

here 11 years ago from Mexico. Yousef*, from Kuwait, has been playing with this association for about 15 years.

Many of the guys have been playing together for more than 10 years, but there are several relative newcomers. Kofi (from Ghana) says he has been playing with the group for three or four years now. Haf (from Iceland) has been playing for two years, but very irregularly due to work and injuries. Bernie (German-U.S.) has been playing for a few years, and began bringing his teenage son Matthias about a year ago.

Some guys — like Mo, aka Mohammad Afshar, an energetic restaurateur from Iran — are twice my age, while others, like Matthias Donner, make me feel old. It's an interesting mix of humanity.

Regardless of the diverse ages, professions and nationalities, organic soccer lets everyone play like carefree children. Haf says playing allows him to savor the final drops of his youth, like a fine wine. That's the beauty of organic soccer; it allows us to recover or renew our energetic and expressive youthfulness, whereas "the technocracy of professional sport," as Galeano lamented, "has managed to impose a soccer of lightning speed and brute strength, a soccer that negates joy, kills fantasy and outlaws daring."

Galeano's affectionate reference to soccer games as "fiestas of communication" seems relevant — today, most guys communicate in English, though some speak Farsi or Spanish, and they all speak some version of soccer.

Despite soccer's distinct dialects and infinite idiolects, the universal simplicity of its underlying grammar makes the game a uniquely inclusive and adhesive language in an unsettlingly divisive society.

And while the grammar may be simple, soccer has

infinite potential for creative expression — or at least untainted organic soccer does. But even formal competitive soccer usually escapes the coach-imposed authoritarianism of many other sports.

Once a game begins, even if a team has a clearly defined plan, unforeseen circumstances and useful observations constantly require spontaneous strategizing amongst teammates. Soccer fields are some of the most fertile grounds for the cultivation of important interpersonal skills. Philosopher Albert Camus is oft-quoted as having said that what he knows "most surely about morality and the duty of man" he owes to playing soccer in Algeria in the 1920s.

Reza moved to Eugene from Los Angeles about 12 years ago, but he's originally from Iran. "Soccer wasn't really my thing," he explains, "but the fact these guys are playing and it's a really good environment, now this is probably the only fun thing I do. Otherwise it's all work and family."

Having witnessed Reza play the game with confidence, grace and imagination, it's hard to believe soccer wasn't always his thing, but I can tell he speaks sincerely about his affection for this association.

"For many of us, this is the only exercise we get, but there's the social aspect too," Reza says. "Sometimes we go for tea or drinks after we play. There's a real caring for the group. We are people from all walks of life. We have a dentist, a doctor, professors, business owners, students, all sorts. It's good fun."

Indeed, it is good healthy organic soccer fun. ■

** Due to the organic nature of the sport, participants often don't know each other's last names, let alone use them, thus some participants are referred to by first name only in this story.*

FIFA GETS RED-CARDED

The world of organized soccer has seen some interesting, perhaps encouraging, but sadly not surprising events lately.

Quite unlike Eugene's informal, organic association of soccer-playing members, there is an infamous association of soccer-promoting national organizations and continental federations — FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), which control the world's most popular sporting event — the FIFA World Cup — as well as several less popular (and less profitable) soccer tournaments. Rather than promoting soccer and its positive qualities, however, FIFA for far too long has been prostituting the people's passion in pursuit of profit and power.

Even before these recent charges were announced, nobody doubted that the corruption of FIFA is systemic.

Following a wave of corruption scandals in 2010, FIFA invited Transparency International (TI) to advise it on reform initiatives. In its 2011 report with reform recommendations, TI explained that "FIFA is answerable to the 208 national football associations who themselves are partly dependent on the funds that FIFA allocates to them. This lack of mandatory accountability to the outside world make it unlikely that change will come either from within the organization or from the grassroots of the football organisations ..."

So far, the U.S. Department of Justice has brought charges against nine FIFA officials and five businessmen, though more investigations and charges are expected from the U.S. government as well as from Swiss, Brazilian and Argentine authorities.

These recent and expected law enforcement actions are very encouraging. What is not encouraging is the fact that, just days after the announcement of the indictments, Blatter was re-elected for his fifth term as FIFA president. Despite having the votes, in an unexpected twist, Blatter resigned amid scandal allegations June 2.

— Killian Doherty

MOHAMMAD AFSHAR



BEN TORKORNOH



MATTHIAS DONNER



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