

The World Cup is the Best P.R. America Ever Had

Who knew soccer would make the world fall in love with the U.S.?

By Bruce Bawer

One thing that I discovered when I moved to Europe is that they have this cute little game that they call football, even though it doesn't require the wearing of helmets, jock straps, and spiked shoes (although there are certain indications that, during post-game celebrations, some players may wear kneepads). Anyway, as far as I can tell, the game – it hardly seems to qualify as a sport – appears to involve two teams, most of whom, nearly always, tend to look pretty skinny for athletes, wearing loose t-shirts and floppy shorts while running around on a field and kicking a ball back and forth in an effort to get it into one net or another. It seems like a safe and diverting enough form of recreation for young children, but in fact, in Europe and elsewhere, it is actually played by adults. Indeed, my research has uncovered the fact that this activity even has some adherents in the U.S. But because America already has real football, these eccentric stateside fans have been obliged to come up with another name for their curious game of choice – namely. soccer.



Now, here's a new wrinkle. It turns out that every four years, national soccer teams compete in something they call the World Cup. Each time around it is hosted by a different country or countries. This year, as it happens, is a World Cup year, and the hosts this time around are the U.S., Canada, and Mexico – but really, mainly, the U.S. Canada is providing two venues, in Toronto and Vancouver; Mexico is providing three, in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. By contrast, sixteen of the sites where the World Cup games will be, or have been, played are in the U.S. The first game was on June 11; the last will take place on June 27. What this means is that hundreds of soccer players from all over the planet have descended on the U.S. for the month of June. And that's not all. This game actually has a lot of fans around the world, and thousands of *them* have also come to America to follow their favorite teams from city to city.

Needless to say, I have no more interest in the game of soccer than in mahjong or tiddelywinks. But something about this state of affairs is nothing less than fascinating to me. As someone who's lived and traveled widely in Western Europe

since 1998, I'm deeply aware of just how anti-American the Western European media are. Every single day, from infancy on, Western Europeans have been brainwashed about us. We're dumb, we're poor, we're morbidly obese, our whites and blacks hate one another, our country is riddled with crime, we eat nothing but lousy fast food, and we're arrogant flag-waving jerks who think we're superior to everybody else. A great many Western Europeans believe every word of this. Some don't – mainly those who've actually been to America, and especially those who've seen more of it than just Manhattan and Disney World. Which is why this year's World Cup is turning out to be more than just a massive athletic event. For thousands of foreigners, it's been an extraordinary eye-opener. With every day of their American adventure, they're discovering that they've been lied to about us all their lives. America, they're learning, is pretty damn terrific. The revelation is so widespread that even Jake Tapper at CNN felt compelled to take notice the other day, airing a brief [interview](#) with a German YouTuber named Fiago who had nothing but superlatives to offer about the country that Tapper himself can rarely bring himself to speak a single positive word.

The thing that amazes our guests the most is our friendliness. I believe it. When my Norwegian spouse first visited New York in 1998, he couldn't stop commenting on how friendly people were. And he was in *Manhattan*, for heaven's sake. I told him: hold on there. Go anywhere else in America and they'll tell you that Manhattanites are rude. But he wasn't having it: he'd never met such nice people as he encountered in New York. Later, when I'd lived in Europe for a while, I understood where he was coming from. Yes, I'd already experienced the aloofness of the English, the colossal obnoxiousness of Parisians, and the scary frostiness of the Germans. But that was only the beginning of my education in these matters. In the Netherlands, which I otherwise loved, I had to get used to the rude, aggressive argumentativeness that passes in that country for camaraderie. And in my partner's own homeland of

Norway, where I've now lived for 27 years, it took me quite a while to understand that the scowls that I received on the street in response to my naive smiles weren't a sign of nastiness but rather the result of centuries of living in cold, remote mountain villages far from the nearest neighbor.

So it's been delightful to see Europeans experiencing the real America – and getting wowed by it. They're even thrilled by things I wouldn't exactly jump up and down about, such as Wal-Mart, Waffle House, and Wendy's. And they're awed by something that has never been on my radar at all – the gigantic size of the stadiums at which the soccer games are taking place. (It turns out – who knew? – that America has 57 stadiums that can hold over 60,000 spectators, while all of Europe has only 32.) They're also losing it over the scale of the fireworks at the games and the stirring flyovers. When Americans do big things, they're learning, we do them big.

Here are some sample quotes from a German guy named Freddy whose [postings](#) on X about his discovery of the real America have gone viral: “Just passing through a town called Gainesville and this place looks beautiful. The houses are insane[:] wow.” “I love Americans. We were about to walk an hour to the stadium in the rain to save on an Uber, and the receptionist at the hotel we were parked in front of decided to drive us there.” “This [another huge stadium] is the most ‘The European mind can't comprehend this’ moment of my life. One of my friends said, ‘Punch me five times tomorrow and I'll still think this isn't real.’” “I'm in a place right now that's so beautiful I'm probably about to make 50 posts about it.” “I know some people will say I'm too positive about everything I see, but this place was crazy.” “The vibes are insane. Driving through the great state of Louisiana on our way to New Orleans. It's crazy how diverse this country is, every day the scenery looks different.” “Staying in the most beautiful guesthouse ever and now watching the USA's first World Cup match.” “Our room for the coming days in Houston. I

don't even know what to say about this. This is just unreal. No words."

It's interesting to note that the almost over-the-top enthusiasm of all these Europeans for America forms a striking contrast with the virulent anti-Americanism of many people from places like Somalia (a certain Congresswoman comes to mind). How curious that the inhabitants of nations that are, after all, in the First World, and that have their own magnificent qualities, can go berserk for America while immigrants from places that President Trump has so eloquently referred to as s**thole countries – that is, countries riddled with poverty, corruption, and disease – can treat America, this land of promise that has welcomed them with open arms, with such utter contempt.

For myself, I can't say I've been entirely surprised to see these European soccer fans falling in love with America. In recent months I've been following the American journeys of a few European YouTubers who've also become smitten with the states. One of them is [Jack Aynsley](#) from Newcastle, England, who has singlehandedly dispelled every calumny about the Deep South; his ability to strike up a conversation with absolutely anybody on the street – old or young, rich or poor, black or white – and end up discovering a beautiful soul and fascinating life story can be deeply moving. Then there's [James and Siana](#), who are also English (but have resolved to move to America), and who recently found an abandoned puppy on a remote Florida road and flew him back home to be their pet. Such big-hearted folks form a wonderful contrast to the despicable likes of [Louis Theroux](#), the snobby BBC hack who visits the same kinds of small Southern towns that Jack Aynsley celebrates only to find – miraculously – nothing but nasty bigots and morons.

Recently, in prominent and controversial speeches, J.D. Vance and Marco Rubio have lectured European leaders about freedom – and been greeted with outraged resentment. The chief response

was: "How dare Americans lecture *us* about freedom? It's America under Trump that is fast turning authoritarian!" The difference between America and Europe today, of course, isn't just about freedom. It's about all kinds of other things, too – friendliness, energy, ambition – that are, if you think about it, not entirely unrelated to freedom. The Macrons and Starmers may dismiss the warnings from America, but the ordinary Europeans who, between their attendance at World Cup games, are glorying in America's foods, freedom, and friendliness don't need to be warned. They're experiencing the differences between America and their native lands. Let's hope that when they return home, they'll spread the word. If they do, it'll go a long way toward dispelling the lies about us that their media never stop telling them. And maybe it'll even give a desperately needed boost to countries that are perilously afflicted with societal malaise, economic stagnancy, and a suicidal hesitancy to stand up for their own fading freedoms against the scourge of Islam.

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