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## Sports XML

Posted on Sat, Aug. 19, 2006

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# On soccer Sundays, Hispanic immigrants crowd parks across nation

MATT REED  
Associated Press

**COLUMBUS, Ohio** - The buzz of a nearby interstate can't drown out the yelling, the shouts in Spanish, the referee's whistle - the sounds of soccer being played on a weekend afternoon.

At Rhodes Park on any given summer Sunday, families and friends gather to watch teams with names such as Club Chiapas, Cantaranas or Quiroga - names that recall professional soccer teams or home villages in Mexico and Honduras.

As more immigrants settle outside the Southwest, Hispanic soccer is becoming more competitive and organized around the country and attracting interest from businesses looking to reach young Hispanic immigrants.

Amateur leagues are sprouting up in Kansas and Kentucky and doubling or tripling in number elsewhere. Cleveland's Men's Hispanic Soccer League had to turn teams away this year because organizers couldn't keep up with demand.

"There are huge leagues in North Carolina," said George Chazaro, a U.S. Soccer Federation official. "I would never imagine there would be a Hispanic league in Rhode Island, but there's 80 teams. That's a lot of people."

The language barrier, registration costs and the desire to be with friends and fellow countrymen have kept Hispanic immigrants away from traditional U.S. soccer leagues, said Alex Flores, president of the Liga de Futbol Inter Latinos in Columbus.

"We play by the same rules as Anglo soccer, but we have a different style," he said. "Since Latinos aren't very tall, we have to play on the ground, with little touches and lots of passes, not big kicks and playing through the air like the Anglo game."

In Raleigh, N.C., there was one league in 2000. Now there are four, with one - La Liga de Raleigh - registering 1,300 players and 40 teams this year. Nearby Durham has three leagues.

"Twenty years ago, you might find a single Hispanic team in a gringo league," said Dr. Tim Wallace, president of La Liga. "Now, the pattern is for these leagues to be



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<b>Calendar</b>	separated."
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<b>Special Publications</b>	
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<b>Traffic Reports</b>	The Hispanic population in the United States grew 20 percent from 2000 to 2005, from 35 million to 42 million, making it the largest ethnic minority, according to census data released this month. Ohio's Hispanic population grew at about the same rate, but census figures showed a 46 percent rise in North Carolina.
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<b>Past Articles</b>	Hispanic immigration to states outside traditional destinations such as Texas and California accelerated in the 1990s, when a robust economy created jobs at all income levels in every region of the country. And immigrants have been abandoning seasonal agricultural work after finding year-round jobs in more permanent areas such as construction.
<b>Advertise</b>	
<b>Newspaper Services</b>	And on weekends, they are playing soccer.
<b>OUR PARTNERS</b>	In Columbus, the Liga de Futbol Inter Latinos is looking to buy land to build more soccer fields. The league has grown to more than 1,800 players and 92 teams from a handful a decade ago.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <a href="#">790TheTicket.com</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">Orange Bowl Festival</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">Miami Dolphins</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">Florida Marlins</a></li> </ul>	"We don't have more because we lack the facilities," Flores said. "We usually don't turn anyone away."
<b>NIE ONLINE AUCTION</b>	Renting soccer fields can cost up to \$50,000 a year, he said. Most of that money is raised through registration fees, which cost \$300 a season per team but in other leagues can run as much as \$900. Sponsorships from car dealerships, Hispanic markets and churches can bring in \$8,000 to \$10,000, but most of that goes to buying uniforms printed with names of sponsors.
Bid on cool stuff and support education in Florida. Items include goodies signed by Dywane Wade, Jason Taylor, Dave Barry and more.	A competing league in Columbus, the Union Hispana, is attracting teams and players by offering \$3,000 for a first-place finish and other individual cash prizes for top scorers. Some players play several games on a weekend, switching teams and leagues and moving from one crowded park to another.
» <a href="#">Click to bid now!</a>	Playing for fun and for pride is usually enough to keep people coming back, Sunday after Sunday, said Enrique Martinez, 30, a native of Toluca, Mexico, who switched teams in Columbus.
	"But if another league has good money, the teams will go there," he said.
	In the Raleigh league, it has become common for captains to pay registration fees for top players. One team captain paid the airfare for a player to return from Argentina in time for a championship game, Wallace said.
	"It's all a process of evolution," he said. "There are teams that want to be very good, to be semiprofessional."
	The large numbers who gather for the games caught the eye of a supermarket chain in Arizona, which organizes a weekend-long, annual tournament - the Copa Food City - with thousands of fans and close to 100 teams at the Tempe sports grounds.
	"We were trying to do some grass-roots marketing, and every time we drove around the neighborhoods, we saw these fields filled up with soccer games," said Robert Ortiz, a vice president at Food City supermarkets, which caters toward Hispanics.
	Among minorities, the buying power of Hispanics has bypassed that of blacks and is expected to exceed \$1 trillion by 2010, said Mike Robinson, chief executive officer of

LaVERDAD Marketing in Cincinnati.

Companies are beginning to notice that setting up booths or handing out fliers at Hispanic soccer matches are good ways to reach young Hispanics, he said. He predicted an "inundation of sponsorships" of teams and leagues in the next three years.

"It's unproven, but it's certainly a viable way," he said. "The secret is to reach Hispanics where they are, and they're gathering on the soccer fields, not at high-end malls."

On a Sunday in Columbus, Metapan and Manchester United - made up mainly of Salvadorans - played for the championship of the Ohio Hispanic Soccer Association. Girlfriends, wives and children huddled under the shade of a large tree on the sideline; one man waved a large, light blue-colored Salvadoran flag. On the other sideline, fruit, tacos and Salvadoran pupusas - a traditional corn tortilla and cheese snack - were sold from a pushcart.

Each team scored in the first half before Metapan won with a goal late in the second.

At one point, the referee stopped play when he shouted insults about the eyesight of one of the line judges became too much. Manchester United fans believed the line judge was related to a Metapan player and was showing favoritism.

One Metapan player, Emmanuel Rojas, 33, from El Salvador, said he was one of the few Hispanics in Columbus when his family moved here in the 1980s.

"Just a few Colombians and Puerto Ricans at Ohio State," he said. "It's hard to believe how the population has grown in the last few years."

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Soccer United Marketing: <http://www.sumworld.com/>

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