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Are You Ready for Some Fútbol?



I'd never seen anything like it. Never. Ever. Never ever. And I'd been around. Chaotic, outrageous, outlandish and sometimes downright romantic victory celebrations were not new to me. Because I'm a sports fan. I love the finals, the championship, the Big Show — whatever you want to call it. I'm a rapt audience for the last game of any sport. And I attend wherever/whenever I can score a ticket. I watched Miami and Atlanta

party for three days straight when their teams won the World Series. I watched St. Louis and New York City greet their Super Bowl champions like conquering heroes with ticker-tape parades and live music around the clock. Heck, I even saw LA in a riotous mess after the Lakers won an NBA Championship. But I'd never, ever, *ever* seen anything like what I saw — not before and not since — on an obscure September afternoon south of the equator.

Two of my bosses and I were in Quito, Ecuador, to promote *American Way's* first-ever international issue in September 2009. Ecuador was the cover story, and the fine folks down there were proud as peacocks to have their country helming a global issue. Nothing about this trip was planned with athletic celebration in mind. This was sheer coincidence on our part. Even still, if someone had told me prior to my trip that I'd be in country during

the Ecuador vs. Bolivia soccer match, my reaction wouldn't have been much different than if you'd told me that Timmy Likes to Fish is playing one night only at the Shiloh Bar & Grill in Columbia, Mo.

The night before the big game, my bosses and I were hanging out with some Ecuadorians on the historic *Ruta de las siete cruces* (the Route of the Seven Crosses). We were talking about the grandeur of the country when one of the locals asked me about American football, as the 2009 season had just started up.

"Are your Dallas Cowboys going to be champions this year?" Joe asked me. I'm not from Dallas, but I live here, and I've learned that when South Americans think American football, they default to America's Team. Because of his question and the recognizable Dallas Cowboys brand that he referenced, I returned the question with a South American twist, referencing the only South American fútbol [read: soccer] team I was aware of.

"Is Brazil going to win the World Cup in 2010?"

All the chatter stopped. I

could have sworn I heard the quintessential record scratch in the background. And a cricket.

"My friend, don't you know what tomorrow is?" Joe asked.

"Of course!" I replied. I was bluffing. Joe knew it.

"Tomorrow is the biggest fútbol match of the year for us. If we beat Bolivia, we will most likely be in the World Cup." Then he explained to me how qualifying for the World Cup worked. If Ecuador had even a sliver of a chance of making it in, they needed to win tomorrow. As Joe spoke, the entire table chimed in with commentary about how strong Ecuador looked as of late. It was a lot of technical-speak, and I barely followed their dialogue, but I could hear their passion. It was the same passion I heard from my days in New York in 2003 when the Yankees beat the Boston Red Sox in the American League Championship Series.

Only the next day, believe it or not, when Ecuador did in fact beat Bolivia, the celebrations were louder than those I had heard six years earlier in Grand Central Station after the Yankees clinched it. Perhaps it was because the entire city of

Quito had shut down — schools and business closed, no cabs were available, no waiters would serve you — but when that 3-1 final was announced, the cheers literally echoed off the mountains, and the entire city let out a resounding *huzzah!*

All this preamble, and this wasn't even a World Cup game. Actually, Ecuador didn't even make the World Cup. So you can only imagine how insane South Africa will be for the next month as all the world's soccer powers vie for the title of World Champion. We soccer novices are given a cheat sheet to the games on page 40, and we're also given a list of all the best soccer bars across the country to catch big-time play on page 46.

As you're watching the World Cup matches on TV, try to catch glimpses of fans in the stands throughout the games. Then tell me you've seen passion like that before. Just try and hear the proverbial record-scratching cricket.

Adam Pitluk
Editor

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