was clear the NASL was on the decline, at least
on TV. Attendance for many teams remained healthy, but the chase for world
famous players had exhausted the coffers of many of teams, and owners began to
pull funding for their teams.\textsuperscript{56} The last NASL game to be broadcast was the 1984
Soccer Bowl, though the number were extremely poor, as the game was locked
behind a pay wall. By 1985, the NASL folded, though it pursued the indoor arena
circuit quite heavily in the following years.

Despite this, soccer on TV was not dead, far from it in truth. \textit{Soccer made
in Germany}, funded by PBS and broadcast on every network that had PBS took
up the soccer torch in the United States. Started in 1976, the show usually
broadcasted game footage from the West German league, and the occasional
European Cup match (now known as the UEFA Champion’s League). And while
footage was often weeks old by the time American audiences saw it, it was largely
the only way Americans could even see European football. There was no lucrative
NBC deal, no Fox Bundesliga coverage, simply the highlights of German games
voiced over by a British commentator.\textsuperscript{57} The show arguably peaked in 1982 when
it covered the Spanish World Cup in full, culminating in a joint broadcast of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] Wangerin, \textit{Soccer in a Football World} 181.
\item[57] Uli Hesse, “Toby Charles: The man who brought German football to the US”, ESPNFC,
June 16, 2015, \url{http://www.espnfc.us/german-bundesliga/10/blog/post/2493361/toby-
\end{footnotes}
1982 World Cup Final with ABC. Soccer Made in Germany would continue until 1988, but many Americans argued it was a major factor in the growth of interest in the sport that also helped contribute to the awarding of the 1994 World Cup to the US.

It’s also extremely important to note that this is also the era where Spanish Language broadcasts were made available on the basic cable packages. This meant that while there was no real English language broadcasts of soccer, the same could not be said for the Spanish International Network (SIN), who would start to broadcast Liga MX in 1986, and continues to do so under the umbrella of Univision.

Developments in 1984 had far reaching implications for the future of the sport in the US. That summer, Los Angeles hosted the 1984 Olympic Games, and soccer, surprisingly, had some of the highest attendance, with a total of 1.4 million people attending all the matches, making that an average of 44,500 a game, a number that far out matched any averages that the NASL save for the Cosmos in their hey day. More importantly, some of these games had over 70,000 people coming to watch, and in the case of the Gold Medal match between Brazil and France, attendance was a staggering 102,000. This was a

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60 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 183.
sharp contrast to the meager gates the NASL had managed to bring in, and soccer aficionados were ecstatic, and investors were intrigued.

Despite an early exit by the USMNT, attendance continued to surge through the Olympics. The fact that critics argued that this more had to do with the fact that soccer tickets were the cheapest available, and Americans simply wanted to be involved in an Olympic event didn’t matter. FIFA itself had noticed the large crowds that the US games had brought in, and realized that there was an opportunity to be had in the future, with Sepp Blatter noting in his report on the event, “FIFA and the world of sports were equally surprised: The Olympic Football Tournament surpassed the keenest hopes…”62 The amount of support for the tournament was also noted by LA Times writer Graham Jones, who stated, “The rest of the world is waiting. It wants the United States to succeed and, in the Olympic soccer tournament of 1984, it has seen the glimmerings of that hope being fulfilled.”63

Unfortunately, this had little to do with the USSF, attempt to secure the 1986 games following Colombia’s forced withdrawal had done little to endear the Americans to FIFA, as the US delegation had attempted to strong arm FIFA into giving the US the World Cup, and much more to do with Alan Rothenberg, who would go on to be a key member of the 1994 Delegation.64 Rothenberg had

63 LA Times Jones
64 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 190.
not only been involved with the NASL, but was also the orchestrator of the success that the 1984 Olympic Soccer tournament had seen.  

By the time the 1986 World Cup, despite the lack of professional league in the NASL, successful indoor leagues had maintained some level of interest, and Soccer Made in Germany continued to provide some insight to the European game, despite it’s rather quaint production values and delayed results. As such, NBC had opted to broadcast seven games, including the final, and ESPN, by now a somewhat larger player in the sport media world, would broadcast fifteen games. The NBC and ESPN broadcasts also, much like the original NASL broadcasts fifteen years prior, had commercial breaks during the game, something of an anathema to the average soccer fan. This was the extent of the English coverage of the World’s biggest event in the United States, though SIN, a subsidiary of Televisa (Mexico’s premier broadcasting company) had all 52 games, although they were in Spanish. While most of the games had low ratings, enough American’s had tuned into the final that the media wondered if Americans had finally began to express an interest in the World’s game. Despite this, speculation, plenty of other sports writers had nothing positive to write about the World Cup, with William Taaffe happily sharing his ignorance with readers after the event,”

For this viewer and, I suspect, most other Americans, soccer is dreadfully dull to watch on TV. There must be something fetching about the game, or

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65 Holroyd, “The Year in soccer-1984”
67 David Goldblatt, The Ball is Round: The Global History of Soccer, 686.
two billion people around the world wouldn't be getting ready to watch the World Cup final on June 29, but I can't see it. Only four soccer scores are known to exist: 2-0, 1-1, 1-0 and 0-0. It's b-o-r-i-n-g, and the ratings prove it.68

Never the less, the fact that despite the lack of a national professional league or US involvement in the World Cup, people watched Soccer broadcasts. while the coverage may not have always been positive, the mainstream media was still discussed the tournament, something that on previous occasions had been relegated to the back pages of the sports section if it was touched at all.

With FIFA announcing that the 1994 Cup was to be held in the US in 1988, national interest in soccer was slowly picking up steam, especially with the United States last minute qualification for the 1990 World Cup off of Paul Caligiuri’s ‘Shot heard Round the World’. As noted later in this thesis, this was to be something of a defining moment in US soccer history, as it had been over thirty years since the United States had made it to the World’s stage. With American’s playing in the World Cup, the US, of course, had to be able to follow the team.

This task of broadcasting the world cup in English-language television fell to the newly founded TNT network, marking another first for soccer broadcast in the US: a World Cup broadcast entirely on cable television.69 Unfortunately for hopeful American fans, the games still had commercial breaks during the action,

68 Taaffe, “Gooooooooooooooool!”
and this time, it cost viewers the chance to see some goals live, with coverage returning after an interruption promising to show a replay. Consequently, many soccer fanatics opted to instead watch the game on Univision, who not only had all the games, but also did not have a single commercial break interrupting the soccer. 70

Despite the less than stellar use of commercials, the TNT broadcast was something of a success. TNT sent broadcasters to Italy, something of a novelty considering the ’86 Cup only had the commentators viewing the game from a booth in California, which caused issues during the commentary. 71 Some of these included mistakes such as a disallowed goal being marked as valid for over ten minutes, as the broadcast missed the linesman flag going up, or the fact that many of the commentators couldn’t understand how the offside rule worked in regards to disallowed goals. 72 And while the US may have crashed out in the group stages, the 1990 Cup set the stage for the 1994 World Cup.

