



America's Surge in Soccer Fandom

U.S. companies must kick into high gear to avoid getting stuck on the World Cup sidelines.



In 2026, the World Cup is coming to North America – with matches spread across the United States, Mexico, and Canada. From June 11th-July 19th, soccer fans will cheer for their favorite teams and players, as they battle it out to see what country's team comes out on top.

U.S. soccer fandom lags behind some of the more established soccer (or should we say football) markets. Ninety-two percent of Mexicans, 82% of Brits, and 80% of Germans say they are interested in soccer. In contrast, just under **three-fourths (72%) of Americans say they are interested in soccer**. Of those who are interested, **a quarter (25%) self-describe as “dedicated,” while 20% self-describe as “obsessed” fans**.

While behind, American fandom is on the rise. Since 2020, we have seen a **17% increase in soccer fandom**. And **almost half (45%) of Americans say their interest in soccer is increasing**. This surge is especially pronounced among **casual fans** (people who have a slight interest in soccer/are casual fans) (**47%**) and **hardcore fans** (people who identify as either a diehard or a dedicated fan) (**82%**).

Using data from The Harris Poll's Sports Momentum Index, and custom surveys, this report explores how U.S. companies can take advantage of Americans' growing interest in soccer, especially in 2026 when the World Cup is held in our own backyard.

Interested in digging deeper into the data featured in this report? Connect with our talented team of researchers about America's growing soccer fandom.

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SOCCER MAY NOT BE 'AMERICAN,' BUT IT'S TAKING ROOT IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Picture an 'American' sport - baseball, football, or basketball may come to mind. Rarely would 'soccer' be your first thought. Almost **two-thirds (65%) of soccer fans agree that people in America are soccer fans, but that soccer is not really an 'American' sport** (Figure 1). Soccer may not be core to *America's identity*, but is already a significant component to many *Americans' individual identities*.

Almost **half (48%) of fans agree that soccer is an important part of their culture**. Even more (51%) agree that **soccer is an important part of their lives**. If soccer were no longer played in the U.S., fans say the following would be strongly impacted – **youth playing the sport would lose an important outlet (61%)**, **individuals who like the sport would be disappointed (56%)**, **less feeling of community and fewer social interactions (43%)**, **negative economic impact due to decline in soccer related activity (34%)**, and a drop in **national identity and pride (27%)**.

65%

People in America are soccer fans, but it's not really an 'American' sport.

35%

Soccer feels like an 'American' sport.

Figure 1. Base: U.S. soccer fans, n=522. Q8. Below are two statements. Which do you most agree with? 'People in America are soccer fans but it's not really an 'American' sport.' 'Soccer feels like an 'American' sport.'



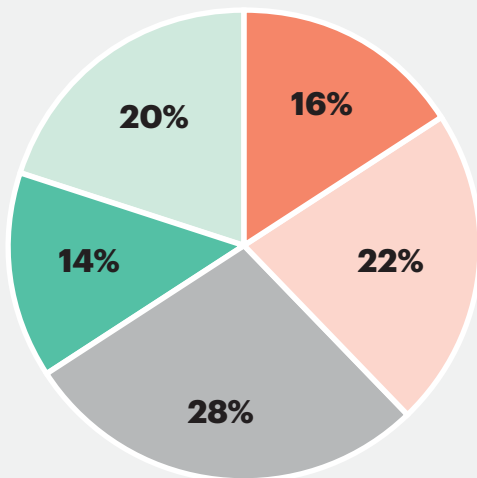


AMERICANS' INTEREST IN THE WORLD CUP GROWS AS THE TOURNAMENT COMES TO NORTH AMERICA

Taking place just once every four years, the FIFA World Cup has long attracted an audience that extends beyond the serious soccer fan. **A little more than a third (35%) of Americans say that they watch major global soccer events (e.g., World Cup) on TV/streaming platforms.** This jumps to **73% among hardcore soccer fans.**

This is not the first time that the World Cup will take place in North America, but it has been over 30 years since the U.S. last hosted (1994). Americans are excited to engage with soccer on their home turf. **Seven-in-10 (70%) soccer fans agree that they are more excited about the 2026 World Cup specifically because it will be held in North America.**

A year out from the start of the tournament, **half (46%) of U.S. adults are aware that the 2026 World Cup will be held in the U.S.** Almost **four-in-10 (38%) agree that their interest in the 2026 World Cup is driven primarily by the fact it will be played in the U.S.** (Figure 2). Americans' boosted World Cup enthusiasm gives the sport an opportunity to pick up new fans, and offers sponsors a much wider audience than just soccer diehards.



