The World’s Game, but not America’s: An Analysis of Soccer’s Disposition in the United States

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THE WORLD’S GAME, BUT NOT AMERICA’S: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCCER’S DISPOSITION IN THE UNITED STATES

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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ABSTRACT

THE WORLD’S GAME, BUT NOT AMERICA’S: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCCER’S DISPOSITION IN THE UNITED STATES
(Under the direction of Dr. William W. Berry, III)

Globally, soccer is the most prominent sport, drawing devoted fans from nearly every country in the world. The World Cup grosses the highest attendance and viewership rates of any international professional sports tournament. For many countries, the game of soccer is a source of national identity and pride. Despite soccer’s global impression, the sport has failed to fully captivate its American audience. The introduction of the professional men’s league, Major League Soccer (MLS), in 1996 spurred interest. The sport has experienced slight growth in popularity, but its national attendance and viewership ratings are trivial in comparison to America’s elite three sports of football, baseball, and basketball. After twenty-three years of the most successful professional soccer league in American history, soccer should not be significantly overshadowed by the elite three in the way that it is today. Soccer’s disposition in the United States has been of much discussion in recent years; especially after restructuring the United Soccer League (USL) and the ongoing misconduct occurring among soccer’s international governing body, Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). My thesis work aims to answer the following question: why is soccer the most popular sport in the world but has failed to be so in America? In order to answer this question, I apply a theoretical framework constructed through relevant news and sports articles, scholarly
and academic journals, scientific investigation, personal interviews, and personal experiences to analyze what causes soccer to be unable to come to fruition in the American sports industry. The results of this investigation conclude that a root cause of soccer's disposition is accredited to cultural differences between individualistic and collectivist societies. These culture differences factor in to many facets of the sports industry, including the sports media, financial investment, audience attentiveness, and athlete interest.
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INTRODUCTION

Individualism, the love of enterprise, and the pride in personal freedom, have been deemed by Americans not only as their choicest, but their peculiar and exclusive possessions. —James Bryce

Sports are an integral component of society, creating indispensable impact both culturally and economically. At their root, sports enhance “the physical and mental well-being of individuals and the integration of social classes,” and “the idea of winning in sports serves as a prime exemplar of success: a highly valued commodity, which often results in elitism and superiority.”

Americanization of the sports industry overemphasizes victory and glorifies the individual, placing value on specific athletes. As a result, the athlete’s worth “translates into the worth of that specific sport en masse, which is why [Americans] unjustly deem certain sports more imperative than others.”

American society holds competition in high regard; consequently, the individual is the main contributor to competitive value in American sports.

America’s elite three contact sports are American football, baseball, and basketball, all of which were invented by Americans.¹ These three are dominating forces in the men’s professional sports industry, creating a near insurmountable barrier to entry socially and financially for foreign sports.³ Football, baseball, and basketball are native to the United States, which is a critical advantage because they align with and provide insight to American cultural values—“to ignore sport is to ignore a significant aspect of any society and its culture.”⁴ These three sports, although all team-based, posit individualistic values at the forefront, overshadowing the collective unit. Therefore, spectators often overlook those sports that do not advocate individual prestige because there is no distinguished player to admire or emulate.⁵

Individualism correlates with American capitalism, reinforcing “that every human being may live their own life...as an end to oneself.”⁶ The professional sports industry is a microcosm of capitalism on the global level; however, there are two possible faults when pursuing a capitalistic structure—“the failure to achieve truly competitive markets

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and the manifest unreasonableness of the initial distribution of income.” Sports have become increasingly commercialized over the years at the expense of amateurism. As a result, monopolistic power in the industry is rampant, especially in the United States, and “efforts to improve the perceived fairness of the income distribution often conflict with the objective of improving economic efficiency.” The American sports industry is organized through franchises in a given league (football, baseball, and basketball), where businessmen found and manage teams, construct stadiums, and sell tickets. These owners operate as a committee making central decisions regarding broadcast rights, merchandise rights, and income distribution. For football, baseball, and basketball, the monopolistic league organization has been widely successful and supported by the economy and American capitalism. These leagues attribute their success to “the rules, which maintain balance among the teams;” skeptics argue that their success “derives from artificial scarcity (entry into the majors is closely restricted) and monopoly power.”

League owners develop their teams and market their athletes through sponsorships, partnerships, and broadcasting to generate money, which causes the teams and athletes to be a commodity exploited for the benefit of the owners. Although these players are highly compensated, their increase in value further supports the interests of the teams’ owners. For example, in 2017, the National Football League (NFL) generated league total revenue of eight billion dollars ($8B), which was then divided evenly amongst the thirty-two teams, giving each team two hundred and fifty-five million dollars.

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($255M). 8 The salary cap, at the time, was one hundred and fifty-five million dollars ($155M), which was divided in various amounts per player, leaving one hundred million dollars for the owners of the team. 9 The amount leftover is spent at the discretion of the owner.

Due to the nature of the American sports industry, athletes are marketed in such a way that they embody the cult of personality—“a situation in which a public figure is deliberately presented to the people of a country as a great person who should be admired and loved.” 10 In the age of technology, sports media and social media have exacerbated athlete exploitation, intensified individualism, and magnified entitlement in the industry. Although athlete endorsements can be financially beneficial, there are also many risks. By associating a brand to an athlete, they are “connected not only to their performance, but also to a passionate and often polarized fan base swarming around their interests and causes.” 11 Technology and media have made sports endorsements more directly connected to both athletes and fans than ever before, which makes it inherently risky—athletes can tarnish their reputations, suffer from injuries, or a range of other issues.

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As a result of the growth in endorsements, professional athletes are positioned against one another to secure the most reward and celebrity status. In turn, cult of personality is heightened and influences athlete entitlement and individual expression—athletes are more inclined to perform successfully for themselves rather than to perform for the benefit of the team, thus producing more individuality on the field or court. The National Basketball Association, for example, glorifies star-athlete, LeBron James—“whom the ESPN announcers cannot seem to find enough adjectives to describe...this has been going on for years in a league that has for decades celebrated individuals over teams.”12 James has dominated the teams he has played for over the years, and his success has continuously been about personal success rather than team success, creating a demanding environment for his teammates. Two of his former teammates, Isaiah Thomas and Jae Crowder, made comments in 2018 regarding their transfers to different teams away from James; stating respectively: “I feel like I got my powers back,” and “I got back to having fun playing basketball with a great group of guys.”13 The entitlement and intensified individualism are increasingly growing in the American sports industry, which further complicates establishing a sport that does not posit individualistic value over collective value.

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Globally, America’s coveted sports are less prominent, eclipsed by the preeminent “Association Football” (hereafter referred to as soccer). In fact, American football does not even rank in the top ten based on its global impression. The 2018 World Cup, professional soccer’s worldwide tournament, garnered the attention of more than half of the global population with total viewership of three billion five hundred and seventy-two million people (3.572B). An estimated three million people attended the matches held in Russia this past year, with an average attendance rate of forty-seven thousand three hundred and seventy-one (47,371) spectators per game. Thirty-two countries were represented over the course of the sixty-four matches in the tournament.

Although soccer is undoubtedly the most popular sport globally, it has failed to captivate its American audience and surpass the country’s prestigious sports associations. Unlike football, baseball, and basketball, soccer is a defensive, low-

scoring, “weak-link”—meaning that the team is only as good as its weakest player—and overtly collective sport.20 In soccer, teams are focused mostly on defending their respective goal rather than on scoring goals. “Identifying defensive excellence is much more difficult” than offensive excellence—“defense is inherently harder to measure, and...defensive statistics are more primitive than offensive statistics.”20 Due to its collective nature and defensive structure, soccer is not in accord with individualistic American culture.

Along with its structural composition, soccer’s international business model also conflicts with the American sports industry. The European model operates through free entry, where the American industry is tightly restricted to the wealthy (enforcing individualistic value to be the most successful). The league is interconnected through the promotion and relegation system, and “this fluidity promotes a kind of cutthroat competition” between teams, as opposed to the individual competition in America.21 The European leagues are unequal in wealth, where American sports for the most part are equal, given the salary caps and divided revenue. The unequal distribution of wealth again posits teams in greater competition, where in American leagues competition is between players to be the most compensated or most rewarded. The current structure of soccer in the United States is organized in accord with those of the other American major sports associations; however, this model does not benefit the league because it does not align with soccer’s global, and successful, design.

21 See Supra Note 7.
To that end, this thesis argues that soccer’s disposition in the American sports industry is accredited to the cultural-based disconnect between collective and individualistic societies. In a cultural context, individualistic and collective “refer to how individuals define themselves in the context of the group—it does not refer to the political or social systems of a country.”

American culture aligns with individualistic values and gravitates toward autonomy within the group environment; “people in individualistic cultures view themselves separately from the group, whereas people in collectivistic cultures view themselves as part of the group.” In light of America’s cultural identification, soccer has been unable to reach its full potential in the United States as a wholly collective sport.

Chapter 1 of this thesis briefly explains the concepts of individualism and collectivism, delineating the cultural implications and demonstrating the effect in sports recreation. Chapter 2 recounts the pertinent history of soccer both in Europe and America, and expounds on soccer’s international governing body, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). This thesis then exposes issues in Chapter 3 that further clarify and demonstrate rationale as to why soccer has failed to reach maximum success in America. Finally, Chapter 4 provides and illustrates resolutions that would cause soccer, as a collective sport, to become more palatable with individualistic culture.

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23 See Supra Note 22.
CHAPTER 1: INDIVIDUALISM

Defining Individualism

Individualism is one of many complex concepts utilized to expound on social and cultural differences apparent among the seven continents of the modern world. The term individualism originates in the nineteenth century with its coining by Alexis de Tocqueville during the creation of the modern Western world; however, the practices of individualism are evident as early as the Renaissance (fourteenth century) and the Enlightenment (seventeenth century) periods, commemorated for the rebirth and rediscovery of radical cultural, artistic, philosophical, political, and economic cultural components.

