

Everywhere and nowhere: the forgotten past and clouded future of American professional soccer from the perspective of Massachusetts

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Professional soccer in the USA enjoyed several moments of popularity throughout the twentieth century. Professional soccer leagues were founded, some as early as the 1890s. In spite of that, the sport has never caught fire at the professional level. Soccer leagues have not only been in the shadow of baseball, football, basketball and, most recently, ice hockey, but with the exception of Major League Soccer, a newcomer on the mainstream sporting scene, all of them have folded within a couple of decades. This essay provides insight as to why professional soccer has failed to attain the status of a major American sport. It also analyses the development of professional soccer in the USA through the scope of immigration and from the perspective of Massachusetts.

Introduction

US soccer is not a common topic among historians. It is not a common topic among soccer fans, either. If you ask any admirer of sports to name the world's finest nations in soccer, the list will be long. Depending on their nationality, different soccer lovers will provide different answers. The Dutch would only grudgingly concede the Spaniards played better in the 2010 World Cup final, and Brazilians still believe they had the ability to capture a sixth World Cup title in South Africa. It would never occur to a soccer fan, however, to include the USA among the world's leading powers of the game. Soccer would seem to be almost un-American, as some writers have implied. Americans have their own sports – baseball, football, basketball and ice hockey; what do they know about soccer, anyway? Until recently, many national teams, even mediocre ones, would be happy to face the maladroit Yanks and expect to win. Soccer is even presented as un-American in the very few movies that Hollywood has dedicated to the game.¹

Despite Hollywood stereotypes, popular beliefs and authors presenting soccer as un-American, the game became professional in 1894, shortly after it had become professional in England and long before, it went pro in some soccer-mad countries such as Argentina and Brazil. American soccer enjoyed several moments of popularity throughout the twentieth century, notably in the 1920s, during the existence of the American Soccer League (ASL). The North American Soccer League (NASL) became the financial Mecca of professional soccer during the 1970s with the arrival of Pelé, Franz Beckenbauer, Johan Cruyff and George Best, just to name

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a few stars, to the USA. The impact of these stars on the NASL is skillfully described in the documentary *Once in a Lifetime*.² In fact, there were so many British players in the NASL that anyone arriving at Heathrow Airport in the summer months of the late 1970s ran the risk of tripping over a Football League player with his bags packed and tagged for anywhere from California to Connecticut.³ Shortly after the departure of many of these internationally renowned players, the NASL folded. Professional soccer was born again in 1996, but even David Beckham – the world’s most famous athlete – has so far struggled to popularize soccer in the USA. Why have several professional soccer leagues failed in the USA? And despite this breakdown, how does soccer manage to survive on American soil? Why has it always come back, even after several collapses?

First, this essay will deal chronologically with the history of professional soccer in the USA. This is a necessary step, as very few scholars have done so adequately. Second, it will examine the major problems of Andrei Markovits’s exceptionalist theory. Third, it will focus on the inconsistent explanations of other scholars who have argued that American nativism was at the origin of the failure of soccer. Finally, from the perspective of Massachusetts and through the scope of immigration, the study will analyse the eclipse of several professional soccer leagues and provide explanations for their quick decline or struggle to survive.

A short history of US professional soccer

Once the game was codified in London in 1863, soccer started to develop at almost the same pace in America as in England. As a result, the first attempt to establish a professional league in the USA was made before the turn of the century. In June 1894, owners of baseball franchises in six large northeastern cities founded the American League of Professional Football Clubs (ALPFC). The officials made agreements on the schedule, which originally was to last from 1 October to 1 December but was later extended to 1 January. The games were to be played on the baseball fields of New York City, Brooklyn, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston.⁴

After the opening euphoria died, the league recorded very low attendance figures. Besides the Baltimore Orioles, who drew around 3000 fans to their home games, the Boston Beaneaters, New York Giants, Brooklyn Superbas, Philadelphia Quakers and Washington Senators could seldom attract more than a couple of hundred spectators per game. The league collapsed because of financial problems a few weeks after its first kickoff.

Despite the complete fiasco that the first professional soccer league in America turned out to be, soccer did not disappear. Immigrants were recreating an old-world atmosphere by bringing soccer across the Atlantic. The game was played in many ethnic neighbourhoods and among factory workers. Some industrialists, such as Horace Edgar Lewis and Charles Schwab of the Bethlehem Steel Co., sponsored soccer activities. They believed that soccer would offer workers entertainment and satisfaction; the thinking was that workers kept busy would refrain from strikes and other industrial ‘evils’.

As early as 1914, Charles Schwab spent freely on the construction of a soccer stadium and other facilities.⁵ He sent his team to foreign countries to acquire experience and international recognition. *The Bethlehem Globe* described in detail the team’s 1919 Scandinavian tour.⁶ The Fore River Shipyard, an industrial plant also

operated by the Bethlehem Steel Co. and located in Quincy – 15 miles south of Boston – fielded a soccer team as early as 1904. By 1916, many talented footballers and their families had moved to Quincy from their native Scotland. ‘Nobody realizes today that soccer was played here a long time ago. It was a popular sport at the beginning of the century [in Quincy] ... there were many Scottish workers at the shipyard and they were good players’, explained Ann Fleming Jensen. Her father, Tommy Fleming, had moved to Quincy as a teenager and played for Fore River FC.⁷ The role of Scots in the global diffusion of the game in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been noted by David Goldblatt.⁸

The famous English team Corinthians, which was composed of upper-class gentlemen, visited Massachusetts as early as 1904. One of the exhibition games played by the Englishmen matched them against Fore River FC. The kickoff was formally executed by John Fitzgerald, grandfather of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and then mayor of Boston.⁹ Given that the game was attended by several thousand spectators, Honey Fitz, as John Fitzgerald was nicknamed by his fellow Irish-Americans, must have seen a window of opportunity for promoting his political agenda. Similar visits were documented later on when the Pilgrims, an English amateur all-star team toured the USA in 1905 and 1909. The visits of the Pilgrims were particularly beneficial for the development of soccer in the Chicago area, where it generated tremendous interest and helped soccer teams and leagues to consolidate.¹⁰ In a similar fashion as in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the factory officials in Quincy, Massachusetts, constructed a soccer field – the best in the area – with stands for spectators and a gymnasium (the Club House, which still exists)¹¹ for the players.¹² In 1918, almost 15,000 workers got together on Labour Day to watch Fore River FC.¹³

Massachusetts and other New England states were not an exception. Outside New England, soccer was a very popular sport in the New York City area, Philadelphia and environs.¹⁴ In the Midwest, soccer enjoyed popularity in Saint Louis.¹⁵ Gabe Logan skillfully explains in his Ph.D. how English and Scots in particular came to dominate Chicago soccer at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.¹⁶ In a similar fashion as in the UK, the amateurs showed the way with a few decades of play, developing a national association the United States Football Association (USFA), which had joined FIFA in 1913, leagues, clubs and, most importantly, a large body of devoted fans. Once the game had become popular (as was the case in many cities, such as Boston, Quincy, Fall River, New Bedford, Providence, Brooklyn, New York City, Newark, Bethlehem, Saint Louis and Chicago, just to name a few), amateurs were allowed to be financially rewarded. Some players/workers at semi-professional factory teams earned more money from soccer than from their industrial jobs.¹⁷ Finally, compensation and the formation of the USFA led in 1921 to the foundation of the ASL, the second professional league in the USA, which operated until 1931.

This was arguably the golden era of American soccer. During its early years, the ASL was successfully competing with baseball: during the 1920s, the three professional baseball teams in the New York City area (New York Yankees, New York Giants and Brooklyn Dodgers), where outnumbered by professional soccer teams (Brooklyn Wanderers, New York Giants, New York Nationals and Newark Skeeters). In industrial cities in New England, such as Fall River, New Bedford, Pawtucket and Providence, baseball was overshadowed by the tremendous popularity of soccer. ‘I was born in 1920 in Fall River, Massachusetts, and all we did was play soccer ... we played the Irish; we played the French’, explained John Sousa, who

played for the USA during the World Cup in Brazil in 1950. Four of his five brothers played competitive soccer for factory or semi-professional teams; none of them played baseball.¹⁸

Once the ASL was established, attendance rose. Clubs from the New York City area attracted around 10,000 fans per game, and teams from Fall River and New Bedford, Massachusetts, often brought in more than 15,000 fans to home games. Club officials generated important funds from admission fees.¹⁹ They were therefore able to entice top professionals from Europe, whose participation allowed the quality of the game to increase significantly. The ASL benefited from a fair amount of media coverage. *The New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* during the 1920s were quite soccer friendly. Other newspapers from soccer strongholds in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, including *The Bethlehem Globe* and *The Fall River Globe*, illustrated soccer events on their front pages. In 1924, after the opening game of the season, *The Fall River Globe* dedicated eight articles to soccer in its sports section (the ASL was composed of eight teams at this time). It is interesting to note that the professional baseball league was composed of 16 teams at that time. The following year, the ASL expanded from 8 teams to 12.²⁰

It is interesting to compare the development of soccer in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century with countries where the sport is a major component of national culture. Whereas during the Roaring Twenties, professional soccer was maturing professionally in the USA, Brazilian teams were still semi-professional. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century soccer was developing much faster in the USA than in the country which would go on to capture five World Cup trophies from 1958 through 2002. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, soccer in Brazil was still a game practised and followed by the elite – the British expatriates and the local bourgeoisie – in private clubs. Post-match celebrations, attended by elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen, were characterized by the consuming of whisky and gin, the singing of English songs and the toasting of the British monarch.²¹ At the same time, soccer in the north-east and some midwestern areas of the USA was already well established as a semi-professional sport, practiced at many factories.

