

For the Love of the Game: Latino Soccer Leagues in Somerville, Massachusetts



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Introduction

Since the late 1970's/early 1980's when some of the first Latino immigrants started settling down in the greater Boston area, Latino soccer leagues have provided a unique cultural activity for those adjusting to life in a new land far from home. The first Latino soccer league was formed in 1981 and held games and practices at Franklin Field in Dorchester. Though titled the Latin American Soccer Association (LASA), immigrants from all across the globe participated, including Jamaica, Ethiopia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Peru, and Colombia. Today, there are about 6 major soccer leagues around Boston. While recognizing the presence of Latino soccer leagues in Dorchester, Lynn and Framingham, this paper focuses on the Central American Soccer League and its relationship with the Salvadoran community in Somerville. The Latino soccer leagues in Somerville and surrounding cities have provided a number of unique cultural services for the Latino community of the greater Boston area. After speaking with Latinos that have been involved with the soccer leagues to varying degrees and at different times, it is my understanding that the leagues serve as 1) an expression of Latinos' passion for the sport, 2) an environment where immigrants of many different countries and cultures come together unified by a love for the sport, and finally 3) a platform for a variety of significant social adjustment processes for recently arrived immigrants. These activities include meeting people and creating a new community for oneself, meeting potential spouses, and networking one's way toward a better job.

Methodology

This paper is the culmination of three months of research in the Salvadoran community in Somerville under the supervision of Tufts University Professor Deborah Pacini-Hernandez. My research contributes to a larger project titled “Urban Borderlands: The Cambridge/Somerville Latino Oral History Project,” where Tufts University students actively engage in a community-based research project documenting the oral histories of the Cambridge and Somerville Latino community. The purpose of this project is to collect documentation in the form of interviews with community leaders and residents, digital photographs, and any other relevant material to reveal and reinforce the cultural exuberance and richness these communities exude.

In an effort to involve the Latino community, the project recruits students from Somerville High School, and partners them up with Tufts students according to project topics and the students’ special interests. In addition to my research on Latino soccer leagues, work was done on Latino owned businesses in Somerville, the process of learning English for newly arrived immigrants in Somerville, and the changing family structures and gender roles for Salvadoran families. I was teamed up with Roberto Velasquez Jr., and Vicente Cruz, both juniors at Somerville High School. Roberto and Vicente helped introduce me to different community members involved in the soccer leagues, attended the majority of my interviews with these community members, and posed questions and comments wherever they felt it appropriate. In working with the high school students, this project promoted both a personal and working relationship between the Latino community and Tufts University. It also helped the Latino youth to possibly learn things about their community they did not know before, increasing their cultural pride.

All of my research involved talking with different members of the Somerville Latino community about their knowledge of and involvement with the soccer leagues. With the help of Roberto and Vicente I was able to interview and talk in depth with people formerly active in the leagues, former team coaches, the main organizer of the Central American Soccer League, and an athlete currently playing on a team in Somerville (for complete interview list see Appendix A). From these interviews I learned the history of Latino soccer leagues around Boston, the infrastructure and organization of the current league in Somerville, and the multi-faceted role of Latino soccer leagues in community building and strengthening for Latinos in Somerville. This paper aims to describe the history of Latino soccer leagues in order to provide a context for the current state of affairs. I will then explain the current organization of the Central American Soccer League in order to 1) document the work and activities of a sorely unrecognized, underrepresented community, and 2) provide specific details about the league that can then be analyzed as either having a cultural impact or reflecting a cultural attitude or practice of the Latino community in Somerville. Lastly, I will describe the different socio-cultural services provided by the soccer leagues that help create and sustain strong community ties as well as ease the transition for newly arrived immigrants. In all, this paper demonstrates the powerful and overwhelmingly positive role soccer leagues play in the lives of Latinos in Somerville, as told by the community itself.

I.

History and

Organization of

Latino Soccer Leagues

Soccer in Central America

Before examining the role of soccer in the lives of Latinos in Somerville, Massachusetts, I feel it is necessary to briefly consider the role soccer played in immigrants' lives before coming to the US. Roberto Velasquez is a native Salvadoran who immigrated in 1980 at the age of twenty-five. He remembers back in his home country that soccer was the most popular sport, if not the most popular form of entertainment. He feels this is because soccer is very cheap and easy to play; all you need is one ball to entertain a large number of kids and/or adults. He then described how the lifestyle in El Salvador is different from that in the US. In El Salvador, everybody knows their neighbors, and entire neighborhoods will often engage in large soccer games in the streets at night, most lasting from 7 pm to 10 pm. Marcos Garcia, also from El Salvador, explained that, "soccer is a very popular sport in El Salvador. I mean the only sport we could enjoy, practice and play was soccer."