70 Hersh, ‘U.S. TV Kicks Into High Gear For World Cup”, 1.
71 Hersh, ‘U.S. TV Kicks Into High Gear For World Cup”, 2.
72 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 202.
Chapter III: American Underdogs

Often times, the US National team played before crowds that more than likely be cheering for the opposition. For example, during qualification for the 1986 tournament, the US, despite playing what should have ostensibly been a home game in Torrance, California, found themselves being booed by a pro Costa Rican crowd. Of course, this is not a shock, as Torrance had an extremely large population of Costa Rican nationals, who were much more willing to show up to cheer for the players from their home country. George Vecsey writing for the New York Times stated,

“In the litter of empty soda cans and empty dreams, Gregg Thompson had a question burning across his face. The young defender from Minnesota strode across the rudimentary locker room and blurted at the American Soccer coach, Alkis Pangouilis: ‘When are we ever going to play a home game?’

The answer from Panagoulias was equally blunt: ‘Never’.

This would be emblematic of the issues that the USSF and their national team faced throughout the 80’s and 90’s, and still struggle with today. Combined with the increased migration to the US in 1965 thanks to President Johnson, Latin American teams, even away from home saw a level of popular support that the United States teams simply could not boast.

Also, compared to the number today, few Americans played in Europe, and the USMNT failed to qualify for a World Cup for 40 years, leading to the

period now referred to as ‘The Drought’, by many U.S. supporters. 74 This lack of exposure for almost a decade following the collapse of the NASL may have spelled doom for soccer in the US, but after successful broadcasts of the ’86 games as well as the success of qualifying for the ’90 tournament, Americans still maintained some interest in the world’s game. Investors and sports entrepreneurs had been paying attention to this situation since the 1984 Olympics.

Knowing this, and leveraging the success that Alan Rothenberg had brought to the ’84 Olympics, the United States Soccer Federation set out to bring the 1994 World Cup to the US, something they had already failed once, for the 1986 Cup following Colombia’s forced withdrawal. Gene Edwards, who in 1982, had been USSF’s president, remarked when questioned about hosting the 1990 World Cup, "We did it to show an interest to host it at some time. We realize it goes back to Europe in 1990. I would say our chances in 1994 would be very good." 75 Of course, 12 years was not a long time to plan a World Cup, and the announcement was hardly reported amongst the international press.

When the USSF had attempted to be awarded the 1986 games, they had done it with a lack of tact and properness that had appalled FIFA. Even the US Soccer’s own website is not kind to it’s predecessors, stating,

“At one time or another, the USSF insulted the soccer world’s governing body, demanding that the organization fly over an inspection team to look its stadiums, making ridiculous threats, wailing about every decision that FIFA ruled against it, claiming that an agreement between FIFA and Mexico was made in secret, and generally embarrassing itself.”  

Combined with the fact that during the ‘80’s, the US was not a ‘footballing nation’ it became more and more clear that the US would not be receiving the 1986 World Cup. Instead, the tournament would go to the United State’s southern neighbor Mexico, as Joao Havelange and the rest of FIFA felt that "Mexico is a real soccer country. The United States and Canada are not ready for such a competition." FIFA’s decision not to accept the bid was vindicated when once again; the US would fail to qualify for the World Cup crashing out at home before even making it to the final round of qualifying.

As such, the USSF went back to their original plan for 1994, and when they submitted the bid to FIFA, far more care had gone into the process. USA World Cup 1994, a subsidiary of the USSF created specifically to handle the implementation should the US win the bid. The bid team also had a much more professional approach to the document presented to FIFA: a 381 page document that not only had a more thorough breakdown of venues, but also included government assurance that teams from countries such as Iraq and Iran would be allowed to obtain visas, and how transportation would fit into the process.  

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Combined with a presentation to the World Cup Bid committee that included a two minute speech by President Reagan, which implored FIFA to award the US the World Cup, US Soccer believed that, despite not having a professional league, or even a broadcasting deal yet, that it was a shoo in for the 1994 World Cup.\textsuperscript{79} Fortunately for the development of Soccer in the US, they were correct, beating out Morocco and Brazil in the end.

Despite the strong bid, announced by Harry Cavan, FIFA’s Vice President, on July 4, 1988 that the US would host the 1994 World Cup, there was outrage all across the international stage as well as at home.\textsuperscript{80,81} International criticism pointed towards the abysmal results of the US National team, as well as the United States lack of a proper professional outdoor league, as well as the lack of culture and awareness that went with the World Cup. One journalist even went so far as to compare the United States holding the tournament as the equivalent of “‘holding a major skiing competition in an African country.’\textsuperscript{82}

On the home front, many Americans were surprised that we even had a soccer team that represented the country, but upon learning that the team was awful, many of them quickly decried the whole affair, arguing the US would be a global embarrassment, as it was possible they might not even score a goal.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Wangerin, \textit{Soccer in a Football World}, 215.
\textsuperscript{81} US Soccer, “The 1994 Bid—How the Us got the World Cup—Part 3”
\textsuperscript{82} Markovits and Hellerman, \textit{Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism} 309.
\textsuperscript{83} Goldblatt, \textit{The Ball is Round: The Global History of Soccer}, 703.
As such, the US Soccer Federation had quite the task ahead of them, especially considering it looked as though the US would fail to qualify for the 1990 World Cup, which would further sour opinions of the ’94 tournament. Luck, or perhaps signs of a rising trend had other thoughts. On the road in Port de Spain, the US found themselves on the verge of qualifying for the first time in over 40 years, but they needed a win. Trinidad and Tobago also were on the edge of qualification, and while the US had to win, they were content with a tie, or of course, preferably, a win. But it was not be. Paul Caligui, a defender, would net a goal that many Americans dubbed as, “The shot heard ‘round the World”, as no one had expected the US to score, let alone advance against a Trinidad side that had not lost at home the entire qualifying campaign. More than that though, the US proved to the World that maybe, just maybe, American’s could find success at the World’s game. Sadly, the US would go onto lose all three of their games in Italy, while only scoring two goals.\textsuperscript{84} It would be a disappointing end to an exciting journey, but Americans expectations and hopes had shifted to ’94, and slowly but steadily, the American people began to anticipate the upcoming event.

In the lead up to the ’94 Cup, the US Soccer Federation realized that the US squad was woefully inexperienced, especially looking at the fact that the team was little more than a glorified amateur squad. Most of the team played in amateur leagues and had almost no experience on the international stage. US Soccer knew that this simply would not do, and that a dismal US performance would not only embarrass the nation, but also likely sink the plan launch

America’s newest professional league on a wave of Soccer fervor following the World Cup. Alan Rothenberg, in his run for the US Soccer Presidency said it best, “I have maintained my relationship with FIFA, and they continually express their concern with...[US Soccer]...It’s just not up to the task.” So, in an innovative step, USSF set up an open training facility in Mission Viejo, California, inviting eligible U.S. nationals players to ‘tryout’ and attempt to make the 22 man roster for the 1994 World Cup. The training was intense, and by the end, many of the players boasted more international caps than many of their World Cup opponents, with some players, such as Tony Meola, the US Keeper, having 79 appearances in the US jersey, when only the year before, he had less than ten.