My interest in the 2026 World Cup is driven primarily by the fact it will be played in the U.S.



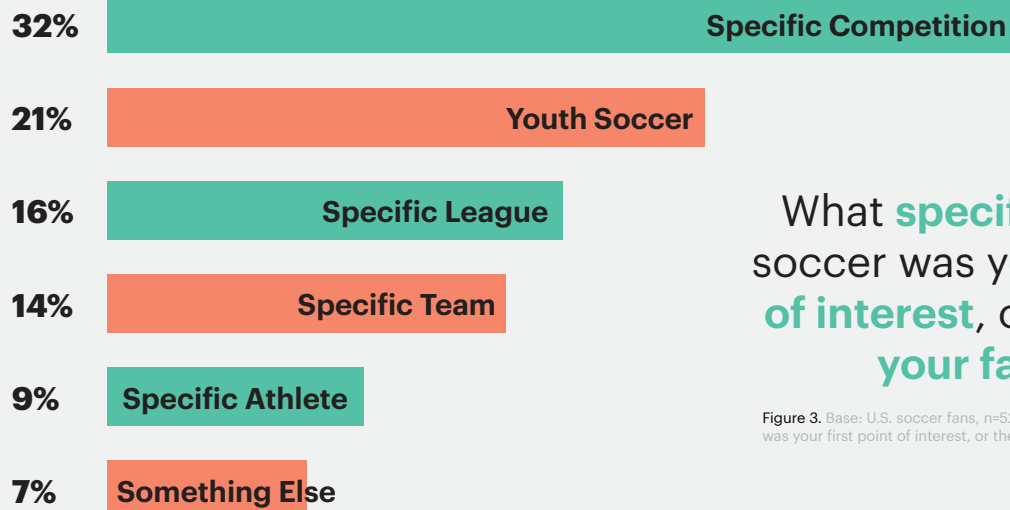
Figure 2. Base: U.S. adults, n=424. Q3. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My interest in the 2026 World Cup is driven primarily by the fact it will be played in the U.S.



NEW SOCCER FANS OFTEN SPRING FROM LARGE COMPETITIONS LIKE THE WORLD CUP

Though it occurs infrequently, the World Cup is a major driver of American interest in soccer. A plurality of **U.S. soccer fans point to a specific competition (e.g., World Cup) (32%) as the specific aspect of soccer that first sparked their interest in the sport** (Figure 3). Beyond that first spark, the World Cup continues to fuel the fandom flame - **87% of U.S. soccer fans say they are interested in the World Cup.**

Beyond large-scale competitions, **youth soccer (21%) is often pointed to as a key entry point into soccer fandom** - reflecting families' dedication to (and investment in) youth sports. Each year, the average American family spends \$1,500 on youth sports per child.



What **specific aspect** of soccer was your **first point of interest**, or the **start of your fandom**?

Figure 3. Base: U.S. soccer fans, n=522. Q4. What specific aspect of soccer was your first point of interest, or the start of your fandom?

HOW CAN U.S. BRANDS SCORE WITH AMERICA'S GROWING SOCCER COMMUNITY?

The 2026 World Cup provides a prime opportunity for companies to engage with soccer teams, athletes, and fans for the first time. **More than half of fans (54%) agree that they pay attention to the brands who sponsor soccer teams and/or events such as the World Cup.** Similarly, 55% of fans agree that they are **more likely to purchase from a brand who supports their favorite teams or athletes.**

One key way that brands can engage with fans - **athlete partnerships that authentically magnify athletes' personalities while driving brand awareness.** Beyond team loyalties, many soccer fans are loyal to specific soccer stars. **Six-in-10 (61%) U.S. soccer fans say that individual athletes bring soccer to life for them.** Almost half (47%) agree that they **follow individual soccer stars as much or more than they follow a specific team.** Companies can lean into this athlete loyalty, partnering with soccer stars that reflect their brand values.

Budweiser, the official beer sponsor of the World Cup since 1986, does this well. During the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, **Budweiser partnered with powerhouse players Lionel Messi, Neymar Jr., and Raheem Sterling in "The World is Yours to Take"** campaign that ran in 70+ countries, aiming to drive global demand for their beer. The campaign was so successful that they revived it the next year for the **2023 FIFA Women's World Cup tournament.** Beyond this partnership, Qatar told Budweiser at the 11th hour that they could not serve alcoholic beer inside the stadiums, resulting in a last minute marketing scramble. Budweiser pulled together a second campaign, **"#BringHomeTheBud," offering to send all the alcoholic beers that they could not serve to the World Cup's winning nation.** Together, these two campaigns connected with fans and generated positive buzz for the long-time World Cup sponsor.