Similarly, native Guatemalan Amilcar Lopez came to this country when he was twenty-six and remembers playing what he called "street soccer" (soccer played in the streets as opposed to on actual soccer fields) everyday after school. Amilcar referred to this as a sort of practice for actual soccer games that occurred at the soccer fields on the weekends. In Guatemala these games were not traditionally organized with specific positions or regular teams, and simply allowed anyone who wanted to play to join in. As an extremely cheap form of entertainment that allows large numbers of participants, soccer plays a significant role in the lives of Central American youth as one of the most popular sports activities. According to my interviewees, this contrasts sharply with soccer's place in American culture where baseball, basketball and football are the primary sport activities. Additionally, soccer plays a less important role in the lives of

some Latinos. Spanish Caribbeans (Puerto Ricans, Dominicans etc.) and Venezuelans prefer baseball over soccer as a form of entertainment or sport activity. Though this paper does not go deeply into this issue, further research would be useful in understanding cultural/societal factors influencing why certain communities prefer soccer, and others baseball and other sports.

Latino American Soccer Association

According to those that I interviewed, the first soccer league around Boston for Latino immigrants started at Franklin Field in Dorchester, and was called the Latin American Soccer Association (LASA). Marcos Garcia described the process that led to the development of this league. When he first arrived in Cambridge, Marcos met other Salvadorans through his factory work who wanted to play soccer, and they started meeting every Sunday at an open park near the Charles River to play. In 1981, some people started the Latino American Soccer Association in Dorchester, and Marcos joined a team composed of Italians, Portuguese and Salvadorans from his workplace. That summer, the league started playing every Sunday at Franklin Park in Dorchester.

As more immigrants settled around Boston in the early 1980's, the Latin American Soccer Association gained visibility and grew in size. Roberto Velasquez remembers his first experience playing soccer after moving to the US. Shortly after arriving in Brighton, Massachusetts, his brother Jose (who had been living there for three years already) invited him to come along to play a game at Franklin Field. Jose had made connections with some Latino soccer teams, and asked for permission to bring Roberto along for a practice. Roberto mentioned that the players in the Latin American Soccer Association at the time were from all different countries such as Colombia, Costa Rica, and Honduras. After watching Roberto play a little, the

players invited him to be on their team. In describing this story Mr. Velasquez repeatedly emphasized the shortage of Latino soccer players in the early eighties, compared to the excess of players that come to play for the Somerville leagues now. The rules of soccer require eleven players on each team, and when he first started playing at Franklin Field there were barely enough people to fill the field.

After the first year of Roxbury's Latino soccer league, the word about the games spread to the ever-increasing number of Latino immigrants. By the second year the league had to divide itself into two sections in order to accommodate the number of people interested in playing. Dividing the league into two sections of 12 teams each allowed for each team to play more often, and gave more people an opportunity to play. Mr. Velasquez said that once the word had spread of a Latino soccer league in Dorchester, people started coming from Framingham, Peabody, and even Rhode Island to play.

Amilcar Lopez, originally from Guatemala, owned a team in the Latin American Soccer League for 10 years. He started off in the league as a player, and eventually decided he preferred coaching soccer from the sidelines rather than playing. As a team owner he had to pay a number of fees including registration costs, and referee charges. He would hold large fundraising events to earn enough money required to run the team. At the games and practices Amilcar would organize a raffle where all the profits would go towards funding the team. Each team was responsible for its own fundraising activities, and a significant portion of that money came from the Latino community that wanted to see good soccer teams. When Amilcar first started his team, the registration fee cost only \$100. When he left the league however, it had increased to about \$1000. While fundraising events did help curb some of the costs of owning a team, Amilcar admits to having paid a lot of money out of his own pocket. Amilcar explained the

sheer fun of coaching a competitive soccer team was rewarding enough for the amount of his own money he invested in it.

As a team owner Amilcar had to organize team practices once a week. The Latino American Soccer Association had acquired a blanket permit for Franklin Park, leaving the team owners to devise a practice schedule among themselves for sharing the field. For ten years this league had a good relationship with the city and was able to maintain its permits for Franklin Park. Amilcar remembers that by the 1990's, younger players were coming to Massachusetts with different, rougher styles of play. The games started breaking out into actual fistfights. Once the players started fighting Amilcar remembered the crowd would get involved, and people would start getting hurt. A few of Amilcar's close friends were seriously injured in some of these soccer fights, though he would not relate any specific stories. If a player was seriously injured in an accident on the field and had no health insurance (very few did), he could be in serious financial trouble. If the injury was serious enough, and Amilcar admits to having witnessed some serious injuries (especially to ankles and knees), the player would not be able to work at their job and make money for their family. In these instances the coach or team would organize some sort of community fundraising event to help pay for the player's medical bills.

I asked if some of these fights were related to feuds unrelated to the soccer game, but Amilcar assured me that the fights came about from players being extremely hyped up and intense about each game, and that there was never anything personal. He also felt there was no relation between these fights and the mix of different ethnicities and cultures on the field and on each team, he felt they came about solely from people taking the game too seriously. Usually the police would have to come in response to complaints by neighbors living near the park.

