

Ahtziri

5 Estrellas

An Ethnography of Soccer¹

PREFACE

As a Latina who grew up around mostly other Hispanics/Latinos, soccer is the one sport that got pushed on me as a kid; it's what all my friends and family played growing up, except for me. I was the one kid who decided to pick softball, which falls in the same season as soccer. Not only did I never get to play the sport, but I rarely ever even got to just go watch the games because our schedules corresponded. It was like this for years. By the time high school came around, I quit playing softball my junior year. After all, I wanted to focus on working because I fell in love with money more than the sport. My friends took this as their opportunity to beg me to try out for the team as they had no doubt I'd make it because our high school team was pretty bad already, but I refused.

I chose soccer to be the topic for my ethnography because I want to see the hype around the sport, and I want to know why soccer is the most loved and popular sport in the world. My boyfriend, Daniel, has been playing soccer his whole life. It's what has helped him meet his best friend, who is like a brother to him. The sport has helped him create countless amounts of memories with his cousins, dad, brother, and plenty of others. He has the same love for soccer that for a long time, I once had for softball. Daniel is going to be helping out in my observation

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and helping me improve my soccer skills so that by the end of my observation, hopefully, I will have changed my view on the sport.

Daniel is also going to teach me about the rules and the basics of how to play, so when he takes me to watch his games, I can understand and follow along with the game better. Daniel is part of an indoor soccer league, at the 5 Star Soccer Field, which is located in Melrose Park IL. He plays on Sunday mornings, so I've never been able to go since I work Sunday mornings. But he just joined a new league where he plays on Friday nights, so I'm able to go watch him play. Throughout the period of time that we are working on this project, I am also going to be joining him to go play at Berens soccer field and practice playing around for fun to get more exposure to the sport.

I am such a sore loser, so I hate playing games that I'm not skilled at, which is why I always had an awful time playing soccer. I am not a runner and what's so exciting about people kicking a ball? Every time I saw the soccer nets up in the gym, I knew it'd just be another day of me not participating because as much as I would want to learn how to play back then, everyone else was overly competitive, so the ball never got passed to me. I know that going to practice and play soccer with my boyfriend will be different since I know he will include me, so I'm wondering if that'll help the sport grow on me.

When observing the game, I expect it to be very loud as I know how passionate people are when it comes to soccer. I am going to assume this place where he's going to go play is massive because I know how big soccer fields are, and I am almost positive they will have multiple fields and have at least three games going on at the same time. As to how the game will

go, I assume that they will win one out of the two games at least. I think that the games will turn out to be very intense since I have seen how seriously men take the sport they love.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An article titled, *Reasons Why Soccer is The Most Popular Sport in the World*, mentions how Football has become more about the money rather than the game over the years, with many people trying to buy the big names in the league for insane amounts of money. For example, *KU Sports* talks about Neymar's 222 million Euros contract that he made with a French club after they bought him from Barcelona ("Reasons"). Not all players are in it for the money; for example, Messi, another big name in sport, turned down a 1.6 billion dollar offer to go play for a team in Saudi Arabia because, to him, soccer has never been about the money he just wants to play the sport he has grown up loving. He chose to sign with Inter Miami instead, which is about a 20 million dollar contract per season.

KU Sports also provides a list of a few reasons why soccer is the most popular sport in the world. The list includes: easy to understand game rules, the little equipment needed, and how anyone can play ("Reasons"). Whether being inside, outside, a big group, or just me and a partner, anyone can enjoy the basics and fun that come with soccer. This contributes to it being known as the most popular sport.

Even though I have never watched a soccer game before, it is easy to pick up the concept of the game. The easiest explanation to give someone on how to play soccer would be that it involves running around and kicking a ball into the other team's goal without the goalie stopping it. I can't use my hands unless I am a goalie, and the game must be played safely. Playing too

rough can lead to getting a yellow or red card, which then leads to sitting out the rest of the game.

