On Wednesday night, August 25, 1976, at Metropolitan Stadium in Bloomington, a standing-room-only crowd of nearly 50,000 fans watched the Minnesota Kicks defeat the San Jose Earthquakes, 3–1, to advance to the championship game of the North American Soccer League (NASL). The match—the Kicks’ final home game of their inaugural Twin Cities season—was significant not only because of the players on the field but also the fans in the stands.

The atmosphere was described as “supercharged”; the scene, “pandemonium.” Following the final whistle, thousands of jubilant supporters stormed the field, mobbing their heroes and celebrating the victory. One player commented, “I’ve been carried off the field before, but never by such a tremendous, enthusiastic crowd.” Moreover, a glance around the stadium revealed a much different assemblage of fans than the usual crowd at the baseball and football games also hosted there. As many women were cheering as men, and the median age was not above 25.¹

What makes the crowd’s size, excitement, and composition even more intriguing is the realization that soccer was unfamiliar to most Americans—certainly, Minnesotans—at the time. Several attempts had been made to establish this global game in the United States, but by midcentury it remained largely unknown, except to some immigrant groups. Then, beginning in 1968, organizers of the newly formed NASL

Color poster showing the team’s signature orange-and-blue (on white) uniform colors

Timothy D. Grundmeier
made the boldest attempt yet to bring the world’s most popular sport into the mainstream of American life. At its height between 1978 and 1980, the league featured 24 teams spanning North America from Vancouver’s Whitecaps to the Tampa Bay Rowdies, the Toronto Blizzard to the San Diego Sockers.2

Despite significant investments, the league was, for the most part, a failure. It collapsed in 1984. Average league attendance for one season, even during peak years, was never higher than 15,000 per game. Only two franchises ever averaged more than 30,000 fans per game in a single season. The first was the New York Cosmos which, fueled by the city’s prestige and team owners’ wealth, acquired some of the world’s most famous stars. The second was the much lower-budget Minnesota Kicks, located in a far smaller market. Nevertheless, the Kicks broke the 30,000 mark twice and from 1976 to 1981 averaged more than 23,000 spectators per game. In that 1976 game against San Jose, they produced a new NASL record attendance of 49,572.3

In many ways, the jubilant August 25 playoff game illustrates the cultural phenomenon that the Kicks would become. The team was successful because it consciously targeted young people, typically unconcerned with traditional sports, attracting them with the sophistication and excitement of soccer—not to mention inexpensive tickets. But many characteristics of this playoff crowd were also harbingers of a troubled future. One newspaper article noted, “While the spirit was undeniable . . . there also was a certain amount of ugliness in the massive rush to the field. . . . and finally policemen went onto the field, threw some fans back over the fence they had climbed and threatened arrest.”4 Such behavior was at first excused as benign enthusiasm, but over the next six years the raucous atmosphere deteriorated into unruliness, pushing away other fans. Then, as the team’s performance on the pitch dipped, ticket prices escalated, and law enforcement suppressed the crowd’s excesses, the fans so crucial to the Kicks’ initial success began to lose interest. Many of the factors in the Minnesota Kicks’ booming success also precipitated the club’s quick demise.

As the NASL was beginning to show signs of progress, several corporate grocery men decided to invest in a franchise for Minnesota. Chief investor Jack Crocker of SuperValu and his associates announced their purchase of the Denver Dynamos in November 1975. Certainly, they saw economic opportunity in this venture, but building a large fan base was the group’s primary concern. “We aren’t expecting to make money this year or next,” Crocker revealed to the press. “We’d rather put 20,000 people in the stands this summer and lose $250,000 than have 5,000 and lose $50,000.”5 In the months that followed, the organization that would become the Minnesota Kicks worked out a marketing strategy that exceeded Crocker’s expectations in both attendance and profit.6

Early on, the investors made a crucial decision that would greatly affect the seasons to come: the team would host games at Metropolitan Stadium, home to Minnesota’s professional football and baseball teams, the Vikings and Twins. Owners of several other NASL franchises had chosen smaller stadiums that were less expensive to rent than the larger arenas of professional teams.6 The result was a self-fulfilling prophecy: low expectations yielded small numbers of fans. In Minnesota, the deep pockets of Crocker and his associates provided the wherewithal to rent Met Stadium, which could hold the desired large crowds.