According to Amilcar, no one would get in any legal trouble from these fights, and the police would simply separate everyone telling them to go home.

Jose Velasquez, elder brother to Roberto and Somerville resident for over twenty-five years, mentioned that the Latino American Soccer Association ended in about 1989 or 1990 after someone was murdered at Franklin Field during a game. Jose admits he heard the story second hand, as at the time he had stopped playing for that league and started playing for the Central American Soccer League in Somerville. However, through his years playing at Franklin Field Jose had seen a number of fights break out, and death threats shouted at referees from drunken fans on the sidelines. He recognized alcohol as a leading cause of most of the violent behavior. Jose described a difference between the kinds of people that start fights at soccer games with those who are truly passionate about the sport. He said he has seen people that thoroughly enjoy soccer, but do not see it as a sport. They want their team to win, and are willing to beat up a referee if they feel they are being cheated out of a game. He feels these people ruin the sport, and do not understand what soccer is truly about. When I questioned Marcos Garcia about these stories he assured me that while there were a few serious incidents of violence during soccer games, the league harshly disciplined anyone involved in these soccer fights and was eventually able to keep the crowds under control. He explained that the fights reflected a lack of security at the games, and after the first few fights the league hired police to supervise. According to Marcos, in the late 1980's/early 1990's, the people administering the league were doing a poor job organizing tournaments and keeping teams happy. By 1989 or 1990, most of the teams had quit the league. This prompted the termination of the Latin American Soccer Association, and the establishment of other leagues all over the state including in Somerville.

Central American Soccer League

According to Roberto Velasquez, the Central American Soccer League was started by Latinos living in Somerville who did not want to commute all the way to Dorchester just to play. The increasing Latino immigration to Somerville and its surrounding cities made Roberto and his friends think it was time to create their own league. Roberto identified the original organizer as Jose Pena, a Latino living in Chelsea who recognized that many Salvadorans immigrating to Massachusetts were moving into Somerville. Jose received the necessary permits from the city of Somerville and secured a place to play. According to Roberto, Jose had little to no trouble working with city officials and organizing the first Latino soccer leagues in Somerville. During the inception of Somerville's first Latino soccer league, Roberto was playing a lot of soccer with the original league organizers, and offered his services as a referee for many games. As mentioned earlier, Roberto had taken courses on how to referee soccer games back in El Salvador, but admits that it was difficult to keep up with the new rulebooks that come out every four years from an international team of World Cup professionals.

Lucas Santos, a Salvadoran who has been playing in various soccer leagues including the Central American Soccer League for the past ten years, described to me the organization of Somerville's Latino soccer league. The Central American Soccer League consists of two divisions: the premier league and the regular league. The premier league comprises of better, top level players and teams. The regular league is considered a second division league, where the play is less advanced than in the premier league. Each league has fourteen teams, twenty-eight teams in total. A lot of the players come from Somerville, others come from Chelsea and other surrounding cities.

As Lucas' uncle has owned a team for about 14 years, I asked if he knew how one would go about starting one's own team. Lucas stated that the leagues are pretty full as is, and that only if one team drops out could someone take the opportunity to start a new one. At the same time however, the owners of particular teams can change frequently. In order to run a team, the owner needs to pay a \$1000 registration fee, money for uniforms, money to pay referees (\$70 per game), and a first-aid kit (usually around \$400). As the owner of a team, you can choose to buy cleats or warm-up uniforms for your players. Lucas also mentioned that currently, very talented players usually get paid to play each game. On his team, one player gets \$150 to play each game, and another makes \$100. This money comes from the owner, as well as fans of the team who want to see them win. Lucas noted his team is ranked number one in the premier league, and that they were asked to play for the Massachusetts State Cup. The team made it to the finals where they were playing against some professional athletes, but ended up losing 1-0.

We next discussed why someone would spend so much money to own a soccer team, using Lucas' uncle as an example. When his uncle took control of the team in 1989, there were only 8 teams total in the Central American Soccer League. According to Lucas, his uncle wanted to expand the league knowing there were a lot of players from his hometown in El Salvador that wanted to play, as well as a lot of fans from his hometown that would be active supporters if he created a team. There was such support for the Latino soccer teams that one can easily have between 600 and 800 people watching and cheering. Lucas then noted that having so many Latino soccer fans in one place can be problematic. When the most popular teams play each other, the biggest crowds come, and team owners can invest in police security in case any disturbances to break out. Lucas explained that sometimes fans go crazy if the game is not going the way they expected, and alcohol consumption can sometimes provoke violent behavior.

Once a team wins the championship of the Somerville league, they can choose to play in the Massachusetts Premier League against semi-professional athletes (those who get paid to play). The registration fees for this league are more expensive (\$1500 per team), each team needs its own home field, a home uniform and an away uniform, and transportation all across the state for intra-state games. Lucas feels the reason most Latino soccer teams from Somerville don't join this league is because of the inconvenience involved with traveling so far for games.