EMBRACE FEMALE FANS AND ATHLETES - AMERICA IS

Gone are the days when sports were exclusively part of the male domain. **Women's teams and female fans are making a significant impact on the sport at-large, and brands would be remiss to overlook this demographic.**



Female soccer fandom: While men may still make up the majority of soccer fans (68% men, 32% women), a significant portion of women are engaged. **A third (32%) of female soccer fans self-identify as either “obsessed” or “dedicated” fans** (Figure 4).

Four-in-10 (42%) female fans agree that **soccer is an important part of their lives**. And many see soccer as a way to connect with loved ones over a shared interest. **Half of female fans (50%) agree that they bond with their family and friends over key moments in soccer** (e.g., the World Cup). When asked what three words they most often associate with soccer, female fans said **“fun”** (58%), **“excitement”** (53%), and **“community”** (43%).

How would you describe your interest in soccer?

Men
Women

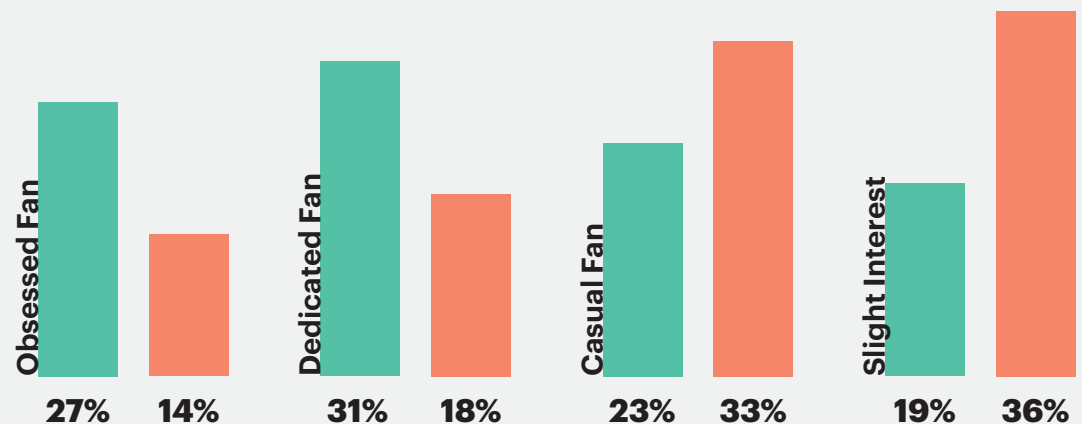


Figure 4. Base: U.S. male soccer fans, n=264. Base: U.S. female soccer fans, n=258. How would you describe your interest in the sport of soccer?

Just wait for the 2027 FIFA Women’s World Cup: 2026 may be all about the men’s soccer stars, but 2027 will be the women’s turn - as the ladies take over Brazil. Interest in women’s sports leagues is rising - 60% of Americans are **excited to see the growth of women’s sport**. And women’s sports are increasingly cool to follow. Almost half of U.S. adults say that the **WNBA** (48%), **PWHL** (46%), or **NWSL** (45%) **are cool to follow or talk about**.

Several women’s leagues made the top five of the **Harris Poll Sports Momentum Index**, a ranking of the sports leagues with the strongest momentum as of June 2025. The top leagues include **League One Volleyball** (60.4), **Unrivaled** (Professional Women’s 3-on-3 Basketball) (59.5), **TGL Indoor Golf League** (59.5), **Professional Women’s Hockey League** (58.8), and the **English Premier League Soccer** (58.28). **The FIFA World Cup** (Men’s and Women’s) is not far behind the leaderboard with a **momentum score of 52.5**.

Brands should embrace the opportunity to partner with women’s leagues and athletes - public support is there.

SEIZE THE MOMENTUM OF THIS RISE IN SOCCER FANDOM

Soccer is experiencing a significant cultural surge in the United States. While the majority of the sport’s global fan base resides elsewhere, U.S. interest, among both men and women, is growing rapidly. With North America set to host the 2026 World Cup, U.S. companies have a timely opportunity to tap into this rising enthusiasm. Forming strategic partnerships with teams and athletes, and actively engaging with fans, can deliver substantial gains in brand visibility, engagement, and ultimately revenue.



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