In 1923, Vasco da Gama, a team sponsored by Portuguese shopkeepers in Rio de Janeiro, became the first team in Brazil to offer financial compensation to soccer players. Most of the players were also employed by Portuguese businesses. Over the course of the following decade, European clubs, mostly Italian, enticed Brazilian players, offering good salaries. During the 1920s and early 1930s, at least 47 players from Argentina and Brazil joined Italian professional clubs. Some even made it to the Italian National Team during the World Cup in 1934.²² In order to prevent a massive exodus of players to Europe, in 1933 many clubs in Rio and Sao Paulo turned professional. At about the same time, Argentine soccer also became professional.²³ By the time soccer became professional in these South American countries, the fully-professional ASL had been in existence for a decade.

After the collapse of the ASL, in the 1940s and 1950s, soccer remained a game of ethnic neighbourhoods. Dry cleaners, garages, funeral homes and small factories became the sponsors of soccer teams, which were affiliated with several semi-professional leagues. Very few soccer players made a living from soccer at the time. Soccer, however, was a sport that provided additional revenue for some. Harry Keough, a Saint Louis mailman and a member of the US national team that defeated England during the World Cup in 1950, collected \$200 for 40

games with Kutis Funeral Home in Saint Louis.²⁴ Walter Bahr, also a member of the 1950 US team, generated more significant funds than his Saint Louisian teammate. He earned \$2400 per year as a teacher in Philadelphia and another \$1200 as a player for the Philadelphia Nationals, which were affiliated with the second ASL – a semi-professional league, not to be confused with the first ASL (1921–1931), composed of a dozen teams located in the north-east.²⁵ The only member of team USA 1950 who earned a considerable amount of money as a soccer player was John Sousa. He played for many semi-professional teams in Massachusetts, such as Ponta Delgada FC and Saint Michael FC, predominantly Portuguese teams sponsored by social clubs. By the early 1950s, John Sousa would travel every Saturday from Fall River to Brooklyn to play for the German-Hungarians, another team affiliated in the second ASL. He was earning \$75 per game playing soccer and \$50 per week in his regular job. ‘The soccer money allowed me to retire earlier than many people at my age and move to Florida’, remembered Sousa.²⁶ John Sousa’s combined salaries as a full-time worker and semi-professional soccer player was probably comparable to the salary of a rookie professional baseball player at the time.

Soccer declined in the 1950s and early 1960s, coinciding with the absence of fully-professional league. In 1966, the World Cup in England recorded surprisingly high TV ratings in the USA. The final between England and West Germany was broadcasted in the USA (it was shown on tape delay). Even people in American football-mad states like Texas saw the game on TV and woke up on the following day to articles from the World Cup final on the front page of major newspapers. As a result, American entrepreneurs saw in soccer the potential to create a new sports industry. In 1967, two countrywide professional leagues emerged: the United Soccer Association (USA) and the National Professional Soccer League (NPSL). The USA was recognized by the official soccer body and was characterized by importing entire soccer teams from Europe during their off-seasons. On the other hand, the NPSL was an outlaw league, characterized by aggressive marketing and decent television coverage. After being at odds for several months, in 1968, the leagues agreed to merge and form the NASL.

During the 1970s, there were many ups and downs, and several of the NASL teams, after relocating and changing their names, had to close down. Some of the 24 NASL teams at the league’s peak from 1978 to 1980, however, enjoyed very good health. It was not unusual for the New York Cosmos to attract crowds of more than 70,000 at Giants Stadium. After the arrival of Pelé, the New York Cosmos almost overshadowed in terms of popularity the city’s American football teams – the New York Giants and Jets. Some stadiums were filled to capacity during home games. Such was the case for the Tampa Bay Rowdies.²⁷ Unfortunately, the NASL failed to breed world-class local players and relied heavily on a ‘star system’ based on importing European and South American – albeit aging – big names. After Pelé, Johan Cruyff, Franz Beckenbauer and George Best, just to name a few, retired, interest in soccer declined. In 1984, bad turned to worse, as NASL membership fell from 12 teams to 9. Clive Toye, commissioner of the NASL, had no choice but to suspend operations for the 1985 season.

Toye and NASL officials made an attempt to save the league. In 1983, when it became apparent Colombia would be unable to organize the 1986 World Cup, Henry Kissinger was recruited to present a US bid to play host to the finals. FIFA president João Havelange was thinking ahead, though, and had a contingency plan.

The '86 finals were awarded to Mexico, thanks to a partnership involving FIFA and Televisa. But there was more evidence of Havelange's forward-thinking, as he planned to use the 1984 Olympic Games to gauge the viability of a future US World Cup. Havelange's instincts were rewarded as soccer, played at venues across the USA, outdrew all other sports combined during the Los Angeles Olympics, culminating with 100,000-plus crowds at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

In 1994, the World Cup finally came to America. It still remains the most successful World Cup ever in terms of revenue and attendance. After World Cup euphoria died, professional soccer in the USA was born again. In 1996, Major League Soccer (MLS) was launched. The league operated with 10 teams, increasing to 12 with the addition of the Chicago Fire and the Miami Fusion in 1998. At the beginning, teams such as the Los Angeles Galaxy, New England Revolution and San Jose Earthquakes registered averages of 17,000 fans per game – crowds typical for mid-size first division European clubs. As opposed to the NASL, MLS has not relied exclusively on the import of expensive internationals. Of course, some famous internationals were hired to buttress the quality of play, but their number was not as significant as in the NASL. Famous internationals such as Roberto Donadoni of Italy, Lothar Matthäus of Germany, Hristo Stoitchkov of Bulgaria and Carlos Valderrama of Colombia were enticed by the MLS to contribute to the development of American-born players. Unfortunately, however, after the beginning of the new millennium, not only did the MLS fold two teams (Miami Fusion and Tampa Bay Mutiny), but the league also registered accumulative losses of about \$300 million. Some teams reported a decline in attendance of more than 50% and TV ratings of the league were mediocre compared to those of American football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey.

During the initial years of its existence, MLS had to pay ESPN and ABC the airtime and had to cover the production and cost of its matches.²⁸ Until the beginning of the millennium, many people speculated about an imminent collapse of the league. In 2007, the situation changed drastically when the LA Galaxy, one of MLS's Californian franchises, announced the signing of David Beckham, one of the most popular athletes in the world. By signing Beckham, league officials made a bold attempt to popularize soccer in the USA.²⁹ Has Beckham achieved what Pelé struggled to do in the 1970s? Is the new soccer league doomed like the many other American professional soccer leagues of the past? In order to answer these questions, let us analyse why these leagues failed and what are the major problems of the existing literature.

American soccer and exceptionalism

According to proponents of American exceptionalism in sports history, such as Andrei Markovits, soccer's place in US society was 'overcrowded' by baseball from below and by American football from above. Once baseball and American football had filled the gap, basketball and hockey made soccer's development impossible. Claiming that soccer was as American as baseball and as popular as football would be an exaggeration. However, underestimating the existence of American soccer and ignoring the episodes of popularity of the game would silence important aspects of the American sporting experience. Certainly, the game was marginalized by baseball, but soccer was not 'crowded out' by all American sports. Baseball, American football, basketball and ice hockey did not develop with the same velocity or on

the same time line.³⁰ Whereas baseball has been rooted in American society since the mid-nineteenth century, basketball was an ethnic sport in the 1920s and ice hockey would not become popular in most of the USA until the 1960s. Needless to say, the fate of American football was still clouded at the turn of the century; therefore, it was not a significant threat to soccer. An extremely violent sport that produced a significant death toll in 1905, American football was to be prohibited by President Theodore Roosevelt. In addition, it was not until 1922 that football became professional. At the time, professional football could not 'overcrowd' soccer, which had already become professional and was doing quite well.

This first discrepancy of the exceptionalist theory is followed by others. According to Markovits and Hellerman, people around the world increasingly listen to the same music, watch the same movies, read the same books and care about the same fashion. So far, very few critiques have contested this argument. The second issue raised by the authors in their book, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*, is that just as America has never developed a large socialist movement, it has also never accepted soccer. This argument, however, is even less convincing than the authors' first. As we have already seen, American sports did not develop with the same pace, nor did they develop on the same time line. On the other hand, the 1920s were known as the 'golden years of American soccer'. It is no wonder then why *The Bethlehem Globe* asked a pertinent question in an article titled *Will Pro Football Crowd Soccer?*³¹ This article appeared in 1919, and it included a debate over the fate of soccer during a period in which soccer was actually very popular. Seventy years after journalists discussed the fate of soccer, Markovits and Hellerman provided the naïve explanation that soccer's place in American society was 'crowded out' from above by football before soccer had a chance to become popular. But how could that be the case if soccer was already more popular than football in 1919? Obviously, it could not.