We next discussed how it is decided which league a team will be placed in. Lucas explained that league placement is based on a ranking system, where a new team will start in the second division and have the opportunity to work its way up into the premier league. At the end of the season, the worst team in the premier league automatically moves down to the second division. Next, the first place team from the second division plays the first placed team from the premier league, and if they win they are entered into the premier league. Also, the second placed team in the second division plays the second worst team from the premier league. If the premier league team loses, they go down to the second division and the other team moves up to the premier league. These games are some of the best attended, as people want to know which teams will change leagues for the next season. For potential players, coaches in the premier league are more strict with who they pick for their team as the teams are always trying to maintain their position in the premier league. Skill level is less of an issue in the second division, although it is still important for teams hoping to move up into the premier league.

Lucas feels the Somerville Latino soccer league seems to ignore the economics of the game. In order to pay for registration fees, uniforms, referees, a first aid kit, special gifts for players such as cleats or soccer balls, security to watch the games and control the crowd, and extra money that goes under that table to the best players, team owners end up spending \$6000-

\$10000 each season just for a trophy that is worth \$150. With 28 teams each putting in at least \$6000 a season, a lot of money is being spent on these soccer teams. He believes it is the feeling of being a champion that drives coaches to make such economic sacrifices. Lucas distinguishes this from the state level leagues where champions receive \$5000 cash prizes and the opportunity to play at the national level. In the end, Lucas feels that the soccer leagues should be seen simply as a hobby. He emphasizes the danger of soccer injuries that could keep someone from working and making money, and supports the idea of soccer as just a hobby.

As the head organizer of the Central American Soccer League, Marcos Garcia had quite a bit to add about the structure of the soccer league. He distinguished this organization from another league known as the Massachusetts State Soccer League, which has many divisions, each marked by a certain age cutoff. The Central American Soccer League has no age restrictions, but Marcos feels young adults understand the kind of tough physical conditioning required to play at the level of most league teams. Marcos seemed proud of the fact that his league has very few restrictions on who can play (such as cutoffs by age), thereby letting as many people participate as possible. In terms of tryouts for the league, Marcos explained that team owners either select a coach take on the responsibilities themselves. Each coach then has his own individual tryout sessions where he invites potential players to play a pickup game while he observes from the sidelines. From these sessions the coach decides how to best build his team and recruits the appropriate athletes. The players, who can tryout for a number of different coaches, then decide which team will suit them the best, allowing their particular skills to shine through. Coaches sometimes offer a pair of shoes, or warm up uniform to attract players, but Marcos feels an athlete's decision is based on his relationship with the coach, and the other players the coach wants on the team. The commitment only lasts one year; at the end of every

season the players are free to play for any other team the next year. Some of the better teams stay together for a number of seasons, especially if there is very good chemistry among the players and the coach. These tryout sessions are usually held around March or April, and have no formal advertising other than word of mouth between coaches and potential players. Marcos explained that it relies on each coach's unique vision for a successful soccer team to ensure that no one team gets significantly better players year after year. This problem is also avoided by the sheer number of talented athletes, each with a unique style of play. As the team lineups change every year, I asked Marcos if fans support certain players, or particular teams no matter what the lineup. Marcos explained fans remain loyal to one team, usually the team that is named after their hometown in El Salvador (most of the teams are named after towns in El Salvador), and sometimes even demand that a coach replace the players on the team to improve from the season before. Not all teams are named after Salvadoran cities though; some are for Mexican cities, and one team is named Somerville United to represent people from all over the globe who live in Somerville now.

Marcos mentioned that other leagues in the state demote and even eliminate teams that act irresponsibly by damaging the fields they play on, or not showing up on time. The Central American Soccer League does not enforce these kinds of rules because as Marcos stated, "the main idea is to promote soccer." Again, Marcos seemed extremely proud of the leagues lack of restrictions that allowed as many people to play as possible. He explained that the only rules involve both players and the crowd adhering to the rules of the particular park they are playing in, and the ordering and matching of games for the playoffs.

Anyone with enough money can start their own team, but there is a 14-team maximum in each division. Marcos explained that some years two or three teams drop out, opening slots for

new ones to emerge. He elaborated that in order to start a team, the coach needs to decide if he wants to compete, or if he simply wants to participate. Marcos remembered a team from a few years ago that lost 5 or 6 games in a row early on in the season, and then decided to drop out of the league altogether. He emphasized the necessity of either picking a very strong team of players with the intention of competing at a very high level of play, or deciding that participating in the league is enough for you and your team, and thus winning is not important.

