



NICK WIEBE

**SOME LIKE IT HOT** Chilean fans show quiet, subtle enthusiasm at their team's 12 July round of 16 victory against Portugal.

## Soccer fans show their colours

Sure the soccer was great, but the best part of the U-20 World Cup matches was watching the rest of the crowd go bonkers for their home countries



ROBIN COLLUM

I'm not a soccer expert by any means. I suppose I could best be described as a casual fan of the beautiful game, but even I was thrilled when I found out that Edmonton would be helping to host the FIFA U-20 World Cup this year. The event is a showcase of the world's best up-and-coming players, and many stars of the U-20 tournament will go on to shine at the World Cup. Figuring that I might never have another chance to see such excellent soccer up-close, I was quick to take advantage of the opportunity to attend.

I was right to be excited, of course. From the (blissfully air-conditioned) press area, I was witness to spot-on passes, majestic saves, and even a few spectacular goals. But equally enthralling to me was the action in the stands.

Soccer might be low on the list of popular spectator sports in Canada, but you'd never have been able to tell that from the fan response at Commonwealth Stadium. The matches here brought the city's soccer community out en masse—painted chests, "marry me" banners, flag-capes, and all.

The tournament brought 24 teams to Canada to play, and Commonwealth Stadium was host to teams from Congo, Austria, Chile, Gambia, Portugal, Spain, Canada, and eventual second-place finishers the Czech Republic. This influx of international soccer talent meant that the many Edmontonians who trace their roots back to those countries made sure to attend the games and lend their support.

And that support was loud and enthusiastic. Imagine the fan enthusiasm of the seventh game of the

Stanley Cup Finals or the Superbowl, multiply that by thirty, and you'll get an idea of the atmosphere created by the fans, arranged in colour-coordinated groups in the stands. The double-headers were the best, of course, because there were twice as many flags waving.

It wasn't just mindless nationalism, either. Everywhere but North America, soccer is huge, and Edmonton's many immigrants brought their love and knowledge of the game with them. Unlike me, a lot these fans know the sport—and the players from their home countries—inside and out.

Alberto Anaya was one such fan. Originally from El Salvador, he has been coaching soccer for most of his adult life. In that country's absence from the tournament, however, his loyalties were divided.

**Everywhere but North America, soccer is huge, and Edmonton's many immigrants brought their love and knowledge of the game with them.**

"First of all I support Canada," he said. "And Mexico is another country in which I grew up and played in as well. For the past about eight years there have been teams from Mexico [traveling here], and I host them in my house. In a big coincidence, Pablo [Barrera] stayed in my house when he was twelve or 13 years old.

"When he scored a goal in Commonwealth Stadium, he said he shared that goal with the families that supported him when he was a child here. It was very unique."

As a Canadian fan, Anaya was disappointed in the team's inability to get out of the group stage. He thinks that for Canadian soccer to really compare with the rest of the world, we need to put more of an emphasis on individual

skill development when players are still young.

"Everybody knows how beautifully Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile play, for example, and it's because they dedicate a number of years to what they call base football," he said. "When you see how not very technical other teams were, including Canada, it's because the lack of time teaching at that level."

It wasn't just first-generation immigrants taking in the action, either. Ruth Billio-Ramos, president of the Chilean-Canadian Culture Society in Edmonton, reported that her youngest son was following all the games.

"Soccer's huge in Chile, and even my young one knows who's who and what position they play," she said. "For him it was really exciting to see these young players playing at the calibre that they do. They're upcoming stars, so I think it was especially exciting for youth, who are looking at these guys as idols."

The Chilean fans were one of the most entertaining groups for me to watch. At the match between Chile and Congo, painted Congolese fans—led by one man in a traditional vest, head-dress, and grass skirt—danced and jumped on one side of the stadium, while on the other there a constantly growing mass of Chilean fans. It was a beautiful, screaming sea of blue, white, and red.

That makes sense, of course, when you consider that Edmonton supposedly has, after Toronto, the second-largest Chilean population in Canada. Most of them fled Pinochet's dictatorship in the 1970s, but they were clearly still extremely proud of their country and their players.

"We were sitting beside someone who was not Chilean, and he was like, 'Are you guys always like that? Do you sing all the way through?'" said Baillo-Ramos. "And we were like 'Yeah!' He thought it was interesting to see how much energy the fans have, whether they're behind or in front."

I couldn't agree with him more.

Paul Lorieau's University Optical



**Free vision test**  
with purchase of lenses or complete eyeglasses

4 3 3 - 5 5 0 0

Conveniently located at 11170-82 Ave Edmonton AB T6G 2L8



You bring the short shorts, we'll bring the frisbees



**GATEWAY SPORTS**  
Defying gravity since 1910

**St. Vital** A Unique Student Dormitory in the Heart of Edmonton  
9916 110 Street (viewing by appointment only)

Three storey historical building  
Furnished rooms from \$200.00 to \$450.00 per month

- One LRT stop from the U of A and one LRT stop from Grant MacEwan College.
- Two blocks from major grocery store and over a dozen restaurants within a 10 minute walk.
- A block and a half north of the North Saskatchewan River and a block and a half south of Jasper Avenue.
- Free laundry facilities
- Each floor has a TV room and a study room
- Internet access (wireless and cable)
- Recreation/Games Room
- Dining room (microwave ovens & vending machines)
- Food services possible depending on demand.
- Limited parking available at extra cost.

For information and viewing appointments call Ray at 499-7424 or e-mail ray.rozycki@gmail.com

**Experience of a Lifetime**

\* Overseas Job Guaranteed



TEACH ENGLISH OVERSEAS

Free Info Seminar  
Tues. @ 7pm  
7712-104 Street

\*Edmonton-based



(780) 438 5704  
globaltesol.com