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The World Cup Is Coming to Orlando

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Mark your calendar Orlando, June 17 to July 17, 1994, because those are the dates for the World Cup, and the big big news in Orlando this week was the announcement out of New York that the City Beautiful will play host to at least four first-round games in this premier international sporting event. Congratulations to the city, and thank you to Joanie Schirm and her committee, World Cup Orlando/ Kissimmee/St.Cloud who worked so hard to make this a reality.

When it was announced that a committee was being formed to bring the World Cup to Orlando, it seemed almost as bizarre as the notion several years ago that some guy from Philadelphia was going to bring an NBA franchise to the city. In fact the situation was similar, as no one in the City of Orlando seemed to care much about the NBA back then, the television stations ignored it, and the newspaper made fun of it, when it noticed it at all. The same might be said of football, or as it is called in the United States, soccer.

The powers that be at FIFA, the international ruling body for football, decided, over the objections of the purists, that the 1994 Cup should be contested in the United States, so that international football might crack the lucrative U.S. sports market. All those TV dollars look as good to international football bureaucrats as they do to college athletic directors. And so with the Cup coming to the United States, this marvelous band of local soccer fanatics and optimists, representing a sport that has an extremely low profile here, put together an effort to bring the World Cup to the City Beautiful.

And in the end it worked. Orlando, not Miami, not Tampa, will be the only Florida city to host the Cup, and in addition the City Beautiful is the only city in the Southeast to host the World Cup. No Atlanta.

How did it happen that Orlando will be the beneficiary of this \$80M infusion into its economy? Certainly it wasn't because there are so many soccer fans here, although as American cities go there are a few. One would expect that both Tampa and Miami would be better choices in this respect, because both have larger Latin populations than Orlando. And it is not because professional soccer had a great following here, although it did

in Tampa, where the Tampa Bay Rowdies of the North American Soccer League, the NASL, drew well over the years.

There was no NASL in Orlando, and no MISL in Orlando, although the Orlando Lions have had a small and faithful following. Miami was ruled out because, among other things, the national pastime will be occupying Joe Robbie Stadium in the summer of 1994.

So what was the secret. Well first, and foremost, the Mouse House is here. People from around the world love the little capitalist rodent, and football fans of the world will be more than delighted to cheer for their national team while wearing mouse ears. In addition there are an abundance of hotel rooms, an international airport that rivals the best in the world, and local government put forth some effort after initial reluctance. But first and foremost the local organizing committee led by Joanie Schrim, ridiculed by many around the state, did an incredible job of selling FIFA on the idea that Orlando is not only the most attractive site in Florida, but it is rapidly becoming the new center of the universe.

In addition it didn't hurt that the greatest woman soccer player in the history of the game was on the local committee. While much has been said about the power of the mouse in this operation, not enough has been written about the significance of Michelle Akers-Stahl as a persuasive force within the international soccer community. I have been told that when the World Cup committee made its official visit to the City Beautiful, the presence of Michelle Akers-Stahl dazzled the FIFA representatives. Remember this is the same person who a few weeks ago was invited to Brazil to share the limelight with Pele.

And so we are reading this week about the great infusion of the green that will come to Orlando from around the world. But this will also be a sporting event, and Orlando, along with the rest of the nation will get a first-hand look at international football. This is not the MISL or the NASL. This is world class football. This is the game that has started wars in Latin America, provoked riots in Europe, and been the reason for mayhem in small towns and major cities around the globe.

For the first time Americans are going to get a look at real football, and real football fans. Americans will have the opportunity to see the game played at the highest levels, and the opportunity to see these games with the best informed and most fanatical football fans in the world. The finesse and skill

that will be on display here will be like nothing ever seen before in this country. No matter how good some of the individual stars were in the NASL, team play of international caliber never did appear in the United States. Now it will, and maybe now Americans will come to understand why football is a game that people will kill over.

So thanks again to Joanie Schrim, World Cup Orlando/Kissimme/St.Cloud, Michelle Akers-Stall, the capitalist rodent and everyone else who contributed to the international sports coup of the decade. Orlando has the World Cup. I still can't believe it.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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