Next, Marcos specified CORES' role in organizing the Central American Soccer League. First and foremost, he feels it is CORES' responsibility to make the competition good for everybody involved, and to make everyone who participates happy. He described their role as to merely guide the teams. In terms of securing soccer fields for games to play at, Marcos explained the city of Somerville won't let the league use any of its parks including Foss Park and Conway Park (a topic I will return to later). According to Marcos, the Latino soccer games that happen at Foss Park on Sunday mornings are unorganized pick-up games not associated with the Central American Soccer League. Instead CORES reserves fields in Chelsea, Cambridge and East Boston. These fields are reserved on a weekly basis rather than determining the schedule for the whole season before it starts. Marcos explained this has to do with limited availability of parks, and sharing them with other soccer leagues who might be using them one week and not the next. The schedule of games and where they will be played is listed every Wednesday from 7:00 to 7:30 pm on a Latino AM radio show, broadcasted by station 1600.

Finally, we discussed what the city of Somerville could do to better support Latino sports activity. Marcos straight away answered that it could make its public parks available for everybody. For example, Marcos remembers when the city opened up Conway Park, CORES approached the city to see if the soccer league could play there. The city stalled on its decision

saying the park was not ready for use, and eventually gave permission for the high school soccer teams to play on it without telling CORES. Now the city says the park is reserved for high school teams and that the Central American Soccer League cannot hold any games there. Marcos feels that if Conway Park is legally a public park, it should be made available to all members of the community. He also feels that the soccer fields at Tufts University, which are not being used during the summer, should be made available to all members of the community. The Latino community understands the responsibility that comes with using public parks, and hold themselves accountable for any damage or vandalism that occurs during the time they are using it. Moreover, the city has told CORES that Foss Park is reserved for little kids' soccer games. According to Marcos, another youth soccer league has a permit to use Foss Park every Saturday from 10am – 4pm. However, Marcos has gone himself every Saturday during this time for a month to see if the park is actually being used, only to discover that nobody is there. He feels this is unfair, and that there is no reason why these parks should not be made available to the public. Marcos added that Latino soccer leagues have proved themselves capable of acting responsibly and respecting rules and regulations in other cities. He wishes the city would open up these unused yet reserved parks to the community, so that they can be brought to life. It saddens him to see empty, dead parks when there is a large, organized and responsible community that could make great use of the space. In addition, players and fans are now forced to travel up to 30 minutes to attend games that are held in Chelsea and East Boston. This does not make sense when there are parks not being used here in Somerville, just a short walking distance from most people's homes.

In response to Marcos' experiences trying to reserve soccer fields in Somerville (the very town that the Central American Soccer League is located), I made some phone calls to the

different agencies involved with administering the appropriate permits. As the Somerville Department of Public Works (DPW) arranges permitting for the majority of parks in Somerville (Conway Park, Lincoln Park and Trump Field), they were the first group I contacted. There I talked with foreman Bert Switzer who issues the permits. He explained that it is a very loose system where a lot of legwork is simply done over the phone. Only occasionally does an interested party have to go to the DPW office to work out an arrangement, but there are no necessary forms for groups to fill out. Interested leagues usually submit their game schedules in writing, and Mr. Switzer then tries his best to accommodate all interested parties.

While the DPW practices a particularly open permitting system, preferences are informally given to residents of Somerville, and public schools are the highest priority for reserving field space. While there is no mandate for the schools to get top priority, Switzer explained that it is a common procedure among cities to favor public school requests. There is also an informal seniority system in place, where leagues that have been around for longer have a higher priority. Switzer explained this system is also not mandated, and that he simply inherited from whoever was the doing permits before him. This seniority system works in such a way that because little league baseball has been around longer than some of the youth soccer leagues, they get first choice for the fields and times.

Most of the requests come during the winter, but anybody can apply after December 31 for the following year. Switzer doesn't make his final decisions until the spring; at this time he makes lists of how each league's schedule stands and arranges a field schedule accordingly. There are no charges to use any of the fields, but there is a \$100 returnable permit fee that pays for any damage done to the field during the season. If each league takes proper care of the fields they get all of their money back at the end of the season. The rules and regulations of each field

are written on a printed permit that each league receives at the beginning of each season. One such rule states that leagues and teams have to relinquish a field 24 hours in advance if they know they will not be using it during their permitted time. This is to allow field access to other possible candidates.

In terms of permitting Latino adult soccer leagues, Switzer clarified that the city does not allow any soccer games at Trump Field. As Conway Park was recently renovated, no adult sports are allowed in order to prevent damage caused by cleats. This limitation is specified for adults, as children don't weigh enough to do any serious damage to the fields. In general, Switzer said all adult (not just Latino) soccer leagues have problems finding field space because of the damage cleats do to the fields.

Overall, Switzer explained the DPW tries to accommodate as many people as possible. Compared to other cities, he feels Somerville has a relatively open system with no permit fees. However, limited space and issues of field damage makes it difficult to accommodate every request for field time.

