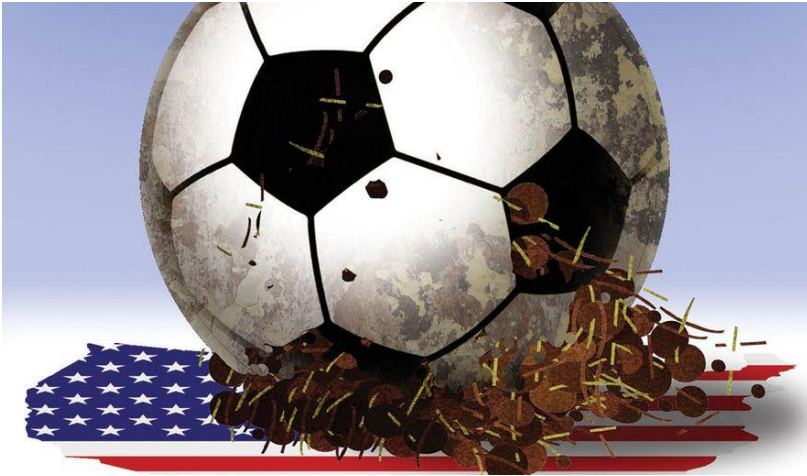


Soccer's culture clashes with America's values

Americans admire fair play, not flopping, gamesmanship and corruption

[Washington Times](#), By Frank Kaufmann - Monday, July 6, 2026



Soccer's corruption and America's values illustration by Alexander Hunter/The Washington Times
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The four-year fever dream has returned and taken over the world and the airwaves once again. This time, quite excitingly, [World Cup](#) is being played throughout [North America](#).

As the tournament intensifies, so does the usual chorus of pundits singing the same tired tune: This is the moment soccer finally “takes over” America. They point to sold-out stadiums and express the hope that a deep run by the very fine American team will finally convert the last of the skeptics.

They are wrong. It will not. Despite the billions of dollars and relentless branding, soccer will never be America's game.

The problem is not the low scoring or the clock; it is a moral one. At its core, international soccer is built on a foundation of deception that is fundamentally incompatible with the American cultural psyche. Put simply: Americans do not respect or admire cheats.

Understanding the cultural origins of American sports explains this resistance. American sports reflect the same hopes we have for our country: the ideal of a level playing field.

From youth leagues to the pros, sports in America are framed as a training ground for character. In the American ethos, a win achieved through subterfuge is not a win; it is a failure of integrity.

Americans honor merit as an ideal in which the best person wins because they worked the hardest, not because they could conceal foul play or feign an injury. These sorts of things disgust Americans.

The contrast to this is soccer's culture, which grows out of the soil of “gamesmanship.” In much of the world, foul play and deception are not bugs; they are features. Concepts such

as malicia and viveza criolla celebrate the cunning player who can trick a referee. What an American sees as shameful, a global audience often sees as tactical intelligence.

When Americans watch a world-class athlete writhe in performative agony to draw a card, only to sprint at full speed seconds later, they do not see a hero. They see a fraud.

From the field to the boardroom

This field-level dishonesty is the fundamental ethic that feeds into the systemic rot characterizing the very top of soccer. Scholars have noted that the sport operates as a culture of impunity.

When success justifies any means on the grass, it inevitably justifies any means in the boardroom. This is how you arrive at the “swamp” that is FIFA. The 2015 corruption scandal, which implicated dozens of officials in a 24-year self-enrichment scheme, was the natural administrative extension of the game’s on-field ethics.

FIFA exists as a “state within a state,” using its statutes to forbid national governments from interfering in corrupt local federations. This autonomy has created a global network of graft in which [World Cup](#) hosting rights are allegedly bought and sold like commodities.

For Americans, who culturally hold the “rules of the game” as something to be embraced with honor, a sports body that operates with the opacity of a cartel is repellent. We can forgive a bad call; we cannot forgive a rotten system.

The danger of nationalist bias

Soccer is also contaminated by a primitive tribalism, which can result in a nationalist bias in officiating. This adds another layer of frustration that turns away American sports fans.

In the [World Cup](#), referees can often be political actors. Unlike American sports, which feature centralized, neutral refereeing bodies, soccer lacks objective, data-driven officiating, leaving the game’s most critical moments to human whim and nationalistic pressure. In a sport where a single goal is so rare, the fact that a biased official can manufacture one makes the victory feel hollow.

Although youth participation in soccer is high in the U.S., the drop-off in adult viewership remains significant. As children, Americans will play the game for fun or fitness, but they will not invest their hearts in an industry that treats the “professional foul” as a virtue and bribery as a cost of doing business.

Even if the U.S. wins the trophy this year, that victory will not bridge the gap. You can sell a game, but you cannot sell a value system. So long as international soccer views the

referee as an obstacle to be navigated rather than a standard to be upheld, the American fan will remain a stranger to the “beautiful game.”

Americans inherently respect and live for a fair fight. That has never existed in soccer, and it does not now.

- *Frank Kaufmann is president of The Settlement Project and author of “Woke Ideology Critique and Counter Proposal.”*