Individualism is a social theory advocating for individual liberty, welfare, and rights to take precedence over societal civil interests— it is the pursuit of individual rather than collective interests. Individualism is in direct opposition to collectivism,
which is a social theory that expresses the concern of individual rights secondary to those of the state.26

Collectivism versus Individualism

The dichotomous view of the world as individualism versus collectivism persists in opposing political concepts, ideology, and cultural realms. In a sociological respect, collectivism emphasizes the importance of establishing one’s identity in community and pursuing collective effort to achieve objectives. Collective societies are colonial and traditional in nature. A traditional society is distinguishable by the following key features: behavior is governed by cultural customs, familial ties are especially predominant, social status is ascribed not achieved, social and spatial mobility are restrained, and political power is dominant.27

Historically, collectivism has been closely associated with the communist idea of operation under a governing body that strives to maintain equality among the classes, ensuring the absence of a class system and unequal distribution of wealth.28 Realistically, communism and collectivism are mutually exclusive societal constructs. Collectivist countries primarily focus on promoting community, unity, and selflessness through

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&u=mag_u_um&id=GALE ICX3708400153&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon


culture not necessarily through governmental force. In opposition, individualistic countries emphasize the rights of the individual and stress values of independence and personal identity. Governmental structure and involvement in the personal and industrial realms differ among countries.

Cultural differences impact human behavior in a variety of respects. These cultural differences influence many aspects of a functioning society including but not limited to clothing, relations, business, education, and recreation. For example, those of collectivist societies tend to gravitate toward building and maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships—in a collective environment relationships are typically enduring and difficult to change due to low social and special mobility; thus, preserving peace is of utmost importance. In contrast, individualist societies elaborate on the relational concept of “networking”—forming relationships for the benefit of personal interest or business ventures. The value of individualist interpersonal relationships is inconsequential in comparison to the value of those of collective nature.

**Individualism in America**

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist and Professor Emeritus of Organizational Anthropology and International Management at Maastricht University in the Netherlands, devised and published his notable Cultural Dimensions Model in the

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1970s to identify, explain, and understand the differences of cultural influences. The dimensions observed and expounded on are power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. This thesis applies the individualism versus collectivism dimension in analyzing the sports industry.

Geert Hofstede’s research quantifies cultural dimension data into a numerical scale ranging from scores of one to one hundred. According to Hofstede’s model, a high individual (IDV) score indicates weak interpersonal connections outside of the core group. As a result, individuals in these cultures refrain from assuming responsibility for others’ actions and outcomes. Individualists are highly concentrated on the self and value independence; they place emphasis on personal pleasure and enjoyment over duties and social norms. In regard to loyalty, individualists are less loyal to their group than collectivists, and therefore, the group rarely defends their interests and wellbeing.

Currently, the United States of America is regarded as the most individualistic culture in the world with a score of ninety-one, followed closely by Australia and the United Kingdom. The “American Dream” substantiates this ranking as Americans continuously strive to achieve the self-fulfilling concepts of success, prosperity, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” as Thomas Jefferson famously said. The American culture thrives on individuality—it is the intrinsic motivating factor guiding behavior and

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https://www.cleverism.com/understanding-cultures-people-hofstede-dimensions/
thought, ultimately creating and intensifying disconnection between individuals and their respective groups. 34

From the beginning of life in the United States, the colonists sought to separate and distinguish themselves from British rule as a distinct and independent country. The dissolution of British governance established a country that finds value in dominance of worldly affairs, competitive edge in all facets of life, and promotion of individual rights over community. (This distinction does not mean that Americans are not in favor of nationalism; rather, it implies that the emphasis on individual success leads to the success of the country as a whole.) The United States of America prospers through differentiation and distinction from its constituencies.

**Individualism in Relation to American Sports**

Reflecting on the implications of individuality, it can be implied that American culture prefers those social activities that draw on differentiation and inherent competitive drive. Individuality is prevalent in the business, political, social, and sports sectors of the modern American lifestyle. For this reason, competitive sports such as football, baseball, and basketball are highly regarded in popularity. Not only do these three promote competitiveness among teams but also among individuals.

Each, in their structural design, provides the opportunity for a potential hero or all-star player in any given position on a team. The offensive nature of these games allows continuous excitement for their respective audiences as scoring typically occurs

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rapidly and frequently. Rarely are there stalls in the game in which both teams are at an absolute standstill. Each require a declaration of a clear winner and loser of the contest, perhaps the most rewarding component of the offensive structure. These three provoke individuality, which is what constitutes their popularity in American culture.

Baseball, for example, "dramatizes a cultural problem: how to reconcile communal values with a tradition of heroic individualism and privatism," and creates a tension between the two in several dimensions of the game. Baseball intensifies contest between the self and society. At its broadest, it is a competition between two teams that promotes some fundamental social loyalty—between both the opposing teams and fans. The second competitive aspect derives between the batter and his opponents scattered on the field, and "it is here that the game most vividly reflects the American dilemma: reconciling ideas of community and fair play with those of privacy and heroic individualism." The third level focus in on the rivalry between the batter and the pitcher, and the team aspect disappears altogether. This crucial, action-packed moment is "exclusively confined to the intimate battle between the mound and the plate," thus, individualism is reinforced even more in this component of the game between the pitcher and the batter.

Sports media also influences society’s obsession with individualism in American sports. The media continuously portrays individualism over teamwork in every sport, and by doing so, it "sends the message that being the best player is as important," if not more.

important, “as being the best team.” For example, after a team wins a championship game, the team is usually awarded a trophy to commemorate their achievement; however, the media then selects who they deem to have been the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the game. The MVP is awarded additional prizes, “although numerous players performed essential roles and were a necessary part” of the team’s success. In addition, the sports media frequently romanticizes sensational achievements, such as homeruns and slam-dunks, while overlooking the mundane but necessary courses of action that led to those events. The fundamentals of collective effort—defense, passing, and teamwork—are overshadowed by the overly glamorized individual skill and accomplishment, which alone require little to no team collaboration.

Television, streaming, and social media have increasingly targeted individual players in all sports, rewarding individuality. This is especially prominent in football. Fantasy football allows fans to draft players and “own” them for a season, drawing attention to the individual rather than the teams for which they play. The over-emphasis on individuals in football affects network ratings as well, “depending on how high profile the person is that gets injured, you see the whole rating for that week dive,” because the culture is more focused on the individual’s success rather than the team’s success. As a result, these all-star players are idolized for their individual achievements. Consider Tom

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Brady and Aaron Rodgers, for example, whom are two of the most highly compensated individuals in the National Football League. Both of these men are exceptional athletes, but the media reinforces their individuality even more so. A Fox Sports news article stated the following regarding the two:

"There is a reason the Patriots have five Super Bowls, and it is largely because of Tom Brady... the quarterback is not just the leader of the team, but he often determines how successful a team is offensively... someone like Aaron Rodgers allows a team to be more creative in its play calling."  

Their statistics and athletic ability are instrumental in their success, but the American culture stresses on certain players more than others because of their position and the way they are portrayed to the public. Quarterbacks are regarded as the most important players on a football team, followed closely by other skilled positions (i.e., wide receivers, running backs, etc.) These positions are highlighted more than others by media due to the opportunities these players have to make key plays; therefore, athletes strive to be in these positions due to their perceived individualistic value. The media perception translates into spectator expectation, as the audiences anticipate some spectacular individual accomplishment in every game.

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Basketball, like the other three, has characteristics that pertain to individualistic values. The National Basketball Association (NBA) “thrives on strong personalities and the best players transcend their teams: Michael Jordan and the Bulls; LeBron James and the Cavaliers” (James recently transferred to the Lakers). Basketball players have the ability to move rather freely between positions and contribute to the team both offensively and defensively. By doing so, each player on the team is presented with the opportunity to score or make key plays throughout the game. There are, however, those players that transcend the team and focus more on their personal success in a game, and this is made possible because of the structure of the game and the fluidity between positions. Endorsements highlight these strong personalities and promote individualism and elitism as players are intentionally selected based on their charisma and performance. For example, in 1984, Nike partnered with Michael Jordan and launched his Air Jordan sneakers—connecting “the signature shoe bearing his name directly to his spirit, performance, and being,” and propelling Jordan to the forefront of the NBA. Michael Jordan has almost been his own entity, apart from the NBA, since his rise to fame with the assistance from the Nike endorsement. The media attention further drives individuality by over emphasizing these athletes.

Soccer, unlike the other three, does not produce the competitive and individualistic components Americans seek, leading the sport to become uneventful, dull,

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monotonous, and insipid to its audience. The lack of competitiveness and individuality, in an American sense, is apparent in both the structural design of the sport and its business model.

Soccer is innately a collective sport and defensive in nature, which is attributable to its vast popularity globally, as illustrated in Figure 1-1.

![Figure 1-1.](https://www.vox.com/2014/7/3/5868115/most-popular-sports-world-cup)

**Figure 1-1.**

The media or spectators of sports, as noted previously, do not typically recognize or glorify defensive skill, and this innate characteristic of soccer inhibits its ability to attract the individualistic American media and fans. Majority of the world, especially
countries where soccer is most prevalent, posses relatively low scores on Hofstede's individualism cultural dimension. Brazil, South Africa, and Spain are three of the most prominent proponents of organized soccer in the world, all of which have considerably low individualism scores in relation to the United States of America. These findings are illustrated in Figures 1-2 and 1-3. The collective influence on these cultures promotes the attraction to collective-based social activities and sports, such as soccer.