Next I called the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (MDC), and was transferred to the lady who does permitting for Foss Park and Dillboy Field in Somerville. I was initially put on hold, and when the call finally went through the discussion was brief and rushed. I was not told with whom I was speaking, and basically was rushed into asking only two questions before the conversation ended abruptly. I was able to gather that in order to get permits for these fields, leagues must send in a request to the MDC, and that youth soccer and Somerville High School have first priority. Other than that I was not able to get any information. After hearing Marcos' complaints about a youth league having a permit for Saturday mornings

that they never use, further research could investigate whether the MDC knows about this or how they feel about it.

Lastly I discussed the possibility of allowing the Somerville community to use Tufts facilities in the off-season. I spoke with Director of Facilities and Fields Rick Miller, who told me youth soccer leagues do use Tufts fields near Powderhouse Boulevard every Saturday afternoon and most week nights. The school has worked out a permit system with the league to make sure the leagues are treated properly. Miller reinforced the notion that adult soccer leagues cause too much damage to fields because of heavier players and their cleats. Miller mentioned in the past Tufts has tried allowing adult soccer and flag football leagues (he did not specify which ones even after questioning) use of the fields, but the money needed to repair the fields before the Tufts teams need them forced an end to this arrangement. He explained that fields need rest time in between seasons in order to maintain healthy grass, and that adults with cleats simply cause more damage than kids. However, he did mention that he has heard complaints from adult leagues about city and state mismanagement of the public parks through policies of granting blanket permits allowing one league to hog a field for an entire season regardless of whether or not they need it or use it. Here is another area for future research that could potentially force change in the system that would open public parks up to more groups in need of the space.

To provide an additional perspective on the Central American Soccer League, Jose Velasquez shared with me his experiences as a coach in the Central American League during the early 1990's. After playing for the Latino American Soccer Association at Franklin Field for a number of years, Jose got involved with the Central American Soccer League that was closer to his new home base in Somerville. He quickly decided that he was getting too old to play with such young athletes and became a coach. At the time Jose worked for a small restaurant in

Cambridge called the East Coast Grill that happened to be sponsoring a Latino soccer team in the Central American Soccer League. They asked Jose to recruit a team and be the coach while they put forward the money for registration and uniforms. Jose had no clear insight into the restaurant's motivations for financing a Latino soccer team, and I was unable to contact anybody still working in the restaurant who was involved with the soccer team. Overall, Jose described this experience as a very difficult one. He found that many of his players refused to learn the kind of discipline necessary to become a good soccer team. Jose held practices twice a week but only 6 or 8 people would show up. While he was willing to put the effort into coaching the team, the lack of commitment from his players wore Jose out. This time commitment on top of his responsibilities at work and to his family did not seem worth the trouble, and after three years Jose gave up coaching. The whole experience seemed to have a souring effect on Jose, as now he admits to having completely dropped out of the Somerville soccer leagues, only rarely attending a game and mostly watching the sport on television.

During the time I spent researching the Central American Soccer League, interviewing community levels at varying levels of participation, the soccer season ended. As winter draws near and the temperature drops, Latinos in Somerville in need of their weekly soccer fix turn to the indoor soccer league that plays in Revere, Massachusetts. Though smaller in scale and popularity than the Central American Soccer League, a discussion of the relationship between the indoor league and outdoor league is quite pertinent to this paper as it provides a more complete picture of the Somerville Latino community's passion for soccer, and its role in their lives.

The Indoor Soccer League

Lucas Santos invited me to watch a few games of his indoor soccer team, after which we discussed the organization of the league. There are four divisions, each playing a different day of the week. All of the games are held at the Greater Boston Indoor Sports Center located at 321 Charger St. Revere, Massachusetts. Games are held Tuesday, Thursday and Friday nights starting at 8, and also Saturday mornings starting at 11. The Friday night games are played by the premier league, where the best and most competitive players are placed. Thursday night games are one division lower and known as the A league. Tuesday night and Saturday morning games are played by equal but separate divisions known simply as the B leagues. Each league has about 10 teams, and in all there are about 3 or 4 teams from Somerville. Other teams consist of players from surrounding towns such as Melrose, Swampscott and Chelsea. The Melrose and Swampscott teams are made up of high school soccer players trying to stay in shape during their off season, while other teams consist of older players in their mid-twenties. At the beginning of each season, the league organizers who work for the Greater Boston Indoor Sports Center decide which division each team will be placed in according to their abilities, and first timers are always placed in the lowest division. At the end of each season, each team's ranking can have an influence on which division they will place into if they decide to come back for the next season, a system quite similar to that of the Central American Soccer League.

