

Soccer or Football Medicine? Global Sports Medicine for a Global Game

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Any given weekend where the sun is shining in the United States, you can jump in your car and see children competing on the soccer field. Soccer, known as football in other countries, is one of the most played sports in the US with over 25 million children participating every year. Despite Americans' mass participation in youth soccer, this level of enthusiasm hasn't necessarily translated into soccer being one of our most watched sports. On an international level, soccer is not only a sport but a way of life, and it is often described as "the beautiful game", as visions of Pelé, Kaká, Messi, Ronaldo, and others can invoke emotional responses in the hearts of so many people across the world.

Over the course of the past 20 years, the enthusiasm for soccer in the US has grown significantly as defined not only by the number of youth players on the field but also now by the increased number of professional teams, energetic supporters in the stands, and fans watching on their televisions at home. This exponential growth started with the success of our US Soccer National Teams in the 1990s, including the 1994 World Cup held in the US, and became cemented into the culture of American sports with the birth, development, and subsequent growth of Major League Soccer (MLS) across the country. Despite the recent disappointment of the US Men's National Team not making the 2018 World Cup, Americans should remain excited that our US Women's National Team is prepared to be a contender in the 2019 World Cup, our US Men's National Team will certainly make a significant push to compete in the 2022 World Cup, and the US is again ready to re-energize Americans' interest in soccer by hosting a collaborative bid for the Men's 2026 World Cup!

Now that I have hopefully energized all of our readers about the current and future impact of soccer within the US, I am personally excited about being an active member of the soccer medicine community through my roles as the Chief Medical Officer of the Orlando City Soccer Club, including Orlando City Lions MLS team and Orlando Pride National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) team, and a Team Physician for US Soccer. What most people don't realize in the sports medicine community and beyond is that our MLS and US soccer medical teams have been working tirelessly for the last 20 years to not only provide top-notch medical care within our country but to

create one of the best medical structures in the world.

Over the last several years, I have learned that our soccer medical community is fortunate to have strength in numbers. In fact, our international colleagues provide a collaborative team to help push the limits on medical innovation so that we constantly reflect upon the quality of care that we are providing for the ultimate improvement of the medical care for all of our players. I recently returned from a trip to Barcelona for the Isokinetic Medical Group Football, known as soccer in the US, Medicine Outcomes Meeting where over 3000 participants from almost 100 countries around the world attended. After previous involvement in Major League Baseball and the National Football League, and since my integration into the soccer medicine community several years ago, I have been amazed and challenged by the complexity of pathology that we see in soccer players and the attention to detail that is required to successfully transition a soccer player back to the field while also preventing a subsequent injury. In fact, soccer players require a unique combination of skill, fitness, performance, nutrition, and sustainability to be successful at the highest level of soccer. As a sports medicine community in the US, we have come so far but yet still have so much left to learn. I'm certainly excited that we will be able to build and share this knowledge base with not only my fellow Americans but also our international colleagues abroad. Who knows, after the 2026 World Cup, the further growth and solidification of soccer and soccer medicine in the US might enable me to change the title for my editorial with no resulting confusion: "Global Football Medicine for a Global Game".

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