On their website, *5Star Sports* mentions “As a family-based business, we understand the importance of promoting sports as a means for families to bond and have fun together” (*5Star*). They continue, “Our pride and joy are our five premium sports fields, meticulously designed and maintained to provide the ultimate playing experience. From Monday to Friday, these stunning indoor soccer fields are open for use, allowing me to indulge in the world's most beloved sport” (*5Star*). *5Star Sports* brings family and friends together through their love for the sport. Since they now provide 7 great fields, there are always games going on ranging from ages 3 years old to the bigger league, which is 18 and up. Having such a wide age range is just another thing that helps the sport be more popular since they are so inclusive.

OBSERVATIONAL DATA AND ANALYSIS

5 April 2024 (10:30 p.m.-12:00 a.m.)

We turned onto a very dark road, and my boyfriend told me that we'd arrived. I'm confused at first until all of a sudden we passed the fence and I saw the place was absolutely packed with people. This place even had 2 parking lots, and they were both filled with cars. People of all ages were coming in and out. I was surprised to see a spot so active at the late hour. It was 10:45 pm by the time we walked in. We walked in, and I noticed that it was set up like an amusement park. They had a barricade that made a line for people to pay to get in, and there were signs everywhere about the things not allowed in: water bottles, outdoor soccer cleats, drugs, guns, etc. We walked up to a booth where my boyfriend paid 10\$ for our entry. The

female clerk asked for our hands so we could get a stamp. It was red and read the day's date with the words "I PAID" on top.

After we met the security area where we placed our belongings on the table so that they could be searched as the security guards proceeded to have us walk through a metal detector. I had forgotten to take my Apple watch off when I went through the machine, so I beeped and then simply explained that it had to be my watch. The security took a look at me and let me pass. My boyfriend walked through it right behind me, and he had forgotten to take his phone out of his pocket. When he showed it to security, they still insisted on having him patted down and searched. After he gave him the clear, we started walking towards a bar area where they had a big projector that had an international soccer game playing. As we kept going I saw all the fields; there were 7 in total. Basically, everywhere I turned, I could see a game going on.

We walked to our field, and my boyfriend headed off to his team's bench to catch up with the rest of his team. They line up to give the ref their player IDs, which show that they are a part of the team and league. They started to warm up by walking back and forth and doing team stretches. A whistle blew, and both teams stopped what they're doing. The captain from each team went to talk to the ref, and they did a coin flip to decide what side of the field they'd like to have or if they'd like to start with the ball.

Our team started with the ball, so they played it back to the goalie, and the goalie passed it to a defender. They started to move towards the other side to start building up on them. They go back and forth, passing and battling each other for the ball. The opposing team scored, and they started back in the middle of the field where we have the ball. I could tell my boyfriend's team was under more pressure as time went on, and they still hadn't scored. That's when the

defender decided to trick the other team by pretending to pass it to the left striker when instead he passed it to the right striker and he scored. Then we're tied, and the opposing team called for a time-out. Both sides run to their benches to huddle and talk about their next moves for the last part of the game.

The ref blew his whistle, and they continued to play. They alternated some of their players. The opposing team had the ball but quickly our defense moved in and stole the ball to score right when the goalie wasn't paying attention. Out of frustration the opposing team pushed a player on our team and started arguing with the ref. It created a commotion amongst the rest of the players and quickly there was a swarm of security that came in to de-escalate the situation. They kicked the player out, and then they continued the game.

At that point, our team was just passing the ball around to let time run out since we were winning and the game was basically over. The buzzer went off, and the ref blew his whistle one last time as both teams lined up on the white line that is right by their benches to high-five and say good game. I went over to my boyfriend to congratulate him on the win, and then we walked out to leave. The place had died down, and all the other six fields were empty and the workers looked like they had started their closing shift cleaning routines as I saw them wiping down tables and sweeping the area.

12 April 2024 (9:30 p.m.-11:00 p.m.)

Pulling in, I noticed that it is way more packed than last week. We were quite literally experiencing traffic in the parking lot as we were sitting ducks waiting for people to leave so a spot could open up. We parked in the second lot so the walk to the door was longer. Once I made

it inside, I had only brought my phone with me so after waiting in line and receiving our stamps, I put my phone on the table and went through the detector as my boyfriend followed. We both passed with green lights and then headed to find our field.