By exclusively focusing on baseball, football, basketball and ice hockey, Markovits and Hellerman did not consider the enormous wave of immigrants (several million at the turn of the century) that reshaped the host society. The newcomers did not follow American sports upon arrival, but rather practiced and followed European sports, with soccer being the most prevalent. According to Markovits, 'immigrants wanted to Americanize and therefore adopted American sports after they settled in their new country'.³² Such beliefs were common for social scientists at the turn of the twentieth century. Contemporary studies, however, show that newcomers are anything but willing to Americanize. Besides this old-fashioned approach, Markovits's theory has another serious flaw, probably the most important one. By claiming that sport's space in each society is limited, the author does not consider that societies are constantly reshaped. American society was relatively homogeneous until the 1850s. After that, and especially toward the turn of the century, immigration ceased to be homogeneous and became heterogeneous.³³ Predominantly, Anglo-Saxon immigration gave way to immigrants originating from Ireland, as well as from central, southern and eastern Europe. The new nature of immigration reshaped American society as a whole. Several million immigrants arrived at the turn of the century and therefore provided an additional 'space' for sports. Some of this additional 'space' was occupied by soccer – the world's most popular game.

By the early 1920s, the number of teams affiliated with the Boston and District Soccer League had grown to 18.³⁴ At the beginning of the century, the teams were predominantly British. After the First World War, many other immigrants moved to

Massachusetts and fielded soccer teams. As many as three Portuguese teams – the Portuguese-Americans, Saint Michael and Lusitania Recreation Club of Cambridge – were competing in the league at the beginning of the 1920s. Some of the Portuguese teams were sponsored by social clubs. According to the *Boston Globe*, 16 February 1924, Lusitania Recreation Club was founded in 1922. The Club still exists and it is located at 45, Fifth Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Armenian-Americans were another non-British team affiliated with the Boston and District League (see Figure 1). All of the players had Armenian names; some were displaced by Turkish genocide and oppression. According to George Collins, a sportswriter from the *Boston Globe* in the 1920s, some of the Armenian players were Turkish citizens who had represented their country of birth during international matches in Istanbul.³⁵

At the beginning of the century, Germany became the major source of immigration to the USA, surpassing Ireland and Italy. Although the number of German immigrants in Massachusetts was very low compared to other states, a group of German immigrants founded Victoria Sporting Club and joined the Boston and District League. ‘This new German team is composed of players who with only one exception all learned their soccer in the homeland’, Collins reported in the *Globe* (see Figure 2). Collins concludes the article with an interesting comment: ‘In what other country in the world will you find such a heterogeneous mass playing soccer or any other sport? In the Boston district alone, there are Irish, English, Scots, Swedes, Norwegians, Armenians, Turks, Welsh, Portuguese, Canadians, South Africans, Chinese and Germans, not forgetting our own boys who of late years have been fast picking up the soccer game’.³⁶ This article clearly proves that many immigrants continued to play soccer once they settled in the USA.



Figure 1. *The Boston Globe*, 16 February 1924.



Figure 2. *The Boston Globe*, 5 March 1924.

The development of amateur soccer in Massachusetts was tremendous. Along with amateur teams, semi-professional teams enjoyed popularity. In 1920, the *Boston Globe* announced the foundation of a semi-professional soccer league sponsored by local factories: ‘Manufacturers’ League seems to be a sure thing for the coming season. Many of the big plants hereabout have soccer teams and with the combination of teams representing Fore River, United Shoe, General Electric, Sturtevents, Trimont, American Woolen Mills and one or two more, a wonderful league could be run’.³⁷ The league indeed was founded in 1921. This evidence points to the significant popularity of soccer in the USA before the Great Depression, a historical fact that earlier scholarship has either underestimated or overlooked. Previous research has neither adequately documented nor fully explained the game’s localized popularity and national marginalization.

American soccer and nativism

Markovits is not the only scholar who has unsuccessfully attempted to explain the failure of soccer in the USA. Some other scholars provide the explanation that the failure of American soccer is due to nativist feelings.³⁸ Certainly, at the turn of the twentieth century, some Americans, who were probably pushed by the popular nativist propaganda of the time, despised many foreign customs and the way the new arrivals nourished themselves and appeared in their ethnic clothing. As the twentieth century unfolded, elements from foreign cultures and values that had been considered un-American became more and more accepted. At the turn of the century, a Bostonian protestant ‘Brahmin’ would never have marched for Saint

Patrick alongside an Irish immigrant, whereas nowadays, 17 March has become a day of celebration for Boston residents as well as the leaders of the city and state. And they are not celebrating Evacuation Day – an official holiday in Massachusetts and an important moment in American history – but rather an ethnic holiday. This is a perfect example of something that was considered un-American, but became perfectly American over the course of a century and is currently observed nationwide.

The same could be said for food: most likely, a respectable businessman from New York City would never have consumed a bagel or knish at a Lower East Side deli at the turn of the twentieth century. Nowadays, bagels are considered as American as apple pie, not only in the USA but also around the world. American fast food chains have adopted them and in this way, they have spread around the world as American cuisine. Bagels are also on the menu of many trendy cafés in Paris and London, and if the French or the English are asked to name the person who invented them, they might mention the Americans and not the eastern European Jews who took the recipe with them while immigrating to the New World. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexican food was without any doubt popular in Texas, New Mexico and southern California and would have been considered foreign elsewhere in the USA. Nowadays, Mexican cuisine has become the ‘national’ cuisine of the south-west of the USA, and Mexican restaurants, and especially Mexican dishes, are omnipresent from New England to the state of Washington. Within the course of several decades, what was considered un-American has become accepted and totally American to such an extent that many restaurants are listed in guides as Tex-Mex.

Another vivid example could even be found in American political life. When Al Smith was defeated in the 1928 presidential election, it was largely due to his ethnic origins. Several decades later, John F. Kennedy was not crippled by his Irishness and managed to defeat Richard Nixon. In 2001, the fact that Al Gore chose an orthodox Jew for his running mate was not the reason why George W. Bush defeated him. Such observations from American political life, food and festivities, in which ethnic values take over more historically ‘American’ ones, raise the following pertinent questions: What is American and what is un-American? Was soccer as ‘un-American’ as some scholars say it was?

‘Soccer was actually considered an American game during my childhood [1920s–1930s]’, explained Walter Bahr, a veteran from the 1950 US national soccer team.³⁹ Born and raised in Philadelphia, Bahr learned how to play soccer with thousands of other children at a sports club called the Lighthouse. John Sousa, a teammate of Bahr’s on the national team, had a similar growing up experience in Massachusetts.⁴⁰

After the first, fully professional, ASL folded in 1931, soccer existed as a semi-professional sport until 1967. By the end of the 1960s, American football – especially after the foundation of the Super Bowl – and baseball – were broadcast on television regularly, generating huge revenues for the leagues. Soccer matches were not broadcasted and, therefore, not watched by the average American, who was at the time enjoying frequently on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays live baseball and football games and the immensely popular Monday Night Football. Many fans would simply stay home and watch Monday Night Football. Many restaurants and stores had to modify their schedules. When soccer briefly appeared on television between 1967 and 1968, entire soccer teams were imported from overseas. Many of the players could hardly speak English, and sometimes only the referees on the field

were Americans.⁴¹ To add insult to injury, the commentators were often hired from Great Britain, as was the case for CBS broadcasts.

Certainly, many Americans while watching a game that was played by foreigners and presented to the viewer by journalists with a heavy Irish accent from Belfast (Danny Blanchflower – the main CBS commentator in 1968/1969 – was a former star of Tottenham Hotspur and the National Team of Northern Ireland) would have easily been convinced that soccer was foreign. Yet, even if it was considered un-American by some in the 1960s and 1970s, is it still un-American in the twenty-first century? In Massachusetts, almost 10% of the entire population is Portuguese-speaking. Almost half of these 600,000 people are Brazilians who have settled in Massachusetts over the course of the last four decades.