Anybody who wants to put together a team can join the league for a \$600 registration fee. The season lasts ten games, and is followed by a playoff tournament and a championship. I was told that usually a coach recruits players he knows of for a team and enters the league, but sometimes a group of people that really want to play and can find a coach who will enter them into the running. Sometimes the registration fee is distributed among players, sometimes it is

covered by fundraising events such as raffles, and sometimes a team is sponsored by a company willing to put up the money. Lucas' team is completely sponsored by his employer, Ames Safety Envelope Company, covering both registration costs and uniforms that advertise "Ames" on the front with numbers on the back. A group of the workers there decided they wanted to form an indoor soccer team, and they were able to convince their boss to sponsor the team. I called Michael Shea, the owner of Ames Safety Envelope Company to discuss his decision to sponsor a mostly Latino indoor soccer team of his employees. According to Mr. Shea, the soccer players are all employees of his company. As a large employer in Somerville, the Ames Safety Envelope Company tries to provide for employees beyond their salary. In addition to an indoor soccer team, they sponsor local little league teams. The indoor soccer team cost \$750 to sponsor, which includes the registration fee and money for uniforms. Mr. Shea described this as a small economic investment as they are a large company interested in helping out their hard working employees.

While Lucas did not have pay anything to join this league, some teams such as the Melrose and Swampscott teams divide the fees among the players. This is slightly different from the outdoor league where it is very seldom that the players are required to cover any of the registration fees. I was very curious about this aspect of the league and its relation to the outdoor league, as it seems that a lot of money is passing between hands, all for the possibility of winning a soccer trophy at the end of the season. Lucas explained that for the outdoor league, most teams are sponsored/owned by companies willing to put up the money required to run a team. They admitted that running a team for the Central American Soccer League ends up costing between \$6,000 and \$10,000 each season. For teams not sponsored by large companies, these costs are paid for through either raffles or fundraising parties. It is usually a financial relationship where a

team is owned by a small restaurant or business that puts up a portion of the money, and the rest is raised by donations from the community. When asked why local businesses or restaurants would put so much money into a soccer team, Lucas replied “for fun, and the notoriety it brings to own a successful soccer team.” He also explained that more often in the indoor league do players have to pay out of their own pockets for registration fees, generally because these leagues are taken less seriously and are mostly a kind of practice or training session during the off-season.

The indoor rules are much less strict than they are for the Central American Soccer League, as uniforms aren’t required, and team rosters are not solidified throughout the season. I was told that in the outdoor league, each team member needs an identification card with his name, his jersey number and the team he plays for. Whenever a player enters the game he hands his card to a referee who records all his information. If a player’s information shows up for more than one team (as if they had played two games for two different teams) he could be suspended from the league for up to one year. Lucas explained that the competition in the Central American Soccer League is taken very seriously, and there are many steps taken to ensure fair play by players and coaches. In contrast, the indoor league does not require a set roster for each season. If an indoor team gets beaten badly one game, the next game they can recruit better, stronger players to increase their chances of winning.

Lastly, we discussed the fans that came to watch indoor soccer teams. I was told that many more people turn out for the Friday night games to watch the premier league play. The crowd was pretty small at the Saturday morning game I attended, about 10 people, but apparently close to 60 people have been known to come cheer for their favorite team on Friday nights. Lucas noted for some Latinos in Somerville, the indoor league is a continuation of soccer action

once the outdoor league is over. The Somerville teams have their own loyal fans who show up to each game and cheer, but overall it pales in comparison to the crowds of at least 200 people that show up to every outdoor game during the summer. Throughout our informal talk, Lucas expressed that the indoor league, especially the division they were playing in, is not taken as seriously as the outdoor league. The field is smaller, the season is shorter, and people mostly see it as a training period to stay in shape. It also serves as a fun sports activity to keep one occupied and happy while working five days a week; Saturday morning games provide a kind of physical and emotional release that one can look forward to the rest of the week.

II.

Social Functions of Latino Soccer Leagues

Differing Cultural Attitudes/Behaviors Concerning Soccer

Throughout my interviews, it became increasingly clear that soccer plays a meaningful role in the lives on many Latinos. Soccer holds a very different place in Latino culture than in the US, and these differences create a context for the social functions the soccer leagues perform for Latinos in Somerville. For example, Jose Velasquez in his interview expressed a passion for soccer that went far beyond its function simply as a sport. When he came to the US, he found his way to a number of different Latino soccer leagues, playing for a variety of teams during the 1980's. Jose admitted that for him playing soccer is an expression of his national pride for El Salvador; out of all the teams he has played on he enjoyed playing on the El Salvador team in the Latin American Soccer Association the best. In his own words, "I like to play on a team from my country called El Salvador, that's the name. And that's when I play more with my soul, with more heart." Before Jose left for the US in 1977 he was working towards a career playing professional soccer for his hometown team, making his way up through the different soccer divisions. But, before he could make it he left El Salvador. The friends he had been playing alongside since they were young eventually made the team. Jose felt strongly about playing soccer in El Salvador, and sees a difference between American and Salvadoran cultural attitudes towards the sport. Jose feels in America one has greater access to better quality uniforms and soccer shoes, but soccer is still a pastime that comes second to making money in order to buy food and pay the bills. This system prevents players from being 100% dedicated to the sport as different responsibilities take precedent over soccer. While Jose feels that if he had not come to the US he would be playing professional soccer for his hometown team, he has no regrets concerning his decision to immigrate to the US in search of a better life.