We will be playing on field 2, but we got there early, so we decided to watch the game on field 4. We ran into some old friends from high school, so we started catching up and the boys started talking about soccer. I can't help but notice how many little kids are just roaming around unsupervised. This one little girl stood out to me because she looked to be about 3 years old and she was just roaming around. I kept looking around to see if someone else was watching her, and I only noticed one other worker watching her as the baby girl kept wandering off deeper into the place. I got up from where I was to try to help her as she looked lost and I couldn't help but think the worse. The worker beat me to her though, and I heard her call over her walkie "Code yellow." I assumed that is the code that they have to announce for a lost kid because maybe about 5 minutes later over an intercom, I heard them call for the parents of a lost little girl, followed by a description of her.

We saw my boyfriend's teammates start to walk in, so we headed back over to the field where we are playing. They do their same routine, which involves them gathering around the bench by the side they are playing and they start to get their equipment and supplies out of their bags. Some of them changed into their jerseys, while others put their shin guards and cleats on. After this, the captain handed them out their Player ID cards, and they then handed them to the ref to commence warming up. They dribbled the ball with their feet and then lined up a single file facing their goalie. They had the ball placed in front of them at an angle, and then they kicked it and tried to score as practice before running back to their bench area. They call this the

finisher part of their warm up.

They started off the game just as they did last time, with a coin toss between the captains and the ref to pick who starts with the ball. The opposing team got the ball, but while going back and forth we eventually stole the ball from them. The opposing team's approach to how they play defense was a lot more aggressive than the previous team we had played, or even how I have seen that we play. A player from the opposing team kicked a player from our team from the back, leading him to fall to the ground. The ref blew his whistle and called a red card. Our team was upset over how "dirty" the other guys were playing. While on a time out, waiting for the ref's whistle to continue, the captain talked to our team about pushing back. The captain said, "Si ellos van estar jugando asi de sucios, nosotros tambien!" (If they are going to be playing this dirty, so are we!)

The ref blew the whistle after he called over his walkie for more security at field 2. "Just in case," he said to the rest of the workers who were also equipped with walkie-talkies. Shortly after I noticed four security guards walking up to each entrance to the field. The fields are caged inside a glass box with a gate on each side by the bench of each team to get in and out of the field.

With 10 minutes left on the clock, our striker scored on the opposing team. Retaliating, a player on the other team purposely ran into my boyfriend, who was the striker who just scored on them. My boyfriend shoved him toward the ground by the wall. He knew what he had done was going to get him benched for the rest of the game, so he was already making his way back to the bench. The opposing player got up and the ref gave him a penalty kick, which is a free shot for getting fouled. He took his shot and just when it looked like it's about to go in, our goalie tipped

it out. “WOOOOOOO,” everyone on our bench was cheering, knowing that now with only 2 minutes left on the clock, this will be yet another win.

The energy of this win was more celebrative compared to last week. I believe it's because of how tense and close the game was. Everyone felt the tension, so the win felt like a weight lifted off our shoulders. Even though throughout the game the two teams were playing harshly, they still came together at the end to show good sportsmanship, and all the players shook each other's hands or waved at one another to say good game and show their mutual respect.

CONCLUSION

After my 2 visits to 5 Stars Sports, I now see soccer in a different light. A sport that I once saw to just be a game of people kicking a ball around, was made so much more than that in this building. Here it's a community, a lifestyle for some. It's their escape from reality. I saw so many grown men, in their 40s-50s, having just as much fun and just as big of a smile on their faces as the Little League, which involves boys ages 3-7. It was nice for me to see how excited they would get to play. This spot allows for these guys to come together and play the sport they love.

Even while just being an observer at 5 Star Sports, they were very welcoming. Everyone there greeted me with a smile, and the food they serve is delicious, especially the refreshing drinks. While seated on our team's side, I made some friends with the other girlfriends/wives who were also there to watch their men play. We all were there supporting their hobbies because we see how this sport is like their twist to what a nail/hair salon or the mall is to us. There was enough security for parents to feel safe enough to let their kids roam around. It was like a Chuck

E. Cheese with the amount of little ones that were running around just having a good time being kids.

Soccer is a passion that the whole community shares even if they aren't the ones playing; watching the game is just as fascinating. It's a sport that holds more to it than just the game; it brings people together to create memories that last a lifetime.

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