Brazilians have settled in large numbers in several cities in the USA. They are well represented in Atlanta, Boston, Miami and New York City. Since many Brazilians are undocumented, it is very difficult to determine their number in Massachusetts – a problem commonly encountered and described by scholars. Therefore, the estimated number of Brazilian immigrants differs significantly from source to source.⁴² Brazilians adore soccer: it is a part of their culture. Considering their passion for soccer, there is no doubt that wherever Brazilians settle, sooner or later they get involved in soccer. In the 1970s, at a well-known Jewish resort in upstate New York that employed hundreds of Brazilians as dishwashers, busboys, waiters and chambermaids, ‘there [were] even Brazilian soccer teams from the various hotels that compete[d] with each other’, observed the anthropologist Maxine Margolis.⁴³ The same type of work-related soccer activities involving Brazilians was documented even earlier in Massachusetts, where ‘in the 1960s, an American businessman organized a soccer team in Lowell, [MA] ... about 20 Brazilians from Belo Horizonte were hired by the businessman ... they later on decided to remain in the city and help other family members follow them’.⁴⁴

The businessman who brought the Brazilians to Massachusetts was in fact Greek and he personally assisted more than 100 players to come to Massachusetts. John Bertos, a Greek immigrant who owned a janitorial company employing some 200 workers, was so passionate about soccer that he invested considerable funds in a semi-professional team affiliated with the second ASL, not to be confused with the first ASL (1921–1931). Bertos acquired the Boston Astros in 1968. From 1968 until the mid-1970s, he made many trips to Belo Horizonte and personally recruited players from the junior team of Atletico Mineiro. Upon arrival, he would assist the players to find housing and often employ many of them in his company (they would work during the week and play on weekends for the Astros).⁴⁵ When the Astros were based in Lowell, home games were played in front of 1000 spectators at the municipal stadium. When the Astros moved to Fall River, the average crowd attending games was between 4000 and 5000 spectators. When the Astros briefly played in Boston, Nickerson Field often had capacity crowds. ‘The Portuguese from Fall River loved us ... spectators were waiting for our bus in front of the stadium, people hugged us, kissed us ... we were treated like celebrities’.⁴⁶ Throughout most of their existence the Astros were predominantly a Brazilian team. In 1973, for instance, nine of the 11 players on the Astros starting lineup were recent Brazilian immigrants (see Figure 3).⁴⁷ Most of these players assisted their families and relatives to immigrate. Francisco Carvalho, a former forward for the Astros, brought five brothers and his mother, who was a widow. It is interesting to note that the number of Brazilians in Massachusetts prior to the foundation of the Astros was not



Figure 3. John Bertos, personal archive.

significant. Carvalho's mother used to invite about 40 people (almost the entire Brazilian population in Lowell at that time) to their house to enjoy Brazilian food for the holidays – 'we did not have any Brazilian restaurants [in 1970] and people were homesick, craving Brazilian dishes'.⁴⁸ From being an insignificant minority four decades ago, Brazilians of Massachusetts are not only the largest group of Portuguese-speaking immigrants in Massachusetts, outnumbering the immigrants from Portugal and Cape Verde, they are also the fastest growing immigrant group in the State since the beginning of the millennium.

The Brazilians have assimilated into North American society, retaining their affinity for the sport – soccer – of their homeland; just as immigrant Greeks, Italians, Scottish et al., became a fundamental part of the fabric of American society throughout the twentieth century. Let us go back to the discussion of the un-American character of soccer, as presented by some scholars. Even if soccer was considered un-American by some residents of Massachusetts in the 1960s, nowadays the Brazilians are so passionate that when the Brazilian national team plays friendly games at the Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Massachusetts, the stadium fills to capacity. Significant crowds turn up for friendly games of teams such as FC Barcelona, Benfica SL, Cruzeiro EC, Celtic FC, Sporting CP, Chelsea FC, Internazionale and AC Milan, which have visited Massachusetts during their off-seasons.

The explanation that American soccer was never successful because its place in American society was already taken by other sports is not convincing because, again, the four major American sports did not develop simultaneously and on the same timeline. Until the early 1920s, the only professional team sports in the USA were baseball and soccer. At that point, there was no professional competition from American football, which remained a predominantly college sport until the 1950s.

If nativism was deeply rooted in American society at the turn of the twentieth century, that has changed in subsequent decades. American society from the early twentieth century has very little to do with post-Second World War America. And American society of today is totally different from both. If soccer was considered un-American because most of the players in the NASL were foreigners in the 1970s, today's MLS players are, by contrast, predominantly American and college educated. Evidently, the un-Americanism that could have crippled the NASL, if anything like that happened at all, today it is no longer applicable to the MLS.

The failure of American professional soccer has not been explained and analysed thoroughly by the exceptionalists. It was not properly done by scholars who have argued that American nativism was at the origin of this failure. The following parts of the essay will analyse why the ALPFC, the ASL and the NASL have all folded. The current problems encountered by MLS will be also discussed.

The forgotten past and clouded future of US professional soccer from the perspective of Massachusetts

Until recently, scholars have attempted to explain the failure of US professional soccer in the same way over different periods of time, notably in 1894, in the 1930s and in the 1970s. For them, soccer was either overcrowded by genuine American sports, or the game was rejected by the American public as a result of its 'foreign' origins. For our part, we believe that American professional soccer failed each time (in 1894, in the 1930s and in the 1970s) for different reasons.

In 1894, the founders of the ALPFC knew very little about soccer. Excited to learn that soccer games in England were regularly bringing together tens of thousands of spectators, the founders were motivated mostly by profit to found a new professional soccer league to generate additional revenue from their otherwise empty stadia during the baseball offseason. The schedule was poorly planned, and many of the games were played during the week. Obviously, the workers who were the primary target as a clientele could not attend because they were working at the factories.

The credibility of some teams was called into question when the Baltimore Orioles, an imported team of British professionals, demolished the Washington Senators, a team that was coached by a baseball manager and had some baseball players in its ranks, 10 goals to 1. Some teams, notably the Washington Senators, believed that by employing some of their baseball players and coaches, they would attract baseball fans to follow the soccer teams. They were wrong. Not only had the huge disparity between the classy British professionals and the maladroit American amateurs and players of baseball caused a tremendous decline in attendance (the games that took place on 18 October in Brooklyn and New York City registered just 18 and 50 spectators, respectively),⁴⁹ but the US Government got involved and threatened to investigate the illegal signings of foreign players. The Secretary of the Treasury,⁵⁰ John G. Carlisle, stated that the 'Immigration Bureau of the Treasury Department will investigate the allegations made' that the Baltimore Orioles were illegally employing foreign players.⁵¹ Frustrated by their bitter defeat, the Washington Senators reported the Baltimore Orioles to the authorities for the 'illegal' use of British professionals.

The poor schedule, uneven strength of teams, poor attendance (which resulted in disappointing gate receipts) and the intention of the US Government to investigate

certain teams complicated the development of the new professional soccer league. The situation became critical when the media spread rumours that a new professional baseball league was to be founded. In an article titled *Conference of Promoters of the New Baseball League*, the *Washington Post* speculated that foundation of a new baseball league could lead to a 'baseball war next season'.⁵² The new league that was to be called the American Association of Base Ball Clubs was a direct attempt to revive the American Association, which had existed from 1882 until 1891, challenging during that period the National Association for dominance of professional baseball. On 18 October 1894, delegates from seven cities met in Philadelphia and decided to field teams in New York City, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Milwaukee.⁵³ The foundation of such a league was considered a direct threat by the owners of baseball and soccer teams from the National League (NL). Additional baseball teams in New York City, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington and Chicago would have created a conflict in six out of eight cities, where the NL fielded baseball teams; in four of these cities, the baseball owners had fielded a soccer team affiliated with the ALPFC. The newly born soccer league had peripheral interest for the owners of baseball teams in Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, New York City, Philadelphia and Washington. It had proven to be financially unsuccessful. Although the American Association of Base Ball Clubs never fielded a team and the NL did not have any direct competition until the foundation of the American League in 1901, the owners of the NL must have taken the threat seriously. After a meeting in New York City, the owners of the ALPFC announced that they 'decided to bring the season to a close as the games were not supported by the public'.⁵⁴ In fact, their real intended purpose was to deal with the imminent threat of the new baseball league and to focus on baseball – a sport that was financially successful and activity with which they were comfortable to deal.

The first ASL, which existed from 1921 until 1931, was probably one of the best soccer leagues in the world during that time. Many professional soccer players from Austria, Czechoslovakia, England, Hungary, Scotland, Ireland and even Egypt moved to the USA. Bela Guttmann, a famous Hungarian player who also later coached S.L. Benfica, F.C. Porto and C.A. Penarol, to name a few famous teams, played most of his career as a soccer player in the USA. In 1926, he joined the Brooklyn Wanderers. In 1932, he finished his playing career with Hakoah All Stars. George Henderson, a legendary midfielder from Glasgow Rangers; Billy Hibbert, a forward from Newcastle United and the English national team and Mickey Hamil, a defender who had played for Manchester United, Manchester City and the Irish national team, had all joined ASL teams. The list of soccer players is long and not limited to the British Isles and Central Europe; it also includes Scandinavian countries (Sweden and Norway) and the Netherlands.⁵⁵ Given that soccer did not turn professional in many Scandinavian countries and Germany until the late 1950s, moving to the USA was a unique opportunity for Scandinavian players to become professionals and earn considerable amount of money. Therefore, it is safe to say that in the 1920s there was a real exodus of European professional soccer players toward the USA.

