



La Lucarne

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TOTAL soccer obsession will consume 90 percent of the world when the quadrennial World Cup tournament begins in Germany on June 9. Sports fans in the United States will probably be more interested in the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry and the National Basketball Association draft, but the World Cup is not entirely lost on the United States and Canada. A growing and passionate cadre of soccer fans will call in sick to work, forget to eat and spend a month — or as long as it takes for their teams to be eliminated — living for soccer.

In 2002, at the World Cup tournament in South Korea and Japan, the United States team exceeded expectations by ending its World Cup run in the quarterfinals — with a loss to Germany, a perennial favorite, after disposing of the powerhouses Portugal and Mexico. Back home in Columbus, Ohio, almost 8,000 fans gathered at 7:30 a.m. to watch the American team's final match on large screens at Crew Stadium, home of the city's Major League Soccer team, the Crew. They painted themselves red, white and blue and wore American flags like capes. One father and son drove all night from Florida.

The Crew showed all of the Americans' games in the 2002 World Cup. About 1,500 fans watched the United States team's first match, and crowds grew from there, Jeff Wuerth, a Crew spokesman, said. This year, the Crew plans to show every game in the tournament, even though only handfuls may turn up for matches like South Korea vs. Togo.

"We view ourselves as the outlet for all soccer," Mr. Wuerth said. For big games, where more than 5,000 fans might turn up, the Crew might use screens inside the stadium, which has 22,555 seats. For others, screens will be set up on the grounds outside.

In Queens, N.Y., the featured games at the Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden, one of the last real beer gardens in New York, will be

the ones involving the Czech Republic. During the World Cup, the garden, a large space with trees and picnic tables, and the adjacent bar will open early, at noon, to broadcast many games while serving barbecue and Czech beers. A huge crowd is expected on June 12, when the United States team takes on the highly ranked Czechs.

A real West Coast showdown will take place in Southern California on June 11, the day of the match between Mexico and Iran, both of which command the ancestral loyalty of large Los Angeles area communities. Red, white and green flags will be plentiful — vertical panels on Mexico's, horizontal on Iran's.

Mexican-Americans will have many places to watch, but for the Iranian-Americans, the place to be is the Caspian in Irvine, the country's largest Persian restaurant. It has seating for 400 but many more than that are expected to jam in for Iranian breakfast and large-screen showings of the game in Persian, broadcast by a satellite TV station. In Iran, soccer competes only with wrestling as the national sport. "We had calls two months before about the games," said Shawn Tehrani, general manager at the Caspian.

IN Montreal, the aim will be to get beyond ethnic rivalries. A festival of films about soccer will end in a public viewing of the final World Cup match on July 9 on giant screens at Jean Drapeau Park. The film festival will begin June 5 and include screenings of movies and documentaries from 20 countries at the Montreal Cinéma-thèque Québécoise and the Goethe Institut. It came about after Mustapha Terki, one of its founders, moved to Montreal after organizing events in France during the World Cup of 1998. He noticed that although soccer was gaining popularity in Montreal, the enthusiasm was confined to communities.

"Every community would celebrate themselves," he said. "I thought maybe we should do something for everyone to celebrate together."

To see the opening World Cup

game in Canada with a big screen and hoopla, go to Edmonton, Alberta. On June 9 and 10, the Canadian Soccer Association and the German Canadian Association of Alberta will hold a full-day public event with live coverage of the World Cup opening games on big screens in Churchill Square. Folk dancers, live music and a German beer tent will create an Oktoberfest atmosphere from which to cheer Germany against Costa Rica.

DETAILS

QUEENS Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden, 29-19 24th Avenue, Astoria (718-274-4925).

What: Telecasts of World Cup matches; admission free.

When: June 9 to July 9.

COLUMBUS, OHIO Columbus Crew Stadium (www.thecrew.com).

What: Broadcasts of every World Cup soccer match, admission free.

When: June 9 to July 9.

IRVINE, CALIF. Caspian Restaurant, 14100 Culver Drive (949-651-8454; www.caspianrestaurant.com).

What: Persian-language broadcasts of all World Cup matches involving Iran, admission free.

When: Beginning June 11.

MONTREAL Jean Drapeau Park

What: Large-screen broadcast of final World Cup match, ending the International Conference of Cinema and Sport (www.lalucarne.ca), admission free.

When: July 9.

EDMONTON, ALBERTA Sir Winston Churchill Square.

What: World Cup game showings in Volksfest 2006 (www.gcaa.ca/news.htm), admission free.

When: June 9 and 10.