

The US Men's National Team qualified for the 2010 FIFA World Cup with the win against Honduras last Saturday. The game was back-and-forth to the last minute of injury time and could easily have ended in a draw. Because the game was not broadcast on the regular outlets, most fans did not have a chance to see it live but some did at the Casa Real restaurant. Chad Landis and Brian Pitts organized a special link and had the game on big screen projection.

The World Cup is a big deal. Like the Olympics of old, it returns every 4 years. National teams compete for three years prior to earn one of 32 slots in the tournament. This part of the competition is organized in "confederations" based on geographic areas. The US is part of the CONCACAF (Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Football) along with 9 other nations. The top three teams from each confederation will go to the first round of competition at the World Cup in South Africa next June and July. The fourth team will compete against the fifth-ranked team from the South American confederation for another slot.

Teams from across the world will meet June 11 in South Africa for a month-long competition. It is the largest sporting event in the world and the most-watched televised event. It has all the spectacle of the Olympics but involves only one sport. The USA has qualified for the sixth straight time in what is truly a "World Series".

The World Cup tournament began in 1930 as a creation of the worldwide governing body of soccer, International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA). FIFA itself was created in 1904 to manage the game across the European continent and among all now-former colonies of Europe. The various national associations deemed it necessary to agree on the rules, field size, etc., making the game easy to transport across borders and language barriers. The game is the same all over the world.

The US came late to soccer although the sport has been part of the landscape in the Northeast since the late 1800's. When the fledgling US Soccer Federation sent a team to the 1930 World Cup in Uruguay, they actually placed third and history credits American Bert Patenaude with the tournament's first hat trick. The tournament continued every 4 years with the wartime exceptions of 1942 and 1946.

When the US returned to the World Cup in 1950, they lost their first match to Spain but scored one of the great upsets in sports history when they beat top-ranked England 1-0. The game had been considered such an inevitable England victory that reporters didn't bother to cover it and when the score was telephoned to the headquarters, the call was thought to be a hoax.

The US was eliminated in the subsequent game, and soccer slipped off the US scene for the next two decades as baseball and pro football became television fixtures. Youth soccer began to explode in the 1970's and by the late 80's the US Men's National Team was once again entering qualifying tournaments for the World Cup.