

## Grumpy Man Doesn't Enjoy Soccer

by Lenhardt Stevens

In between these days of the jubilant meting out of newly legal sessions of cannabinoid consumption, the living room noisebox in the den of my mother's condominium (I'm working a dead end job in my mid twenties; what's your excuse?) has been gormlessly reminding me of the international competition in Brazil, where we can pretend to be european-Oregonians for nearly five hours on each occasion of kick ball, chase ball, put ball in net. I can't help but wonder in between matches if my chances of getting laid increase with my feigned appreciation of the sport, or plummet precipitously. Do women in this city desire a man who wants to canvass the success of Malcolm Smith despite his team's failed Super Bowl appearance, or Wayne Rooney's receding hairline? There's even a prominent car company that would like to tell its potential customers, with the help of a well-bred model in a low-cut shirt, that they should make this summer about "fútbol," rather than blowing your hand off during the fourth of July. She then changes the channel on the television in the dive bar in Anywhere, USA, from a baseball game to a televised broadcast of FIFA, while the besotted and stupefied men continue looking at her latin curves instead of the game. This inability to control their drive for sex in the presence of a beautiful woman is very un-American, and I dismiss that these men are true sports fans because of it. My guess is, if they were real patriots, they changed the channel back to what they were watching when she leaves.

The message of this commercial, and others like it, is clear: Americans don't like soccer, but, by gum, we could if we knew it wasn't gay to enjoy it. Aside from the obvious economic benefit of an American market from tuning into Premier League matches, there is a deeper matter of trying to know which sporting activity we should indoctrinate the youth of today into. With so many to choose from, it's enough to make you wonder; why should we, *qua* Americans with free-time, move the masses of bar or coached bound sports fans to enjoy a sport they don't care about during the three and half years we don't have ESPN telling us to love it? I see a fourfold justification:

- 1) My partner loves this game, so I end up watching it through proximity, and because I'm competitive by nature, I'll watch anything where people are behaving non-cooperatively.
- 2) MLS could use more fans, otherwise it starts looking like a double AA baseball franchise, and that is too depressing to let happen.
- 3) More eyes on the television screen mean more viewers of commercials, so make that a check for corporate marketing, and if we can get people to spend more time watching live television

than watching youtube or watching programming On Demand, maybe we can resurrect a dying industry.

- 4) *The Saintly Move*: Soccer is the world's sport. If we don't get out of the "our sports against everyone else's" mentality, we're putting ourselves in a miserable relationship with the other six billion people on earth. And by the way, we should eat more rice while we're at it.

There is some highly invective and slur-ridden language on the internet directed towards soccer players, sometimes, in the case of the motivation for the criticism, for good reason.<sup>1</sup> The highly commented upon but player silent issue of taking falls riddles the game with the same frustrations the NBA experiences, except people do occasionally draw blood during basketball, where as I'm never sure what muscle these soccer players are pulling when they collapse to the ground, only to rise moments afterwards. The Oscar nodding performances slow the pace of the match and are oftentimes incomprehensible to us on the sidelines. There is no other sport that has to add-on more time at the end of regular allotted play because people were rolling around in agony at regular intervals, thereby disrupting the match for everyone else. Not even rugby or American football, sports with players grabbing one another's ankles in mid-stride and sending each other face planting into the grass afterwards, accommodate player agony into their time limits.

More than anything, dives are an act of dishonesty. An example that immediately comes to mind is German player Thomas Müller flopping like a fish on a Hamburg dock when Portugal player Kepler "Pepe" Ferreira had his hand briefly in the German's face. Pepe, in a moment of unchecked aggression, put his face in Müller's while he was still on the ground and was ejected by the referee. I think Pepe's anger was justified, even if it was misspent. Müller's energy when arising to meet Pepe's challenge was revealing. Why did he take Pepe's antics so seriously if he was legitimately injured?

It makes you wonder what is discussed behind closed doors between players. How many nights over drinks do these players reveal the deceptive nature of their behaviors on the field? Moreover, at what stage do players begin to decide that they will, upon entering the penalty box, turn into limp piles of boiled spaghetti, vulnerable to contact of any kind? With PKs acting as what are essentially free goals, the sport teeters on charade with these stunts. Disagreeers may cite the relevant examples from other sports, but it's a question of frequency, and in a game where time doesn't stop for anything, an awful lot of it is spent taking care of its players bruised knees when, in fact, they are catering to bruised egos.

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<sup>1</sup> I do not condone using slurs in order get someone to stop acting like a pussy.

Lastly, I will direct some attention to argument (4), the issue of soccer being an international language Americans have an obligation to speak is like telling Americans the majority of the world eats rice every meal and therefore we should eat it. Though a noble incentive with a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity at heart, I reject its premise. I find it disingenuous to suggest I can begin liking any sport, or cuisine, if I give enough attention to it. Since when was that how I spent my time watching sports? If the whole point of me watching a Mariners game in my underwear while drinking a flat Rolling Rock is to enjoy myself, no amount of tanned Brazilian goddesses can come in and persuade me to sacrifice my day to learn how to enjoy it. I'm spectating because I like the game, not because I'm *learning* to like it. Moreover, since when did it become a moral duty to do the things the world was doing? If I am not mistaken, one of America's proudest past times is ignoring the culture of the rest of the world. Things like universal healthcare, a notable lack of gun related injury or death, and life without trucks in an urban setting aren't for us, so I see no reason why we should make a sporting event that grants only minimal primal satisfaction for bloodlust part of our country, either.

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