

PERSPECTIVES

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WOMEN *of the Moment*

The U.S. women's soccer team's riveting run to the World Cup championship captures all of America's attention

"Lightening in a bottle," is how Hank Steinbrecher, the U.S. Soccer secretary general, summed up the 1999 women's World Cup.

It was, indeed, magic. The 90,185 delirious fans who packed the Rose Bowl for the championship game Sunday was the largest crowd to witness a women's sporting event anywhere, ever.

Outside the stadium in Pasadena, tickets to the game sold for as much as \$1,000.

More than 40 million American viewers tuned in — making the U.S. team's victory the most-watched soccer game ever on American television.

Almost one billion people watched worldwide.

Next week, the U.S. women will appear on the covers of Time, Newsweek, People and Sports Illustrated.

The folks at the TV networks reportedly got vicious, fighting about on which new show America's newest and brightest heroines would appear — only to be shocked when they appeared on all of them, one after the other.

America's team is, deservedly, getting more love than any team has gotten in a long time.

And now, understandably, the focus is shifting to the future.

Could there be a women's professional league ahead? Contract negotiations for higher pay? What kind of endorsement possibilities are out there?

Everyone wants to measure the phenomenon of the last three weeks. There's an ill-fated need to place a dollar-and-cents value on it.

But let's not.

Because this is what it was — good.

It was good for soccer in America.

Those players couldn't have done a better job drawing attention to the game that they love.

It's good for women's athletics. The 1999 World Cup will go down as one of the most significant landmarks in the scope of women's sports history.

It was good for America. This soccer team exposed more patriotism in people than they knew they had. Consider all the "U-S-A" chants that reverberated from the vast seas of red, white and blue at every arena where the women played.

And, most definitely, it was good for sport.

It was fun. It was exciting. Refreshing. Thrilling. Beautiful.

What sports should be.

Brandi, Briana, Mia, Michelle and all of their teammates are national heroes.

They're heroes who kids can look up to. They played hard. They played together. They have good attitudes. All that stuff.

The Los Angeles Times even reported a 13-year-old boy's take on his favorite player, America's hardest-nosed midfielder, "Michelle Akers, she's my thug."

See, they brought the whole package.

And this is the best part. They inspired America's kids with it.

Nobody can put a rating on that.

Anything that encourages youth to be active is good.

Studies have proven sports to benefit young people.

Playing on teams, or even competing in an individual sport like tennis against other kids, helps develop social skills. Dealing with people in athletic settings teaches children to work with and respect other people. And that raises kids' self-esteem for the rest of their lives. That correlates into success on and off the playing field.

It also keeps kids in shape. Being active physically is a more healthy pastime than hanging out at the mall or pounding in Playstation buttons all day.

Competition teaches lessons not only

about winning and losing, but about believing in oneself.

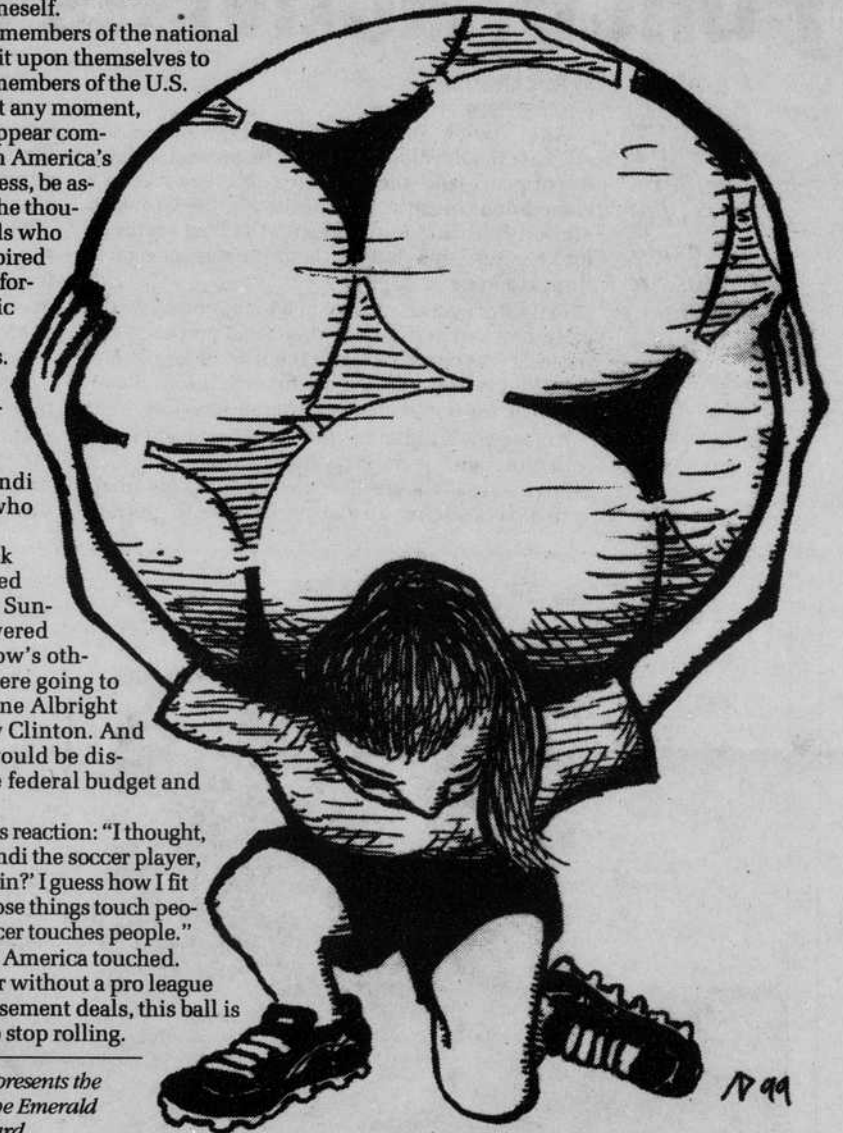
So while members of the national media take it upon themselves to assure the members of the U.S. team that, at any moment, they'll disappear completely from America's consciousness, be assured that the thousands of kids who they've inspired won't soon forget the magic of the last three weeks.

Prior to her appearance on "Meet the Press," Brandi Chastain, who scored the penalty kick that clinched the Cup on Sunday, discovered that the show's other guests were going to be Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton. And that they would be discussing the federal budget and Medicare.

Chastain's reaction: "I thought, 'Hi, I'm Brandi the soccer player, how do I fit in?' I guess how I fit in is that those things touch people and soccer touches people."

Consider America touched. And with or without a pro league or fat endorsement deals, this ball is not going to stop rolling.

This story represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.



Editorial Cartoons



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