

MPR News | Minnesota Now Soccer reporter on excitement around sport in the U.S. after World Cup
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NINA MOINI: Well, congratulations to Spain for winning the World Cup. Yesterday, they defeated Argentina 1 to nil in a game that both delighted and frustrated many. Here in Minnesota, hundreds of people gather to watch the game at the North Loop Green. There, they sported jerseys for their favorite teams, even if they weren't playing.

JULIANA: My name is Juliana, I support Brazil. I'm wearing a Brazil Jersey. It's bittersweet, you know? We deserve the loss, so what can I say? We played bad. That's that. Now we have to wait four years.

It feels like, wow. Why are you guys cheering from this country? Like, why? Or, like, everyone is cheering for someone. So that's cool that I see a lot of fans from Spain that are not even from Spain, so it makes me very happy.

FAN: I'm wearing my US jersey-- home jersey that I happen to just get a few days before today. I think it's just fun to just be excited about soccer and have other people excited around you as well.

NINA MOINI: Well, it wasn't the climactic end of the World Cup many wanted, but it did draw the eyes of the world, and it introduced many Americans to the excitement of soccer. Here to tell us more about the World Cup's final game and its impact on Americans is Minnesota Soccer Reporter Jon Marthaler. Thanks for being with us, Jon.

JON Hello, how are you?

MARTHALER:

NINA MOINI: I'm doing OK. You know, I wasn't that into the World Cup, but people asked me what team I supported, I'd say Team Shakira. I think that's a team we can all get behind. But tell us about this game, Spain and Argentina. Give us some of your lowlights and your highlights.

JON Well, I think in some ways, the lowlight was how good Spain's defense was because one of the things that a lot of
MARTHALER: people were watching the game for was to see how Lionel Messi would get on in another World Cup Final, and Argentina didn't even have a shot till the end of the game. So Spain's defense was just so good, it prevented anybody from Argentina, specifically Messi, from showing off.

NINA MOINI: And so what about the highlights?

JON I think, in a lot of ways, when one of the teams doesn't have a shot for the whole game, you can look at it and go,
MARTHALER: well, that's not a very exciting game, but you're never going to feel like a game that has a tournament-winning goal in extra time is a particularly unexciting game overall.

So I think the winning goal, which was just at the start of the second half of extra time, the 106th minute, was definitely the highlight of the game. Ferran Torres scoring for Spain, I think that's one of the things-- maybe the thing that people are going to remember about this game.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, because Spain hasn't won a World Cup in over a decade, right? So what do you think this says for the team? It sounds like you're saying they're just really strong.

JON Yeah, I thought coming into the semifinals, Spain was playing France, and I thought France was about as good of
MARTHALER: a team as you could get, and I thought France would dominate that game, and Spain shut them out.

And then they came into the final against Argentina, and Argentina has Messi. They had unlimited, seemingly, comeback wins throughout the tournament, and so I thought, well can't bet against Argentina in that game, and then Spain shut them out as well. So by now, I think I have to admit that Spain is the best team ever, basically.

NINA MOINI: I feel like the World Cup does introduce more people to the excitement of soccer, and some of these stars. There are other stars other than the really well-known ones like you talked about. Did you feel like there were other impacts of this World Cup, especially on Americans?

JON MARTHALER: Well, I think every time the World Cup happens-- and that goes for the Men's World Cup and it goes for the Women's World Cup, those of us who spend a lot of time following soccer-- and I'm talking about me here, you can get jaded and say, well, how is soccer going to have any-- get any more fans now? Everybody knows about soccer.

And I think I said this the other day, and that very same day, two different friends of mine who are not soccer fans before sent me messages to say, no-- I'm so locked into this tournament. I'm watching all the games. I built my day around England playing against Argentina in the Semifinals.

And so that was my moment where I said, oh, well, I think it's probably happening this time around, too. And it being here in America, I'm sure there's people who didn't think of themselves as soccer fans before this tournament, and then either went to a game or saw people in their town going to a game for all the cities across the country that were hosting them, and now are looking around and going, oh, maybe this soccer thing has something to it.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, there's always room for more people to love a sport. And so you actually got to attend a few games, and that's a different kind of experience I think on a whole other level, but how did it compare to some of the pro soccer games you've seen here? Because I mean, pretty popular here in Minnesota as well.

JON MARTHALER: Yeah, I think-- I've never been to the Super Bowl, but I really got the sense that, in some ways, the experience of going to the World Cup games-- I was out in Seattle because I have family out there that I could stay with.

And the experience of going to those games I think has to be similar to the Super Bowl in the sense that there were a lot of people there who were cheering for one team or the other-- obviously, those fans were coming from all over.

But then there were a lot of fans like me who were just there to experience the game and experience the spectacle. And there's 60,000 people packed into Seattle stadium, all of whom are having the best day of their lives, and it's just an amazing experience.

NINA MOINI: How would you describe to people, maybe some of your friends who are just getting introduced to soccer, what the experience is like here, say, at a Minnesota United game?

JON MARTHALER: I think one of the things that Minnesota United has going for it is you have that energy that you have at a World Cup game. They don't have 60,000 people at the games, but that same energy is every time Minnesota United is playing is happening at Allianz Field.

And so that is one of the chief things that Minnesota United always is going to try to sell, and they have that going for them. You're going to go to a Minnesota United game, if this is the first time you've gone, and if you just saw the World Cup, you're going to see that and be like, yeah, same energy, same vibe, this is something that I'm really interested in.

NINA MOINI: Well, I feel like their fans, too, are top notch fans, Minnesota United fans. They're great fans. What about-- you mentioned the Women's World Cup. When is that coming up? Talk to us a little bit about the popularity of this World Cup and the women's team.

JON
MARTHALER: Yeah. I think it's 338 days until that kicks off, something like that. It's next summer. They're down in Brazil. And one of the chief differences for the US Women's National Team is every time the men play in a World Cup, the question is really how are they going to do this? Can they finally make it to the Quarterfinals? How are they-- can they finally become one of the better teams in World Soccer?

The US Women long ago passed that. They're the best team in World Soccer. They're the team that everybody wants to knock off. And Spain right now, they, after winning the Men's World Cup, now they are the champions on both sides. So now it's going to be up to the United States to try to knock off Spain on the women's side.

NINA MOINI: Well, we hope you'll come back when you're covering the Women's World Cup and join us again. We really appreciate your expertise, Jon, thanks.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. If anybody wants to send me to Brazil, let me now.

NINA MOINI: It won't be us, but have a great day.

[LAUGHTER]

Take care. That was Minnesota Soccer Reporter Jon Marthaler.