

# Something's afoot here

by David Hermanson

It is somewhat ironic that soccer, the world's most popular sport for almost 100 years, has only recently gained a toe-hold in Canada and the United States — two nations notorious for their sports-minded multitudes. Just why the game has failed to make strides in these parts is a question despairing promoters must often ask themselves between applications of Grecian formula.

The fact is that despite extensive competition on both amateur and professional levels in this country, soccer has never really netted a wide following. One need only look back at last year's fruitless Edmonton Black Gold experiment or, better still, last year's attendance figures for the U of A's own Golden Bears (yes, Virginia, we do have a soccer team!) to get an idea of the problem.

Yet, as remarkable as it may seem, in the face of what would appear to be at most marginal interest, a few stubborn zealots remain convinced that soccer is salable as a spectator sport in Canada. More remarkable still is that these stubborn zealots are probably right. History has indeed borne witness that you can't keep a good sport down.

It is interesting to note that in 14th century England, the rough-and-tumble street-soccer of the day was, in King Edward II's view, much too dangerous a sport for any respectable monarchy to endorse so that in 1314 a proclamation was issued banning further play. The public,

though, had been bitten by the soccer bug and were not about to have this entertaining pastime wrest from them under mere threat of imprisonment. And inevitably, thirty years later under Edward III, street soccer was once again widespread.

Similarly, American collegiate soccer of the early 1800s was prohibited at Harvard and Yale as it was deemed too physical. Shortly thereafter, the game's rules were modified to those of rugby and the sport eventually became North American football — CFL style.

In the 18th century, soccer was several times outlawed in the British Isles under the pretext that it took interest away from the national military sport of archery. But as in the other cases, the activity persevered due to an overwhelming popularity.

## The Grand Old Game of Soccer

Although the origin of soccer as a team game is said to be the ancient Chinese sport of Tsu-chin played during the third and fourth centuries B.C., it is very likely that the appeal of propelling a roundish object into a crude goal arose in prehistoric times, our first soccer player being an inventive caveman.

After suffering strained knee ligaments and numerous broken toes, our clever caveman no doubt realized that the pace of the game could be quickened considerably if he were to substitute a ball of bamboo fibers for the boulder he was kicking

around. This light-weight spheroid became the air bladder of the ancient Greek and Roman versions of the sport wherein simple rules were devised.

From these humble beginnings has risen a soccer empire governed by giant unions like FIFA (the Federation Internationale de Football Association) and UEFA (the Union of European Football Associations) who are responsible for some 25 million footballers on 330 thousand clubs in 145 nations. In the majority of these countries, soccer is not only a booming business but a way of life.

It is not uncommon for a significant international match to attract well in excess of 100 thousand paying spectators. In 1950, at the World Cup final at Maracana Municipal Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, a colossal crowd of 205,000 looked on, the biggest in the history of the game. On the occasion of the F.A. Cup final at Wembley Stadium, in 1923, some 50,000 gate-crashers added their numbers to a paid attendance of 126,047.

With only one exception, geography has been desively influential on the outcome of the World Cup tournament. Only Brazil, in 1958, playing in Sweden, and in 1970, playing in Mexico, was able to return triumphant from another continent.

All other winning teams of the past 50 years have taken the Cup in their own bailiwick: Uruguay in 1950 at Rio de Janeiro; W. Germany in 1954 at



photo Jim Connell

Here's looking at you kid: Driller's bogie Turudija in action.

Berne; Brazil in 1962 at Santiago; England in 1966 at London; Germany in 1974 at Munich; and last year in Buenos Aires, the Argentinians were victorious. Of these victories, five were right in the home ball park.

Where money is concerned in soccer, amounts are astronomical. Take, for example, the one million pound contract with Nottingham Forest signed this year by former Detroit Express star Trevor Francis — that's one heavy contract.

In Argentina, a group of businessmen calling themselves "The Friends of Mario Kempes" offered Spanish first division club Valencia three and a half million dollars for the scoring leader of the most recent World Cup. They wanted to give

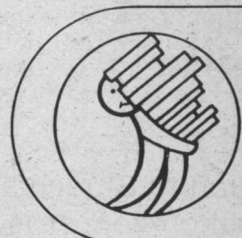
Kempes to an Argentinian club whose coach was a member of the group and who had personally pledged a million dollars towards the player's purchase.

If the stakes measured in dollars are high in the world of international soccer, then those measured in emotions are even higher it would seem. Suffice to say that the fans take their game just as seriously as do the owners.

In Turkey, military commandos armed with automatic weapons are frequently called in to control angry crowds at soccer matches. In Greece this year, fans attempted to kill a referee who was about to allow a goal scored by the visiting side while six members of the home side were at the opposite end of the field still celebrating a goal they

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