The US players, alongside their coach, Bora Milutinovic, who had led Mexico to the semi-finals in 1986, knew that there was an intense amount of pressure on the team to advance out of the group stage. Alexei Lalas, an up and coming defender, known at the time for having led Rutgers to a National Championship in 1990 as well as attempting earn a spot at Arsenal, and now widely regarded as one of the best players to wear the US badge said,

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85 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 220.
87 The term Cap originates from the hats awarded to players following an appearance for their national team aka ‘Caps’
88 Bennett, “American Underdogs: Slogging Away in the Shadows”
“We talked all the time about the fear of embarrassing ourselves. The pressure was immense. We were not just playing for our team or our nation. We were fighting for the future of our sport. If we went out there and s--- the bed, the profile of soccer in the United States would never recover. We had to get out of the group stages...”  

And he wasn’t wrong. While expectations weren’t high, the US was expected to do well for the United States and succeed in not looking terrible, especially following a 2-0 victory over England in the 1993 U.S. Cup, and a close 4-3 loss to World Champions Germany in the same tournament.  

The Mission Viejo experiment is one of the biggest reasons for the US success in that 1994 World Cup, at least according to the players who were there and participated. The experience bonded the team, so by the time the World Cup rolled around, the ‘Scrappy Americans’ went far beyond what was expected of them, and kick started a soccer revolution in the country.  

International anticipation leading up to the World Cup was mixed, with criticism and skepticism the most prominent, mixed with the excitement of such a prestigious event being held in the US. One of the most vocal detractors of the

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91 Bennett, “American Underdogs: Slogging Away in the Shadows”  
92 Bennett, “American Underdogs: Slogging Away in the Shadows”  
93 Bennett, “American Underdogs: Slogging Away in the Shadows”
entire affair was England, who, failed to qualify for the 1994 Cup along with France. Much of Europe questioned if American’s would even watch the sport, or understand it, causing the whole game to be simplified. Detractors and organizers feared that the stadiums would be empty some who wondered if this would be the first World Cup to ‘flop’. Some critics even went so far as to criticize the logo itself, arguing that the direction the ball was moving meant something had gone terribly wrong. Combined with fears of increased commercialism tainting the sanctity of the game, many Europeans expected a disaster.

When tickets went up for sale, most of the world expected there to be a surplus of tickets available, with many critics speculating that this would be one of the easiest World Cups to attend. Much to their chagrin, open opening sales to the public, the initial ticket blocks were sold out in minutes, creating the idea that World Cup tickets were a ‘hot’ item, and driving demand up even more, and make American’s look more soccer crazed than anticipated. Amusingly, and a clever marketing ploy, USSF had been selling tickets to ethnic communities, specifically, Latin American communities in the United States, who they considered to be the ‘Soccer Fanatics’ in the United States as well as local soccer teams for weeks before, in a bid to drive up demand. And in the end, the outreach to local fans worked. Almost every game had excellent attendance numbers, with the average

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96 Goldblatt, The Ball is Round: A Global History of Soccer, 815.
97 Julie Cart, “Ticket Plan is Announced for World Cup”, LA Times
game attendance an impressive 69,000 people a game, a record that still stands today.98 FIFA of course, alongside the USSF’s Alan Rothenberg, had prayed for this attendance, and this desire had been a driving factor in the US bid. FIFA, despite later claims that this was to ‘help launch soccer in the US’ realized that the infrastructure and population base, a World Cup in the United States would be a boon for FIFA’s coffers. Following the LA Olympics, international organizers saw how much money an event in the US could make, noting that the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics had been the first to turn a profit, and arguably changed how the world viewed major sporting events, as advertisers and organizers alike had made quite a bit of money.99

Of course, one of the biggest reasons the US has seen such a growth in soccer spectatorship since 1994 is how many people simply saw the games themselves, including a USA team who performed far better than anticipated.

Having been drawn into a group comprised of Colombia, Romania, and Switzerland, a sense of dread had enveloped the hearts of many soccer knowledgeable Americans who understood that all three teams were powerhouses in the sport, with Colombia marked as an early contender for the winner.100 In one of many firsts for the sport, the opening game between the US and Switzerland played on an indoor field and implanted grass. While extremely commonplace now, such a thing was almost unheard of at the time. Due to the

99 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 228.
fact that at the start of the MLS, no team had a soccer specific stadium, the ability to play indoors, as well as on Astroturf was extremely important, as soccer specific stadiums would not arrive in the US until 1998.\footnote{Roger Bennett, “American Underdogs: The Moment of Truth”, \textit{ESPN FC}, March 5, 2014, \url{http://www.espnfc.us/united-states/story/1737110/american-underdogs-the-moment-of-truth} (Accessed 2/17/17)}

Played in Pontiac, Michigan before a crowd of over 70,000, it is likely that the US for the first time in its spotty soccer history actually experienced a crowd that supported them in the way that the Costa Ricans in Torrance had for their team a decade earlier. While the US conceded a goal in 39\textsuperscript{th} minute, right before half-time Eric Wynalda scored off a free kick. Coming out of the half, the US was desperate to advance with even a point, and play reflected that. Bora set the team up defensively, and while the Swiss relentlessly counterattacked, the Americans managed to hold on. This hard fought tie, which was baffling to Americans, also kept the American’s dream of advancing alive going into the Colombia game.

The Colombia match shocked the world. The scrappy US side stunned the Colombian team, defeating a team that had been earmarked for a Final appearance prior to the start of the tournament by Pelé himself.\footnote{Bennett, “American Underdogs: Destiny Approaches”} Colombia’s midfield was one of the best in the world, and throughout the game they dominated possession, but the pressure from home was immense, and one of Colombia’s star midfielders Gabriel Gomez\footnote{Bennett, “American Underdogs: The Moment of Truth”}, had been forced to sit out the US match following death threats to the players families.\footnote{Bennett, “American Underdogs: The Moment of Truth”} And while these high stakes were unknown prior to the game, information revealed later shows a
Colombia team who perhaps wasn’t all there the day they lined up against the US. From the start, Bora Milutinovic took cues from what Romania had done to trounce the Colombians 3-1 just days earlier: they smothered their strikers, and led pacy counterattacks up the flanks. And while the tactics saw some success, watching the match, it was clear that the US was still outclassed by Colombia. And inevitably, it would be stroke of luck that gave the U.S. team their first goal against Colombia. John Harkes fired a low cross across the box towards Ernie Stewart, while Andres Escobar, one of Colombia’s most popular players, went for a routine clearance. The clear found itself in the back of the net as an own goal. This shifted momentum solidly to the Americans. Colombian players began to desperately chase the game. They equalized but Ernie Stewart, (Netherlands born Ajax trained) slotted home another goal in the 52nd minute. Watching the game, it became clear that Colombia doubted that they could win, and the fight seemed to drain from them. Colombia gained a little pride in the 90th minute with an Adolfo Valencia goal, but the US had done the ‘Miracle on the Grass’, though the team despised this term, with Alexi Lalas commenting, “A miracle is a baby who survives a plane crash.” But miracle or not, the US had upset a major player, and confidence was high. In the following game, the US would lose to Romania, but advanced to the Round of 16 as a Wild Card. It was there that they would face a perennial contender in the Brazilian National Team.

