

# As American as--soccer?

LYNNE FLOCKE Staff Writer

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Staff Photo  
By Jim Dougherty

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Hot dogs, apple pie, Chevrolet, soccer.

Yes, soccer. Those are red-blooded American kids out there kicking around that oddly shaped football.

More than a million of them are on organized teams, including 3,000 in Austin. The rapid growth of "football" (as the rest of the world calls it) means that soccer will be the number one sport in America in just 10 years, its proponents claim.

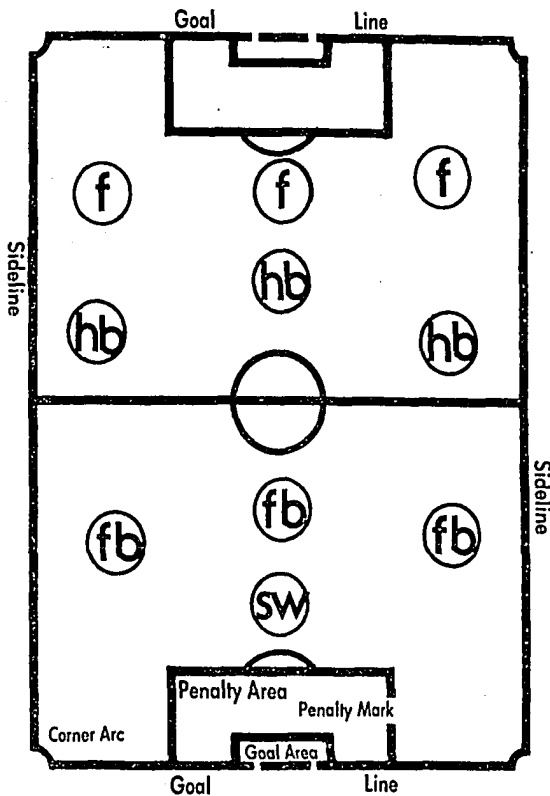
Extreme puffery, one might note, if that person paid more attention to television on weekends rather than the local fields.

Those grassy mudflats in Austin play host each week to some 4,000 men, women, boys and girls, all of them huffing for 90-minute, competitive soccer games. There are kid leagues, grownup leagues, school leagues, college leagues.

There's even a professional league (not in Austin) with some of the world's best (See SOCCER, Page 5)

## The field

A soccer field can be 100 yards long, but it doesn't have to be. The length must be between 100 and 130 yards, the width, between 50 and 100 yards. The game is started with a kick from the center circle, with both teams on their respective halves of the field. The formation pictured is an offensive attack — one of many — in which the ball is probably near the other team's goal at the top. Three forwards (f) try to score a goal, with the halfbacks (hb) backing them up, controlling the midfield. The fullbacks (fb) position themselves to defend their own goal, should the other team make a fast break. This formation shows a sweeper (SW) hanging back as a final defense before the goal area, which is defended by the goalie.



## SOCCER

(Continued from Page 1)

soccer players (e.g. Pele), although soccer fans wouldn't know it by watching local television stations. Sunday afternoon, Aug. 29, when the championship game of the North American Soccer League was televised live from Portland, Ore., Austinites had a viewing choice of golf, a non-Dallas Cowboy exhibition football game and a to-be-announced movie.

Perhaps what has happened north of Austin in Jollyville, of all places, best typifies what may happen in other places.

Seven hundred boys and girls are expected to register this week in Jollyville's second full soccer season. Compare that to the 100 expected in the town's youth football program.

"If we didn't have the soccer program, the football league would gain another 100," said Bill Bartling, president of the soccer league, which is sponsored by Town and Country Optimists. "But then there would be 500 kids doing nothing, especially the girls."

Big cities are soccer-crazy, too. In Dallas, 50,000 play on registered teams, and the professional Tornado team often draws more fans than the baseball Rangers.

"There's a soccer ball in every yard," said Phyllis Bartling, whose daughter and son play "They both love it," she said, especially compared to baseball, which they have both played.

"The kid isn't standing up there either hitting the ball or missing it or striking out," said her husband Bill, who coaches a youth soccer team. "The kid doesn't tend to get pigeon-holed into right field. They're running, kicking at the ball, yelling, having a good time."

Jollyville soccer recently won national attention in a soccer magazine, *Soccer Corner*, which devoted a four-page spread with color photographs and a cover promotion to an article entitled: "Today Jollyville, Tomorrow the World."

Soccer interest in Austin started with the grown-ups and trickled down to the kids, who now play in two YMCA soccer programs in the spring and fall.

In the 1960s, European and Latin American men attending the University of Texas or working in Austin met regularly on a Zilker Park soccer field on Sunday afternoons for a pickup game that has mushroomed to 30 teams, many of them American.

Women, watching men play, began kicking a ball around on the sidelines and eventually formed the Austin Women's Soccer League.

Youth soccer in Austin began four years ago at the Central YMCA. This fall nearly 900 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 14 will play soccer there and at the Northwest YMCA.

The Y teams are coed, but the 120 girls playing soccer in Jollyville play on separate teams from the boys.

"Ours is a low-keyed approach to competition," said Ken Johnson, Northwest YMCA soccer coordinator. "The emphasis is on having a good time and learning some skills."

The old coach-parent, put-my-kid-in-or-else conflict often found in other youth sports is virtually nonexistent in soccer. Free substitution rules allow a coach to shuttle players in and out, and besides, there's not too much a coach can do during a game except yell with the crowd.

Rev. Robert Phipps, who coaches soccer, football and baseball at St. Stephen's Episcopal School west of Austin said, "Coaches have a tendency to control the game too much in baseball and football. We can call in every play and every pitch. In soccer, you can't do that. We teach them our basic philosophy of offense and defense, and we can substitute if they get tired. But the game is totally in the kids' hands, and I think they like that."

St. Stephen's, a powerhouse in the Southwest Preparatory Conference, fields several girls' and boys' teams each year. Even the best Austin teams, both men and women, traditionally lose to B and C teams from St. Stephen's.

The Austin Independent School District fields 24 high school and three junior high teams with more than 500 students.