**FIGURE 1-2.**


**LEGEND:**
- Blue - Brazil
- Green - Spain
- Purple - South Africa
- United States - Orange

**FIGURE 1-3.**

As evident in the Figures 1-2 and 1-3, the United States is overwhelmingly driven by individualistic values, in stark contrast with the majority of the world. Therefore, there are discrepancies between the cultural values of the United States of America and the cultural values of nearly every other country in the world.

**European Individualism**

Although the majority of European countries are classified as individualistic by Hofstede’s standard, it is imperative to recognize that soccer originated in Europe. Developed by rural laborers and designed to be a collective sport, soccer is an integral part of everyday life, and has been for hundreds of years, in countries such as England, Italy, Spain, Germany, and France. Although these countries have transitioned to be more individualistic over time, these countries certainly would be reluctant to abandon their own creation, even after years removed from collective cultural practices.

At this point, it is necessary to consider the relevant history and background of the sport in order to form a more sound understanding of this logic. The act of integrating collective-based sports into individualistic culture (which America has been since its founding) would be rather difficult; however, soccer is innately collective, born out of collective English culture.
CHAPTER 2: EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF SOCCER

The Beginning

Soccer is easily considered the most popular sport in the world today, yet its history is quite complex. The exact origin of soccer is not precise. Historians suggest that a form of the sport dates as far as 2500 B.C. in which Greek, Egyptian and Chinese cultures engaged in social games involving a leather ball and their feet. In these early constructs, however, the use of hands, feet, and sticks were permitted to move and control the ball.  

The most pertinent ancient game to modern association soccer (football to majority of the world) is the Chinese game Cuju. During the Han Dynasty, the Chinese implemented a small net into their original game, allowing players to score by kicking the leather ball into the new addition. The net was situated between two bamboo poles, which were hung thirty feet above the ground. This exercise was often employed as a training mechanism for Chinese soldiers.

Modern History of Soccer: 19th Century Forward

The creation of modern soccer is credited to Great Britain, originating in the 19th century as the sport gained popularity among the English working class. Prior to the 19th

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century, the industrial labor force collectively participated in a much more violent version of soccer, called “folk football,” in the streets, meadows, or fields of England in mass quantities. Often resulting in injury and extreme violence, the sport became prohibited between 1337 and 1453 by law under King Edward III’s administration.44

In the early 1800s, soccer re-emerged as a winter game in England’s public schools, such as Winchester, Charterhouse, and Eton. Although each school engaged in the sport of soccer, their respective code for the game varied. The discrepancies made it difficult for former athletes to continue play at the university level when participating with students from various public school backgrounds.45

In 1848, the University of Cambridge codified and standardized the rules of the game in the “Cambridge Rules,” which were then spread by its alumni as they formed soccer clubs upon graduation.46 The rules were not accepted universally in Britain, however, and many clubs continued to follow their own regulations. The Football Association (FA) formed in 1863 in England in response to a series of meetings held to, once again, solidify the rules and regulations of the sport. Through this association, handling or carrying the ball became prohibited in soccer (with exception of the goal keeper) and restricted to rugby. The Football Association, at the time, was comprised of fifteen clubs, and in 1871, the teams competed for the first “cup.” This competition

enticed twenty-eight new clubs to join the association, yielding forty-three clubs in competition at the beginning of 1877.47

The development of modern soccer in England is closely associated with industrialization. As England urbanized, the working-class “gradually lost their old bucolic pastimes…and sought fresh forms of collective leisure,”47 which led to state institutions to organize the working-class men into recreational soccer teams. A rise in literacy promoted press coverage of the sport, and new transportation systems enabled fans and players to travel longer distances to watch and play.

**Professional Soccer**

Soccer’s popularity starkly increased at the end of the 1800s, and the Football Association’s amateurism rule faced challenges as teams across Great Britain began to pay illicit wages in an effort to attract those highly skilled working-class players. In 1884, the Football Association expelled two club teams from play due to exploiting professional players; however, the practice of paying athletes had become so commonplace, the association faced immense pressure and authorized the practice a year later.47

Upon authorization of paying players, the number of leagues in Great Britain grew rapidly and began to spread across Europe. The Irish and Scottish formed leagues in 1890, followed by formations in the Netherlands, Germany, and France. During this time,

soccer was not regarded as a profitable investment. Professional clubs were established as limited liability companies primarily to acquire land for future stadium development. Businessmen owned and controlled the clubs, but their shareholders received little reward, other than inflated public status.48

European professional soccer leagues operate through promotion and relegation. In this system, teams are transferred between multiple leagues dependent upon their performance throughout the season. Those that finish at the bottom of the league are “relegated” down one division. Those that end the season on top of their league are moved up to a higher division. The number of teams permitted to be promoted and/or relegated varies by country. The English Premier League, for example, generally promotes and relegates three teams per division; Scotland, on the other hand, only transfers one team per league.49

Many professional soccer associations around the world have adopted the promotion and relegation system for several reasons. First, promotion and relegation elicits excitement and interest in teams throughout the entire season because their status can change in either direction. Second, the system allows more competition as lower division teams qualify for the top league. Third, teams that are not performing well are punished, creating more incentive to continue to exert maximum effort throughout the season. Promotion and relegation provides several advantages, but there are also disadvantages. In some cases, though very rare and extreme, the financial ramifications

48 See Supra Note 47.
of relegation can result in bankruptcy for teams. In addition, relegated teams may also face difficulties in retaining players after falling in divisions.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)}

Soccer rapidly expanded across Europe at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, creating the need for an international organization. Representatives from the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark founded the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 1904 to be the regulating body and oversee international soccer organization.\textsuperscript{51} FIFA adopted the British rules of soccer as the official regulatory code of the game, yet England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales were reluctant to become members of the newly founded association. These countries joined, resigned, and rejoined on several occasions before finally resolving issues in 1946.\textsuperscript{52}

FIFA organized the first international competition—the World Cup—in 1930, which attracted clubs from all over the world, and the association reached two hundred members by the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.\textsuperscript{53} The World Cup remains to this day the most popular global sports competition.

From 1904 to 1970, FIFA’s controlling forces were Northern Europeans. The association maintained stability through modest income, majority of which was generated through the World Cup finals. Efforts were focused on enforcing regulation and

\textsuperscript{50} See Supra Note 49.
\textsuperscript{52} See Supra Note 47.
amateurism, in regard to illegal transfers and broken contracts. Under their leadership, FIFA operated conservatively and neglected the opportunity to expand into developing countries or to explore financial potential in the West.54

In 1974, FIFA elected Brazilian, João Havelange, as president of the organization. Under his leadership, FIFA transformed from a simplistic club into a global corporation. The association formed partnerships with transnational corporations and engaged in billion-dollar television agreements, which catalyzed exponential growth and popularity. Developing countries were finally granted inclusion into the World Cup finals.55

FIFA is not merely a governing body of soccer. The organization exerts influence in international relations, and “membership of FIFA... is the clearest signal that a country’s status as a national state has been recognized by the international community.” In its early years, FIFA was “as much of a gentleman’s club as it was an international bureaucracy,”56 and many argue that it has not changed due to the numerous scandals and the corruption occurring within the last few years.

In 2015, Sepp Blatter, president of FIFA for seventeen years, announced that he would not be completing his fifth four-year term, for which he had just been re-elected four days prior.57 His resignation came amid multiple allegations of bribery, fraud, and

54 See Supra Note 47.
55 See Supra Note 47.
racketeering—several decisions made by FIFA executives since 2010 led to an investigation by then United States Attorney General, Loretta Lynch.

In 2010, FIFA awarded the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the 2022 World Cup to Qatar; the United States was a candidate for the 2022 World Cup.\textsuperscript{58} In 2012, FIFA’s ethics committee held an investigation into corruption allegations under the direction of Michael Garcia, but the wrongdoings of Russia and Qatar’s bids were not justifiable to reopen the bidding.\textsuperscript{58} Although these findings did not confirm the allegations, a lengthy investigation conducted by Loretta Lynch in 2015 uncovered decades of misconduct and corruption. Fourteen people, including nine former and current executives, were charged for federal racketeering, wire fraud, money laundering, and bribery totaling upwards of one hundred and fifty million dollars, alleging corruption for over twenty-four years.\textsuperscript{58} Officials were also accused of “buying and selling their votes for countries like Russia, Qatar, and South Africa to host the prestigious World Cup tournament.”\textsuperscript{59}

Amidst all of the investigations into FIFA’s executives, the ethics committee conducted a separate investigation explicitly into Sepp Blatter. Blatter was suspended for eight years for a disloyal payment made to Michael Platini, president of the European Football Association. The ethics committee also discovered that “Blatter and two other high-ranking members of the organization had stolen $80 million in a coordinated effort


\textsuperscript{59} See Supra Note 57.
to enrich themselves through annual salary increases, World Cup bonuses and other incentives.60

In 2017 after two years of ongoing investigation into FIFA, the United States Department of Justice held a trial in New York City. Three men pleaded not guilty to the charges: Jose Maria Marin, former Brazilian federation president; Juan Angel Napout, former South American confederation president; and Manuel Burga, former Peruvian federation president. Over forty officials and executives were charged, many of which pleaded guilty in hopes of being awarded reduced sentences.61 As witnesses testified about World Cup bid bribes and broadcasting bribes, Manuel Burga threatened the witnesses on the stand by making a slashing motion across his neck insinuating that he would kill them for speaking.61

