

NINA MOINI: The United States is hosting the World Cup soccer tournament, but Minnesota is not a host city, so instead, fans are flocking to bars and breweries. New data from the payment company square found bars and breweries saw an 8% increase in revenue, and that was just during the first round of the tournament. Here to talk to us about the economic moment brought by the World Cup is Wes Burdine, owner of The Black Hart of St. Paul, an LGBTQ+ Soccer Bar. Thanks for being with us, Wes.

WES BURDINE: Thanks for having me.

NINA MOINI: This is an exciting time. I feel like it's been more vibrant. I've seen people out and about and you can just feel it. The World Cup is pretty long, it's more than a month long or so. How has it been going for you there at Black Hart?

WES BURDINE: Well, it's great. My voice is a little hoarse today. We've got the US team game yesterday, we've got Aurora in the playoffs, and you happen to catch me at the last final moments of Argentina playing Egypt. So if I scream, I apologize to your listeners. But it's tied up right now in the final minute.

NINA MOINI: Well, we really appreciate you making time for us. We understand if you keep one eye on the screen there. So as a soccer bar, you already have a base of customers, obviously, who love soccer. But are you seeing new fans show up and jump on the bandwagon?

WES BURDINE: Oh, absolutely. The World Cup is this period where me and so many soccer fans, we were aware of the sport and we watch it every once in a while. And then World Cup is this every four years plus with the Women's World Cup every few years. People just realize like, oh, I can do this all the time. This is fun.

And so we have a ton of new people coming in, whether if they're Colombian and they want to come watch Colombia play or they're just generally interested. I met a couple, they showed up for the first game, and they've been there for maybe a third of the games, and they just wanted to get into soccer. And this is that thing that then makes people realize I did in 2006, I can do this all the time. That led to the dangerous path that I'm walking down now.

NINA MOINI: So you mentioned, some of these moments in these games like the one you're keeping your eye on right now. I'm wondering what the viewing party scene is like. Like say, yesterday the game the US lost against Belgium, but what was that viewing party like? When the US is playing, is it extra fun?

WES BURDINE: Oh, absolutely. It varies between the US. We are just jam packed. We have an extra screen on the back of a truck that comes in so that we can fill up our patio.

And then today it's a little bit more chill. People are a little bit more hungover. There's maybe 20 folks in the bar. But it goes between 400 people and 20 people. And as we get closer to the end when we have these afternoon games we've got a great Spain, Belgium game coming up, France, Morocco, these really good games that even if you don't have a horse in the race you want to come see.

And so the environment is great. Even if there were Belgium fans there, it's very jovial. People want to get together and cheer for the country that they want to support or their own country. And it's been a blast.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, and I know we talked about the atmosphere, and I don't want to make be so serious all the time talking about the economy. But it is as we were saying in the introduction there, this is a big deal for people, seeing an 8% increase at the snapshot that they took for people. I mean, how big of a deal is that do you think for businesses?

WES BURDINE: Well, there's two things in Minnesota. Black Hart didn't have it as bad as many places from the occupation, but we were probably down 20%, 25%. I didn't pay myself for an entire month. I delayed a lot of payments. And it was a real struggle and we didn't have it nearly as bad as so many places.

Oh, my goodness, I don't want to alarm your listeners. But there was a goal, a very dramatic goal that just happened.

NINA MOINI: Tell us. You can say who.

WES BURDINE: Argentina we're down 2-0. And in the last 10 minutes, they've now scored three goals. There's five minutes left of stoppage time, but it looks like they will win and go on to play this Saturday night at 8:00 PM.

NINA MOINI: Oh, look at this breaking news. Thank you. Wes, I'm impressed by your ability to hold so many things in your mind and talk to me and watch the game. It's all very impressive. This far into it.

It is a big deal for businesses to be able to have people come out and experience joy after the surge of federal agents that came to Minnesota that everybody remembers. Seeing this joyous time, and you're right next to Allianz Field over there. And the next game there is on the 25, I'm seeing.

WES BURDINE: 25.

NINA MOINI: So that's a ways. Oh, this really is a long tournament.

WES BURDINE: It is.

NINA MOINI: Do you think the World Cup fervor, will bring out a lot of people more to experience Minnesota United, Aurora? I feel like it's already super popular here in Minnesota, but I bet there's always room to grow.

WES BURDINE: Oh, absolutely. I mean, it is really popular here. And the Minnesota United games almost always sell out. Aurora has been constantly doing really well with its games, and next year with the Women's World Cup as well, is going to be a big boon for women's soccer.

But yeah, there's always room to grow, especially the people who then take it into watching it on TV. There's lots of people who want to show up to the game day experience, but there's less casual TV watchers, and this will be fantastic for all of that and for us.

I interrupted my response to your question, but if we were down 25% in the winter, it's been up 50% through the month of June and July. And already as a queer soccer bar, June is always our biggest month. And so to have a June that's 50% above that, it's even better.

NINA MOINI: Amazing. Wes, thank you so much. Wish we had more time. Wishing you another fun week ahead during the World Cup. Thanks so much. And thank you all for tuning in to Minnesota Now.