

The Dakota Wesleyan Tigers women's soccer team ended their record-breaking season with a loss to Graceland College, Iowa, this week. Congratulations to the team and the three former Rapid City Cobblers who added significantly to the season: Kasha Roberts, Skye and Kayla Pahl.

College soccer championships are on the schedule for the next two weeks as NAIA, NCAA with their divisions cap the season. Professional soccer ended their season last Sunday in Seattle. The LA Galaxy and the upstart Real Salt Lake, at team of misfits and castoffs, finished on penalty kicks with Real slipping one more into the net than did the Galaxy.

Big business moguls were keeping one eye on the game and another on the big business picture of this young league. More than 46,000 fans were in Qwest stadium and the ESPN televised game went up in ratings in a time slot against an NFL game.

Seattle's homegrown soccer climate with soccer pubs and specialty soccer shops helped create a large soccer presence. Their expansion team, the Sounders, grew from a United Soccer League team that has enjoyed a solid fan base for more than 30 years. The Sounders games are opened by the "Sound Wave", a crazy volunteer marching band often led by co-owner Drew Carey who encourages the fans to be involved in the team. The city even painted the Space Needle to mimic the MLS Cup game ball.

Seattle has long had adult leagues, several soccer complexes, and multiple indoor soccer facilities. Their 30 to 40 year-old soccer culture reaches from youth through adult professional levels and continues to grow.

Major League Soccer brought David Beckham to Los Angeles in 2007 with a \$125 million contract (most was endorsements) but his attraction did bring people into stadiums and now more international players are considering a move to the league. Beckham is under contract with LA until 2011 or his retirement at which time he will be eligible to buy one of the MLS new franchises. Beckham has recently said he is interested in doing that. It is simply a good investment.

MLS attendance numbers are growing. This past season saw more people at MLS games than at Scottish Premier League games. New soccer stadiums and an increase in teams keep bringing the game closer to fans across the country. International business is investing big in sponsorships of teams and facilities as multi-nationals like Coca-cola, Toyota, McDonald's, adidas, Nike, and others show the world that they are connected to soccer in all nations. Televised games are now a regular part of the weekend schedule on ESPN, ABC, and Fox Soccer as well as Spanish channels.

Interestingly, although many Americans still see the sport as a passing fancy, it is Americans who have bought the most tickets for the South Africa World Cup next summer. There are more registered players in the US than anywhere in the world. The most popular game in the world has gained a huge presence in the US over the past 25 years, hosting 2 men's World Cup Tournaments and 2 women's along with the continued growth of the youth programs across the country.

As we sit down to Thanksgiving dinner today, take a moment to remember how fortunate we are to be in this country and to have a segment of our population that volunteered to leave their homes and families behind in order to make the world safer for all. It is a humbling thought.