

# **BOOK CLUB EDITION**

FANS' DISCUSSION KIT

## **American Soccer Nation** **The Remarkable 150-Year History of Yanks on a Roll,** **from Mob Football to the Modern Game**

By Mark C Franek

For Bonus Material and Branded Apparel, visit: [AmericanSoccerNation.com](http://AmericanSoccerNation.com)

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### **THE BIG IDEA**

This book highlights the peculiar and powerful legs of the American soccer journey in a series of chapters that get delivered like exceptional, hopeful crosses into the box. This book does not downplay the historical context of the global game or sugarcoat the facts. Instead, the author is optimistic and confident, and believes in our soccer future. A rising tide of professionalism, knowledge, and coordination will lift all boats in the vast U.S. soccer ecosystem.



Across 150 years, the sport has repeatedly emerged, collapsed, and reassembled under new structures. Despite deep historical roots and hard-won victories stretching back to the mid-1800s, each generation believes it is starting from scratch. American soccer is not a story of absence — it is a story of fragmentation, which has eventually found, in modern times, solid ground.

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### **TIMELINE SNAPSHOT**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Event</u>
1860s-90s	First organized clubs formed by immigrant communities
1913	U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) established (even though its name evolved)
1921-31	Rise and Fall of the American Soccer League (ASL) and the “American Menace”
1930	U.S. reaches World Cup semifinal
1950	U.S. historic 1–0 win over England
Mid-1970s	Boom years of the National American Soccer League (NASL) (Pelé era)
1984	NASL collapses
1994	U.S. hosts FIFA World Cup
1996–Now	Major League Soccer (MLS) begins, struggles, emerges as top U.S. pro league
2026	U.S. hosts FIFA World Cup

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & GAMES**

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### **HISTORICAL PRESSURE POINTS**

1. What circumstances and events in the late 1920s and early 1930s led to the decline of soccer's popularity (from a high point reached in the mid-1920s)?
  2. Why didn't early success by the United States Men's National Teams (USMNTs) in the 1930 and 1950 World Cups lead to more popularity and spur soccer's growth across the U.S.?
  3. Do you agree with the author that soccer fans and players have always been more diverse (ethnically, racially, and socio-economically) than the people who play and support the four other big North American pro sports, regardless of epoch? Why or why not?
  4. What circumstances and events led to the decline and then death of the NASL?
  5. Do Americans understand and appreciate "Total Football"? Why or why not?
  6. Did the 1994 World Cup change soccer in the U.S.? If you believe that it did, how so?
  7. How do you feel about the MLS? What observations and opinions support your viewpoint?
  8. Will the changes afoot in USL (which intends to adopt PRO/REL) have any effect on MLS?
  9. Will the 2026 World Cup and its after-glow alter the course of soccer in the U.S.? If so, how?
  10. Could professional soccer in the U.S. catch up and even supersede (in terms of popularity) the NHL, MLB, NBA, and/or NFL? If you believe so, which ones will it overtake and how soon?
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### **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS**

1. What do you like/dislike about the team your son/daughter/friend plays(ed) on?
  2. How does paying-to-play affect who gets identified and promoted?
  3. Is the pay-to-play system the biggest problem for developing top players in the U.S.?
  4. What could USSF do to help (i) young players get better? (ii) independent clubs get better? (iii) MLS academies get better?
  5. How have MLS academies changed the pro-player pathway compared to the past?
  6. How do the size and population of the U.S. make it harder to find/develop talented players?
  7. Has the Homegrown Player Rule, as amended, changed how MLS teams develop young players?
  8. How did the change from the USSF's Development Academy (DA) to MLS NEXT affect youth development across the U.S.?
  9. Do MLS academies help players play creatively, or do they hold them back?
  10. In the final chapter of the book, the author outlines a concept called "TOTAL IMMERSION" (TI) for elite male players. Do you agree with the idea of TI for top young players, and is it realistic?
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### **FUN "WHAT IF" SCENARIOS**

Choose one and talk about its potential impact:

- A. NASL survives into the modern era
- B. U.S. invests heavily in youth development post-1950
- C. Promotion/relegation introduced into the MLS in 1996 (its inaugural year)
- D. U.S. wins the 1950 World Cup
- E. U.S. makes the Final Four in the 2026 World Cup

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## FAN REFLECTION

Answer individually:

When did soccer become meaningful to you?

Club versus country: which defines your identity more? Why?

Do you believe the U.S. can become an elite soccer nation? Why or why not?

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## WORD-CLOUD GAME

All the words on the last page of this packet (which, together, form the shape of a soccer ball) were plucked from the book. Pick three words or phrases, and sound-off about what you remember from the book or know (from outside knowledge) about each of your selections.

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## AUTHOR INSIGHT

The defining feature of American soccer history is not failure — but fragmentation and lack of coordination. Each era builds without fully understanding the last. Today’s soccer organizations and soccer people are connected and should work together to inspire a brighter soccer future.

**Agree or disagree? Defend your position.**

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## CLOSING DEBATE QUESTION

“The United States has prioritized stability over greatness in soccer.”

**Agree or disagree? Defend your position.**

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## FINAL TAKEAWAYS

Biggest myth or misunderstanding this book challenges?

Most important moment in U.S. soccer history?

What would you do to transform the U.S. soccer landscape if you had unlimited power and money?

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