105 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 235.
Played on July 4th in the sweltering summer heat of California, the US marched onto the field in the red and white stripes of their home uniform. Brazil was clad in their traditional yellow, and for the most part, the world expected a blow out. From the start of the game, Brazil controlled the pace, leading attack after attack against an outmatched US side. And while Brazil would drop to 10 men after Leonardo violently elbowed Tab Ramos, largely in response to the US attempts to bully the Brazilians off the ball, it would not be enough. In the 72nd minute, Bebeto would break the hearts of the host nation, slotting a goal past Tony Meola. The US would fight desperately to equalize, but after ninety minutes, the United States were out. Despite the early exit, most Americans remained optimistic and were proud of the performance put on by a team that many had felt didn’t even deserve to be there. Brazil would go on to win the entire tournament, and the fact

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107 Bennett, “American Underdogs: The Moment of Truth”
that the US lost to the eventual champion assuaged the ego of the country. 108

Alexander Wolff, in his article following the Americans elimination remarked,

> Despite its elimination, the U.S. team raised its profile immeasurably during its Cup run. Say "Bora," and Statesiders no longer think of half an island in the South Pacific… So millions of Americans have reason to continue to follow this World Cup, in spite of the elimination of the home team—and to come to terms with a notion that only a few weeks ago must have seemed strange indeed: that they have a first favorite team, too. 109

While the US didn’t win or advance deep into the 1994 tournament, it likely cemented soccer in the minds of many Americans, and acted as an inspiration for many members of the current US national team. Clint Dempsey, one of the US most prolific players, said, "So yes, the 1994 World Cup was crucial in giving that opportunity, to not only [to] American kids but other people as well..." 110 Many Americans marked that as the first time they cared about soccer, and for some of them it would turn into an obsession, leading to the creation of fan groups such as the American Outlaws and Sam’s Army. 111

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110 Baxter, “World Cup in 1994 gave U.S. Soccer kick in pants it needed”
Chapter IV: The MLS Experience

Following the 1994 World Cup, Soccer experienced something of a renaissance with much of the country fascinated with the underdog USA team, as well as the burgeoning MLS. Alexi Lalas became something of a sport icon in the United States, with his bright orange goatee and hair, appearing on Letterman, and being able to demand $10,000 appearance fees, a number almost unheard for a soccer player. He, with some of his colleagues, also played in Italy at the highest levels, thanks to the exposure he and his teammates gained in the United States. Unlike Lalas, the MLS had a rocky start, as it was originally slated to kickoff in March of 1995. Some of the reasons were specific to the corporate organization of the MLS. The MLS was set up along cooperative corporate lines, unlike any other professional Soccer league in the world. The league was formed as a single entity. Alan Rothenberg, now the president of the USSF, realized that soccer audiences and investors did not have the funds to pay outrageous transfer fees to bring in international talent. There would be no New York Cosmos paying exorbitant prices for players, driving up the prices across the league. Instead, owners bought into the MLS, forcing them to share profits (and losses) with other share holders, and a strict salary cap would be enforced on teams: $1.3 million dollars, split amongst 18 players initially.

112 Roger Bennett, “American Underdogs: The Circus Leaves Town”
113 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 241.
114 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 245.
115 A little like Major League baseball.
Even with this system in place, Rothenberg still struggled to attract investors into the league, though he eventually managed to reach the sum of $75 million dollars that he needed.\textsuperscript{116} A major proponent of this endeavor was none other than Lamar Hunt the big investor in the NASL, as well as a last minute investment by Philip Anschutz, which ended up guaranteeing him a team in Colorado.\textsuperscript{117} Unsurprisingly though, by the time fans could buy MLS gear and season tickets, the World Cup fervor had largely dimmed, and many of America’s top players had gone abroad already. Sports media could care less about soccer, despite the success of the World Cup, so many fans found themselves wondering if yet again, professional soccer would fail to materialize in the United States. Luckily, with the last minute investments, the ML moved forward, and kicked off it’s inaugural season in 1996.\textsuperscript{118} They established some variations on the rules to appeal to soccer haters, adjustments approved by FIFA. They included the ‘Shoot Out’ that was used in place of penalties shootouts, and the total absence of a draw result.\textsuperscript{119} Combined with cheerleaders, flashy pyrotechnics and somewhat quirky nicknames and designs for teams were to make the game more palatable to the average soccer hater.\textsuperscript{119} Combined with a marketing focus towards the Colombian and Mexican in regards to the signing of players like Carlos Valderamma and Jorge Campos, it seemed that MLS had the perfect recipe for success. And initially, it did. Rothenberg had projected a conservative average of 11,000 fans a game, based on data gleaned from the NAS. Attendance far

\textsuperscript{117} Wangerin, \textit{Soccer in a Football World}, 256.  
\textsuperscript{118} Wahl and Straus, “The Birth of a League”  
\textsuperscript{119} Wahl and Straus, “The Birth of a League”
exceeded these expectations, and in the opening game of the season, over 30,000 fans turned out to see Eric Wynalda dribble his way past a defender to score the first MLS goal. Professional Soccer was back, and if Rothenberg and his sponsors had their way, it was here to stay.

Sports pundits widely lauded the opening game, which was discussed both positively and negatively in the news, something that while common during the World Cup, was rare outside of that. The Boston Globe had raved, “If this game was a test, MLS passed.” Others, such as Sports Illustrated, who, perhaps having felt they’d been burned by soccer before, were dismissive of the entire affair, rarely covering the league, and when they did, it was rarely kind, at one point simply titling their article ‘Goal-Poor’ and displaying an ignorance of how many of the MLS games were often high scoring (Averaging over 3 goals a game).

Attendance stayed consistent throughout the season, with 29,000 fans coming to watch the LA Galaxy every week, and they even had over 90,000 for a double header that saw Jorge Campos play for both Mexico and the Galaxy in the same day. And while the media still wasn’t as friendly to soccer, and many of the games had poor television figures, more and more Americans wanted information about the goings on in the soccer world.

