Is the United States Ready for a Major Soccer League?

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press, "If we can do half as much in the next few years as we did in the last four, we can win the World Cup in 1998." Time will tell if what he says is true. For the moment, though, it is quite believable. Bearing the responsibilities of being the host nation has provided a huge boost to America's World Cup team. After losing all three of their first-round contests in 1990, the team was determined to at least save themselves from embarrassment when the competition came to its turf. The U.S. Soccer Federation hired an experienced Hans Millatovici, who immediately entered the construction of a national training headquartered in the Netherlands. Many of the top players joined American professional leagues to gain some experience. I have a feeling that Americans sense some kind of need to be a world power in all major sports. While my statement can be disputed, it is true that in soccer, the most popular sport in the world, the United States seemed to have lacked something. The drive for improvement in this sport is possibly one of the best things done to any athletic program in the country.

All of the hard work seemed to have paid off. The team advanced to the second round for the first time ever. Along the way, it pulled off an upset against Colombia, a team many had chosen to win the whole thing. Interestingly, that single game may have set the careers of many American soccer players, as a number of them were flooded with offers from European teams later the night after the game. It is hard to believe that a team that gave up only one goal in each game did not advance any further. Even so, masses of fans that suddenly popped up clearly showed their support throughout the four games played.

With such a high amount of participation among the younger Americans, I am quite surprised that the United States is not already an international power. After all, soccer is one of the first sports many children pick up, and at least where I live, "The World Cup" of that age group came to a close, as demonstrated by the "Dream Team II" that easily won the World Championship of Basketball week later. I had a strange feeling, though, when I read in the newspapers that the Major Soccer League is being formed next year. With the momentum generated among the public by the World Cup, this is an ideal time to form such a league. The league is a good idea but I wonder if it will work.

Will the league actually attract talent and spectators, and produce world-class players? A problem I see is that many American players already have lucrative contracts overseas, and would prefer to stay there. Thus, it is possible that the Major Soccer League will consist of everyone except the very best, even within the American talent pool.

It will be difficult to bring in players from other countries, unless there are enough people with enough money to lure them there. There is a lot unknown about this league so far, so we will just have to wait and see how it turns out. Something that might help the American cause even more is to continue exposure to international competition. The U.S. team needs to gain even more experience, which comes from playing from the world's best.

The team could do so by having the opponents come over here. A few international tournaments and some exhibitions could work wonders. I also hope that teams from other countries would enjoy and would be willing to play in America.

Many players enjoyed playing and staying in the States during the World Cup. Some members of teams that played in New Jersey (Giants Stadium) even made side trips to Atlantic City and New York City during their free time.

There is one final thing I would like to discuss about soccer in America. Many of you probably know very well who Moela, one of the best-recognized members of the U.S. World Cup team, has signed to play American football with the New York Jets. I do realize that soccer players often become successful football players, and that this might be something that Moela really wants to do, but his decision doesn't seem to be too good for the image of soccer in America.

This move will probably affect how soccer followers in other countries, like American interest in soccer. They may find it hard to believe that with people such as Moela, the United States is still serious about becoming a world power in soccer. They have probably acquired the interest and opportunities to be more about football than about soccer. Furthermore, Moela is 30 years old, drams from many good years ahead of him. He could be much better in 1998 - I noticed that the goalies of the final four teams were each either in their 20s or early 30s.

Moela was the only goalkeeper on the U.S. team who actually saw playing time during this World Cup. Will he be able to match Moela's skills? We will see.

Should penalty kicks be used?

I do not have too much more to say about the World Cup, but there is one point about the rules that I have a need to discuss. Those who watched the championship penalty shootouts between Brazil and Italy witnessed the first ever final tied after overtime, when the Italian goalkeeper shot wide. Will he be able to match Moela's skills? We will see.

Should penalty kicks be used? If there are enough respondents, I will print the results of the poll, and what some people said, in a future issue. I hope to continue asking big questions like this on a regular basis. Even if the penalty kick shootout tiebreaker is not the best way, at least those who attended the final got the money out of their pockets.

In closing, you can clearly see that I have had a lot to write about the World Cup alone. However, I must stress that the tournament was only a small part of all the sporting events that happened this summer. Sports fans have truly been treated by the fact that everything has coincidentally happened as virtually the same time.

There is more to come, so enjoy it while you can because the student program's events might not be this good.

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