The task of drawing those crowds was given to Chuck Ruhr Advertising of Minneapolis. In accepting the account, the agency was well aware of the difficult task ahead. “The biggest problem with these new clients was that they didn’t really have anything tangible to sell,” Ruhr later said. “They had a name, a logo, a franchise . . . but they had no coach, no team, no big name star.” Moreover, they were making their way into an area with well-established professional teams. Given these challenges, Ruhr’s marketing efforts emphasized the excitement, sophistication, and universality of soccer, often in contrast to other sports. They also educated fans about the game’s rules and history. The theme for the first season’s
ads said it all: “Minnesota, join the world. Join the world of soccer.”

Armed with this strategy, the Kicks’ front office began to seek out prospective season-ticket buyers through personal contact at luncheons and other soccer-related events. Their efforts yielded some positive results. On April 20 the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported that the Kicks had beaten the Twins in season-ticket sales; nevertheless, the Kicks’ total of 4,000 fell far below their goal of 10,000.8

Instead, the team’s surprisingly high attendance would come from people in their teens and twenties, who almost exclusively bought tickets at the gate. After a careful demographic study of the fans of the more successful NASL franchises, Chuck Ruhr Advertising had decided to concentrate on young adults, reaching out to them through newspaper and radio. Columnist Allan Holbert of the *Minneapolis Tribune* noted two of these advertisements’ most effective appeals: “low ticket prices, and probably even more important, free parking.” It would be an oversimplification, however, to attribute the successful campaign purely to cheap entertainment. One Ruhr representative explained, “We also knew that with the kids we were up against a very tough market with intelligent, sophisticated, discriminating buyers who wouldn’t come to an event just because it was there. You had to give them some cerebral and emotional reason for wanting to be there.” That reason was provided by marketing soccer as a new, exciting, urbane, global sport. As a 1976 television special on the team put it,
“Among the junior sophisticates, the Kicks became the ‘in’ thing, and if you were at the game, you were ‘chic.’” This is not to say that the match itself was unimportant. But, according to Holbert, for many of these young fans, a Kicks match was “more than just a game.”

The marketing strategy yielded results as early as the home opener on May 9, 1976. The Kicks were anticipating an attendance of about 12,000, an ambitious goal for a newly relocated NASL club. The crowd exceeded these expectations by so much that Crocker and his co-owners were caught completely off guard. Just minutes before kickoff, thousands of fans were still backed up in the ticket line. After delaying the kickoff for 15 minutes, the owners decided to allow two- to-three-thousand fans to enter the stadium free of charge. The decision built goodwill among the media, the community, and the 17,054 fans already inside; the crowd “chose to cheer instead of boo when it was announced that the latecomers were getting in free,” Holbert related. The Minnesota Kicks had officially joined the world. Undoubtedly, the front office would have been satisfied with such crowds for the rest of the season. Yet one highly publicized game soon propelled attendance figures to even more surprising heights.

That game took place one month later, on June 9, and featured the world’s most famous athlete, Pelé of the New York Cosmos. The Kicks’ marketing, as well as the media coverage, centered exclusively on this “superlunar attraction,” about whom columnist Larry Batson wrote, “There are stars in soccer. There are a handful of immortals. Then there is Pelé (pronounce it puh-LAY) alone above them all.” In many respects, this promotional approach coincided with the Kicks’ strategy of marketing the idea of soccer, not the rivalries usually emphasized by more established sports teams. Most Americans did not know facts or statistics about Pelé, nor could they recite the attributes and skills that made him so spectacular. As Batson’s parenthetical note indicates, many could not even pronounce his name correctly. Most merely understood that Pelé had to be exciting because he was the world’s best-known athlete. Thus, the buildup to his arrival centered on his aura, not his abilities. Large pictures and language fit for a demigod dominated sports pages and newspaper advertisements. It did not matter that he was past his prime. An advertisement simply needed to announce, “Pelé is here June 9.”

