

Why I Don't Like Soccer

By Curtis Jerry Smothers



Spoiler alert: This is just my opinion. I apologize in advance to anyone offended by my main criticisms of game:

--It is low scoring. Of 104 total matches played in the 2026 FIFA World Cup, just slightly under 3 goals per game were scored.

--It is boring to watch. The majority of most matches consist of a game of keepaway, where the ball travels to and fro, up and down the enormous soccer pitch. One almost wishes the players would hold still so the fans could watch the grass grow on the pitch. It would be about as exciting.

--Many regular season soccer games can end in a tie. The British First Division, for example played 350 games with 104 ties. The NFL played 272 with only one tie. . To be fair, in soccer championship rounds, if the game ends in a tie, they play 30 minutes of overtime--not sudden death. If the game is still tied they have a round of penalty kicks, which are fun to watch. In any case, it's like deciding a basketball game with free throws.

Americans don't get it...

It's not just me. Soccer has never been the rage in the United States that it has in Europe, South America and elsewhere. The game lacks that "certain something" that Americans are looking for in a competitive sport.

There is no doubt that soccer is a fast-paced game requiring skill, stamina, speed and conditioning. But to be brutally honest, to most Americans the game is just a bunch of men (or women) in shorts running around playing keepaway with a ball on a large field and rarely (if ever) scoring. It is boring to watch.

The foregoing is, of course, a vast -- and admittedly opinionated -- oversimplification, but it gets to the heart of the matter. We Americans prefer a game where players can use their hands. Soccer, to the average American fan, is the sports equivalent of Irish dancing, where the dancers must keep their arms rigidly by their sides. It just doesn't seem natural somehow. We'd prefer the arm-waving choreography of Dancing with the Stars.

What else is wrong with the game

In addition to our objecting to the unsatisfactory restriction on using the hands, Americans dislike the unfocused play of soccer and its disproportionate field size. Roughly the size of an American football field, the soccer field has the unfortunate tendency to allow the game to get somewhat out of hand as running players struggle to formulate some coherent game plan that can't keep up with the long defensive kicks by goalies. Since no one can touch the ball except the goalkeeper, and most of the players are very, very skilled, it all gets rather frustrating.

We Americans are usually a democratic group, and soccer is a very democratic game that favors speed and skill over size. For that reason, soccer is popular at the kids' level. However, the game has never taken root like collegiate American football, basketball, or baseball.

Since the foregoing sports (especially football and basketball) favor size as well as speed and stamina, American sports fans tend to be drawn to sports where the big guys fight it out. Baseball, incidentally, is popular because of its symmetry and special skills required. We also love it when the big guys come to bat and crush the ball over the outfield stands.

Hooligans overseas gave soccer a bad name

There are other reasons why Americans don't care for professional soccer. One is that European soccer fans can, at times, be somewhat gross and boorish. This can be best illustrated by a personal experience my son and I had years ago attending the Scottish Cup Championship in Glasgow, Scotland. (I was stationed with the U.S. Navy in Holy Loch,

Scotland, at the time. The year was 1978, and a group of us sailors were able to get tickets to this really big event.)

We got off the bus at the stadium and headed for the entrance. The first thing my 14-year-old son and I noticed was the large number of drunken fans (it was only 11:00 a.m.) staggering into the stadium. Many of them were menacing looking big blokes bedecked with their team colors. The teams vying for the championship were the (Protestant) Rangers and the (Catholic) Celtics. So the contest also had worrisome sectarian elements, and the local police actively stationed themselves between the fans, who filed into opposite ends of the stadium.

Our tickets were with the Celtic fans. We expected to be seated; instead, we were herded to what was known as the "terrace," which was a sloping area with no seats. The area was intermittently populated with railings where fans, packed like sardines, leaned and drunkenly chanted. (Terraces have since been banned from most soccer stadiums, but in the U.K. I understand that they will be reintroducing "safe-standing areas" that meet safety standards--presumably with armed troops and cattle prods.)

Anyway, back to the Scottish championship nightmare...

The behavior of those all-male fans was uniformly disgusting as they got drunker and drunker, spitting and urinating on the terrace. During half time the mob of hungry, inebriated fans crowded to the inadequate concession area. One group (and I saw this with my own eyes) literally stormed a hot dog vendor and looted his wagon.

As the game proceeded, there really wasn't much to cheer over as the ball went back and forth with no one (typically) able to score. Soccer fans have a tendency, by the way, to be constantly set up in expectation of a score, only to be consistently disappointed.

Goal keepers (who get to use their hands) have an enormous advantage over the rest of the players. As the game progresses, even getting the ball within 10 meters of the goal seems to bring the fans to an unbearable level of excitement.

The game ended 1-0 in favor of the Celtics. It was won on a penalty kick (the soccer equivalent of a free-throw). By mutual agreement, my son and I left before the second half was finished, since we were in no mood to endure the after-game shenanigans of that crowd. To this day, my son (now past 50) hates soccer.

The quadrennial World Cup Guilt Trip in the U.S.

Soccer is, of course, a truly popular and international sport. Every four years the rest of the world goes crazy as the World Cup gets underway. The one nation that views the spectacle with only mild interest is, of course, the United States. We have other fish to fry. For excitement, glitz,

hype and entertainment, most Americans would prefer the NFL Super Bowl, and we don't have to wait four years for it to come around.

Here's a fun poem I wrote in honor of the 2022 World Cup:

Another Brand of Football
By Curtis Jerry Smothers

There's another brand of football
Which to me seems rather boring
No passes or rough tackles
And a paucity of scoring

They love that game in Europe
In the U.S. not so much
We get our kicks from scrimmage
And the pigskin's soothing touch

A four-year World Cup fever
Burns through those foreign fans
They drink the FiFA Kool Aid
In colorful, draped stands

But after ninety minutes
Of kicking by their heroes
It's hard to get excited
When the score is double zeroes

There's another brand of football
With no helmets in the locker
It's really not real football
With a beachball we call soccer