Among death threats in court, there were also many threats made outside of court when officials learned of certain witnesses’ cooperation with the authorities. A former Argentinian official, Jorge Delhon, committed suicide after it was made known to the court that he had accepted bribes for television rights. During the trial and investigations, many presidents of federations left their positions to avoid facing connections with the allegations; among those was Ricardo Teixeira, former son-in-law of João Havelange, FIFA president from 1974 to 1998, left his presidential position and FIFA executive position in 2012 as the allegations became more material.61

60 See Supra Note 57.
In February of 2016, Gianni Infantino became the newest FIFA president. Under the new administration, reforms were passed to “improve accountability, transparency, and diversity” and address “governance matters including term times of elected officials.”62 The new reforms limited presidential terms to a maximum of three to four years and integrated a thirty-six-member council, “designed to set global policies and include at least one female representative,” replacing the previous structure of an executive committee. FIFA now has nine committees that report to the council and ensure checks and balances in all aspects of the organization.63

**Soccer Around the World**

Although the regulatory code is the same across continents, cultural traditions and playing styles vary by region. In Europe, teams focus more on advancing ball-handling skills and emphasize teamwork by utilizing the passing game. During the 1930s, Europeans perceived international matches as a way to display physical agility and military capabilities to their competitor. Soccer reflects “the distinctive political and cultural complexities of European regions.”64

In Great Britain, soccer is strongly associated with its industrial working class, historically providing opportunities for success in the sport for the impoverished. Spain’s club teams, such as Futból Club Barcelona, enrich deep nationalist identity. France’s

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64 See Supra Note 47.
local governments and investors provide open facilities for communities to utilize in order to promote the development of its youth programs. Italy is known for creating a unique sense of unification by embodying profound civic and regional pride in its respective teams.\textsuperscript{65}

In North America, soccer is most popular in Mexico. Mexico’s league is one of the most successful in the Western Hemisphere and has produced exceptional athletes since the early 1900s. Its national team is ranked highly by FIFA and continues to excel in international competition. In South America, soccer initially was popular with those of poorer backgrounds. The sport gained popularity as professional teams were formed, and it became a crucial aspect for ethnic and national identity because soccer allowed the poor to accumulate wealth and stability.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{Soccer in the United States of America}

The American Soccer League (ASL), founded in 1921, was America’s first attempt at a competitive professional soccer program. Operating in the Northeast, the ASL was comprised of teams from metropolitan areas and industrial towns—a welcoming environment for immigrants. Immigrants from European countries were employed in various industries across the country, such as steel manufacturing and railroad construction, where they shared their passion for soccer with their new communities. ASL teams were operated and sponsored by successful businessmen, giving these professional teams advantage over their competitors; they were able to pay higher wages or provide higher-paying factory jobs for top athletes. These recruitment

\textsuperscript{65} See Supra Note 47.
tactics attracted European players, but contracts were often negotiated illegally. In 1927, the ASL was sanctioned by FIFA for blatant disregard of international contract agreements. 66

Before the first World Cup (1930), the ASL was largely a successful league, but in 1928, the league’s reputation began to dismantle. The United States Football Association (USFA), America’s governing body of soccer, had imposed multiple restrictions on the ASL for changing the rules of soccer—the league wanted to Americanize the sport by allowing substitutions, adding an end-of-season playoff, and creating a new scoring system to determine ranks; the owners believed the sport was too foreign to gain mainstream acceptance. The USFA and FIFA excommunicated the ASL from international competition due to the rebellion and indifference for the governing rules of the game. ASL’s profitability dropped dramatically after being exiled, and soon after, the Great Depression caused irreparable damage to the stock market and decimated American industry. As a result, the league was unable to repair its reputation and maintain financial stability, leaving the ASL in utter disarray. 66 In the 1960s, the American Soccer League re-formed and rejoined the United States Football Association, but it soon collapsed due to a lack of support and popularity.

Although a soccer league in America did not flourish in the early 1900s, the American national team was relatively competitive in the first World Cup. Team USA recorded the first shutout (no goals scored against) in the tournament in World Cup

history, and the team placed third overall after losing to Argentina six to one in the semi-finals. Over the last century, the men’s national team has not been as successful in international competition. In the twenty-one FIFA World Cups that have been held since 1930, Team USA has not made a single appearance in the final game. From 1954 to 1986, the men’s team did not even qualify to compete in the World Cup, nor did they qualify for the most recent competition held in 2018. [The United States women’s team, however, has dominated the FIFA women’s World Cup—beginning in 1991—appearing four times in the final game and winning the title three of the four.]

In 1996, a new professional cooperative emerged to resurrect America’s soccer program. The United States hosted the World Cup in 1994, which aroused more interest in the sport as the country hosted the prestigious sports tournament. Capitalizing on the excitement, Major League Soccer (MLS), a limited liability company, established itself with ten club teams as a division one professional league, operating within the confines of the USFA and FIFA. Unlike its predecessors, the MLS has been widely successful in the last twenty years and has grown to twenty-eight teams that are now in competition.

It should also be noted how “Americanized” the name of the new league is, considering its stark similarity to Major League Baseball and dissimilarity to other global professional soccer leagues—English Premier League, Primeira Liga, Russian Premier League, etc.

The United Soccer League (USL) is an overarching professional league, operating under the MLS, which has recently remodeled to align with international structure—one

67 See Supra Note 47.
central organization, three-tiered divisions. The USL is comprised of the United Soccer League Championship (USLC), the United Soccer League One (USL1), and the United Soccer League Two (USL2).[^69]

The USLC is a division two professional league operating in the United States and Canada with thirty-six teams. The USL1 is division three professional and will begin its first season in the spring of 2019 with ten teams; two expansion teams are in the process of joining the league for the 2020 season. The USL2, formerly the Premier Development League, is division four pre professional that provides elite amateur athletes the opportunity to compete and develop while maintaining collegiate eligibility. The seventy-four USL2 clubs are owned and operated by MLS and USLC franchises, promoting progression to the professional level.[^70] [This thesis intentionally excludes discussion of the North American Soccer League (NASL) due to its cancellation following the 2017 season.][^71]

**Current Issues with MLS and USL**

The MLS and USL are undoubtedly gaining popularity, but the two leagues have yet to reach their full potential in the United States. Mexico’s professional soccer league, Liga MX, and the English Premier League attract more viewers than the MLS does in its

own country. By comparing television-viewing numbers during the 2018 MLS season, Liga MX had over one hundred and five million viewers (105M), the Premier League had over sixty-two million (62M), and the MLS only had thirty-one million people (31M) tune into any game this past season.72 There are approximately three hundred and thirty million (330M) people living in the United States, and only nine percent of America watched any game of the entire 2018 MLS season.

The television audience number from the 2018 season is actually an eight percent increase from 2016; during the course of the 2016 season, only twenty-eight million people watched MLS games.72 Liga MX and the Premier League dwarf the MLS in television ratings, and the MLS does not appear to be surpassing the two this season. In fact, the television ratings for the “first three game weeks of the 2019 season were down twenty-seven percent.” The MLS’s current television deal will expire in 2022, and the league has the ability to increase revenue in a new deal if it is able to efficiently expand into new markets. Currently, the league is the “third most popular soccer league in its own country,”72 and it trails Liga MX and the English Premier League notably.

Professional soccer players are not as recognizable or as popular as other professional athletes. Though this has much to do with the lack of soccer’s popularity, it is also attributable to the lack of the individualistic media attention given to these professional athletes. For example, a sports writer wrote the following in an article regarding a dinner recently in Washington D.C.:

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"It turned out that we were sitting right next to one of the captains of
Washington’s Major League Soccer club, D.C. United’s Steven Birnbaum. Now,
I’m a soccer fan, and because D.C. has a soccer club, I’m a D.C. United fan...
We were in a major U.S. city sitting next to a professional athlete from the most
championship-heavy team in the city ... and I’m pretty sure nobody realized
it...These footballers are rock stars in so many places in the world, but in D.C.,
and presumably, in many cities in America that are home to soccer clubs, star
players on most of the teams wouldn’t get much attention...Wayne Rooney just
joined D.C. United from Everton... I’m pretty sure that though we’re all really
happy to have him in D.C., unless he’s standing next to Bryce Harper who is
specifically telling people that Rooney is great at his sport, the vast majority of
folks in D.C.—sports fans included—probably wouldn’t recognize him on the
street. Professional soccer players just might be sitting right next to you at an
event and you might not know it. Or maybe you would. But if LeBron walked into
a room, we’re all pulling out cameras. I sat next to a professional athlete for
dinner and didn’t know it definitively for a while and I’m a fan of the sport and
team. That’s the U.S. relationship with soccer in a nutshell."

Despite television ratings decreasing and the lack of attention on professional
soccer players, the chance of soccer becoming popular among American citizens seems
hopeful for the first time in its history. The development of the MLS and the restructuring

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73 Jackson, Panama. “Soccer May Be the World’s Most Popular Sport and the U.S. Is
 Catching Up, But We Have a Lot More Work to Do.” In Very Smart Brothas. August 1,
worlds-most-popular-sport-and-the-u-s-1828028084
of the USL have sparked interest in the sport that has long been viewed as foreign.

Though there has been a slight shift in popularity in recent years, soccer continues to trail behind America's elite sports of football, baseball, and basketball. Will the development of these professional leagues be enough to allow soccer to be competitive or even surpass the top three in popularity? Are there innate qualities of this sport that will inherently place a restriction on its ability to prevail in American culture?
CHAPTER 3: WHY DOES SOCCER NOT WORK IN AMERICA?

The Big Three

The three most popular sports in the United States of America are American football, basketball, and baseball. Each of these either were created or made ubiquitous by American sports culture. Gridiron football began in the late 1800s, and the National Football League (NFL) was formed in Canton, Ohio in the 1920s. America developed football and is one of the sixty-four countries (out of one hundred and ninety-five) that have some form of a competitive football league. [These sixty-four also include those that only have little-league federations.]