121 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 261.
122 Murphy, “Goal-Poor”
Following the 1994 World Cup, the US would be invited to the CONMENBOL Copa America, and while ABC and ESPN had failed to even show any of the matches, not realizing the significance, American fans found their own ways to get information on how US Soccer was doing. This included fanzines such as *Bookable Offense*, which David Wangerin describes as, “...pages teemed with the home-brewed mixture of passion, irreverence and indignation more commonly found overseas.”123 Fans also formed Sam’s Army, a supporter group that travelled USMNT games to help create a home crowd atmosphere, something that was still difficult to do. They also used the Internet to communicate and stay on top of events, effectively bypassing the ignorance of much of the mainstream media in regards to matches.124

In its second season, the MLS continued to grow attendance wise, and many of their players would be a part of the group that would help the US reach its third consecutive World Cup in France. Led by Steve Sampson, the USMNT did not move past the group stage, and Sampson, frustrated by the results, lashed out at the MLS, stating that it was clear Americans could not reliably perform at the highest level.125 This shocked many fans at home, who wondered if this confirmed what many had already began to suspect in the league’s third season: that the MLS was simply a training ground for talent that would inevitably move on to bigger and better things.

123 Wangerin, *Soccer in a Football World*, 265
125 Wangerin, *Soccer in a Football World*, 269
Despite this fear, results would argue this is not the case, even as far back as 1998, when DC United defeated Toluca in the CONCACAF Champion's League, arguably the most prestigious tournament in the region.\textsuperscript{126} Unfortunately, this success was not reflected in the game attendance, and once again, gate numbers had fallen, though not to level that would cause a panic amongst supporters.\textsuperscript{127} By 1999, the MLS seemed like it was in trouble, it still was seeing some success as the United States first soccer specific stadium saw a match played. Located in Columbus, and funded almost entirely by the ever-positive ever-rich Lamar Hunt, Columbus Crew Stadium sat a little over 20,000 fans, but it was a milestone for the sport and the league, which had been forced to lease time from various football teams to use their stadiums. Hunt, after the opener sold out commented, “One Stadium in one city and one sold out game don’t make a success, but this stadium will be here for 50 years, even if I won’t be.”\textsuperscript{128} Hunt would be more than right than he knew, with Columbus’ stadium becoming known in the future as Fort Columbus, the USMNT unofficial home stadium, largely to the the US friendly crowds that flocked to the games.\textsuperscript{129}

Moving into the new millennium, it appeared that while the MLS would likely never be a big name in the US sports scene, it had carved itself a niche that seemed solid, despite claims that the league was hemorrhaging money (it was,

\textsuperscript{126} Wahl and Straus, “The Birth of a League”
\textsuperscript{127} Wahl and Straus, “The Birth of a League”
\textsuperscript{128} Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 271.
having lost over $250 million dollars in five years). Nevertheless, Commissioner Don Garber was never concerned that the league might fold, or even the fact that attendance was dropping. Instead, he focused on getting expansions into the league, as well building soccer specific stadiums to help develop fan bases and improve matches.

Garber and MLS also capitalized on the success of the US in the 2002 World Cup, who, with eleven MLS players on the roster, had shocked the world in reaching the quarterfinals, and according to some pundits, outplayed the Germans they had been paired with.

Garber succeeded in one aspect, with the MLS Cup that year breaking MLS records with over 61,000 fans watching the home town favorite New England fall once again to the LA Galaxy. Combined with a historic first of every club averaging more than 10,000 people a game, and more than half with 15,000 a game, the MLS had more regular attendance than the NASL. During this time period, multiple teams had opened their own soccer specific stadiums, another milestone for soccer in the US, which also found itself in sports media far more than in the past, albeit on ESPN2. Despite being relegated to smaller cable channel, the league continued to grow, though the gold-standard middle-class suburban TV audiences prefer. Friendlies with clubs such as Manchester United, Barcelona, and Juventus racked up large attendance figures, proving

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131 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 276.
132 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 277
133 Goldblatt, The Ball is Round: A Global History of US Soccer, 820
what was already well known: American’s were still attracted to the big names of Europe, and would watch them over the grind of the domestic product, a fact that had helped lead to the demise of the ASL in the 1930’s.

Attendance continued to stay at a reasonable level, and in an effort to yet again appeal to the massive Latino demographic, that the league still felt wasn’t being touched (which likely has to do with the fact many of these fans can watch Liga MX for free, and see a higher level of play in any case.) Garber and the MLS approved Chivas USA, whose slogan “Goodbye Soccer, Hello Futbol” made it very clear what the goal of the team was. The MLS opted to place Chivas USA in Los Angeles, a city with the second largest settlement of Mexicans in North America, whose team, the Galaxy, already had a large contingent of Mexican American fans, who saw no need to jump ship to team that seemed almost exploitative of their culture. As Ricardo Lopez, a local editor for La opinion, a Spanish language paper put it, "They didn't understand anymore what their identity had to be. The owner of the team didn't know who they were. Things can't go well under that situation."  

Chivas continued to play in the league, but never achieved the level of play expected of the club. In 2014, the MLS shut down the team.

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334 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 282
336 Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World, 287
By 2007, MLS grew more prominent (though it was still operating at a loss) Media darling Claudio Reyna returned to the US, and MLS signed David Beckham leading to sell out crowds around the country. MLS signed a more lucrative television deals soccer had ever seen with ESPN, which broadcast a game every Thursday, as well as major events, such as the MLS Cup and Opening Day being broadcast on ABC itself. The $8 million a year was a smaller fee than what some of the European leagues commanded in the States. 137 but to the MLS, it was more exposure than ever.

Speaking as someone who played soccer during this MLS boom that saw the league expand to 18 teams, I can state that the decision to showcase one game a week was effective in getting me interested in the sport, and when combined with the cross promotion for the 2010 World Cup, I was hooked on the sport. According to US Youth Soccer, I wasn’t the only kid in the US who was getting more and more involved. While numbers had largely peaked by 2007, over 3 million kids were playing the sport, up from less than 2 million in 1996, the year the MLS was launched. 138

During this time period, ratings were not impressive at a .6 in 2008 (Equitable to around 600,000 viewers, a far cry from the 1.4 million during the first two seasons), and the broadcasting channel was shifted multiple times in a bid to help make the broadcasts better, as it became clear that MLS soccer could

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138 US Youth Soccer, “Key Statistics”
not carry a night on it’s own.\textsuperscript{139} By 2011, MLS and ESPN had agreed to a one year extension, which ensured that up to 31 games would be broadcast, as well USMNT games and three playoff matches.

By the 2012 season, MLS had once again changed broadcasters, staying with ESPN, but moving on from Fox to NBC sports. This move had a drastic effect on viewership numbers, as NBC broadcast to over 77 million people, compared to Fox Sports rather limited 9 million.\textsuperscript{140} The shift in audience reached was instantly apparent, NBCSN and NBC combined showed a total of 45 games, whose viewership numbers were almost double those of Fox Sports. Combined with a move from ESPN2 to ESPN, the MLS was averaging close to 300,000 viewers a game, with attendance figures to match, averaging just over 18,000 people a game in 2012.

