

Chicano Integration into United States Sports

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Abstract

This paper as a whole will talk about the Chicanos assimilation into our United States sporting system. With a focus on soccer, and more specifically the MLS (Major League Soccer) this paper will discuss the successes and the failures they've had in regards to assimilation... Following that there will be a section of educated opinions and speculations about the future that will be backed up with research such as the rise in population of Chicanos on the rosters from the founding of MLS in 1996 to the present. Using "Chicano and/or Mexicans" as key words to my search in US sports brings a lot of results but when fined tuned to soccer the analysis is much more possible because the amount was far greater. The research seen so far shows that Chicano culture and Chicano people are common in some sports but in others it is nonexistent. This paper will expose the truth on the underrepresentation and assimilation of Chicanos as a whole in the US sport system.

Keywords: Assimilation, Sports, Chicano, Athletes, Soccer, Success, and Failures

Chicano Integration into US Sports

Soccer still is not a mainstream sport in the United States. Chicano immigrants are the only people among the working class who care about soccer. Chicano immigrants can be the ones to be blamed for any success soccer has had, has right now, and will ever have. This paper will describe how Chicanos impact the MLS (Major League Soccer) and how even though soccer is the sport from their homeland their representation is not where it should be.

Past

“The United States Soccer Federation was founded in 1913 as the United States Football Association. Since then, this country has been involved with soccer. It has participated in many world cups and even played in the semi-finals in the 1930 Uruguay World Cup this country's best position ever in any World Cup. The United States played in the next few World Cups, until the 1950's World Cup in Brazil. The USA would wait 40 more years to play in another world cup. Yet, soccer died in popularity and only came back to the spotlight in the 1970's. The game had nearly been completely forgotten by then,” (Wahl) but in a change of fate Pelé came to play in the North American Soccer League, which is now known as Major League Soccer. “There he played for a few years after his official retirement from Santos FC of Brazil for the New York Cosmos. There he signed a \$4.5 million, 3-year contract (something unheard of at the time).” (Wahl) Pelé has been one of the few names and in most cases the only one that Americans associate with soccer. To Brazilians and many other people he is known as the best player the world has seen. Many believe that Pele was the pioneer of soccer, in other words he started the game, which is not true

at all but to Americans that is true. He brought soccer to the forefront of the media and he changed the game in the US forever. One example of the impact that Chicanos had early on was the naming of the team located in the highly Chicano area the “Los Angeles Aztecs,” (Wahl) who are now the LA Galaxy in obvious reference to the Chicano community of the area.

Present

Chicanos are not accurately represented in the league. In our country where Chicanos make up a majority and when they come from countries that are 85% permeated by soccer there needs to be representation. “MLS commissioner Don Garber likes to say the Chicano/a market is part of the league's DNA, it is apparent in the stands of its stadiums. Forty percent of fans attending an MLS game in the past year were Chicano/a. The census estimates nearly 47 million Chicano/a people reside in the United States. Eighty-five percent of that population has roots in countries where soccer dominates the sporting landscape.”(Ortiz) This just shows how skewed that the league is. It’s really sad because even the fan base for the MLS is mainly Chicanos. It shows that they love the sport; they have the passion of the sport in their blood. They want to watch soccer and they want to watch stars in the league of the country they live in. They want to cheer for the USA in the world cup they want to cheer for their team but when the “US Men’s National team that will be playing in the world cup this year features 13 Chicano’s where there were only 4 just 4 years ago” (Afrozander). That is still not enough because although there are 13 on the team there are only 5 on the starting 11 and those 5 are most likely the only ones who will play. Yes 13 players are better than 4 but again its not enough. If 85% of the American

populace are Chicano than at least 85% of the national team should be Chicano.

That's just not the case; people say that this is their sport and they deserve it but if one is to think about it how is it their sport. It's not at all their sport.

"Everything we do as a soccer league and on a team level is already directly focused on Hispanics," said Marisabel Muñoz, director of international communications for MLS and Soccer United Marketing. **This is their sport.** The realization of that passion and the league's eagerness to embrace it should continue to pay off for MLS in terms of community visibility and revenue. (Wahl) The MLS just like every other league is a business and are trying to make money. They rely on the Chicano fan base to make their money. That's really the only reason Soccer still exists in the US. Chicanos make up 40 percent of the fan base. "The reason we sprinkle the few Chicano players is so we don't lose viewers and we don't lose money," (Ortiz) which is the true capitalist pig way to look at it. Chicanos continue to be important in soccer in the United States. Right now there are many Chicano and Latin American soccer players in the MLS. The MLS website is available in both English and Spanish.

"Let's take the Los Angeles Galaxy as an example of how big Chicanos are in the MLS. They have 3 US-born Chicanos: Midfielders Guillermo Gonzalez and Peter Vagenas, and defender Ryan Suarez . The assistant coach is Mexican-born, but naturalized American Martin Vasquez. The head athletic director is US-born of Peruvian and Cuban descent Ivan Pierra. They also have three Latin America-born players: Midfielder Marcelo Galo Saragosa of São Paulo, Brazil. On loan from one of Brazil's top teams: São Paulo FC. Forward Carlos Ruiz of Guatemala City, Guatemala. Played for CSD Guatemala; voted among best players in the MLS. Forward Alejandro Moreno of

Barquisimeto, Venezuela. Went to college in the US.” (Wahl) Other teams follow similar patterns. They all have Latin America-born Chicanos or US. “Another example of how important Chicanos still are in the league is that the number one goal scorer for the 2004 season: Amando Guevara of the Metrostars, born in Honduras. Another proof that Chicanos are very important to the US soccer scene is what happened in a World Cup qualifier match in 2001 between the US and Honduras in Washington DC. A US victory in this game was essential to go onto the next round. People were loud, going so crazy that if the game had been played in a country with lesser engineering standards, it would have been time to worry about a stadium collapse. The game seemed like it was happening in Tegucigalpa. More people wore the blue-and-white Honduran jersey than the red American one.” (Wahl)

“The Major League Soccer (MLS) has struggled for decades searching popularity and the revenues their counterparts in other markets get (Mexico, Argentina, England, France, Spain, Germany, etc.), and also what other sports’ industries accomplish (NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL, etc.). It hasn’t been easy. They’ve come along way sure, but not enough. Is it really that Americans doesn’t care for soccer? Maybe, but my point is it doesn’t matter, why? Because you have a brand new audience that it does. They have a whole socioeconomic sector avid of soccer fans; in fact they are already consuming it, mostly from Mexico. But what if they start bringing young players directly from Mexico (and South-America) offering them spots on a team in the US, and a training and athletic level they’ll never get in any professional Mexican team. The MLS can tap into a new audience and become relevant in Mexico with the arrival of fellow countrymen. Young players, with the energy and natural Latino skills that American players don’t have,

formed with university and/or professional training programs, have everything to be an outstanding players. And they'll be idols too, because everybody here understands that. Americans love their athletes, and they made heroes of them." (Cardenas).

The MLS is making an effort to include Chicano people in their viewing radius. More than 40% of the main office of the MLS is bilingual. They are paired with 3 Spanish speaking and 1 Portuguese TV stations. The effort is there but it just isn't enough.

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