In 1891, James Naismith designed the game of basketball in Springfield, Massachusetts as a less violent and winter alternative to American football. Basketball quickly became an international game, appearing in the Olympics in 1904 as an exhibition. Professional leagues developed as early as 1901, but the National Basketball Association (NBA) was not established until 1946, formerly known as the Basketball Association of America and the National Basketball League.

Baseball, often regarded as America’s pastime, officially began in 1846 in New Jersey. By 1869, the first professional league was inaugurated in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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organized into the National League and the American League in 1901 and held the first World Series (a misnomer considering all teams playing in the tournament were American-based) in 1903. American baseball has flourished globally with one hundred and twenty-two members registered in the International Baseball Federation.\(^76\)

All three of these competitive sports began in the late 1800s, predating the introduction of soccer (1920s) by nearly fifty years. As presented earlier, professional soccer in America has only recently become a contender in the sports industry. The delay in introducing the sport initiated an early disadvantage when other professional sports, created by Americans, had already been in play for decades. Not only did this create an imbalance then, it also affects development of the program today.

Generations of parents have raised their children to participate in the same or similar activities of which they were involved in during their youth. Parents are inclined to promote the furtherance of shared experiences with their offspring because they are familiar with the activity, whether it is football, baseball, basketball, or any other popular recreation. For decades, soccer was not prevalent, and until recent years, was not available in many parts of the country for young children to participate. As a result, the majority of the American population, who were exposed to soccer as a child, is relatively young, and the next generation whose parents played some form of the sport has yet to be born.\(^77\)


\(^77\) Vogel, Caryl (High School and Club Soccer Coach, New Albany, Mississippi). Personal interview conducted through email. March 22, 2019.
From a historical perspective, soccer is a foreign creation brought to America through immigration. Most immigrants to the United States, both past and present, come from areas where soccer is the top-rated sport (nearly every country in the world). Americans have the tendency to view themselves as superior to those of other national origins; therefore, “this type of mindset does not invite customs from other countries,” and instead furthers negativity and resistance to the unfamiliar. This sense of extreme nationality is deeply ingrained in individualism. The United States of America prospers through differentiation and distinction from its constituencies; American culture thrives on national pride and individuality as a whole, situating itself as superior to all other countries’ customs, traditions, and culture. Due to soccer’s origin and its delayed introduction in America, it has encountered much opposition to compete with the big three sports. Football, baseball, and basketball offer a few incentives, aside from being native to the country, that entice the desire for investors, spectators, and players to be involved in their respective programs.

Investors: Financial Advantages and Disadvantages

Investors, in any facet of the financial sector, support companies that will provide the most return on their investment. There are the select few that are inclined to take risks, but for the majority of investors, the least risky is the most desirable and valuable. In America, the professional sports industry generates billions of dollars in revenue each

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year; however, professional soccer revenue is trivial in comparison to the “big three” sports.

The National Football League is the most profitable of the three, reporting in 2017 a generated revenue of fourteen billion two hundred million dollars ($14.2B). The NFL operated from 1946 until 2016 as a not-for-profit organization, and even though the league is now categorized as for-profit, investors cannot directly invest in the NFL. Each team is owned individually or by small groups of individuals. Wealthy Americans invest in owning a team due to the millions of dollar profit incurred throughout the season. As for those outside of ownership, there are several investment opportunities that reap substantial benefits. The NFL earns money through broadcast rights, merchandise, licensing agreements, and ticket sales. Several ancillary companies—such as Nike, Adidas, Google, Microsoft, PepsiCo, and Anheuser Busch Inbev—are invested in the organization and are allocated a considerable allotment of revenue and benefits. For investors, there are multiple avenues, either directly or indirectly, to access the financial rewards of the NFL.

The National Basketball Association is organized similarly to the NFL; its teams are individually owned, and revenue is produced through broadcast rights, merchandise, licensing agreements, and ticket sales. The NBA reports a seven billion four hundred

million dollar ($7.4B) revenue for the 2017-2018 season.\textsuperscript{81} The average franchise incurs earnings upwards of fifty-two million. According to Forbes’ “investor interest in the NBA is enormous right now thanks to the league’s strong current economic environment, as well as the international growth prospects, which are the best of any major U.S. sports league,” which differentiates the investment opportunities of the NBA from the NFL.\textsuperscript{82}

Major League Baseball, in contrast to the NBA and NFL, does not incur more than twenty percent of its revenue from broadcasting and licensing; rather, eighty percent of revenue is generated through local ticket sales.\textsuperscript{83} Neither the league nor the individual teams are publicly traded; therefore, the exact financial figures are not disclosed to the public. Analysts, however, estimate that the MLB’s 2018 revenue was ten billion three hundred million dollars ($10.3B).\textsuperscript{84}

As evident, each of the “big three” professional sports in America produce significant financial gain for its investors, regardless of direct investment through team ownership or indirect investment through subsidiaries or ancillaries. The NFL, NBA, and MLB are each the most prominent leagues with the most financial value across the world in their respective sports. In a study conducted to organize professional sports leagues in

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
the world based on annual revenue, the NFL is first, MLB is second, and NBA is fourth. (The English Premier League is ranked third).\textsuperscript{85} The remainder of the twenty ranked sports leagues are nearly all soccer federations (association football), with the exception of the National Hockey League, which is ranked fifth.

The United States’ Major League Soccer organization is internationally positioned as the eighteenth most valuable sports league, but its revenues are insignificant compared to its European counterparts. The English Premier League generates annually more than five billion three hundred million dollars (\$5.3B).\textsuperscript{85} Major League Soccer, like MLB, does not disclose its financial reports; however, estimations show that the league produced six hundred million dollars (\$600M) in revenue in 2017.\textsuperscript{86} This figure is considerably lower than both European and American sports associations.

The MLS is not a top-class league; therefore, it does not attract investors. Without investment, there is little to no growth in the American professional soccer realm. Wealthy Americans do not want to expend their resources into a program that does not provide any financial benefit or reward. A lack in financial surplus enhances the inability to attract investors, but it also inhibits the league’s ability to captivate and efficiently compensate world-class players. For these reasons, the MLS remains relatively uncompetitive in the financial sector.


In regards to individualism, Americans prefer to support those things that will increase their individual value. An investment in the “big three” or ownership in any of their respective teams provides a significant disbursement. Soccer is currently unable to compete in this facet due to its incapability to maximize individual investors’ financial gain.

**Spectators: Implications of Watching Sports**

Sports fans from all corners of the world become deeply infatuated and devoted to their favorite sport and team. In America, several nights per week are committed, for most, to recreational sports, whether it be playing a game, attending a game, or watching one on television. An estimated one hundred million (100M) people viewed the 2019 Super Bowl,\(^{87}\) and although this number is lower than years’ past, ninety-nine million (99M) more people watched the Super Bowl than the one million (1M) who followed the 2018 MLS Cup.\(^{88}\) The United States does not particularly favor watching soccer, and there are several reasons for this, aside from simply not understanding the sport. It does not produce the competitive thrill Americans seek, leading the sport to become uneventful, dull, monotonous, and insipid to its individualistic audience.

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Vince Lombardi’s famous maxim, “winning is not everything, it is the only thing,” summarizes the stance of American athletes and dedicated fans. Football, baseball, and basketball are all, by their very nature, offensively designed. Although the defense is key to withholding the other team from gaining the advantage, the offense is responsible for scoring numerous points, and ties or draws rarely occur (exceptions in youth programs). For example, baseball games will often continue for hours, through multiple extra innings, to establish a clear winner and loser of each game.

Soccer, however, is a defensively designed sport. Matches often end in a tie, no score at all, or a difference of a mere point or two between the teams. The “offside rule,” along with team positions, dictates the defensive configuration. In short, a player is considered offside if he is nearer the opponent’s goal line than both the second to last defender and the ball (on the defensive team’s half of the field). This rule inhibits many goal-scoring opportunities, considering in nearly all circumstances there is at least one defender protecting the goal. A goal in soccer is a rare occurrence, and the rules are inherently preventative for an offensive-styled game.89

Due to the defensive structure, soccer matches consist of ninety minutes of constant turnover between teams with minimal reward. In a society that celebrates and earnestly seeks instant gratification, many spectators simply do not possess the patience to attentively endure a game with infrequent excitement and little to no commercial breaks. In addition, neither fans nor players are aware of the exact time remaining—the

clock continuously runs. Any adjustments are made at the discretion of the referees, undisclosed to the public.

Spectators prefer to exert their energy into an activity that they deem entertaining, that produces a reward, and that decides a definitive winner and loser. All of which are closely associated with individualistic American culture. Americans are drawn to those sports that promote individualism—there is a winner and loser, there is individual glory, and there is instant gratification. Ann Coulter, a political and social commentator, wrote the following in an article in 2014 that describes the American outlook on soccer and embodies the true individualist expression desired in athletics.

"Individual achievement is not a big factor in soccer. In a real sport, players fumble passes, throw bricks, and drop fly balls—all in front of a crowd. When baseball players strike out, they’re standing alone at the plate. But there’s also individual glory in home runs, touchdowns, and slam-dunks. In soccer, the blame is dispersed and almost no one scores anyway. There are no heroes, no losers, no accountability, and no child’s fragile self-esteem is bruised... Do they even have MVPs in soccer? Everyone just runs up and down the field, and every once in a while, a ball accidentally goes in. That’s when we’re supposed to go wild. I’m already asleep."  

Although her opinion is extreme, she highlights several issues regarding soccer and how it interrelates with the appeal of individualism to fans. Athletic audiences expect

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action, individual glory, and triumph (for at least one team). The intrinsic structure of soccer does not allure to inherent individualistic culture.

