

For The Love Of FIFA

By Jasen Obermeyer

Few sporting events capture the attention of the entire world.

The Olympics, definitely. But in terms of just one sport, it's soccer (or football, however you call it). And through it, FIFA.

With the next FIFA tournament approaching right around the soccer field, it's always such a fun, exciting time.

But why is FIFA so big? Why is it so popular worldwide, and only getting bigger?

I believe it's because the sport is very simple to get into, both as a player and a viewer. It's not difficult to understand or follow. It provides enough strategy and excitement to keep you invested. Unlike, say hockey, a sport that's identified and associated with Canada, soccer is more borderless. It's transcended boundaries. Plus, most countries don't have the temperature or capacity to have an ice rink. But most countries have the ability to always ? or good portions of the year ? be able to play soccer. Plus, unlike the NBA or MLB, FIFA doesn't take up almost the entire calendar year.

It just brings nations and cultures of people together. Whether they're the same or not, when you've got a bunch of Belgians and Spanish in the same bar, it's all for the simple love of a sport.

Plus, with other sports leagues, you generally cheer and identify with the team in your city, or closest to you geographically. But with FIFA, you identify with the nation, and your ancestral background. It makes you proud of your nationality, passionate.

It's always great seeing the different, colourful flags hanging or flying outside cars, people honking their horns. It's just a fun time to cheer for your team(s) and enjoy it with others. And even if you're of that nationality or not, it's still fun watching.

It just makes the world feel united and alive.

FIFA is definitely big in my family. Being German on my dad's side, and Italian on my mom's, it's interesting when the two teams compete against each other. A playful line is drawn in the sand at our house. Fortunately, both teams have won against each other at various points.

Though my cousins on my Dad's side and I get into a (mostly) friendly disagreement over their support for The Netherlands and mine for Germany, FIFA is something we still bond over. My Uncle Dolf passionately loved cheering for his home country, and for the World Cup final 2010, as soon as he came over to our place for our annual summer get together, he just simply said ?Hello, now turn on the T.V. for the game.? Though Holland lost to Spain, it was a fun day for us all.

Even with friends, once in a while we'll get together at home or in a restaurant and watch a game. Even though we don't identify with either team, it's still a lot of fun.

I got into FIFA during the 2006 World Cup. During weekends and summer vacation, it was always traditional to go for a nice swim in the pool, dry off, go inside for lunch, and watch the day's game. It was exhilarating seeing Italy beat France in penalty shootout. What a nerve raking, nail biter of a game.

Though I haven't seen many World Cups, 2014 is, and probably will always be, my favourite. It's the one that made me a massive fan of the tournament, and really grabbed my interest in soccer.

I followed it every step of the way, every game I kept a close eye on. When it came to the elimination round, do-or-die, I correctly

predicted all but two of the games. The best was watching the final, Germany versus Argentina, with my cousin's Daniel and Alessandro. They're hardcore soccer fans, so watching it with them was the best. When Germany won, we collectively screamed and cheered. Plus, I did win a \$10 bet from a friend, so that was a nice icing on the cake.

FIFA has provided some historical, cultural moments, like the U.S. beating England 1-0 in 1950, or Cameroon beating Argentina in 1990. Or memorable highlights like Diego Maradona's Hand of God, or his Goal of the Century. Definitely Germany's thrashing of Brazil 7-1 in 2014, which even my Nonna commented "Do [the Brazilians] even know how to play??" So many names have been elevated to legendary status because of the tournament.

Soccer has definitely grown here in Canada, with the Toronto FC, and this year going to FIFA for only the second time in history. I'm very excited for FIFA 2026, as we're co-hosting with Mexico and the U.S. I hope to watch a game live at BMO Field.

So whether you're a casual or hardcore viewer of the sport. Whether you know the players or not. Whether you're of a full blooded background, or just a smidge, or even not at all. Enjoy FIFA!