A new NASL record—46,164 fans—saw the Cosmos beat the Kicks, 2–1. More significant than this numerical achievement, the June 9 match marked the emergence of the youth culture that would drive the Kicks’ attendance boom. A front-page article described the scene: “The crowd began filling up the Met Stadium parking lot about two hours before the game. Three-fourths of the people looked to be under 35. Most had probably never seen a soccer game and were there mostly for a

The June 9 match marked the emergence of the youth culture that would drive the Kicks’ attendance boom.
good time.” Throngs of young people, lured in part by “the mystique of Pelé,” had discovered a new venue for self-expression as well as a new sport. One slightly inebriated twenty-something summed up his and many others’ reasons for coming to the game: “I wanted to have some kicks, I wanted to party, and I wanted to see the phenomenal Pelé.” Such an atmosphere would continue to bring in large crowds. Save for one more game that first summer, the Kicks’ attendance never dipped below 20,000 for the next three seasons. 12

**With the help of reasonably priced tickets and free parking, these youth had made the traditional American tailgating experience their own.**

To be sure, other factors contributed to the Kicks’ success, most significantly their performance on the field. The team won its division in each of its first four seasons and, in its inaugural year, made it to the championship game. Even more impressive, the team lost only ten home games in those four seasons. In addition, many observers admired the Kicks’ “character” and lauded the fan-friendliness of its players and coach Freddie Goodwin. At the same time, the Twins, the Kicks’ primary summertime competition, were not a winning team. During the six years that the two teams shared Met Stadium, the Twins never finished higher than third place in the American League West. 13

Given these factors, it is not surprising that, at the height of the Kicks’ success at the ticket gate in 1978, Dan Stoneking of the Minneapolis Star proclaimed that “the biggest reason” for the high attendance figures was the team’s “back-to-back [division] championships.” 14 This assertion would prove to be erroneous the following year, when the team had its most successful season on the field—finishing 21-and-9 and losing only one regular-season home game—but saw attendance drop by more than 20 percent.

Instead, the chief reason for the Minnesota Kicks’ success was their unique ability to create an exciting atmosphere that made each home game an event—not just a sporting match—especially for young adults. With the help of reasonably priced tickets and free parking, these youth had made the traditional American tailgating experience their own, embracing a sport that they could call their own. Introducing Crocker at a celebratory roast in 1976, the emcee summed up the key to the Kicks’ success: “Here’s the man who turned Metropolitan Stadium into the Woodstock of professional sports.” 15

Notably absent from this introduction was any sign of worry that this atmosphere might pose problems. Certainly, the Kicks’ owners and supporters were aware of the behavior that accompanied the Twin Cities’ Woodstock. But this rowdiness was often treated with amusement. After the Kicks’ record-setting 1976 playoff game, for example, Minneapolis’s “law and order” mayor, Charles Stenvig, commented on the victory celebration: “I think the spirit is terrific. . . . I thought they had to let out steam. . . . who am I to criticize?” 16

Minneapolis Tribune sportswriter Joe Soucheray portrayed the pre-game scene of one July night in 1977 with typical lightheartedness.

The demographic scorecard might read: average age, 24; sex, undoubtedly; favorite clothes, coveralls worn by house painters; hobby, looking good; income, what, me worry?; soccer knowledge, increasing in quantum leaps. 17

The other night in the Met parking lot a customer could enjoy two bands . . . three or four circus-sized mess tents, impromptu displays of motorcycle daredevilry and the latest fashions in customized vans. Records and near records were established for beer consumption. . . .

