

I Get No Kicks From Champaign- Or Soccer Either

By Lou Lombardo, LMT, NCTMB

Our two young daughters recently finished their soccer program and the parents were invited on the last day to play a match.

Even though it was 97 degrees that day, I decided that I could score points with the girls (I mean I could really fulfill some fatherly duties) by showing up.

Soccer has always been a foreign sport to me. In fact I wouldn't know the difference between a mid-fielder and a mid-ruff bulge. Although I'm pretty sure Brandi Chastain doesn't have the latter if I remember her famous "wardrobe malfunction" of a few years back.

For all those guys who recall, back in the Woman's World Cup finals in 1999 Chastain, not to be confused with Mia Hamm, who married baseball star "No-More" Garciparra, scored the winning goal and, in a show of emotions, ripped off her shirt to reveal her sports bra and some well defined abs.

Now, that was a game worth watching! But I digress.

While growing up in Jamestown, NY we never saw any soccer fields around town.

The only sports we played were baseball in the spring, summer and fall, and football in the fall and winter. Both were American sports played by All-American boys like me.

The first time I remember being exposed to soccer was in my junior year at good old "Freddie State" where I graduated "Magna Cum Lousy". I recall that we actually fielded a soccer team that year.

And recently I read that Fredonia State is constructing a \$4.3 million soccer complex. The sport has really taken off back there and is as popular as in some European schools.

When I made my first trip to Italy in 1989 I remember not seeing any baseball fields. Instead the cities and countryside were filled with soccer stadiums. How un-American can you get?

And nowadays soccer is being taught to kids from age 4 or 5 and all the way through high school and college.

Although immensely popular, I still am not able sit and watch players running up and down the field for who knows how many innings only to have the game end in a 1-0 score. (unless you have another disrobing incident like Brandi's)

And the fans and players give a whole new meaning to the term “fanatic”. Riots have occurred as a result of a team winning or losing a match. Players have been known to head-butt opponents over a silly reference to the suspected illicit employment of a player’s mother.

Some guys are really touchy about those things.

So, anyway, here I am showing up at my daughters’ soccer fields on the hottest day of the year to try my hand, or, in this case, feet, at this foreign sport.

I was immediately assigned to the “orange” team and was appropriately given an orange vest. No one asked if I ever played the game before. After a minute it became obvious.

I staked out a five-yard area near the goal and was intent on not moving from that spot. If the ball came to me I would try to kick it into the net. If I scored I would only rip off the orange vest.

But I must have gotten caught up in the spirit of the game as I found myself venturing further and further outside my self-appointed space. In fact, I even began to go after others who had possession of the ball.

However, whenever there was a loose ball that I was running toward, if another player arrived at the same time I politely conceded it to them. I wasn’t about to get my foot or shins kicked for such a silly cause.

I have to tell you that after ten minutes of play I was soaked- happily with perspiration and not anyone’s blood. The sport on the field was certainly more exciting than watching it from the stands.

And the benefits to the human body are tremendous. (Finally the justification for a column appearing on the “Health & Wellness” page).

Not only are you strengthening your leg muscles (soleus, gastrocs, tibialis and peroneals, quads and hamstrings, you are flexing you hip muscles (iliacus and psoas) and benefiting muscles of the shoulder, arms and back (too numerous to mention).

In addition, your cardiovascular system is kicked into high gear, your blood pressure is lowered and stress is reduced. Your metabolism is raised which burns up calories and helps you lose weight.

So many benefits from what I thought was such a foreign thing. Go figure.

I left the field feeling good about myself. Not only did I get to play a sport for the first time, my body felt all the better as a result, even if it was for only 10 minutes.

But I’ll leave this sport for the younger at heart and stick to softball- it’s my patriotic duty.

(Lou Lombardo is a NYS Licensed Massage Therapist, nationally certified by the NCBTMB and is a certified Strength Training Specialist. For questions, comments or more information you can contact him at (585) 734-2200 or by e-mail at lombardolm@aol.com)