The United States Men’s National Team’s lack of success in world competition does not aid in the attempts to popularize the sport. If America cannot dominate other countries in this aspect, why support it? In football, basketball, and baseball, the United States is dominating in comparison to its rivalries. Each of these receives support from hundreds of towns and cities across the states, some with multiple clubs per city, and fans are consumed with their relationship to a team. Extremely passionate individuals identify themselves with the team, sport, or athlete they choose to encourage, and it is ingrained in their self-perception. With its current structure both internationally and domestically, soccer does not provoke this deep sense of commitment and fervor.

To that end, historically, Americans tended to support and favor certain professional teams that were within their geographic scope, simply because they were closest in proximity. In an era where television and streaming allow fandom to grow outside of geographical boundaries, Americans are typically ‘fair-weather fans’—only showing support when the team is performing exceptionally well—and are beginning to follow players instead of teams. For example, fantasy sports teams promote the shift because they “allow anyone to build teams comprising athletes from across a given league,” encouraging fans to “root for stars outside their media market, stars whose

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success might well come at the expense of the local team...pulling attention away from any one team and its traditional rivals.”

For developed leagues like basketball, baseball, and football, the shift from teams to players is not detrimental. The three already have a firm foundation financially and a devoted fan base, with or without fair-weather fans. American soccer, on the other hand, has not quite accumulated a firm financial foundation or fan base, and it does not have the all-star players to attract the American audience following these players (i.e., Lebron James, Stephen Curry, Tom Brady, Odell Beckham, Jr., Eli Manning, Peyton Manning, Clayton Kershaw, Bryce Harper, etc.)

Americans are not invested in soccer teams in a way that embraces “identities that transcend regions—social, cultural, or political identities,” like those of European countries—“European soccer clubs just seem to represent more, stand for more than American franchises.” To be a fan in Europe requires experiencing soccer, and “it is not about being a mere spectator—it is about being a participant.” In these countries, fandom is a rite of passage, involving years of instruction and dedication and demonstrating knowledge in the presence of other people before being accepted as a ‘real’ fan. Soccer fans describe themselves as the ‘twelfth man,’ and consider them to be

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an essential part of the game for players and coaches. As for relationships, soccer creates intense social bonds among fans and players; “football friends are different from friends in other areas of life. Something special is shared and exchanged by them.”96 There is a strong tie to specific historical factors that induce the social and cultural roles that soccer plays in certain countries, as explained in Chapter 2. Overall, soccer fans in other countries are deeply invested in their teams, not solely because of proximity, but because of the value it produces in multiple facets.

There are definitely exceptions to the rule, but for the majority, Americans are not invested in soccer in the way of other countries. Soccer is not ingrained to American social identity as it is elsewhere, and with a plethora of other sports substitutes, it may never reach that.

Players: Implications of Playing Sports

As with any extracurricular activity, athletes engage in sports because they receive enjoyment and pleasure from doing so.97 Through these activities, they are provided with an outlet of individual expression. In less economically developed areas, sports offer an avenue out of poverty or at the least, a distraction from an impoverished lifestyle. One of the implications of soccer that increases its popularity around the world is that it is a low maintenance sport with little equipment and minimal requisite skill and

96 See Supra Note 95.
physical ability. Regardless of economic status, physical size, gender, or skill level, anyone is able to play, and the game can be played anywhere.

In Haiti, children often gather in the streets, which are mostly gravel, and create a field by positioning two large rocks as the goal posts. Teams are selected from the handful of young boys and girls, with ages ranging anywhere from four to twenty. Although the team composition initially seems unfair to certain physical attributes, even the smallest child has just as great of a chance to excel as the largest player on the field; women are as capable as men to succeed.

In soccer-enthused countries, all of these factors contribute to its vast prosperity; however, the aspect that anyone can participate does not conform to individualistic culture. American sports celebrate distinctions between those who can and cannot transcend into professional leagues. Even at an early age, football players are generally larger in body size. The average NFL athlete weighs two hundred and forty-seven pounds (247 lbs) with a body mass index of thirty-one and a half—the average adult male weighs one hundred and eighty-six pounds (186 lbs) with a body mass index of twenty-six. The NBA’s athletes average a height of six feet seven inches, dwarfing the average man by a staggering ten inches. The stereotypical physique of each athletic organization correlates to an athlete’s success because these sports reward these physical distinctions.

Soccer, in contrast, does not emphasize physical characteristics. The average MLS player is five feet and eleven inches, weighing one hundred and seventy pounds (170 lbs), with a body mass index of twenty-three. In terms of weight, height, and body

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mass index, soccer players are more aligned with the average man than any other American contact sport. There is no advantage or disadvantage to be the largest or the smallest player on the soccer field, and this alone utterly contradicts American sports culture. An individual is not advantageously positioned based on his physique in soccer.

As noted earlier in the excerpt of Ann Coulter’s article, Americans experience little individual glory in soccer. Although individuals score goals, it is mostly a collective, team sport that does not explicitly highlight individual talent. Football places immense demand on the quarterback to be the ultimate creative mind, the running back to be the innovative force, or the wide receiver to be the ingenious playmaker. Soccer requires the collective effort of every athlete on the field to be the visionary, and without this skill, the team ultimately fails.

Football, basketball, and baseball are active programs in nearly every division one school in the country. In the NCAA Division One schools, there are two hundred and fifty-four football teams, two hundred and ninety-nine baseball teams, and over three hundred basketball teams. In comparison, there are only two hundred and four men’s soccer teams that are division one programs, none of which are in the South (the South here excludes Florida, South Carolina, and Georgia). The majority of division one men’s soccer programs are located in the North East or along the West coast. For young men, the probability of advancing from high school level to collegiate level is dismal, as illustrated in Figure 3-1. Less than one percent of male high school soccer players will advance to the division one level. The lack of programs along with the low probability of

99 See Supra Note 98.
further development is not encouraging to young men to continue to play a sport that provides little growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of US High School Soccer Players</td>
<td>456,362</td>
<td>390,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of College Soccer Players (see table below)</td>
<td>39,858</td>
<td>39,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of US High School Soccer Players competing at any College Level</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of US High School Soccer Players Competing at NCAA I Schools</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds of a US HS Soccer Player making an NCAA or NAIA Roster</td>
<td>18:1</td>
<td>13:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds of a US High School Soccer Player making an NCAA I Roster *</td>
<td>99:1</td>
<td>46:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3-1.**

Current Issues

The MLS and USL divisions also contribute to the disorganization and discouragement of soccer in America. Unlike foreign constituencies, the MLS and USL currently do not operate through a promotion and relegation system. Instead, these leagues compete within their respective divisions, and there is not necessarily an award or punishment for the top and bottom teams, except for the ability to select first in the draft. In European leagues, teams are transferrable between divisions. The three lowest ranked clubs in the top-class league are forced down a division, while being moved up to the top division reward the three highest ranked clubs of the bottom class. Teams that fall in divisions lose a substantial amount of revenue, television partnerships, and sponsors.\textsuperscript{49} Not only is there a competition for securing the overall championship title, there is also the battle to remain or move up in the division. MLS and USL’s organization discourages participation because it does not promote individualistic incentive to win every game as it does in other foreign leagues.

As of March 2019, one hundred club teams in the United States filed a lawsuit alleging that MLS is not in compliance with FIFA’s statute regarding promotion and relegation.\textsuperscript{101} The statute reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
"A club’s entitlement to take part in a domestic league championship shall depend principally on sporting merit. A club shall qualify for a domestic league championship by remaining in a certain division or by being \textcolor{red}{promoted or relegated} to another at the end of a season." \(\text{VIII. Sporting Integrity, Article}\)
\end{quote}

Without promotion and relegation, the MLS operates as a corporate entity, like the other U.S. franchise-based sports leagues, and awards new franchises on the basis of several criteria. These criteria include "determining financially secure and committed owners, ownership of, or approved plans for, a stadium, the local population and realistic size of the market for the club, and whether or not there is already an established local fan base." 

MLS’s single entity structure is unique, even for American sports leagues. MLS was designed this way "to protect the league against instability, to ensure guaranteed returns for investors and to deter the possibility of anti-trust challenges." Even though this structural design has its benefits, it has created consequences for the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), the governing body of soccer in the United States. USSF is a member of both the Confederation of North, Central American, and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) and FIFA, and it is obligated to each of their statues. All three organizations have set out statutes that mandate compliance with FIFA regulations as a requirement to remain members of the organizations.

FIFA also has a statute, Article 9.2, that allows for other considerations deciding on participation in league championships:

"In addition to qualification on sporting merit, a club’s participation in a domestic league championship may be subject to other criteria within the scope of..."


the licensing procedure, whereby the emphasis is on sporting, infrastructural, administrative, legal and financial considerations. Licensing decisions must be able to be examined by the member association's body of appeal." 104

Eighty-five percent of top-tier leagues in the world operate through promotion and relegation, except for the United States and Australia. In 2008, FIFA sought to address this issue in an article titled “FIFA to tackle areas of concern” that specifically referred to Article 9:

“Concept: Results on the pitch decide whether a club goes up or down a level in every championship around the world except in the United States and Australia, where there are “closed” leagues. Recently it has been possible to achieve promotion artificially by buying or moving a club. FIFA wishes to make sure that this cannot happen again.

Objective: To protect the traditional promotion and relegation system for clubs based purely on sporting criteria—which is the very essence of football.