MLS continued to grow, as did attendance and TV figures. In 2014, MLS negotiated another television contract, this time with ESPN, Fox and Univison. Combined for a total of $90 million a year, this deal spoke to the stellar work increasing spectatorship in the numbers of viewers and spectators.\textsuperscript{141} From 2014 through 2016, the numbers for the MLS jumped from an average of around

\begin{itemize}
  \item Tannenwald, “MLS, U.S. Soccer officially announce new deal with ESPN, Fox, Univision”
\end{itemize}
600,000 viewers a game (combining both Spanish and English broadcasts) to close to 900,000 a game in 2016. Though the numbers the NASL was putting up in its prime, it’s extremely relevant to note that the MLS has far more games broadcast a season than the NASL ever did, and it is forced to contend with not only other leagues, but also baseball and football season. 142

In sharp contrast, average attendance for MLS games far outstripped NASL average attendance, with an average of 21,796 fans a game, a figure the NASL could never break. 143 This is also extremely relevant, as this places MLS as the third most attended sporting event in the US behind the NFL and the MLB, but ahead of the NHL and the NBA. Considering that in the past 16 years, attendance and viewership for the MLS has been consistently growing, it might be possible that it could overtake the MLB as the second highest average attendance, considering that baseball attendance figures are falling. 144 Whether the USMNT does well in 2018 and 2022 World Cups seems to have little relevance. Soccer will continue to surge in participation, game attendance and television viewership, especially looking at the potential rosters that will likely include a high number of MLS players. Bruce Arena’s decision to grow the USMNT from the MLS may augment the trend, but it is clear that young people

and families will not stop playing and watching soccer. In fact, at Texas State, intramural soccer is the most popular sport, with multiple divisions filling up every year.

Had the 1994 World Cup not occurred, soccer in the US would not be anywhere near the level of popularity that it enjoys currently. While the MLS is not considered a top league, and likely won’t be in the foreseeable future, it is growing steadily, and ensures that there is a steady stream of quality soccer, a club infrastructure, and an opportunity to cheer local teams week in and week out. This continued presence allows younger generations to experience what previous generations did with the 1994 World Cup, and helps ensure that another generation will at least be aware of the sport, something the pioneers in the ‘70’s and ‘80’s simply cannot boast.
Chapter V: Soccer by the Numbers

Renowned racist and soccer-hating pundit Ann Coulter was right to worry about the future of the United States. Soccer is now the third most watched sport in the United States among teenagers, below basketball and just above baseball, America’s game. More kids play soccer than baseball, causing old white men to worry about the future of America without actually considering what American kids are actually doing. This project traced the growth in stadium attendance and television viewers as a measure of popularity. This section will now attempt to understand youth involvement.

My methodology for this research project was analyzing what I had identified as the four pieces that define something as popular in the landscape of American culture. These four components were: Stadium Attendance, Television Viewers, Media Coverage and youth involvement. The 1994 World Cup suddenly exposed the United to a much wider soccer world that most Americans had never seen or likely never even knew existed. And that’s what has driven the rapid growth of soccer’s popularity in the US: Exposure combined with more and more young people within the country growing up involved with soccer.

And it’s exposure in all sorts of media that have really made a difference in how the average American views soccer, especially in the 18-34 demographic, which is the fastest growing demographic in the United States.\(^{145}\) It is in this demographic, which largely were the first generation to experience soccer post 1994 that have, and will drive the sports viewership to new heights.

\(^{145}\) Johnson, “Soccer by the Numbers: A Look at the Game in the US”
For example, the 18-34 demographic is over 40% of the MLS viewer base and the popularity of the sport has tied MLB in popularity among the 12-17 demographic, a stunning fact, considering how the MLS has only been in place for a little over 20 years. Another statistic, based off of ESPN’s poll, ‘Annual Sports Poll’ conducted in 2014, shows the level of growth that the MLS has achieved since its establishment in 1996.

This level of popularity with youth is extremely important to the growth of the sport, and combined with the close to 3.5 million youth players registered

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146 Johnson, “Soccer by the Numbers: A Look at the Game in the US”
with US Soccer\textsuperscript{148}, (a number far exceeds any other country, and second only to basketball) it is obvious that soccer holds a stronger grip on the teenage demographic than stereotypically American sports like baseball, hockey or football.

The phenomenon of children playing soccer and the parents, (usually the mother aka Soccer moms), has become a well-known aspect of American culture. Many kids grow up being involved with soccer, and their parents are right along with them. These Soccer moms have become not only a vital part in getting their children involved with soccer, therefore, likely learning the aspects of the game and the rules (which could lead to them watching more soccer). These women are also an important part of voting blocs, and were especially important in the 1996 election, often leaning left, just as Ann Coulter fears. \textsuperscript{149}

This level of interest has also not gone unnoticed among not only domestic soccer clubs, but also internationally. Places like Eastern Pennsylvania and Grand Rapids, Michigan have massive amounts of player registered with US Soccer, (120,223 and 92,022 respectively).\textsuperscript{150}Grand Rapids does not even have an MLS team.. The Eastern Pennsylvania based PA Classics had a large part of the development of 18 year old Christian Pulisic, who has become a vital piece of Thomas Tuchel’s Dortmund side in Germany, and is widely regarded as US

\textsuperscript{148} US Youth Soccer, “Key Statistics
\textsuperscript{150} US Youth Soccer, “Key Statistics”
Soccer’s hope for the future.\textsuperscript{151} And on a note much closer to home, FC Barcelona – the richest club in the world - has recently announced that it would be opening a FCB Escola’s here in Austin\textsuperscript{152} based out of the Circuit of the America’s as well as Round Rock. This speaks to the fan base and money European clubs see in the United States. the potential development of players, but again leads to more exposure for soccer in the US. Or perhaps, its more along the lines that many American families have plenty of money to invest in silly soccer camps, believing that Barcelona will be better for their child than any one of the local clubs. Whether this is the case, of course, remains to be seen.

Of course, it’s entirely possible that these developments would have occurred without the 1994 World Cup, I very much doubt that it would be the case. As noted earlier, the US currently has 3.05 million youth player registered with US Soccer, but as recent as 1990, only 1.6 million kids were playing soccer in the US. By 1995 though, this number had doubled to 2.4 million players across the country, and ever since then, the numbers have risen at a steady level that the sport had never seen before.