The primary motivation of these professionals was the high salaries that the American club owners offered. On 31 August 1925, the *Fall River Globe* published an article titled *American Menace Arouses the Scots: Scottish Football Association Peeved at the Invasion of the Team Owners From States*. The article described how

some Scottish players, notably Partick Thistle's Hugh Collins, would receive salaries from Scottish teams, and despite their contracts with these teams, would move to the States, where they were paid much higher salaries. The American owners would hire the Scottish players by completely ignoring the fact most of the players were under contract. According to the USFA, 'the professional engagement applie [d] only to Great Britain and Northern Ireland'.⁵⁶ This antagonism could have been one of the reasons why the football associations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales withdrew from FIFA for several decades.

The economic hardship of the Great Depression, which left every third person in the country out of work (even devoted fans could not afford to pay \$1.10 in New York City or the \$0.75 in Boston to see their teams play), was a major factor contributing to the decline of professional soccer in the USA at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s. Entire teams relocated in order to survive. The famous Fall River Marksmen moved to New York in search of more soccer fans and became the New York Yankees (not to be mistaken with the baseball team). The Great Depression crippled more than just soccer. This economic 'black plague' even made things difficult for America's pastime – baseball. In 1932, 180,000 baseball fans went to see games at Fenway Park, the Boston Red Sox recording an average attendance of about 2000 fans per game. The professional baseball league managed to survive, whereas the ASL died.

Why did professional baseball survive, whereas professional soccer disappeared for a few decades? In 1931, the only true professional team sports in the USA were baseball and soccer. American football was by and large a college sport; basketball was a sport practiced at YMCAs and universities; and, finally, ice hockey was a Canadian sport limited in popularity to Boston, Chicago, Detroit and New York.

Baseball, as compared to soccer, was more commercialized even at its early stages of development. The absence of numbers on the shirts of baseball players, which lasted until 1929, had made baseball scorecards very popular. Baseball score-keeping is the practice of recording the details of a game (pitching, hitting, home runs, etc.) as the game unfolds. Baseball scorecards were sold at ticket booths and concession stands. They were very popular among the fans during the 1920s–1930s and therefore represented additional revenue for the team owners. In a similar fashion as the baseball owners were earning funds from the sales of these scorecards, the movie industry was able to survive by generating additional revenue. It is interesting to note that during the Depression, Hollywood was not affected by the economic crisis as much as other sectors were. As historian Jacques Portes put it, owners of movie theatres generated additional revenue, which was more significant in some cases than the sale of tickets, by selling popcorn and soda.⁵⁷ The existence of the ASL coincided with the Prohibition. Therefore, the soccer league could not benefit from any beer sales. In a similar fashion as food sales helped the Hollywood industry to survive during the Depression, beer and hotdog sales provided additional revenue for baseball team owners throughout much of the 1930s and the 1940s. At some stadiums, such as the Sportsman's Park in Saint Louis, concession sales (mostly beer sales) represented a major source of revenue for the owners.

And baseball owners, like the film industry, controlled their venues. Baseball teams owned and operated most of the major professional stadia in existence in the first half of the twentieth century in the USA. Baseball owners had vested interests in these buildings and were able to absorb losses during the economic downturn. Soccer owners, with exceptions such as Bethlehem Steel and Sam Mark in Fall

River, did not control their stadia, instead sharing existing structures, often as a secondary tenant.

Radio was a new medium that grew rapidly during the 1920s. By the mid-1920s, baseball scores were broadcasted several times per day by many radio stations in the USA. Before the Great Depression, some important games were broadcast live. At first, baseball owners were convinced radio broadcasting of baseball games would hurt attendance and some opposed it. Little by little, though, this changed and by the mid-1930s some teams, notably the New York Yankees, would generate \$100,000 of additional revenue from radio broadcasting.⁵⁸ Although broadcasting of baseball would not reach its mature stage until the early 1940s, it helped the game even at early stages by allowing unemployed workers who could not afford to buy tickets to follow games at home (or at the local coffee shop) or by generating additional revenue for some teams. Soccer was, on the other hand, almost absent from radio broadcasting: only a few shows were broadcasted in the late 1920s by New York- and New Jersey-based radio stations. In 1927, between April and October only the following stations broadcast soccer: WJZ New York, WMSG New York and WKBQ. The broadcasts on WKBQ were titled either *Soccer Football Talk* or *Soccer Football Gossip*. They all lasted 15 min.⁵⁹ The WMSG station broadcast one show titled *Soccer Talk*.⁶⁰ The only show that looked a bit different was titled *Soccer Football by Dr G.R. Manning*. Dr G. Randolph Manning was an English-born, German-educated physician who had moved to the USA and was elected the first president of the USFA.⁶¹ The show was broadcasted on WJZ New York and lasted 10 min.⁶² According to the radio broadcast schedule, published in the *New York Times*, no more than seven soccer shows were broadcasted throughout the entire year. On the other hand, baseball was omnipresent on the radio.

Finally, baseball was easy to broadcast: the game is very slow and almost everybody can easily describe the actions of the pitcher, its antagonist – the batter, the infielders and outfielders. On the other hand, even today it requires a lot of skill to vividly describe action on the soccer pitch. Certainly, at that time (given as well the early stage of radio broadcasting) very few journalists would have been capable of broadcasting a soccer game while capturing the listeners' attention with utmost intensity.

All of these factors – sale of baseball scorecards, sale of food and beer at concession stands, control of stadia, radio broadcasting (allowing people to keep up with the game on a daily basis) and especially revenues from broadcasting – helped professional baseball survive during the 1930s and consolidate during the 1940s. Professional soccer, as a result of its under commercialization as compared to baseball, could not benefit from these factors and was therefore much more vulnerable during the initial years of the Great Depression. After experiencing significant decline in attendance and after frequent moves of soccer teams, from city to city in search of sufficient number of spectators, the ASL collapsed in 1931.

During the 1940s, 1950s and much of the 1960s, soccer was ghettoized in ethnic neighbourhoods. 'There is no doubt that the immigrants kept soccer alive', commented Walter Bahr.⁶³ In 1947, Ponta Delgada FC, an all-Portuguese, semi-professional soccer team from Fall River, Massachusetts, represented the USA during the North American international competition in Cuba. Although some clubs have been heavily represented by the national teams of many great soccer nations, this is one of the few times a club, whether professional or semi-professional, has represented an entire country. While soccer was absent as a professional sport, other

sports were gradually becoming commercial enterprises. By the mid-1970s, Major League Baseball and the National Football League (NFL) generated hundreds of millions of dollars from TV contracts, and many of their teams were financially successful even before counting funds from gate receipts. Soccer, on the other hand, whether American or international, was under commercialized before the election of João Havelange as a president of FIFA in 1974. It still took Havelange and his FIFA partners another 10 years to develop a sophisticated marketing strategy to sell the TV rights of the World Cup and other international soccer tournaments.⁶⁴ In the USA, the NASL benefited from a TV contract with CBS. Expecting to achieve similar results as it did during the World Cup in 1966, the television company was disappointed by the TV ratings of the NASL during its initial season in 1968. In 1969, CBS suspended the contract with the NASL, and the league depended on revenue from gate receipts for almost a decade: a factor that distinguished the under-commercialized American soccer from the hyper-commercialized American football, baseball, basketball and (to some extent) ice hockey. In 1978, ABC announced that it would televise nine matches per year, including the Soccer Bowl, for the next three seasons. While each NASL club was allocated less than \$30,000 from the deal, each of the 28 NFL teams received \$6 million per season from TV contracts.⁶⁵ The deal with ABC lasted two years.⁶⁶ During these two years, the quality of broadcasts was very poor and games were interrupted on a regular basis for commercials. Deprived again of a TV contract and with attendances and the number of affiliated teams in decline, the NASL struggled at the beginning of the 1980s. An expensive legal battle against the NFL proved exorbitant for some NASL owners.⁶⁷ Although the soccer league finally won the case, its membership had declined to nine teams, the league was going bankrupt and the funds that the NASL was awarded for successfully suing the NFL for violating the Sherman Antitrust Act went to a liquidating trust to pay off creditors.⁶⁸ As it turned out, though, the ruling in *NASL vs. NFL* cleared the way for cross-ownership investment in MLS in the 1990s.

The lack of TV contracts, aggressive growth (within a few years, the NASL had 24 teams), moves of teams from city to city and dependence on aging international stars contributed to the NASL's decline in some areas, notably in Massachusetts. NASL teams in Massachusetts – the Boston Beacons, the Boston Minutemen and the New England Teamen – did not fully benefit from the huge ethnic support of soccer in the state. Not even the signing of Eusebio in 1975 nor the coaching of the famous Irish player Noel Cantwell (West Ham United, Manchester United and the Irish National Team) could convince the numerous Portuguese and Irish immigrants to attend home games of the teams. Part of the reason for the low attendance numbers of NASL teams located in the Greater Boston area was the tremendous following of ethnic amateur and semi-professional teams.

