

# Why Liberals Like Soccer More than Conservatives



I've always been a big sports fan, which explains why I have absolutely no interest in soccer. The fact is, I'd rather watch my accountant get his toenails clipped than take in a soccer game – and that includes the World Cup final, which I'm sure will be as *scintillating* as any other soccer game.

In soccer, they spend hours frantically trying to score. That's not sport. That's a young guy trying to convince his date that he likes her for her personality. If you could bottle soccer, you'd have a cure for insomnia.

But hey, if you like it, that's fine with me.

And it's not just because it's so dull that I don't like soccer. Another reason I don't like it is because of a certain kind of American who does like it. Most of these sports fans – a term I use with no regard for either word, “sports” or “fans” – wouldn't know a fumble from a first down, a hit-and-run from a double play. But every four years they show up at bars and go wild when the American team ties the Tunisians zero-zero, or nil-nil, as they call it.

I'm not much of a fan of Ann Coulter either (though she's infinitely more interesting than soccer), but she's right when she says that soccer is “excruciatingly boring” and that “the reason there are so many fights among spectators at soccer games is to compensate for the tedium.”

Which brings us to how, for many Americans – almost always liberal elite Americans – soccer isn't really about soccer so much as it's about proving the superiority of the young over the old, of liberals over conservatives.

Take Peter Beinart, a liberal journalist and professor of journalism and political science at the City University of New York. Mr. Beinart was with Fareed Zakaria on CNN the other day and had a lot to say about how soccer just might save America – from its narrow-minded, insular self.

Soccer fans in America, he said, show us that “we have a less nativist sports culture and we’re more open – at least some groups in the United States – young people, immigrants, political liberals – are more open to liking the same kinds of things that people in other countries do. Things don’t have to be ours and ours alone.”

Part of the attraction of soccer, Mr. Zakaria says, is that we’re sharing the sport with the rest of the world; we’re following something the rest of the world is following. Yes, Professor Beinart says, but it’s much more than that. Younger Americans, who like soccer more than older Americans, “are far less likely than older Americans to say that American culture is superior or to say that America is the greatest country in the world.”

In case you were wondering, this is a good thing to Mr. Beinart, and I suspect many other liberals. Because “it reflects a more cosmopolitan temperament, more of a recognition that America has things to learn from the rest of the world, and that in fact maybe we have to learn from the rest of the world if we’re going to remain a successful country.”

After taking that in, Mr. Zakaria observes that soccer fans in the United States look a lot like the Obama coalition. To which Beinart replied: “That’s exactly right, and if you look at the states where soccer is most popular, they’re overwhelmingly blue states and the states where soccer is least popular are red states.”

You see: Soccer is much more than a game that puts people like

me to sleep. It's a bunch of guys running up and down a "pitch" in short pants teaching us an important lesson – a lesson about how the tide is turning, about how the same people who embrace soccer embrace the idea that despite all the talk from those old right-wingers, America isn't so special after all. Or as Peter Beinart explains it: "Younger people are far more likely than older people to say they like the United Nations. There's a willingness to accept the idea that America is one of many nations. Yes, we have a special affinity for it. But it doesn't mean in some objective sense [that] us, and everything we do are necessarily better."

So there you have it. He grants us that as Americans we might have "a special affinity" for our homeland, but thanks to soccer we can learn a lot from the rest of the world. We can learn that we're not as great as we think we are – or, more precisely, that we're not as great as old, conservative, red-state Americans think we are.

Turns out that soccer is teaching me a lot more about elite, liberal intellectuals than it'll ever teach me about the rest of the world. In fact, soccer has already taught me that smug, liberal elites are the single biggest reason I have no use for soccer, and that Ann Coulter isn't crazy when she says, "Any growing interest in soccer can only be a sign of the nation's moral decay."