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## Soccer Ball



Soccer is the biggest sport in the world and is played in every country and almost every culture. New talent is found every day and the competition is becoming more and more intense. Soccer is nothing but a luxury. However, some people view it as a way of life. Soccer runs through their body like the blood in their veins. You can spend almost nothing to thousands of dollars a year for training or to be on a team. It does not matter how poor or rich you are; there is talent across every inch of this world. However, a topic of controversy surrounding this game is the question of whether or not it can be conclusively said that every player gets an equal opportunity to develop their skills to their fullest potential. Players throughout Europe, South America, and even Africa are trained differently than players who grew up in North America or Asia. Their style of play varies from controlled possession to emphasis on attacking the net. Despite the difference in the way the game is played, soccer brings everyone together and gives a sense of peace for moments at a time.

To me, soccer is a blessing. It is more than a sport; it's an art. Soccer is something beautiful; it's more than just a game. I started playing soccer when I was 4 years old, and I haven't stopped since. Soccer has brought me competition, glory, challenge, and a brotherhood that I will never forget. It has brought me my closest friends and something that I will be able to enjoy for a lifetime both on and off the field as I now watch from the sidelines. Soccer is an escape and also a great outlet for stress and hardships. Anytime I have a ball at my foot any pain or sadness that I was feeling would vanish. A soccer ball in its simplest form gives all sorts of meaning, and for a young kid from a small town in Connecticut, it was just the beginning.

The first soccer ball was created in 200 A.D. by the Chinese (Soccerballworld, 3). The Chinese used animal skin to form a ball that they would use in a game where they would kick the

ball in between two sticks that had a net. However, since then, you can see that the soccer ball has changed drastically, and in 1855 a man named Charles Goodyear changed the way a soccer ball would be designed (Engineering Sport). Goodyear designed the first rubber ball, which is pretty much the center of every standard soccer ball that is created today made of latex.

Soccer balls are sold all around the world. According to *Engineering Sport*, “approximately 40 million soccer balls are sold yearly around the world.” This is astonishing because a large percentage of its enthusiasts are unable to afford actual soccer balls to play with. In Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia, soccer balls are more common and you can find them almost anywhere compared to the United States. In the United States you will commonly find a soccer ball at a sports store or a major department store placed in a specific section. However, with first hand experience in my own personal travels around the world, this is not the case in foreign countries. Soccer is not as big in the U.S. as it is around the world. If you are a fan of soccer, this is something that you know off the top of your head. When you go somewhere where the culture revolves around a ball, you do everything in your power to spend money on something you love. I have been to Mexico, England, France, and Spain. When the word soccer comes into your head, these are the countries that you think of. I remember being in these countries looking for souvenirs and gifts to take home. In the small shops, major stores, and in the market places you could almost always find a soccer ball and that amazed me.

Soccer balls are made in many different places around the world. In a small town named Sialkot in Pakistan (Haqqie, 1), the manufacturing of soccer balls is how they produce their income. Sialkot is said to make up on average about 55% of the soccer balls produced yearly. They produce anywhere from 20-30 million soccer balls a year, and during the World Cup this

town has been known to produce around 50 million soccer balls. Because the World Cup is the largest sports tournament in the world, this tournament brings in billions of viewers every time it happens. Soccer balls come in a variety of sizes and start at all different prices. A size 5, which is the standard size ball for professionals, is about 27-28 inches in circumference (Nike, 2019). If you wanted to buy an official match-ball you would have to spend \$165. You do not need to spend this much money on a ball, and from personal experience, I have played with a \$15 soccer ball and it does not make that big of a difference. In some 3rd world countries it is sad to see people struggle. Even if they cannot afford a soccer ball, they find their own ways to improvise. I have seen pictures of kids in Africa using plastic bags, strips of cloth, and socks then wrapping them together with rubber bands to use as a ball (Zhang, 1).

To truly experience the culture of soccer you would have to go to a derby day. A derby is when two rival teams play each other. A few major matchups are Real Madrid vs. Barcelona, Manchester City vs. Manchester United, and Boca Juniors vs. River Plate. This past December, Boca Juniors played River Plate in the Copa Libertadores Final in Argentina. The final was made up of two games. One game was played at each home field. These teams have such an intense rivalry that no away fans were allowed to travel to watch the game. They could only see it when the game was at their team's home field. The first game ended in a draw with a score of 2-2. The second game was supposed to take place 3 days later. However, when the Boca Juniors bus arrived, River Plate fans smashed the bus windows with chairs and other objects, thus suspending the game 24 hours. Due to threats and the danger between fan bases, the South American Football Confederation suspended the game again and stated that the second game had to be held outside of Argentina. The final game was held in Madrid, Spain at the Santiago

Bernabeu. Even outside of Argentina, the game still sold out in minutes, and the stadium was filled with each team's supporters (Sporf).

In many places around the world soccer is what people do for a living. There is a lot more to do than just become a professional player. There are many other types of jobs available in the field of soccer. When you look at the overall picture, soccer creates millions of jobs. To name a few you have coaches, trainers, referees, doctors, scouts, announcers; this is just the beginning to those who work for the soccer clubs. For manufacturing jobs, you have all of the people who make and produce the products. These products start from jerseys, to soccer balls, the variety of training gear, and the soccer cleats. Also, you have the contractors who build brand new stadiums for major tournaments and make sure that the present stadiums are in top shape. There are also many other jobs available: groundskeepers who make sure the fields are in top shape, those who package the products that are bought, and people who usher and work concessions at games. These are just a few examples of the many jobs in the world of soccer.

No matter where you are, everyone can enjoy soccer. The meaning of a soccer ball can be different between the upper, middle, and lower classes. People who live in the upper class have enough money to satisfy themselves for a lifetime without having to worry about acquiring the necessities in life. The upper class are people who own soccer teams and buy season tickets. They are the ones who are sitting in the suites every game watching it in their own way. The middle class is divided up among each other. Many season ticket holders in Europe are from the middle class. Their passion for the sport drives them to use large amounts of their salaries for the love of the game. For the lower class this is where soccer is something completely different. A majority of the best players who played the sport have grown up in 3rd world countries or 3rd

world situations. Many players in foreign countries that have no money may not be able to get a good education. The only thing that they may have left is soccer. They look at soccer as a way to change the future of their own family forever (Rossing, 8). A key player who I look at is Cristiano Ronaldo. Ronaldo grew up in the streets of Portugal. His mother worked multiple jobs trying to support their family but it was not enough. Ronaldo used soccer as an escape from the world. A soccer ball allowed him to dream about a future that seemed impossible but would soon come. Ronaldo is now the highest paid soccer player of all time and financially supports his entire family.

Whether it be French culture where a soccer ball is known as “ballon de football,” Spanish culture where it is known as “Balón de fútbol,” or even Portuguese culture where it is known as “Bola de futebol,” a soccer ball is still a soccer ball around the world. In its simplest form, a soccer ball cultivates a sense of belonging and allows the dreamers to dream. It harbors a sense of community and culture; the ball represents a sense of true meaning and passion. It allows the beautiful game of soccer to manifest into something greater than just a game. It is something everyone of all cultures can enjoy as one. It serves a great purpose that unifies our nations and develops exquisite talents.

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