Many of the American players of the 1994 World Cup team associate that World Cup as the first event that really gave soccer an identity in the US. Joe Max-Moore argues that, “For the first time in history, kids in America had soccer-playing heroes to look up to: Tab, Lalas, Cobi, Meola. It completely changed the


way the sport and the athletes were perceived…”¹⁵³, and Landon Donovan, who is widely regarded as the best player the US has ever fielded even admitted,

Going to that game was such a big deal for me, because I’d never seen a live soccer game, I didn’t know what it was about. It sort of opened my eyes to the bigger world of soccer besides just playing club soccer or playing in my backyard. ¹⁵⁴

And with the spikes in youth soccer numbers following each consecutive World Cup, it will not be a surprise to hear future players discussing how so-and-so World Cup was a defining factor for them, and that can be squarely traced back to the 1994 World Cup

Another important aspect to look at is how the growing Latino population will help carry the sports popularity, and while this may not have a direct tie to the 1994 World Cup, I feel that it is an important aspect of the growth of soccer’s popularity in the US. As I stated earlier in thesis, I am a Hispanic male, and I have lost count of how many times that I have been asked, “Well isn’t Soccer the Mexican sport?” or “Well yeah you’d like soccer, it’s in your blood.” Yes, the Hispanic population does support soccer at a higher level than many Americans and according to Nielsen reports as well as polls conducted by YouGov during the 2014 World Cup, 35% of the Hispanic demographic follows soccer during non World Cup years, with close to 25% of Latino males consider soccer to be their

¹⁵³ Bennett, “American Underdogs: The Circus Leaves Town”
favorite sport. But much of this demographic is almost cut off from participating in “American” soccer. Growing up, our family rarely watched the MLS, we watched the Liga M. We were not unique, for the Liga MX figures out pace the MLS by more than 400,000 viewers. This is extremely common amongst the Latino population of the US. Judging by my family, many Latinos rarely follow the MLS with any depth, but Liga MX is a daily discussion, at least in my personal experience, growing up with my grandfather, who would discuss transfer news and results with me every morning. The viewership numbers bear this observation out.

However, the USMNT recruitment pipeline does not reflect this much larger and more involved fan base in the United States. As of the last call up for the USMNT, only 4 out the 24 players called up to the National team had a Hispanic heritage.

Much of this ‘exclusion’ stems from the issue that soccer has in the US that it does not experience anywhere else in the world: Soccer is somewhat exclusive to the middle-class, at least in the eyes of much of the public. Among the USWNT, every single one of the players who won the 2015 World Cup has a college degree, and amongst the Men’s team, the number isn’t anywhere near

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156 Baxter, “Mexico’s Liga MX has lion’s share of soccer viewers in US”
as high, with Clint Dempsey, and Jordan Morris, being amongst the few members of the team to have degrees.\textsuperscript{159} The same cannot be said of either the German or Spanish National teams, neither of whom having active players who have a degree.\textsuperscript{160,161} This of course, has much to do with how player development in Europe and the rest of the world differs from the US, but it does help illustrate how for the mens team, and especially the women’s team reflect the middle class background that most of the players come from.

This is because unlike the rest of the world, where soccer is accessible to all class of people, in the US, soccer is a sport that you play as child, and many of the major travelling teams that help gain prospective players exposure are prohibitively expensive, especially for the lower income families that make up 55\% of the Hispanic population here in the United States.\textsuperscript{162} This means that many talented players and fans of the game likely have a hard time affording the costs of organized play in the US, as well as being able to attend local MLS games, therefore failing to account in the estimates for the growth of popularity of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{159} US Soccer, “Men’s National Team Roster”
\textsuperscript{161} UEFA, “Germany”, \url{UEFA}, \url{http://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro/season=2016/teams/team=47/index.html} (Accessed 5/11/17)
\end{footnotesize}
sport. Clint Dempsey has discussed this on many occasions, as his family often had to live on shoe string budgets and get help from friends to allow Dempsey to be able to attend soccer camps that ended up being six hour commutes, often in other cities.\textsuperscript{163}

Of course the question might be, so what How is this relevant to how the 1994 World Cup and its impact on the popularity of soccer in the US? Clearly, Latinos probably led the way watching the world cup in 1994, following events even after the United States and Mexico had been eliminated from play. Their eyes on the screens counted as much as other. But, since 1990, the same year the US returned to the World Cup, Latino immigration and births has jumped from 7.8 million to 14.7 million and 14 million to 35.9 million in 2014.\textsuperscript{164} And with the Hispanic population being the fastest growing demographic in the US, with a projected 119 million citizens estimated to be from this demographic, even if only 25\% of the population lists soccer as their favorite sport, that’s close to 30 million people who consider soccer to be their favorite sport.\textsuperscript{165} This of course, does not factor in the possibility that this number may jump, nor does it factor in the popularity of soccer growing in other demographics.

And while currently much of the Hispanic population continues to support Liga MX, Mexican Americans may move away from Liga MX and El Tri\textsuperscript{166} and


\textsuperscript{164} Brown and Stepler, “Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States”

\textsuperscript{165} Author’s own calculation

\textsuperscript{166} Nickname for Mexican national team

Therefore, one can reasonably argue that the growing Hispanic population in the US will help grow the sports popularity in the United States. This may not be a true side effect of the 1994 World Cup, but the cultural emphasis on soccer prevalent in the Hispanic demographic combined with the new level of exposure that 1994 helped bring to the sport will be factors in the growth of soccer within this demographic and the US as a whole. With how popular Liga MX is within the US, and how fast the Hispanic population is growing in the US, it is clear that the soccer fan base will continue to grow and flourish here in the United States. So while right wing pundits can cry to the heavens of how soccer will never make it and continue to disparage the people who follow the sport, they will slowly but surely find themselves in the minority as more and more people start to watch and enjoy soccer, no matter the origin.
Chapter VI: Looking Like a Soccer Player

The final aspect of the new exposure I felt was important was looking at how the FIFA videogames, exhibition tours by major European teams, and the increased broadcast of European games have helped develop the growth of the soccer’s popularity.

As someone who has fanatically followed the German Bundesliga for three years, I can safely say my interest in Bayern Munich had little to do with any marketing the club put out, nor in truth, games on television (though in 2014, the Bundesliga was not carried by any major US network). Instead, it came from what an unlikely source: the FIFA videogames developed by Electronic Arts. While I had played the game growing up, I had never quite appreciated them. But in the fall of 2014, I fell into the trap many people my age have, and when one of my friends had picked Manchester United, a five star team, I too felt that I too had to play a five star team. Selecting Bayern Munich, who I knew had an American (Julian green) on their team, I quickly fell in love with the Bavarian giants. Since then, I’ve visited the Allianz Arena in Munich, bought a new jersey every season (I currently own eight) and have flown across the country to watch them play.

While this may seem atypical, as Bayern Munich play thousand miles away, the story is not exactly uncommon. Looking across campus on any given day a keen eye will spot jerseys from teams such as Real Madrid, Barcelona and Dortmund, but also Dynamo and FC Dallas jerseys. Talking to the owners of these jerseys, I often try and discuss what they think of the team they are representing. About half the time they follow the team, but the other 50% often
admit they don’t follow the team at all, but it ‘their’ team in FIFA. In 2016 alone, FIFA 17, EA’s newest title sold 3 million copies\textsuperscript{168} in the first week, vastly outselling the same edition of Madden, and shattering any of EA sports launch records.