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The other night in the Met parking lot a customer could enjoy two bands . . . three or four circus-sized mess tents, impromptu displays of motorcycle daredevilry and the latest fashions in customized vans. Records and near records were established for beer consumption. . . .
The Kicks’ reputation spread beyond the Twin Cities as the team became a symbol of the success the NASL hoped to achieve. Per-game attendance averages increased from 23,121 in 1976 to 32,775 in 1977 and held steady at 30,928 in 1978. Lamar Hunt, owner of the Dallas Tornados and a founder of the league, told *Sports Illustrated* that “Minnesota, averaging 33,000 in a city where they walked in cold against pro base-
ball and football, is the real success story. To make it in a major-sports market, not pushing anybody out of the way but filling a gap—that’s what we’re all about. That’s success!” NASL commissioner Phil Woosnam called the Kicks’ record-setting attendance in the August 25, 1976, playoff game “the sports story of the century.” At the start of the 1979 season, the praise extended beyond in-house hyperbole. A *Washington Post* article lauded the low-budget Kicks in comparison to the high-rolling New York Cosmos: “If there is a true success story in the North American Soccer League, it is the Minnesota Kicks.”

As the season unfolded, though, the Kicks would see declining ticket sales and a disgruntled fan base, situations that would worsen in coming years.

**Chuck Ruhr Advertising** realized well before the start of the 1979 season that several economic factors—“player costs up . . . stadium costs up . . . overall Kicks operating budget down”—would make it difficult to maintain the attendance and profitability of past seasons. Because of these concerns, management had chosen to raise ticket prices by one dollar in each price range and add a two-dollar parking fee. To counteract the anticipated backlash, the agency decided to “position Minnesota Kicks Soccer as the entertainment that continues to give you more value on a dollar for dollar basis than any other entertainment in this area” and run a promotional gimmick at every home game. The positioning theme would be: “Minnesota Kicks Soccer. Still the most kicks per buck.”

After the season opener against Atlanta, where a crowd of 24,131 endured a rainstorm to see the Kicks win 4–1, attendance figures began to decline, as feared. The next seven home games did not exceed the first season’s average attendance of 23,121. The June 20 arrival of the ever-popular New York Cosmos, now without Pelé but featuring another world-famous player, Franz Beckenbauer, temporarily resuscitated the Kicks’ crowd numbers to 43,562. But only two of the remaining eight home games drew more than 30,000 fans.
By the end of the season, Crocker may have wished to recant his earlier proclamation that he would “rather put 20,000 people in the stands and lose $250,000 than have 5,000 and lose $50,000.” The Kicks’ average attendance had decreased to not much more than 20,000, and the team had lost close to the large sum Crocker had once casually dismissed. Following the 1979 season, he and his associates began looking to “peddle the franchise,” the Minneapolis Tribune reported.20

Analysts, both inside and outside of the organization, offered explanations for the dip in attendance. At a post-season meeting, Ruhr listed four factors: “Poor early season weather . . . tight schedule . . . pricing . . . and most significantly inflation/recession.” The Minneapolis Tribune had offered a similar assessment in August. But much earlier in June, Soucheray had dismissed these predictable reasons, offering instead a tongue-in-cheek explanation: because “the team keeps improving and scoring more and more goals,” fans were leaving the party in the parking lot early, ruining the atmosphere.21

Soucheray was right in one respect. The conventional explanations, while certainly factors, did not tell the full story. The weather was not always pleasant, but the Kicks’ largest early-season crowd came on the coldest game in their history. On warmer days, such as the June 3 match-up with Tulsa, attendance was low. Star striker Alan Willey agreed: “You can’t say it’s the weather.” Also, while scheduling conflicts with the Twins did limit the number of Saturday-night games, the Kicks in the past had drawn large crowds regardless of when they played. Even the most obvious explanation—price increases coupled with the tough economy—had flaws. As Soucheray pointed out, “The American teenager, packed four to a car, doesn’t run on so thin a margin that he can’t chip in four bits to park the machine.” As for the one-dollar increase in ticket prices, Soucheray continued, “A dollar is a dime in these inflation-
ary times.” Nor could the decline be blamed on a national trend, as overall attendance in the NASL actually increased by ten percent in 1979 and would grow again the following season.22

Although Soucheray was correct that the young adults in the parking lot were key to the waning attendance, the root of the problem was not their dissatisfaction with the game. It was their behavior, which offended many older ticket holders. To ease safety concerns, in 1979 the Kicks called for more security than the usual number of police officers, a move that may have backfired.

