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The Menace of Soccer

By Akosh Chernush

WELL, MAYBE JOHNNY still can't read, but he is certainly getting better and better at dribbling, scissor-kicking and controlling the ball with his feet. He is too young to understand that he will one day undermine America. For if Johnny keeps at it, there will soon be an American team in the World Cup finals. As if we don't already have enough troubles.

After a slow, uninspiring start in the Sixties, soccer has caught on here. Even the President likes it. At least he seems to prefer it to contemporary Russian literature.

For one who knows the rules and has played the sport, nothing in the world is more exciting. If one's team loses, it can be a personal as well as a national tragedy. Soccer can change an enlightened cosmopolitan into a rabid chauvinist and an otherwise tolerant humanist into an unmanageable brute. Someday all this will be grist for a Harvard dissertation.

The United States has survived for two centuries, but over the longer haul I am convinced that no country, not even this one, can survive soccer. Of course, this being an election year, it is difficult to make courageous moves. But if America is to remain strong, united and second to none, the first step must be a constitutional amendment banning soccer once and for all. Unpopular though this may be, we have no choice. Just look at what soccer has done to other nations.

The English used to be the champs; Britannia played against "the rest of the world." But in London's Wembley Stadium in 1953, England lost its hegemony to the invading Hungarians and it has been one sunset after another ever since. Frustration is mounting and people are always getting pummeled at English games. Not very sportsmanlike. In fact, the English appear headed back to the Dark Ages: They are considering building castle-like moats between the stands and the soccer fields.

In 1954, in a rehearsal for their uprising two years later, the Hungarians staged a mini-revolt. The Magyars, who had quietly swallowed every form of economic mismanagement, could no longer stand it when party hacks mismanaged the national team's composition at the World Cup finals, resulting in Hungary's loss to West Germany.

It wasn't until Real Madrid got into a losing streak that Spain began agitating for the return of Gibraltar. French soccer is not in such good shape either, which may account for recent findings of national "moroseness." In Corsica, separatist sentiment against the French mainland flared into a full-fledged movement in 1972 after Bastia lost the championship to Marseilles.

Here in Washington, only Henry Kissinger fully understands and appreciates soccer's global implications, which is why he receives the European scores every week in a bulky "Eyes Only" envelope.

T rue, soccer can stop war, at least for the day of an important match, as happened in Biafra. But soccer also can start war, as it did between El Salvador and Honduras. I am afraid things will only get worse and world tensions mount further if the United States were to appear on the soccer scene.

Just contemplate what would happen to U.S. investments in Brazil if we ever beat the Brazilian eleven. Does anybody think an American will be able to vacation in the Caribbean after we clobber Haiti or Trinidad? What about oil imports if we topple Tehran? I won't even mention the Panama Canal.

At home our birth rate will soar whenever our team wins. Nine months later boys will be named Pele, and girls, Pelee. But when the national team loses, there will be many suicides and our language will reach new heights of zieglerization as spokesmen explain the joys of finishing a strong second.

By the Eighties, Hollywood actors will be out and we will have a former goalie for President. In the public interest, we will finally ban handguns, as well as kitchen knives, meat hooks, clubs and assorted other weaponry. From time to time, however, referees will still be found cut in four in mysterious and unexplained ways. There will be hatred between towns and states and regions. When the Los Angeles Aztecs lose the national championship, California will be the first state to sever its ties to the nation, long before the quake does the job. The Civil War could not unmake the Union. Soccer will.

Akosh Chernush is a writer for the Hungarian service of the Voice of America, who recognizes that his views on this issue are rather personal.