EA itself, following the success of FIFA 15, released an infographic showing the effect the FIFA videogames had on its American audience. The biggest takeaway was that the US market was the second largest market for the game, despite the continuing belief that soccer is a fringe sport. The image, based on polls conducted by Richard Luker as well as EA themselves, also had two somewhat surprising facts: 50% of Americans who played FIFA became more interested in professional soccer, and 34% considered themselves fans of professional soccer following playing the game.\textsuperscript{169}


BY THE NUMBERS

EA SPORTS FIFA

and the Impact on Soccer in the USA

★ EA SPORTS FIFA IS INCREASING

THE POPULARITY OF SOCCER IN THE USA ★

34% of EA SPORTS FIFA players became pro soccer fans after playing the videogame

50% of EA SPORTS FIFA players are more interested in pro soccer after playing the videogame

★ AMERICA PLAYS FIFA ★

... A LOT ★

95% of Americans who play soccer videogames play EA SPORTS FIFA

#2 Best-selling country for FIFA 14

293M MATCHES played

3.1B MINUTES have been spent playing FIFA

637M GOALS scored

★ AMERICANS ARE PLAYING MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER ★

112%↑ Increase in number of people playing with an MLS Club in FIFA 15 vs. FIFA 14*

★ TOP 5 MLS GOAL SCORERS IN EA SPORTS FIFA ★

Glen Davis 9.6M

Thierry Henry 7.7M

Olivier Martinez 7.3M

Robbie Keane 4.4M

Landon Donovan 4.3M

★ TOP 5 MLS CLUBS IN EA SPORTS FIFA ★

Seattle Sounders FC 1.9M

LA Galaxy 1.3M

New York Red Bulls 1.1M

Chicago Fire 867K

D.C. United 604K

*According to matches played

Source: Leder on Trends – ESPN Sports Poll and EA SPORTS FIFA (as of Oct 23, 2014)
This is extremely impressive, in and of itself, and combined with an increasing simplicity in regards to following the English Premier League, the German Bundesliga, or Spain’s La Liga on television, means that now American’s can not only play as their team on FIFA, but they can easily follow their team in real life as well. Dillon Asher, who in a Huffington Post stated, “‘Playing Fifa in college really accelerated my soccer fandom... Now, I am a soccer addict. I saw my first and only soccer game at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena a couple years ago and Manchester United won 7-0 against LA Galaxy.”\textsuperscript{170}, and this sentiment is common all across college campuses. The fact that a videogame based on a sport that was almost invisible to the country, and that was launched the only a year before the 1994 World Cup has now solidified itself as a perennial top seller goes to show how far the sport has grown in the US. As FIFA sales continue to grow with every new game, and an increasing amount of European soccer shown on TV, it is easy to see how in the long run soccer will continue to grow in popularity in varied demographics around the country.

The last aspect of increased exposure I opted to look at was the increased level of European, as well as South American teams coming during the summer to play exhibition games against other World power houses. Inevitably, these games often play to massive crowds, and ticket prices are often astronomical. The International Champion’s Cup for example, was played the US this past summer, and average attendance hovered at just over 45,000 people a game, far more than

\textsuperscript{170} Neil, “Soccer Is Here, for Real This Time”
the average MLS side during the same period.\textsuperscript{171} Much like clubs in the 1930’s, and again in the 1970’s American Soccer finds itself overshadowed by it’s European cousins, though match day attendance for the MLS did not dip during this period.\textsuperscript{172} Since the World Cup in 1994, major teams have ventured across the Atlantic to showcase the talent it has to offer, with Manchester United and Chelsea being some of the most consistent visitors, which has largely been the reason for both club’s extreme popularity in the US.\textsuperscript{173}

Unlike MLS and other US professional soccer matches, these exhibition matches are often priced at a premium far exceeding those of local games, and many times, the play is nonchalant, with the title of ‘Friendly’ being extremely applicable here. In regards to ticket price, during the summer of 2017, the first El Clasico outside of Europe will be held in Miami, with the cheapest tickets are a stunning $450 dollars.\textsuperscript{174} For a comparison, Orlando City FC season tickets, the closest MLS club, clock in at $350 dollars for seats that are considered the

nosebleeds...and that’s for 17 games. But the fact of the matter is, these games are rare occurrences, and for the diehard fans, this is often the best chance for them to see their teams in person. Personally, I flew out to see Bayern Munich play Inter Milan, and even was afforded the opportunity to meet some of the players after running into them on the street. Much like FIFA, and the growth of professional soccer on TV, these exhibition matches help create a buzz in the host cities, with fans flocking out in droves, chanting and waving a multitude of flags and crests, making it easy to be transported back to the summer of 1994 when soccer was reborn in the US.

Bayern Munich v. Inter Milan
July 27, 2016-Attendance: 46,000
Photo Credit: Simon Vazquez

Chapter VII: Conclusion

The question I asked at the start of this thesis was a simple one: How did the 1994 World Cup kick start the growth of soccer’s popularity in the US? Through my research, it quickly became clear that the 1994 World Cup was indeed the turning point for soccer in the US. Following the summer tournament, the United States saw the return of a professional outdoor soccer league, rapid growth in youth involvement, and an increasing amount of games on national television and coverage in the media. All of this has contributed to the increased level of exposure that soccer has experienced around the country, and its popularity will only continue to grow.

Of course, I will not pretend that I covered every base, and soccer’s growth in the US has other factors that have helped lead to it’s popularity, particularly with the level of success that the Women’s team has experienced in the global stage. Personally, I feel that while much of the information I have presented is not groundbreaking by any definition of the word, the chronological presentation alongside some of the major developments in regards to electronic media is a different approach to the norm in regards to the analysis of why soccer has grown in popularity in the US. Thinking more clearly about the long presence of corporate sports ventures like the LIGA MX, the Premiere League, the Bundesliga, and la Liga in American media culture allows us to see a transnational dimension of American culture become deeply rooted in American youth culture, physically and virtually displacing hockey and baseball in American hearts, minds, and playing fields.
In conclusion, the semi-accidental world event of the 1994 world cup catalyzed a league, a fan base, and a community of players. That generation of supporters went on to make soccer in the United States a possible hub in the circuits that shape athletic careers. In the end, soccer is just as American as baseball, and in fact, youth in America are more likely to own a soccer ball than a baseball mitt or hockey stick.

It is also clear that videogames like FIFA the growing popularity of the MLS and LIGA MX are vital in assessing the state of soccer in the US. With the recent announcement of a potential 2026 World Cup once again held on US soil, looking at how this World Cup, should it be held in the United States, has affected another generation of Americans would be an interesting comparison and contrast to the effects of the 1994 World Cup. In the end, I think it will be safe to argue that the 1994 World Cup has had a lasting effect on the soccer landscape in the US through an increased level of exposure that has driven more and more people to give the ‘World’s Game’ a chance.
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