Their presence created, in the words of one self-described older season-ticket holder, “an aura of subtle intimidation,” that corroded the atmosphere for him—as well as for many young adults.23

While previous seasons had seen unruliness from young fans, it was not until 1979 that the response from the media and older ticket holders shifted from lighthearted amusement to annoyance and, sometimes, anger. The Woodstock environment, which management had encouraged to keep attendance high, allowed some young adults to test boundaries, sometimes violently. Under the headline “Kicks’ Parking Lot, Not Playing Field, Often Sees Fiercest Action,” the Minneapolis Tribune reported about a police officer who was mugged by five drunken fans trying to sneak beer into the stadium.24 Older fans—from corporate executives to parents with young children—filled the mailbox of Freddie Goodwin, now club president as well as coach, with complaints. One businessman wrote:

No more Kicks games [for us].
Not because we don’t like the sport. Many of us do! We don’t like the fans! The ones that filter down to the field box seats from up above and intimidate us with the foulest language imaginable! The parking lot activity doesn’t help either. We’re all for professional sports in the Twin Cities—we have tickets for all major sports—but we just can’t subject business guests to such an abusive environment.

Another correspondent, a fan “since the team came to Minnesota,” asserted

I consider myself to be relatively enlightened—hardly prudish—but I do not intend to bring my children to see the Kicks play again for a long time to come. . . .

The combination of incredible sums of alcohol, mass profanity, marijuana, various degrees of sexual activity . . . were more than enough to detract substantially from the play on the field.25

Such complaints led to further increases in security provided by the Minneapolis and Bloomington police forces. According to a policeman who oversaw security at Met Stadium for both sports, “the crowd at Kicks games is a younger, more raucous crowd than at Vikings games,” requiring “three times as many officers.” By the end of the season, increased law enforcement had substantially reduced crime. Not coincidentally, attendance had dropped as well. The Kicks relied heavily on admissions bought at the gate, mostly by the younger crowd. Same-day purchases normally outsold advance tickets by well over half. But in 1979, when advance purchases remained roughly stable, same-day sales declined substantially, indicating a significant drop among younger fans.26

Increased security worked against the Kicks’ carefully cultivated image as “the people’s club” and the soccer experience as “anti-Establishment.” Many fans felt that

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**NORTH AMERICAN SOCCER LEAGUE, 1968–84**

- Over its 17 seasons, 43 different franchises took the field.
- Twelve of the original 17 teams folded after the first season (1968), casualties of minimal attendance and poor television ratings, but the league would gradually grow again.
- At its height, from 1978 to 1980, the NASL fielded 24 teams, after which it lost teams rapidly.
- In its final season, 1984, there were only nine.
- No franchise survived throughout the league’s history, and 11 played in multiple cities, often moving to avoid bankruptcy.

Source: The American Soccer History Archives, homepages.sover.net/~spectrum/
they were subject to “unreasonable and uncalled for treatment” from the police officers. One disgruntled letter writer labeled some of “Bloomington’s ‘finest’” as “storm troopers.” The higher ticket prices and parking fees also hurt the populist image. A Kicks’ representative later commented, “It was like our attitude toward them had changed and their attitude toward us changed in turn. People still thought us to be the best value in town, but we sort of lost the edge [by increasing prices].”

The situation deteriorated further in 1980, as ticket sales both at the gate and in advance decreased. The Kicks were now developing a bad reputation nationally. Explaining the dour prospects for the NASL’s future, sportswriter Ray Ratto told Soccer America readers, “The novelty has worn off some franchises, most notably in Minnesota, where the Kicks are floundering badly. . . . [It] is another disaster-in-progress. The open-door policy—free parking, tailgater’s heaven, low prices—apparently brought in a lot of riff and raff, and a lot of families are getting turned off by the atmosphere.” The Kicks’ poorest win-loss record to date did not help the attendance situation.