The Luso American Soccer Association (LASA) was founded in 1973. Within a few years, the number of affiliated teams grew to 20. LASA benefited from a sophisticated structure and solid fundraising, based on the traditional club system of Portugal. Each season, distinguished clergy such as Bishop O'Malley (now Cardinal O'Malley) and dignitaries such as the Portuguese Consul General attended annual fundraising dinners of the league.⁶⁹ Sponsors of the league ranged from small, family-run businesses to big corporations owned by wealthy Portuguese-Americans.⁷⁰ The large Portuguese community of New Bedford, Fall River and Taunton preferred the intimate atmosphere at municipal stadiums to the professional games of the NASL teams: The average attendance of LASA teams ranged from 3000 to 5000

spectators.⁷¹ The Boston Astros, affiliated with the second ASL, were disputing games in front of similar crowds while playing in Fall River. When the Astros moved to Boston they often played before large crowds. John Bertos had reached a \$10,000 deal with a grocery store. According to the terms of the deal most of the tickets for Nickerson Field – the home field of the Boston Astros – were given to clients of the grocery store who had spent a certain amount of money on groceries. More than 15,000 spectators attended the home games of the Boston Astros during this partnership with Stop and Shop.⁷² Had these spectators (the ones who attended LASA games and the matches of the Boston Astros) attended the matches of the Boston Minutemen or the New England Teamen instead, some of these NASL teams might have survived.

Compared with the NASL of the 1970s, MLS benefits from decent media coverage, especially on television. Unfortunately, however, many local fans prefer to follow European and international teams and tournaments. The current average attendance of New England Revolution home games is about 12,000 spectators per game. On the other hand, when the Brazilian national team plays friendly games at the Gillette Stadium at Foxboro, Massachusetts, or Barcelona, Celtic, Chelsea, Internazionale, or AC Milan play off-season exhibition games, the same stadium has attracted as many as 67,584 spectators. Attendance is important for professional sports; TV ratings are, however, crucial.

In an attempt to popularize soccer in the USA, in 2007, MLS enticed David Beckham. The signing of Beckham by the LA Galaxy was termed the ‘Beckham Experiment’ by sports journalist Grant Wahl. The purpose of the Beckham Experiment was to increase the attendance of soccer matches and to improve TV ratings. Simultaneously, MLS executives hoped that the transfer would be financially rewarding. The transfer proved to be financially rewarding: the LA Galaxy sold more than 300,000 jerseys adorned with the name of the Englishman; Beckham helped the team secure a \$20 million jersey deal with Herbalife and, finally, the signing helped convince ESPN to sign an eight-year, \$64 million broadcasting contract with MLS.⁷³ After a slight improvement during the second season of Beckham in MLS, attendance and especially TV viewership declined sharply. In 2006, the average number of MLS viewers on ESPN2 was 263,000 (for the whole country). The number of viewers increased to 289,000 in 2007, but declined to 253,000 in 2008. During the same year, some MLS franchises experienced a decline at the gate: FC Dallas lost 14% of its spectators (13,024 average attendance for 2008); Kansas City Wizards lost 7.8% (averaging 10,686 spectators) and the Colorado Rapids lost 7.4% (bringing down their attendance to 13,659 spectators).⁷⁴ In the Boston area, the World Cup in 2006 and *Copa America* in 2007 registered very good TV ratings. The match between France and Portugal, broadcasted by the Spanish-language channel Univision/Telefuturo, registered a TV rating of 1.3 and 4 shares. In other words, 1.3 % of all the households in possession of a TV receiver (which represented in this case 31,000 households in the Boston/Manchester TV market) watched this game. The significance of the share is also very important: In this case, a rating of 1.3 (31,000 households.) represents four shares of the Boston/Manchester TV market. Germany vs. Italy registered a score of 1.1 ratings with three shares (26,000 households), whereas Brazil vs. Australia racked up a 0.9 rating and three shares (21,000 households). In 2007, during *Copa America* the match Brazil vs. Argentina registered a score of 1.2 ratings with 3 shares (28,000 households), whereas Mexico vs. Argentina got a 0.9 rating and two shares (21,000

households).⁷⁵ In comparison, in 2006, the New England Revolution's best score during the regular season on ESPN/ESPN2 for the whole season was a 0.5 rating and two shares (13,000 households), whereas in 2007 it was a 0.75 rating and two shares (18,000 households).⁷⁶ It should be noted that ESPN/ESPN2 are available at many homes at the Boston /Manchester market, which is not the case for Univision/Telefutera. The disparity between the TV ratings (even though ESPN/ESPN2 is available to a larger public) clearly shows a genuine interest in international soccer and relative lack of interest in following the MLS on TV.

When speaking about soccer in the USA, it would be unfair to exclude women's soccer: the game is usually associated with the millions of girls who play it nationwide. Also, the USA is one of the very few countries in which a fully professional women's soccer league exists. In a similar fashion as in men's soccer, very few scholars write about women's soccer in the USA, with Andrei Markovits being the most prominent exception. By extending further his exceptionalist theory, Markovits argues that women's soccer is a recent phenomenon. It is strong and well established in countries, where male soccer teams are weak, such as the USA, Norway and China.⁷⁷

In 2010, the Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) kicked off its second season. The predecessor of the WPS was the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), which existed from 2001 until 2003. In 1999, the Women's World Cup turned to be a huge success. The US Women's National Team attracted more than 400,000 spectators for their six matches (an average of 69,000 per match) and all of the 32 games were televised.⁷⁸ The final between China and the USA garnered more than 10 million viewers (11.4 Nielsen rating) and it still is the most watched soccer match on television in the USA. Such attendance and especially viewership were equal to, if not better than, TV ratings and gate receipts from baseball – the American pastime. As a result, a group of investors founded WUSA, trying to capitalize on that unprecedented success of soccer in the USA. After its first season, however, the WUSA's attendances and TV ratings were disappointing: in fact, they were even lower than these of MLS. WUSA switched games broadcasting from the well established and frequently available TNT to the lesser-known Pax Network, where viewership plummeted (viewership averaged 100,000 households nationwide).⁷⁹ Why was the Women's World Cup a huge success, whereas the WUSA an enormous disappointment for investors?

Based on attendance at the 1999 Women's World Cup, it was estimated that the overwhelming support for the tournament came from girls aged 8–18.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, the 1999 World Cup was an exception. One of the key problems investors of the WUSA did not anticipate was that the millions of girls who play soccer in the USA do not necessarily watch the game on television or in the stadiums. Nor do their parents, who favour the junior games of their daughters, whether by choice or obligation. Whereas the World Cup was held in June and July – during the junior leagues' offseason – the WUSA's beginning and end of the season coincided with the active seasons of most junior leagues around the country. This was certainly a handicap, probably the major one. The patriotic feelings and euphoria which fuelled the huge success of the Women's World Cup had diminished. WUSA was founded in 2000, but curiously did not begin play until 2001. Had the league begun operations in 2000, the year immediately following the Women's World Cup, WUSA would have certainly benefited from the momentum and enthusiasm the tournament had created among the American public. The league counted eight teams and targeted young

consumers and families. During its first season, WUSA had an average attendance of 8103 spectators per game, but this number declined quickly. In 2002, the average attendance was 6982, and by the third and last season of WUSA, attendance was down by 4% and averaged 6644 spectators.⁸¹ In order to survive, the league had to find eight corporate sponsors willing to pay \$2.5 million per year. Unfortunately, the league found only two corporate sponsors willing to spend that much. The league's other sponsors, including Coca Cola, invested only \$500,000 in the WUSA. In 2003, the league suspended operations as a result of financial difficulties.

A new women's professional soccer league was founded in 2007. WPS began play in 2009. At the end of its first season the WPS struggled to achieve the results of the WUSA during its third and weakest season. The Los Angeles Sol folded after the first season. Saint Louis Athletica followed at midseason of 2010, bringing the number of teams to seven. With rumours half the teams were having financial difficulties, one may wonder if the WPS will surpass the longevity of WUSA. WPS, which might have seemed well established and successful at first sight, actually has a more uncertain future than the men's professional game in the USA.

Conclusion

Let us cite Nathan Abrams, paraphrasing Markovits, and ask the question: 'why is there no more serious scholarship on soccer in the United States?'⁸² Some of the accounts dealing with American soccer were written by scholars at departments of physical education. Lacking essential training as social scientists, these scholars failed to elaborate sophisticated analysis and were merely descriptive. Some other accounts were written by journalists who were too colloquial. The very few social scientists who studied soccer, notably Markovits and Hellerman, as well as Sugden and Tomlinson, were tempted to generalize the failure of American soccer by providing transitory explanations (saturation of the space for sports in American society for the first team⁸³ and nativism and the un-American character of soccer for the second team of scholars).⁸⁴ Although they seemed revolutionary a decade ago, neither of these approaches could adequately explain the failure of professional soccer in the USA over a long period of time.

