

# RED WHITE AND AZUL



**AZUL PLAYS ITS FIRST HOME GAME SUNDAY, MAY 20, AGAINST OREGON RUSH. BE THERE.**

In the U.S., fútbol is a sport that's overshadowed by football. Mainstream sports networks rarely cover soccer unless it is around the time of World Cup — and it's no stretch of the imagination to say that there are more than a handful of Americans who have no idea when the next World Cup will be (2014, in Brazil).

For the record, that World Cup is exclusively the domain of international men's soccer teams — it's probably even safer to say that a greater amount of Americans are unaware of when the next women's World Cup is (2015, in Canada), or even that a women's World Cup exists.

Lack of cultural enthusiasm for soccer is as American as baseball and corn dogs. While a large portion of Americans link their personal identities to professional football teams that play for their respective cities, the rest of the world derives nothing less than national pride from soccer teams competing on a global scale.

In Ireland, soccer-fans-turned-hooligan fight it out in the streets over the outcome of high-profile soccer games. In Colombia a player was shot to death for accidentally deflecting a ball into his own team's goal, which resulted in a World Cup game loss. Although these are extreme reactions to something that is "just a game," both incidents point to a glaring reality that does not exist in the U.S. — people take soccer really really seriously in other countries. So why don't we?

## HIGH-LEVEL WOMEN'S SOCCER TEAM, BORN JUST IN TIME FOR SUMMER

BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST

### GET ON THE BALL

Perhaps it's that our culture of fighter jet fly-overs and 21-gun salutes relates more to the regimented military progression of a football game, rather than the fluid and continuous jazz of soccer. Is it that the high-scoring double-digits of the gridiron speak to Americans more than the stoic punctuations of goals and penalty kicks? If these things were the case, wouldn't basketball and hockey also be condemned beneath purple mountains majesty?

Frankly, it doesn't make sense. Are we so close-minded and isolated a country that we can't get on track with what the rest of the world collectively considers to be the sport of all sports?

There's a pretty good chance that all it comes down to is a lack of exposure, and we should find a way to get ourselves into the stands of highly competitive soccer games. This summer in Eugene, that won't be too hard to do. There's a new team in town that's about to bring fútbol to the masses.

### KICKING IT

Congrats Eugene, you are now home to a new Women's Premier Soccer League (WPSL) team, the EMFC Azul, and this skilled group of die-hard soccer players is slated to kickoff a 10-game season in the Northwest Conference. The WPSL is the largest women's soccer league in the country — meaning, these ladies take their fútbol seriously.

The Eugene Metro Fútbol Club (EMFC) is the biggest soccer club in the Willamette Valley, known for hosting competitive youth soccer games throughout the Eugene and Springfield areas. The club is stepping it up with the formation of Azul, a collection of the best high school and college-age players from the community. Azul will face off against WPSL teams from Portland, Bend, Issaquah and Spokane, over the course of the summer.

Azul is a vision that head coach and EMFC director of coaching Jürgen Ruckaberle has wanted to bring into reality for quite some time.

"I grew up in Germany where there is a model for soccer," Ruckaberle says. "You play as a youth, and then

**RIANNA MANSFIELD** grew up playing soccer at South Eugene and went on to play for UO. She says she wanted to continue the sport after college, but there were few opportunities to do so at a high level of the game.

"I'm a true Oregonian, I like playing in the rain. It makes it more fun to slide tackle people," says 23-year-old Mansfield, an intimidating midfielder/forward who commutes from Ashland to practice and play with Azul.

**TAYLOR BOYER**, a Eugene-born, steeley-eyed midfielder who will go on to play for Oregon State in the fall, has high hopes (and sights set) on beating other teams in the league. "I'm looking forward to playing against the Oregon Rush," says 18-year-old Boyer. "They're a solid team and most of them are going on to play at D1 schools like I am. And of course, the Portland Rain, 'cause they're the best team out there and we're looking to be the best team out there."



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