In an effort to renew rapport with their original target audience, Kicks’ management decided to forego the parking fee, beginning with the July 2 match against Edmonton. While the move produced a season-high crowd of 24,154, it also brought back the “old problems,” the Tribune reported: “underage drinking, exploding fireworks and people who enter the lot with no intention of attending the game, just partying.” Soon, more calls for stricter measures came flooding in. The team was caught in a double bind: one fan base could only be satisfied at the expense of another. Young adults were now both the club’s only chance for an immediate attendance boost and a guarantee of imminent demise.

Later in the 1980 season, the Kicks discontinued free parking, and crowd sizes began to decline. Though the 16-and-16 team managed to sneak into the playoffs, the season ended with a poor showing on the field and in the stands. The team lost to Dallas in the first round, with an attendance of 17,461—below its season average of 18,279, which was the smallest yet. Even worse news for the Kicks was their projected net loss of $500,000. A few weeks later, Crocker announced the sale of the team to a group led by Welshman Ralph Sweet.

The 1981 season—the Kicks’ sixth and final—was fraught with disappointment. In an attempt to reinvigorate the club, Sweet “authorized the marketing strategies that made the Kicks so attractive . . . in the first place,” Soucheray reported, most notably, free parking. But while he was trying to tap into the club’s past successes, Sweet was also paring the front office “to the bone,” according to sportswriter Bruce Brothers, and replacing the largely popular Freddie Goodwin. This and other moves did not sit well with the fans, media, or players. As the league’s average attendance declined less than three percent, the Kicks’ numbers diminished significantly. The team finished the season with an average attendance of 16,605, more than ten percent below 1980 and its lowest ever.

The Kicks’ final game, a September 6 playoff against the Fort Lauderdale Strikers, encapsulated all elements of the team’s downfall. Because of a scheduling conflict with the Twins, the match was moved to the University of Minnesota’s much smaller Memorial Stadium. Before 10,722 spectators—almost 40,000 fewer than at their playoff victory six years before—the Kicks lost, 3–0, in their only home game played away from Met Stadium. The young fans had moved on, and the Woodstock-like atmosphere had evaporated.

Soon the Kicks, too, would disappear, as a debt of more than $500,000 and two missed pay periods forced the NASL to fold the franchise in November 1981. Shortly before the club’s financial collapse, a St. Paul Dispatch article lamented its plight. Citing the team’s best-known slogan, “In 1976, Minnesota Joined the World,” columnist Jim Wells commented, “That was a message suggesting that Minnesotans had been backwoods
isolationists before the arrival of soccer.” He went on to lament how the team that “brought the world to Minnesota” was now “in danger of leaving it.” 

Like many others, Wells blamed the new owner, but the Kicks’ failure had been set in motion years before Sweet took the helm. The same factors that had created the attendance boom—most notably, the support and shenanigans of young adults—had precipitated its decline. The exuberant atmosphere that had carried Minnesota into the world of soccer could not be sustained.

The end of the Kicks did not mean the total collapse of Minnesota’s soccer culture. In November 1983, two years after the team’s failure, the Minneapolis Star and Tribune announced that the NASL would return to town. The Fort Lauderdale Strikers—ironically, the team that defeated the Kicks in their final game—was relocating to the Twin Cities. The team’s owner was Elizabeth Robbie, wife of Joe Robbie, a Minneapolis lawyer and owner of the National Football League’s Miami Dolphins; the general manager was their son Tim. Though the Robbies were unable to secure the rights to the old team name, they promised that there would be a “Kicks’ flavor to much of the Strikers [sic] effort.” Like the Kicks, the new team would make its home at Minnesota’s largest stadium: the Metrodome in downtown Minneapolis, which had recently replaced Met Stadium. Management would also attempt to produce the “spirited tailgating” so instrumental to the Kicks’ success. The Strikers’ marketing slogan even paid homage to their predecessors: “Minnesota’s newest kick.”

The Strikers immediately faced significant challenges. Pundits wondered how attractive an indoor venue would be during the summer months. In addition, the Metrodome’s lack of onsite parking was hardly conducive to the “festive atmosphere” the owners hoped to recreate. The biggest problem, however, was the severe decline of the NASL. In the upcoming 1984 season, only nine teams would take the field. Though the league’s new president hoped to rebuild, this season would prove to be the NASL’s last.