Professional baseball could barely survive the Great Depression while professional soccer was deracinated by this economic black plague (it is worth noting again that in the 1920s the only true team professional sports were baseball and soccer). The baseball league was helped to survive by the fact its owners controlled their stadia and, even at its early stage, it was generating additional revenue from merchandise sales (notably baseball scorecards), concession sales and radio broadcasting, which soccer never managed to accomplish. The legacy of baseball (the oldest professional sport in the world) and the early commercialization of the sport could have been significant factors for the survival of the league during the Depression years. Soccer, actually, remained under commercialized, as compared to the major American sports, well until the 1970s. Baseball was omnipresent on the radio since early broadcasting in the 1920s. Soccer scores and talk shows were seldom broadcast. By the mid-1930s, some baseball teams were generating significant amounts of revenue from radio broadcasting, whereas the ASL never did.

During the 1920s and 1930s, there was not any clear distinction between ethnic soccer and professional soccer. Many of the ASL teams before turning fully professional were semi-professional teams in which many immigrant workers

played. There were many immigrant working-class supporters of ASL teams throughout the entire existence of the league. Whereas ethnic and professional soccer in the 1920s and 1930s were in the same cluster, the period from the 1970s to today – from Pele’s Cosmos to Beckham’s Galaxy – ethnic and professional soccer have moved in different directions, with ethnic soccer overlapping professional soccer. When major league professional soccer returned to American stadia in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a clear distinction between ethnic and professional soccer. In some areas, notably in Massachusetts, well-developed and well-followed ethnic semi-professional teams and leagues had a negative effect on the development of teams like the Boston Minutemen and the New England Teamen of the NASL. In addition, summer exhibition games of famous European clubs and the abundant broadcasting of the English Premier League, *La Liga*, *Serie A*, Champions League and other international games and tournaments have been competing with MLS, since the renaissance of professional soccer in the USA in 1996.

Perhaps we can credit the exceptionalists for one important observation. The USA is different from the rest of the world in one major aspect: from the 1970s on, there is a clear distinction between the practice of soccer and the following of the sport. Many of the millions of players who practice the sport do not follow it at the stadia or in the media once they take off their boots after their weekend games. In addition, a significant part of the ethnic supporters of soccer in the country favour the clubs and national teams of their countries of origin, which is unlikely to happen in the rest of the world. Maghreb immigrants in France prefer to follow and support teams from the French *Ligue 1* rather than teams from the Tunisian, Algerian and Moroccan leagues. The same applies to first- and second-generation sub-Saharan immigrants in France.

Soccer has enjoyed several moments of popularity in the USA. It was a popular game at the turn of the century; it was almost permanently established as a professional sport during the golden years of the ASL in the 1920s. After a decline during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, soccer came back to America’s sports arenas in the 1970s with the NASL. Now, MLS is hoping to establish itself a world class professional soccer league. Unfortunately, every time soccer has threatened to establish itself as a professional sport on an equal basis with other American team sports, different factors – poor management; internal conflicts; economic hardship during the Depression; lack of fair media coverage and most recently lack of interest from immigrants and overexposure of international soccer on television – have contributed to its decline, momentary disappearance or struggle to survive. Is US professional soccer a momentary passion (as it was at times during the past), or is it a future national sport with a domestic professional league that will stay for good and will be rated among the best in the world one day? The answer is not yet known, but what a thrill, what an absolute enrichment to the game it would be to have the greatest sports power in the world among the world’s finest nations in soccer. And if that happens and America plays one day on the same level with the best in the world, can we dream and look forward to a World Cup final featuring the USA?

Notes

This essay is based on the findings of the Ph.D. dissertation of Steven Apostolov. The dissertation is titled ‘Les Hauts et les Bas du Soccer Professionnel aux Etats-Unis à Partir du Cas du Massachusetts’ (Ph.D. diss., Université de Paris VIII, 2011).

1. *Victory*. Directed by John Huston. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 1981. Despite the participation of Michael Caine, Sylvester Stallone, Max Von Sydow, Pelé, Bobby Moore and many other famous actors and soccer players, *Victory* was not a successful movie. Until recently, Hollywood has dedicated very few movies to soccer. This clearly reflects the attitude of American society toward soccer.
2. *Once in a Lifetime: The Extraordinary Story of the New York Cosmos*. Directed by Paul Crowder. Los Angeles: Miramax, 2006.
3. Tossell. *Playing for Uncle Sam*, 176.
4. Cirino. *US vs. the World*, 6–11.
5. Murray. *The World's Game*, 56.
6. *The Bethlehem Globe*, October 8, 1919. 'Soccer Champions Back to Bethlehem [from Sweden]'.
7. Frank Dell'Apa. 'Steelworker Forged History'. *The Boston Globe*, September 28, 2005, C8; Ann Fleming Jensen (daughter of Tommy Fleming – player of FC Fore River), in discussion with the author, April 30 and July 8, 2008.
8. Goldblatt. *The Ball is Round*, 98.
9. Sam Foulds and Paul Harris. *America's Soccer Heritage*, 28.
10. Logan. "'Pilgrims' progress in Chicago', 198–212.
11. Frank Dell'Apa initially found and interviewed Ann Fleming Jensen. Thanks to Dell'Apa's article and subsequent interviews with Mrs. Fleming Jensen, the author was able to locate the *Warren S. Parker Historical Collection* at the Quincy Public Library. These archives represent an important primary source for researchers who seek to analyse the development of semi-professional soccer at the Fore River Ship Yard.
12. *Warren S. Parker Historical Collection*, Thomas Crane Public Library, Quincy: Massachusetts, Series III, *the Fore River Log*, Vol. 2, No. 1, May 1916, 12.
13. *Warren S. Parker Historical Collection*, Thomas Crane Public Library, Quincy: Massachusetts, Series III, *the Fore River Log*, Vol. 4, No. 6, January 1919, 44–46.
14. Douglas. *The Game of Their Lives*.
15. Robinson. 'The History of Soccer in the City of Saint Louis'.
16. Logan. 'Lace up the Boots, Full Tilt Ahead', 11–12.
17. Ann Fleming Jensen (daughter of Tommy Fleming – player of FC Fore River), in discussion with the author, April 30 and July 8, 2008.
18. John Sousa (US National Team player in 1950), in discussion with the author, May 12, 2008 in York, Pennsylvania.
19. *The Fall River Globe*, September 11, 1925. Advertising for the league opening in the newspaper shows a 50¢ fee for the Brooklyn Wanderers vs. Fall River Marksmen game. In 1928, prices would increase to 75¢ in Boston and \$1,10 in New York City and Brooklyn.
20. In 1925–1926, the ASL was composed of the following 12 soccer teams: Bethlehem Steel FC, Boston Wonder Workers, Brooklyn Wanderers, J&P Coats, Indiana Flooring, Fall River Marksmen, New Bedford Whalers, New York Giants, Newark Skeeters, Philadelphia Field Club, Providence Clamdiggers and Shawsheen Indians. In 1926, the American and the National Leagues were composed of the following 16 baseball teams: Boston Braves, Boston Red Sox, Brooklyn Robins, Chicago Cubs, Chicago White Sox, Cincinnati Reds, Cleveland Indians, Detroit Tigers, New York Giants, New York Yankees, Philadelphia Athletics, Philadelphia Phillies, Pittsburgh Pirates, St. Louis Browns, St. Louis Cardinals and Washington Senators.
21. Murray. *The World's Game*, 35.
22. Martin. *Football and Fascism*, 195.
23. Bellos. *Futebol, the Brazilian Way of Life*, 33.
24. Harry Keough (US National Team player in 1950), in discussion with the author, November 11, 2002 in Saint Louis, Missouri.
25. Walter Bahr (US National Team player in 1950), in discussion with the author, November 19, 2002 in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania.
26. John Sousa (US National Team player in 1950), in discussion with the author, May 12, 2008 in York, Pennsylvania.
27. Ray Hudson (Former player from Newcastle United and Ft. Lauderdale Strikers [NASL]; former coach of Miami Fusion [MLS] and DC United [MLS]; and, currently play-by-

