

FANS IN BOSTON READY TO TAKE SIDES

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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"The Cup and the Selecao are massive draws with the migrant community," said Dr. Miguel Moniz, a Cape Cod-raised professor at the Universidade de Lisboa Social Sciences Institute. "Beyond the social aspects of it, I think part of the reason the Portuguese are so obsessive about their team is that if you leave aside the 15th century, the Portuguese haven't exactly been big players on the world stage, and the fact that the team is among the best in the world is a considerable point of pride."

"I was in Hyannis watching the 1998 final when France defeated Brazil and I was my usual characteristic glum self at the end of a Cup when I realize a month of my life is gone, and the team I am rooting for is out," Moniz recalled. "The guy who set everything up came up to me and said, 'Oi kid, the game is over, now it's time to celebrate.' And loss or no, they had a parade and a party that went all night, anyway."

FULL TEXT

There are more than 160 ethnicities represented in the Boston area, and these groups have long been closely following the World Cup. But only a few teams will bring celebrating fans into the streets, should they experience success.

In recent years, championship wins by Italy (1982) and Brazil (1994, 2002) have led to all-night outpourings and prolonged partying. Portugal attracts similar support in New England but has not come close to matching its 1966 third-place finish. England also could ignite passionate crowds, but has only threatened once (fourth place in 1990) since winning the 1966 title. And Trinidad and Tobago, a 750-1 outsider, will certainly trigger outbursts if it can even win one game in its first World Cup finals appearance.

The evolution of support for World Cup teams spilling outside the confines of the home or a closed-circuit telecast in a theater or bar dates to the 1960s in the Boston area.

When Lino Rullo arrived in the United States from Avellino via Milan as a 28-year-old in 1966, there was no conventional way to find out what was happening in the World Cup finals. So, Rullo hooked up a Telefunken short-wave radio, then relayed the results on his own sports radio show on WROR-AM.

"A lot of times the news came in at very strange hours," Rullo said last week. "I then gave the results and highlights

in my radio program and I have to say, honestly, it was very widely followed from all over the state, because that was the only way to get such news in those days."

Rullo spread the word every four years. Then, Italy won the 1982 Cup, and Rullo joined the celebration of honking cars and all-night barbecues.

Meanwhile, Rullo was raising a family, and his daughter, Dr. Ornella Rullo, and sons Carmine and Riccardo have become supporters of the team of their native land the United States.

Rullo will view the Italy-US game June 17 at the Dante Alighieri Society in Cambridge.

"My children will be rooting for the USA and I will be hoping for a tie to give both teams a chance at advancing," said Rullo, honorary president of the Dante Alighieri Society. "Of course, if it comes to Italy needing the win, then I will be rooting for Italy. I believe that the two teams could meet again in the quarterfinals, where I will have to cheer for my native land. I hope my children forgive me. They will be for USA, but if they are out, they will support Italy. And if it is the other way around, I will be for the USA 100 percent."

Rullo's split loyalty symbolizes the multinational fabric of the Boston area.

The Portuguese immigrant community remains strongly attached to its roots and the national team.

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Those colonial seafaring exploits 500 years ago established lasting relations, and the Portuguese also have allegiances to Brazil's national team and, in this World Cup, Angola.

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The increased availability of soccer broadcasts has helped increase the sophistication of local followers.

"When I first came here [in 1991], there was sort of a black hole as far as information was concerned," said ESPN announcer Derek Rae, a Beverly resident. "The Globe gave us sort of a lifeline by printing the English and Scottish scores. It was the only way of keeping in touch, along with articles sent from home.

"But it has gone from a dead zone to a football-watchers paradise. No doubt about it, the level of knowledge is great now among young adults in their early 20s."

Rae moved to Boston from Scotland after receiving a BBC broadcaster of the year award.

"I get a feeling a lot of American soccer fans relate to England," Rae said. "It is purely down to familiarity. They

watch the Premiership and Champions League on television and they get to know players like Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard.

"Maybe they relate a bit more to England because the language is the same and it is easier to follow. From that point of view, they have empathy for the way they play in England. That is a curious thing, because the USA is such a mosaic of different cultures.

"But Brazil is everyone's second-favorite team. How can you not love them? I know I did in 1982, that was the team I wanted to win the World Cup, and, living in Scotland, I wasn't alone. They are exponents of the beautiful way of playing. Brazil in South America and Holland in Europe embody what the neutrals like to see in the game. I was talking to my father and he said he hoped Brazil and Holland do well, because they play good football."

Mike Lavigne has been following soccer since he was a youngster in Groton, waiting for the US to emerge.

"The USA is the biggest surprise, in a sense," said Lavigne, an assistant coach with the Boston College women's team. "We have a team and they're good and people know about them. The game is huge among the younger generation, and so much more now that the US is good. You talk to high school kids now and they are excited about the US, and that is a huge difference from how it was a few years ago.

"A lot of them follow England. It's the star power of [David] Beckham and [Wayne] Rooney, plus the fact that they're good. This is England's chance, look at the midfield they have, and it's the first time where their players are the right age everyone is in their middle 20s."

Some of the biggest and most regular soccer celebrations in the area used to take place during the FA Cup on Saturday mornings around the Plough and Stars on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge.

"That was one of the only places you could see a game," Lavigne said. "The TV was stuck up in a corner over the bar and people were lined up outside looking through the windows. Now, people are Tivo-ing it. But we all miss that, the feeling of everyone being in one place, almost like you snuck away to a meeting in Casablanca together.

"Now, you can watch games for nothing at home, but then you had hundreds of people together. A big change was when Ireland made it to the 1990 World Cup everyone was going crazy and Setanta came in and offered [broadcasting rights] packages."

But the Irish, who advanced to the '90 World Cup quarterfinals, did not have to even come close to winning the Cup, or even playing a stylish game, to satisfy their followers. Nor will Trinidad and Tobago have to do very much to please their supporters.

"The whole country is proud, they declared a national holiday when Trinidad qualified," said Kenny Bovell, who works in human resources for the Boston Housing Authority and coaches the state Under-15 team. "I don't expect them to upset Sweden and England, but just to look respectable and trigger some interest so qualification becomes more frequent.

"People will be drinking German beer and there will be a lot of parties around the place. Brazil is usually the favorite of the T&T community we like to play a similar game, though we're not as good, and they are our neighbors."

Bovell missed viewing games when he arrived in Boston in 1974.

"There was no watching a game here then, and when it was on, it was a grainy picture and you had, maybe, a 26-inch set in a Portuguese place and you had to watch through all the smoke," Bovell said. "I missed watching games, but I just played more soccer when I came here. Now, you can watch games all day."

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