



Bethlehem Steel Soccer Team 1925-26,
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Chapter 3

Soccer's Popularity in the USA: A Historical Perspective of American Sports

The question of why soccer is not one of the major sports in America is the subject of endless debate between those who love the game and those who don't.

Soccer fans tend to see the glass as half-full and rapidly rising. They envision each development as the dawn of a new era where soccer takes its place alongside football, basketball, baseball and hockey as a major American sport.

People who don't like soccer see the glass as half-empty with a crack in the bottom keeping the glass from filling up. They scornfully dismiss anything related to soccer, especially when soccer appears to gain momentum.

The hype surrounding the World Cup or arrival of a David Beckham spurs the cultural experts and mouthpieces of the sports world to protect the American public from the soccer menace.

Recent history strongly indicates that soccer's destiny in the next 20 years will land somewhere between the two extremes. The Sixties dramatically altered the landscape of American sports. Television brought sports into our homes and for the first time, a large segment of the population that lived outside major league cities could actually see star players for themselves.

For those who were not fortunate enough to live near a pro team and attend live games, radio and the print media were their connection to sports.

Before 1960, baseball was the undisputed number one sport in America. The NFL, NBA and NHL had loyal fan bases but their affect on American culture at that time was limited compared to what followed over the next 20 years.

Basketball and hockey held considerable sway in the Northeast and spots in the Midwest but barely made a ripple elsewhere. Boxing started a long slow fade at the end of the decade; it stayed in the spotlight through the showmanship of Muhammad Ali and his rivals. After Ali retired, boxing slid downhill unabated despite