- play analyst for GolTV), in discussion with the author, March 6, 2009. The New York Cosmos is usually credited as the most successful team of the NASL. It could have been the case during the short stint of Pele' with the team. Ironically, if we compare the Tampa Bay Rowdies and the New York Cosmos, we could see that the team from Florida was more consistent in terms of attendance over a long term. According to Hudson, the success of the Rowdies was largely due to the fact that each game in Tampa was preceded by spectacles which involved dancers, acrobats and cheerleaders. After that, many other NASL teams, even the Cosmos, were trying to replicate these shows.
28. Hopkins. *Star-Spangled Soccer*, 100.
 29. Wahl. *The Beckham Experiment*.
 30. Markovits. 'Pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas de Football aux Etats-Unis?', 19–36. Andrei Markovits had further developed this article and later on published his book, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism* with co-author Steven Hellerman.
 31. *The Bethlehem Globe*, October 3, 1919.
 32. Andrei Markovits (author of *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*), in discussion with the author, October 8, 2001 in Oneonta, New York.
 33. Tilly. 'Transplanted Networks'.
 34. *The Boston Globe*, January 2, 1923.
 35. George Collins. 'These Armenian Players are no Slouches at Soccer', *The Boston Globe*, February 16, 1924, 6A. According to Collins, the team was composed of the following players: Panosian, Noobar, Aerad, Haig, Katabian, Hunkiar, Hatchgonitz, Kirkorian, Ashod, Aghagan, Papazian, Caribbean and Koresian.
 36. George Collins. 'German Sport Club Latest in Soccer Field Hereabout', *The Boston Globe*, March 5, 1924, 17A. According to Collins the team was composed of the following players: front row, left to right – Karl Schmatzler, Karl Braun, George Schneider, Otto Svarowsky, S. Sidow; back row – Gerorge Butzky (manager), Herman Siegrist, R. Guenther, Ernst Delniger, Herman Brunchau and Max Korumueller (please note that some of these German first and last names could have been misspelled by Collins). Most of the players were born in Germany. Many of them were also veterans who have fought in the Kaiser's army during WWI.
 37. *The Boston Globe*, January 3, 1920.
 38. Sugden. 'USA and the World Cup'.
 39. Walter Bahr (US National Team player in 1950), in discussion with the author, November 19, 2002 in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania.
 40. John Sousa (US National Team player in 1950), in discussion with the author, May 12, 2008 in York, Pennsylvania.
 41. *Soccer 1967 Annual, Official Publication of the National Professional Soccer League*. St. Louis: The Sporting News, 1967, 3; Manfred Rummel (FC Kaiserslautern, Pittsburgh Phantoms [NPSL] and Kansas City Spurt [NASL] player), in discussion with the author, January 13, 2004.
 42. Steven Apostolov. 'Sports and Brazilian Immigration to the US: the Case of Soccer in Massachusetts'. Paper presented at the First National Conference on Brazilian Immigration to the USA, Harvard University, March 18–19, 2005. It is very hard to determine the number of Brazilian immigrants in the USA because many of them are undocumented. According to the US Census, there are approximately 212,000 Brazilians in the whole country and about 30,000 just in Massachusetts – numbers, in my opinion, unrealistically low (Census Bureau, 2000); the Brazilian Consulate in Boston puts the number of Brazilian immigrants in Boston between 100,000 and 250,000 for the whole New England region (vice consul Rodrigues, e-mail correspondence dated April 4, 2005). For my part, I believe that the number of Brazilian immigrants is around 300,000 in Massachusetts.
 43. Margolis. *Little Brazil*, 12.
 44. Braga-Martes. *Brasileiros nos Estados Unidos*, 61–62.
 45. John Bertos (Owner of the Boston Astros 1968–1975), in discussion with the author, May 19, 2009 in Lowell, Massachusetts. We were welcomed very warmly by Mr. Bertos who gave us several interviews, allowed us to review his personal achieves and most importantly introduced us to several of the Boston Astros players who still reside in New England. Many of these players cordially accepted to talk to us or answered

- questions by e-mail. We were therefore able to document some of the history of the team and especially the Brazilian involvement.
46. Wagner Leao (Midfielder for the Boston Astros 1968–1972), in discussion with the author, June 26, 2009 in Lowell Massachusetts.
 47. Ernane (Ernie) Gomes (Forward for the Boston Astros 1970–1975), e-mail correspondence from July 1 and 5, 2009. See again Figure 3. Ernane Gomes is the third player from right to left, standing up in the back row. On the bottom of the picture, there is a list with the names of the players: Standing: (L to R) – Gustavo Carias, Tony Soares, Ernie Gomes, Carl Benedito.; Front: (L to R) – Joe Santos, Luis Oriveira, Helio Barbosa, Eddie Braga, (capt.) Itamar Alves. Mr. Gomes confirmed about the authenticity of that list in his e-mails.
 48. Francisco Carvalho (Forward for the Boston Astros 1970–1975), in discussion with the author, June 23, 2009.
 49. *The Boston Herald*, October 19, 1894.
 50. It should be noted that at the end of the nineteenth century, the immigration and naturalization service was under the umbrella of the Treasury Department.
 51. *The Boston Herald*, October 19, 1894.
 52. *The Washington Post*, October 15, 1894. ‘Conference of Promoters of the New Baseball League’.
 53. *The Boston Herald*, October 19, 1894. ‘New Factor in Baseball: The American Association Takes Form at Last’.
 54. *The Baltimore Sun*, October 22, 1894. ‘Sudden Notice of an Ended Season’.
 55. Jose, *American Soccer League 1921–1931*, 468–95.
 56. *The Fall River Globe*. August 31, 1925. ‘American Menace Arouses the Scots: Scottish Football Association Peeved at the Invasion of Team Owners From the States’.
 57. Portes, *De la Scène à l’Ecran, Naissance de la Culture de Masse aux Etats-Unis*. Paris, 320.
 58. McChesney. ‘Media Made Sport’, 60.
 59. *The New York Times*, June 26, 1927, X29; *The New York Times*, September 18, 1927, R20; *The New York Times*, October 30, 1927, XX20.
 60. *The New York Times*, April 17, 1927, XX20.
 61. Allaway, Jose and Litterer. *The Encyclopedia of American Soccer*, 160.
 62. *The New York Times*, May 4, 1927, XX18.
 63. Walter Bahr (US National Team player in 1950), in discussion with the author, November 19, 2002 in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania.
 64. Smit. *Pitch Invasion*.
 65. Wangerin. *Soccer in a Football World*, 193.
 66. *Once in a Lifetime: The Extraordinary Story of the New York Cosmos*. Directed by Paul Crowder. Los Angeles: Miramax, 2006.
 67. *NASL v NFL*, 670 F.2d 1249 (2d Cir. 1982), New York City.
 68. Toye. *Kick in the Grass*, 167.
 69. *Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives*, Dartmouth: University of Massachusetts, MC 30/PAA, Vertical File Collection, Box 10, Folder: Soccer Groups, LASA Annual Book: 20 Aniversario, 5. ‘Bispo O’Malley Orador Principal no Banquete do 20 Aniversario’.
 70. *Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives*, Dartmouth: University of Massachusetts, MC 30/PAA, Vertical File Collection, Box 10, Folder: Soccer Groups, LASA Annual Book: 20 Aniversario; LASA Annual Book: 1989. In 1989, LASA had 48 sponsors – businesses which ranged from small family firms to large corporations such as S&F Concrete Contractors Inc. – one of the largest construction firms in New England. In 1993, LASA benefited from the generosity of 59 sponsors. Thirty-nine of these Portuguese-American enterprises still exist.
 71. Angelo Bratsis (United States Soccer Federation – USSF - National Referee Inspector), in discussion with the author, May 6, 2009, in Norwood, Massachusetts. Mr. Bratsis was an international FIFA referee. Before he became professional referee for the NASL, he learned how to officiate while refereeing games for LASA and ASL teams.
 72. John Bertos (Owner of the Boston Astros), in discussion with the author, May 19, 2009 in Lowell, Massachusetts.

73. Wahl. *The Beckham Experiment*, 39–51.
74. Tripp Mickle. 'MLS Attendance, TV Viewership Numbers Slip'. *Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal*, Vol. 11, Issue 27 (November 3–9, 2008), 10.
75. Meg Godin (Marketing Director at Univision New England), e-mail correspondence with the author, dated July 7, 2007. We have received complete Excel Sheets with ratings for all the games, elaborated by Nielsen Media Research. TV ratings for the following tournaments were provided: World Cup in 2006 and Copa America in 2007 for the Boston/Manchester market. It should be noted that we have selected from the entire sheet the games with the best scores.
76. Charlie Shin (Marketing Manager at SUM – Soccer United Marketing), e-mail correspondence with the author, dated January 12, 2010. We have received complete Excel Sheets with Nielsen Media Research TV rating from all the MLS games broadcast on ESPN/ESPN2 from 2006 until 2009. However, for this study we have only analysed MLS games played in 2006 and 2007 and broadcasted in the Boston/Manchester market. It should also be noted that we have selected the games from the regular season that obtained the best scores.
77. Markovits and Hellerman. 'Women's Soccer in the United States', 14–29.
78. L'Hote, Eaves, and Fletcher. *Soccer in North America*, 215.
79. Andrew Zimbalist. 'What Went Wrong with WUSA'? *Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal*, (October 13, 2003), 26.
80. L'Hote, Eaves, and Fletcher. *Soccer in North America*, 219.
81. Jennifer Lee. 'WUSA to Seek Individual Owner'. *Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal*, (August 11, 2003), 1.
82. Abrams. 'Inhabited but not Crowded out', 1–17.
83. Markovits and Hellerman. *Offside*, 41. According to Markovits and Hellerman, 'America's sport space became filled very early and, it seems, to capacity'.
84. Sugden. 'USA and the World Cup: American Nativism and the Rejection of the People's Game', 222. According to Sugden, 'soccer has been and continues to be viewed by the mass of the American public as an essentially foreign game'.

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