These circumstances doomed
the Strikers from the outset. Nevertheless, the team’s first home game, an exhibition against the New York Cosmos, drew 21,039 fans, more than the franchise had ever drawn in a regular-season game in Florida. To build on this surprisingly large crowd, management hosted several events at the regular-season opener, hoping to “attract people 18 to 34 years old,” but attendance dropped to 15,631. In another attempt, on May 28, the Strikers hosted not only the Tampa Bay Rowdies but, more important, the Beach Boys, who played a concert after the game. The event drew 52,621 fans, a Minnesota soccer record and one of the largest crowds in NASL history. But this success did not translate into sustained interest. The Strikers played their final game on September 14 before a crowd of 8,989 fans who booed as the team lost.36

One key factor, lacking in the Strikers’ single season, had propelled the Kicks’ box-office success. While the Strikers were wise to target the youth market and aim high by renting the Metrodome, management made the mistake of thinking it could manufacture success through promotional gimmicks. The youthful exuberance surrounding the Kicks had been organic and spontaneous; the owners had merely provided a venue that was open and accessible.

Recent attempts to revive professional soccer in Minnesota have been small-scale ventures: minor-league teams playing in smaller stadiums. Both the Minnesota Thunder (1995–2009) and, currently, the Minnesota Stars have appealed mostly to families with soccer-playing children. The problems of crime, drunkenness, and unruliness no longer surround Minnesota soccer, but neither do large numbers of fans.37 The future of Minnesota professional soccer might just depend upon achieving the balance that the Kicks never could: An atmosphere that attracts a youthful crowd, curbs excesses, yet maintains a feeling of edginess and populism. Such a formula, however elusive, might ensure that Minnesota would not only join the world of major-league soccer but remain there.  

Notes

2. Unless otherwise noted, all statistics in this article—attendance averages, league standings, game results—are from The American Soccer History Archives, homepages.soccer.net/-/spectrum/ (accessed Jan. 23, 2012).

Efforts beginning in the late 1800s to establish professional soccer in the U.S. culminated in the American Soccer League (1921–31). It was surprisingly successful but could not survive the Great Depression. U.S. soccer then relapsed into obscurity for more than 30 years. The NASL was the result of a 1967 merger of the United Soccer Association and the National Professional Soccer League. Colin Jose, American Soccer Leap, 1921–31: The Golden Years of American Soccer (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Wayne D. Rasmussen, “Historical Analysis of Four Major Attempts to Establish Professional Soccer in the United States of America between 1894 and 1994” (PhD diss., Temple University, 1995), 7–52; Dave Wangerin, Soccer in a Football World: The Story of America’s Forgotten Game (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 15–120.


6. For example, the Denver Dynamos played their first season at Jefferson County Stadium, which hosted amateur baseball and softball games, rather than the larger Mile High Stadium, used by the football Broncos; Holbert, Kicks, 22.


8. Holbert, Kicks, 43–44; presentation by The Haworth Group, 1975, box 14, Team Records.

9. Holbert, Kicks, 45–47, 53; Frank Buetel, Minnesota Kicks (Minneapolis: Sports Film & Talents Inc., 1976), videotape.

10. Minneapolis Tribune, May 8, 1976, p. 1C; Holbert, Kicks, 16. Original reports counted 2,000 free admissions; by the end of the season, either through exaggeration or more accurate estimating, the number rose to 3,000. Minneapolis Tribune, May 10, 1976, p. 1A, Aug. 26, 1976, p. 1A.

Six years later, when the franchise was folding, that decision was remembered fondly; see, for example, Minneapolis Tribune, Nov. 1, 1981, p. 10C. It remains among the first things mentioned about the club: see Joel A. Rippel, Minnesota Sports Almanac: 125 Glorious Years (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003), 294; Phil Tippin, Sports Legends: A History of Minnesota Sports (Minneapolis: D Media, 2008), 112.
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