

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

US CHOSEN FOR WORLD CUP SOCCER 1994



The best fireworks of this Independence Day weren't even in this country — they were in Zurich, Switzerland, where the Federated Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) announced that the United States will host the World Cup Soccer matches in 1994. Instead of lighting rockets and flares, the members of the World Cup USA 1994 delegation popped corks on champagne bottles to celebrate more than two years of hard work trying to convince FIFA that the U.S. was a legitimate home for international soccer.

This month, six years from now, the best soccer players from around the world will get to see the real fireworks as they visit this country for more than 50 playoff matches held at 12 different stadiums from the state of Washington to Washington, DC. They will play on some of the best sports turf in this country, if not the world. Perhaps then, the world will recognize that this country is serious about both types of football and the turf on which they are played. Furthermore, maybe this country will accept soccer as a spectator sport equal to or greater than football, baseball and basketball.

We congratulate the management of the 18 stadiums inspected by FIFA this past April. They cleared away any doubt as to whether the U.S. can meet international tournament standards. Their willingness to invest money in stadium fields to satisfy FIFA specifications, in some cases to cover artificial surfaces with temporary natural ones, sent the right message to the decisionmakers in Switzerland. Even though only 12 stadiums will be used, all 18 were willing and able to commit the necessary resources to meet FIFA requirements.

Soccer didn't just arrive in the states. It's been steadily building up over the past three decades. Almost every child in U.S. elementary schools today is introduced to the sport.

It wasn't that way 30 years ago. Back then, few physical education teachers took soccer seriously. Fortunately, I grew up in St. Louis, one of the early strongholds for youth soccer. Jim McCann, an Irish physical education instructor at my grade school, made every student from second grade on practice soccer skills. His efforts helped launch soccer in our community.

He knew you had to play soccer to appreciate it. He also knew it was a sport of international significance. I'll wager that more kids play soccer today than baseball and football combined. In fact, this has probably been the case for more than ten years. Through increased participation, we have been building our appreciation of soccer on a national scale. In many areas, soccer has the same popularity it has in foreign countries that view it as their national sport.

The selection of the United States for the World Cup Soccer 1994, is the culmination of decades of interest. It's time for American soccer players to join the ranks of international stars such as Pele. World Cup Soccer 1994 could do that.

During the next six years, many aspiring soccer stars will be practicing their skills on your fields. Help them out by making your soccer fields every bit as good as your football and baseball fields. Do your part to build the U.S. soccer spirit.

When I played soccer in college we'd be lucky to have 50 spectators in the stands. And, we all know that professional soccer has had a tough go of it the past ten years. FIFA has given us the chance to prove that soccer can be a major success in this country. We have six years to get ready.

If we all give as much as Jim McCann did 30 years ago, and start this summer, our best players will grow into a team that can take on the likes of Brazil — and the adults who grew up playing soccer will fill the stands. But first, give them the turf they need to make it happen.

Bruce F. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

AUGUST

2 Turfgrass Field Day, Purdue University Agronomy Farm, West Lafayette, IN. Contact: Jo Horn, Dept. of Agronomy, Purdue University, W. Lafayette, IN 47907, (317) 494-4803.

3 University of Georgia Turf Field Day, Georgia Experiment Station, Griffin, GA. Contact: Dr. Gil Landry, 2400 College Station Rd., Athens, GA 30605, (404) 542-5350.

9 Mississippi Turfgrass Association Annual Meeting, Royal D'Iberville Hotel, Biloxi, MS. Contact: Professor Euel Coates, P.O. Drawer PG, Mississippi State, MS 39762, (601) 325-3138.

10 Texas Turfgrass Field Day, Texas A&M Extension Center, Dallas, TX. Contact: Dr. James Reinert (214) 231-5362.

10 Penn State Turf Field Days, Joseph Valentine Turf Research Center, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. Contact: Dr. Joseph Duich, Dept. of Agronomy, 405 Ag. Admin. Bldg., University Park, PA 16802, (814) 865-9853.

26 Third Annual Turf Test, University of Rhode Island Turf Research Plots, Kingston, RI. Contact: Richard Skogley, University of Rhode Island, (401) 792-2791.

SEPTEMBER

13-15 Virginia Turf Field Days, Virginia Tech Turf Research Center, Blacksburg, VA. Contact: J. R. Hall, professor of turfgrass management, College of Agriculture, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, (703) 961-5797.