Application: The decision was taken at the FIFA Executive Committee meeting on 15 December in Tokyo. The article will now be submitted to the Congress next May for approval and implementation as a “new article” within the rules governing the application of the Statutes.” 105

Despite this publication, there has been no action on behalf of FIFA or CONCACAF to amend MLS structure. MLS’s closed league system inhibits its ability to

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104 See Supra Note 102.
compete with top leagues on the basis of quality. Although it has been undoubtedly the most successful top-tier soccer league in America, its stability is questionable. This lawsuit will draw FIFA’s attention to the blatant disregard of its statutes, and should they choose to act, will disrupt the current structure of the league. This will affect investors and players immensely. The professional league faces a number of challenges to its longevity.
CHAPTER 4: HOW CAN SOCCER BECOME MORE POPULAR IN AMERICA?

Soccer is currently in a period of exponential growth in America. The MLS and USL are in a unique position where slight changes to the infrastructure have the potential to catalyze youth development, professional expansion, and social acclaim. By instituting a new interrelated system, the MLS and USL can garner considerable investment from financial investors and devoted soccer enthusiasts, and their support can further the soccer appeal to American individualists by making the collective sport more palatable to individualistic culture.

Promotion and Relegation

As mentioned previously in chapters two and three, Major League Soccer and the United Soccer League do not operate in a promotion and relegation system; the two leagues are only connected by the MLS’s ownership of a few USL League Two teams and affiliation with fifteen of the USLC teams. The USLC (Championship League-Division II) and the USL1 (League One-Division III) combined have forty-six teams in play for the 2019 season, and the USLC plans to expand to thirty-eight teams with the additions of Chicago and East Bay in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The MLS is comprised of twenty-four clubs and will soon reach its twenty-eight-team self-imposed limit with an expansion plan in place for the 2019 and 2020 seasons.
The present-day infrastructure of each league consists of a season of regular matches with the addition of post-season playoffs, leading to a cup game to determine the champion. There is no interleague play. Implementing a promotion and relegation system would create a dynamic unbeknownst to American sports and would have no comparison to the NFL, NBA, or MLB championship tournaments.

The promotion and relegation system incentivizes each team to put forth the utmost effort in every match to ensure that the position held in a league would not suffer. Consequently, the regular season matches would hold more weight than just the potential of a playoff game or championship cup. As a result, each match is more exciting and draws more attention for its audience. As teams are promoted and demoted, sponsorships and partnerships increase for respective teams, providing more revenue and motive to compete for these financial benefits.

Currently, “there are challenges in growing domestic club broadcast audiences, sustaining them across a season, and keeping pace with other soccer broadcast properties,” and “promotion and relegation offers appealing and exciting broadcast content throughout the season.” As evident from other open leagues, there is an overall increase in match attendance in the context of promotion. The average attendance gap between Division I (MLS=21,873) and Division II (USL=4,916) is large, but former

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USL teams have transitioned into MLS, demonstrating that interleague movement is not only possible but also beneficial in terms of increasing attendance and interest in US Soccer.

Businessmen invest in lower-league teams for potential profitability, which builds up the program as a whole. The opportunity to invest in these teams with the hopes of promotion attracts new owners and improves the overall quality of management and clubs in all divisions. Existing owners are compelled to continuously “improve their organizations either in hope of winning the league or achieving promotion, or through fear of relegation,” encouraging “ambition, innovation and dynamism, with no room for complacency or inertia on the part of every ownership game.”

Investing in all divisions furthers the development of the entire organization and creates more opportunities for owners—which is unique to the American sports industry. The promotion and relegation system incentivizes investors and promotes individualism as owners are given more autonomy over the success of their team across multiple divisions. Implementing thorough regulations, as used globally, ensures that clubs meet the standards of professionalism and are financially sustainable enough to be promoted.

Individualism correlates with American capitalism, reinforcing “that every human being may live their own life...as an end to oneself.” The professional sports industry is a microcosm of capitalism on the global level; however, there are two possible faults when pursuing a capitalistic structure—“the failure to achieve truly competitive markets

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109 See Supra Note 106.
and the manifest unreasonableness of the initial distribution of income.”\textsuperscript{111} Sports have become increasingly commercialized over the years at the expense of amateurism. As a result, monopolistic power in the industry is rampant, especially in the United States, and “efforts to improve the perceived fairness of the income distribution often conflict with the objective of improving economic efficiency.”\textsuperscript{112} The franchise-based league organization, where businessmen found and manage teams, construct stadiums, and sell tickets, actually conflicts with true capitalism. These owners operate as a committee making central decisions regarding broadcast rights, merchandise rights, and income distribution. For football, baseball, and basketball, the franchise-based league organization has been widely successful and supported by the economy; however, this structure is more monopolistic than capitalistic. These leagues attribute their success to “the rules, which maintain balance among the teams;” skeptics argue that their success “derives from artificial scarcity (entry into the majors is closely restricted) and monopoly power.”\textsuperscript{112}

The European model operates through free entry, where the American industry is tightly restricted to the wealthy. European organization promotes true capitalism far more than American industries because anyone has the ability to begin a team and wealth is determinate on performance. The league is interconnected through the promotion and relegation system, and “this fluidity promotes a kind of cutthroat competition.”\textsuperscript{112} The European leagues are unequal in wealth, where American sports for the most part are

\textsuperscript{112} See Supra Note 7.
equal, given the salary caps and divided revenue. The unequal distribution of wealth again promotes true capitalism. The current structure of soccer in the United States is organized in accord with those of the other American major sports associations; however, this model does not benefit the league because it does not align with soccer’s global, and successful, design nor does it further capitalistic goals. Shifting from the franchise-based structure to promotion and relegation allows for more capitalism and creates more competition between investors, teams, players, and fans.

Promotion and relegation increases competition, which in return, provides players with greater competitive experience. Due to the increase in competition, owners are more likely to invest in better facilities and coaches, promoting better player development. As players become more skilled, they become more attractive to other teams. Players can “provide a potential revenue stream for owners looking to realize value” through transfers.\textsuperscript{113} Athletes in turn become more valuable commodities—this directly correlates with individualism as players increasingly improve their own value and worth in the league through their performance.

Aligning with other world-renowned leagues positions the United States as a global player. The current “closed league” prevents the United States from being a contender competitively with dominant teams. Changing the infrastructure would allow the national team to attract more developed and highly skilled players and would assist in their ability to achieve international success. American support would increase if the national team were more able to effectively compete and dominate internationally—winning is a major factor for individualists.

\textsuperscript{113} See Supra Note 106.
Along with the promotion and relegation system, the championship cup should be a separate entity. If the results of the regular season play determine the teams promoted and relegated, teams are more motivated to perform skillfully and professionally. The championship cup could then serve as a reward to those teams who exhibit exceptional performance throughout the season, and the playoff tournament leading up to the cup would consist of the top teams from each league. Again, this structural change furthers team development, financial investment, and competitive appeal—all of which align with individualistic values, as each match becomes more of an individual battle than ever before.

The institution of a season-total league also creates a solution to America’s disapproval of allowing professional soccer games to conclude in a tie between teams. Although playoff and championship games cannot end in a tie, regular season matches are permitted to under the current regulations. If every game determined a team’s eligibility to not only assume a playoff position but to also maintain their current league standing, then no match could ever end in a tie. Therefore, at the end of the allotted ninety minutes, overtime periods would ensue to declare a winner. A definitive winner of each game satisfies the individualistic condition of American sports.

In sum, instituting the promotion and relegation system allows soccer to become palatable with individualistic culture. Through this structure, investors, spectators, and athletes each receive more individualistic value in the sport.
Marketing

One of the most significant disadvantages of soccer in comparison to other American sports is that there is no hero or world-renowned player—America does not have a Cristiano Ronaldo, or Lionel Messi, or Ricardo Kaká that showcases American talent and embodies national pride. The MLS attempted to create a star by bringing Real Madrid’s David Beckham to join the LA Galaxy—his career was short lived due to injuries, lack of commitment to American soccer, and his distraction with “celebrity status.”114 Even though Beckham’s career did not fully produce what the MLS had hoped it would, his move to the United States did spur more interest for foreign players to consider joining the league.

The MLS and USL employ both American and foreign individuals, and by adjusting their marketing approach, can compose America’s own soccer hero or heroes all over the country. In order for soccer to become a threat to the NFL, NBA, or MLB as the most successful sports organization, the clever individuals need to be promoted. The NBA and NFL market certain players through sponsorships and advertisements. The MLS and USL can endorse specific players through these sponsorship agreements with corporations such as Nike, Adidas and Puma. Highlighting individuals in this way provide the public with a name and image to follow, which engages individualistic society. In other countries, soccer players are worshipped for their talent and creativity on the field, but the American media has yet to seek out these athletes.

The sports media plays a significant role in how sports and individuals are perceived by society. The media continuously portrays individualism over teamwork in every sport by romanticizing achievements while overlooking the mundane but necessary courses of action that led to those events. The fundamentals of collective effort—defense, passing, and teamwork—are overshadowed by the overly glamorized individual skill and accomplishment, which alone require little to no team collaboration. The media perception translates into spectator expectation, as the audiences anticipate some spectacular individual accomplishment in every game.

In order to promote individualism in soccer, the media needs to highlight the individual skill in soccer, which is unlike that of other sports. Soccer requires quick intensive footwork to move down the field and defeat the other team’s players one-on-one. Individual players employ offensive moves such as the Maradona, inside touch scissor, v-pull, stop-and-go, and elastico as they work their way down the field against the opposing team.\(^{115}\) This display of skill should be rewarded, just as those who score goals are rewarded. On that note, exceptional defensive skill should also be recognized. By highlighting the offensive and defensive skills unique to soccer, the sports media creates interest for individualistic society that praises such abilities.

