

## SOCCER'S WOES: Can U.S. make a mark?

Written by Editorial Staff  
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Apparently, soccer isn't quite dead in the United States. On life support? Maybe. But there is a chance for a full recovery.

It is no secret that soccer (or football to the rest of the world) lacks much support in America. We've got millions of kids playing the sport, and America has produced some outstanding talent. But few notice and soccer languishes in obscurity. Oh there are fans here — don't ever doubt that. A day after The News-Telegram ran an editorial cartoon depicting soccer as a sleep aid for Americans, an angry fan called to protest. That doesn't happen when President Obama gets the same treatment.

But soccer can't take that next step the sport so badly needs to take. Football is king here. Baseball is right with it. Basketball and NASCAR and hockey fall in line next. Soccer sits at the end of the bench with tennis and Australian Rules football. Quick test: Have you watched a minute of the World Cup? Can you name a member of the U.S. team? Do you even know there is a World Cup?

It is not that soccer doesn't exist in the States. Millions of kids grow up kicking the ball up and down the field each spring (and there are more and more year-round leagues, especially in the bigger cities). Thirty years ago, that wasn't the case — but soccer is a major player for kids now. But those kids don't stick with soccer as they advance in age and ability. They focus on football. They focus on baseball. Kids are even leaving soccer for lacrosse now.

Why? Success, mainly.

Until America produces a soccer success story on a national scale, the sport will languish. What soccer needs is a U.S. World Cup showing. America doesn't have to win — but the U.S. team needs to push the rest of the world. Could this be the year? The U.S. tied England in a much-ballyhood match to open Cup play, then staged a dramatic come-from-behind tie Friday morning against Slovenia. And it was good drama (the U.S. was even robbed of a win against Slovenia by an inexplicable call nullifying the winning goal with just minutes remaining). But that isn't enough. Ties are good, but U.S. soccer needs wins.

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Soccer needs a 1980 Olympic hockey-style moment. U.S. soccer has to capture the hearts of the people who aren't diehard soccer fans now. If and when that happens, then the sport will get the attention and support it deserves in America. Until then, it will remain in obscurity — loved by few, ignored by many.