

SOCCERHEAD

A book by
Jim Haner

An Accidental Journey into the Heart of the American Game

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What Every Parent, Coach & Sportscaster Should Know about soccer -- but probably doesn't, from...

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- ⊕ Soccer is an American game. The sport arrived on the continent long before it was ever introduced into Brazil, Germany, Italy or France - and at least 200 years before baseball, football and basketball were invented. Prior to the Great Depression, soccer had spawned more than 50 professional and semi-professional leagues and rivaled baseball in popularity as a spectator sport.
- ⊕ With more than 18 million registered players - half of them under the age of 12 - soccer has become the second largest participation sport in the United States after basketball. There are now more youth players in the U.S. than in any other country in the world.
- ⊕ There are three times more girl soccer players in America than there are Girl Scouts; and eight times more than in any other industrialized country. From just 28 high schools in the year Mia Hamm was born, more than 8,000 now field girls' soccer teams. The number of young women playing high school soccer has risen over the past three decades from 700 to 290,000. The sport now captures five times more players than field hockey - and nearly as many as softball.
- ⊕ As the growth of boys soccer programs overtook other sports at the high school level, Major League Baseball began "importing" half of its prospects from overseas. Boys' soccer has grown at three times the rate of baseball - from about 49,000 scholastic players in 1972 to more than 300,000 today.
- ⊕ With median household incomes of \$78,000, soccer families coalesced during the 1990s into grassroots political action groups, pushing through millions in bond issues for elaborate "soccerplexes" that dwarf traditional hometown sports facilities. In one of the biggest construction booms in youth athletics since the New Deal, major soccer complexes sprang up in such places as Albany, Philadelphia, Virginia Beach, Raleigh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Boulder, Denver, Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Dallas and at least seven cities in California. Built at a cost of \$22 million, The Maryland Soccerplex outside Washington, D.C. features 23 soccer fields, a 66,000-square-foot arena and a 3,200-seat stadium - exclusively for youth league games.
- ⊕ Of the 38 million American kids who are enrolled in sports leagues, about a third quit every year, complaining of burnout and pressure from adults. Budget cuts for physical education programs have reduced the ranks of degreed professional coaches, so 85 percent are now amateur-Dads - and fewer than one in 20 has been certified to work with kids. Remarkably, soccer is the only mass participation youth sport with a nationwide training and licensing program for coaches overseen by a single governing body (the U.S. Soccer Federation).
- ⊕ Soccer now attracts so many kids that only about 7 percent of youth players under the age 12 will ever qualify for their high school team. Of those who do, there is only one college soccer scholarship available for every seventy-eight male high school players. Among collegiate varsity players, the odds of playing professionally in the U.S. are no better than one in a thousand.

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