The media also needs to recognize the American players who have succeeded in the top leagues around the world—Clint Dempsey at Fulham and Spurs, Tim Howard at Manchester United and Everton, Christian Pulisic at Borussia Dortmund, Landon Donovan at Club Leon, just to name a few. Currently, Americans view those playing

internationally in a negative light; however, “Brazilians do not think this way when Neymar goes to Barcelona...this is how it works in the rest of the world.” Americans feel that playing elsewhere rejects the soccer system, but “in reality it is the exact opposite. It is a celebration of the system.” Former United States Men’s National Team player Geoff Cameron states “nobody is more proud of having played in MLS than me. The Houston Dynamo launched my entire career. They got me to the Premier League” (Cameron currently plays for the Queens Park Rangers Futbol Club, based in White City, London, England).116 American culture should celebrate the athletes that its soccer system produces, and this recognition begins with the media. Thus, the change in marketing and media perception enhances the agreeability between collective soccer and individualistic America.

Individual advertisement can also be formulated to promote nationalism. The United States Men’s National Team will benefit from the individual endorsement as the country becomes more aware of its prominent players. As awareness increases, engagement in professional soccer rises, and society becomes more involved and devoted to soccer in all aspects. The Men’s National Team’s likelihood of success in international competition increases as resources are expended into the development of the American soccer program as a whole—American soccer becomes more attractive to aspiring youth, young professional, and foreign players. The current system is restricting and “the powers that be in U.S. Soccer have created a poisonous divide between the MLS players and the

so-called ‘European’ players, and until that culture is torn down, the [United States
Men’s National Team] will continue to slide backwards.”

Youth Academy

In early March of 2019, the United Soccer League announced the creation of its
newest division, the USL Academy, which is the organization’s first ever Academy
League. The vision of this program is to “provide a unique way to bring together the top
three tiers of the USL—the Championship, League One, and League Two—allowing
academy teams from all three levels to compete against one another and provide local
youth with a chance to display their potential,” developing a “clear youth-to-pro path in
each of the communities USL clubs reside, while providing more opportunities than ever
for young Americans to pursue professional soccer.” The Youth Academy League will
enable young men to have the opportunity to experience more advanced training and skill
development than has ever been possible.

Academy systems are prominent in other countries, but the system has not been of
importance to American leagues in the past. America’s youth soccer program that has
been in place over the years has long excluded “low-income and non-suburban families
from participating at the same rate as higher-income families,” prohibiting much of the
soccer-enthused population from being able to play. Many children stop playing soccer

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117 See Supra Note 116.
118 “USL Unveils New Vision for Academy Landscape.” In USLSoccer.com. March 14,
http://theconversation.com/until-youth-soccer-is-fixed-us-mens-national-team-is-
destined-to-fail-85585
due to financial reasons and the lack of accessibility to development teams. As a result, talent is scarce, and the program fails to produce exceptional athletes.

In the past, these development teams have been expensive and sparse, excluding an enormous number of young children from the opportunity to further their skills. Each USL club, regardless of division, will implement an academy team for youth under thirteen (commonly seventh grade) and under seventeen (commonly eleventh grade). This system will impact nearly every state in the country, enabling majority of soccer players to have the ability to play at advanced levels. These clubs will also be significantly cheaper as scholarships are offered for those that need financial assistance, and the clubs pay for most of the expenses associated with competitive play. Figures 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3 depict the states and clubs impacted by the new Academy League.

![Figure 4-1.](https://www.uslsoccer.com/news_article/show/1004181)
Figure 4-2.

Figure 4-3.
The introduction of the academy league provides an unprecedented challenge and opportunity to American soccer culture. This advancement has the potential to inspire a substantial amount of growth of club teams in states where soccer is currently not prevalent. It also provides a pathway from youth to professional that does not require the conventional college route. There are not enough division one men’s programs to support the number of players seeking advanced levels of soccer. This is especially prevalent in the Southeast, considering only Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina have a division one men’s soccer program. Those that play for division two, division three, and community college schools in the South are left with minimal opportunity to further their career at a division one school, let alone a professional club. The implementation of the youth academy will further develop American youth, but it will also instigate future international success and increase soccer’s marketability and demand.

Overall, the promotion and relegation system combined with the youth academy creates an advantage for soccer over the other “big three” sports. These structural changes allow more competition within the soccer industry and more opportunity for individuals to enhance their talent and skill. By enforcing competition, marketing and recognizing individual talent, and providing more opportunities for development, soccer can become more aligned with America’s culture and individualistic values.

**Rule Changes: Penalty Kicks, Offside, and Headers**

Sports analysts and commentators have argued for years for the dissolution of the rules regarding penalty kicks, offside, and headers in soccer. Penalty kicks occur after the two fifteen-minute overtime periods to end the game and decide the winner. These
analysts disagree with this rule, declaring “there is nothing worse than when teams pour their hearts into a scoreless 120-minute tie and the game is halted, to be settled by an oft-arbitrary round of penalty kicks. It’s sad. Just think of all those fans deprived of dozens of more minutes without any goals.” Although this rule does inhibit the continuance of a competitive game, it protects players from potential injury due to exhaustion from playing one hundred- and twenty-minute games. It is also rare for professional games to end in penalty kick shutouts—only two World Cup games to this day have ended this way. America’s desire to discard of this rule is ungrounded, and penalty kicks provide ample individual glory for both those players taking the shots and the goalies protecting the goal, which is exactly what Americans want more of in soccer.

The offside rule is one of the more controversy rules in soccer. Opponents of the rule rationalize that offsides hinders the game by limiting offensive play. The rule is designed to make it more difficult for the offense to gain advantage on the defensive side of the field, adding value to scoring a goal. In soccer, this is one of the most essential rules for the defense. Many teams win games based on this rule alone, and an exceptional offense is able to employ remarkable tactical skill to avoid an offside trap. Removing the offside rule would severely diminish America’s ability to compete internationally because both the offense and defense would be unequipped to successfully play with international teams accustomed to this. The media and marketing changes, however,

overcome this limitation by altering spectator perception to heed to those offensive and defensive field skills, as opposed to simply scoring goals.

Headers are a common way to contact a soccer ball, especially when scoring or defending goals. In recent years, however, health professionals have frowned upon using the head to control the ball. New research concerning Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), a neurodegenerative disease caused by repeated blows to the head, has created much apprehension in contact sports.\textsuperscript{121} Most of the studies have been conducted on football and hockey players,\textsuperscript{122} but researchers are beginning to examine the brains of soccer players as well. The studies have only just begun, and there are no conclusive results currently.\textsuperscript{123}

This medical issue, however, does raise many concerns for players’ health. On average, a soccer ball weighs one pound,\textsuperscript{124} and the repeated blow to the head over time, even at such a minute weight, can stimulate brain damage. In 2002, former British soccer player Jeff Astle died at age fifty-nine after battling dementia for many years. Following his death, Astle’s family urged medical researchers to further investigate his cause of death. In 2014, his death was attributed to CTE—only four other soccer players at the


time had been diagnosed with CTE who played soccer from a young age to the professional level. The English Professional Footballers Association and the Football Association commissioned research into the link between soccer and brain disease.

The research of CTE in soccer is relatively new, and the sample sizes are small; “the findings cannot be extrapolated on a wider scale,” and the studies have only been conducted on those who have had a very high amount of exposure. Upon the findings in CTE research, “the American Youth Soccer Organization has eliminated heading all together for players under the age of ten and limited heading during practice for those between eleven and thirteen.” Michael Alosco, a clinical neuropsychologist at Boston University’s CTE Center, stated “that exposure to RHI (repetitive head impacts) during peak neurodevelopment may increase one’s vulnerability to later-life thinking, memory, and mood problems…although much more research on this topic needs to be conducted to determine the short and long-term effects of youth football on the brain, it seems to make intuitive sense to limit potential brain injury during a time when the brain is undergoing tremendous maturation.” Taking preventative measures by discarding this rule in professional leagues would certainly be beneficial; however, the removal of the rule should be left to the discretion of soccer’s international governing body, FIFA. As with the offside rule, eliminating headers in American soccer could potentially cause harm to international competitiveness. There is not enough concrete evidence to establish

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a connection between heading the ball and brain disease; however, these confirmed cases are certainly warnings to those that do have frequent exposure. Until there are more conclusive results, it seems unlikely that FIFA will eliminate heading from soccer universally.
CONCLUSION:

In sum, American individualistic culture creates a barrier to entry for soccer, as wholly collective, to reach its full potential in terms of financial investment, player development, and spectator attention. Major League Soccer and the United Soccer League have failed to amend to their structure and marketing strategies to become malleable with individualistic society. As a result, soccer has yet to prosper in the United States of America as it does globally.

This thesis argues that soccer has the ability to capitalize on this issue of individualism by altering its American infrastructure and marketing. By implementing promotion and relegation, MLS and USL are able to overcome their shortcomings in investment, retention, and stability. The leagues gain a competitive advantage over other major sports industries due to the unique organization of the internationally acclaimed soccer structure. Shifting from a closed league to an open league positions the United States to be competitive with international competition. Focusing through the media on the individual aspects, such as offensive and defensive skills, scoring goals, and individual player accomplishments, allows the sport to attract and captivate larger audiences seeking the individual glory. Highlighting individual talent also posits certain players at the forefront, creating the all-star players soccer has lacked in comparison to NBA, NFL, and MLB.

Minor changes such as those presented would create a shift in the perception of soccer in America. It would help curtail the idea that soccer is too foreign and too
collective to be successful in America, which has led to a mass misconception of the sport and reduced its popularity.

The USL has arguably taken a baby step in a positive direction by restructuring its organization to align more with foreign leagues. The MLS’s defiance to embrace and adopt FIFA rules, however, holds back the organization as a whole to move forward. Query whether the USL’s advancement and the pending lawsuit against the MLS will be enough to provoke the needed transformation or if it will only exacerbate the problems the sport already faces.
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