Throughout our discussion Jose kept referring to people that do not understand the true meaning of soccer. I asked him for his definition of the true meaning of soccer and to explain the difference between his understanding and that of others. Jose responded that soccer is a fantastic sport. Soccer is good if you can really understand the rules, and for Jose, a man who wants to play soccer must have strict discipline. He mentioned a lack of discipline in popular sports today, referring specifically to the basketball superstar Allen Iverson and his lack of true discipline. He also mentioned soccer's lack of popularity in the US. Jose feels kids in the US today have a greater opportunity to play and learn about basketball, football and baseball because they are the most popular sports. He remembers in El Salvador at every street corner you would see kids kicking around a ball, and that he first started kicking a soccer ball when he was ten years old. In the US, Jose feels people only understand soccer as a game of kicking a ball far and fast. In El Salvador he feels there is a greater understanding that to play soccer you must learn to dominate the ball, to be able to stop any ball coming near you and immediately have complete control over it. He explains that it is not about playing soccer with your feet, but with your head, and understanding exactly how to react to any kind of situation that might occur on the field so as to gain better positioning to pass or score.

Moreover, Jose speculated that the reason fights have been known to break out during Latino soccer games involves a conflict between the referees and fans that stems from the fact that most Latinos are not used to playing soccer with a referee. The street soccer played in El Salvador and Guatemala did not use referees, and lots of Latinos learned to play soccer in these loosely regulated situations. Therefore most people don't understand all the rules of the game, and are not used to so many regulations that are enforced by an official who has studied these rules. For example, Jose's brother Roberto had taken courses on how to referee soccer games

back in El Salvador, but admits that it was difficult to keep up with the new rulebooks that come out every four years from an international team of World Cup professionals. I was unable to contact any of the current referees for the soccer leagues, but am curious as to the expected level of understanding for the most current soccer rules. If play is stopped by a referee calling a penalty that the fans do not understand let alone agree with, a tensions begin to mount that if not supervised can become problematic. Jose Velasquez recounted stories of scuffles occurring between fans and the referee when penalties were called that the crowd did not understand or agree with. I have not heard of any effort to teach the Latino community in Somerville the official soccer rulebook, but wonder if this might have an effect on relieving some of the tensions between fans and the referees. I also wonder if the referees have different understandings of the official rulebook, how this could effect fans that see different calls being called or not called each game according to who the referee is. Further research into the requirements for being a referee and efforts to educate the community about the official soccer rulebook could examine their relationship with problems on the field between fans and referees.

Jose's brother Roberto contributed insight into differing cultural attitudes toward soccer, and described the significance of soccer for Latinos in Somerville today. When asked whether soccer holds the same significance to Latinos in Somerville as to those still living in El Salvador, Roberto responded that while his body is in Somerville, his mind is in El Salvador. He then showed me his hometown soccer team's flag that was hanging proudly in his living room, and stated that everyday he checks online to see how well that team is doing. Though we did not discuss this aspect further, it would be interesting to investigate the role of the internet in allowing Latinos to remain connected to soccer activity in their home country. Further research could also compare the situation now to that of fifteen years ago, when limited internet

availability and access would have made it much more difficult for Latinos to stay updated on the latest international sports news. When the El Salvador team came to Boston to play in the Gold Cup, Latinos came from all over the country and even Canada to watch them play at Gillette Stadium. Mr. Velasquez had connections with his hometown radio station and was given a press pass, allowing him to watch the game from the commentator's box where he announced the game to those listening back home in El Salvador via an internet webcast. He even became good friends and had his picture taken with Jorge Gonzales, the most popular native soccer athlete among Salvadorans who now plays for a small Spanish team. Roberto's and Jose's devotion to soccer, and the connection it gives them to their homeland suggest a powerful cultural meaning the sport has for Latinos in the US.

One last noteworthy cultural difference that affects the relation between the soccer leagues and the Latino community in Somerville involves behavior at the publicly owned soccer fields. The community-organizing group CORES, which runs the Central American Soccer League in Somerville, and has taken responsibility for educating the Latino community about proper behavior on the soccer fields as they are public land, and each field has its own restrictions of activity. Every year, park officials call a meeting with Marcos Garcia (chief administrator at CORES and head organizer of the soccer league) to explain all of the changes in rules and regulations within the park. Therefore, CORES holds biweekly meetings all year with representatives from all the soccer teams where among other things they discuss any changes to park rules for the fields where they play. New rules have included regulations of pets allowed in the park, park closing times, and fines for littering. CORES educates the team representatives, and then holds them responsible for educating and controlling their teams as well as their fans. CORES maintains a policy of zero tolerance for players or fans of a particular team that are cited

as disobeying park rules and causing problems for CORES with the park commissioners of different cities. Punitive measures such as not allowing those fans to attend games, or kicking those players off of their teams have been taken in the past. Marcos Garcia remembers when the league started, 70% of the season involved dealing with park commissioners or the police complaining about improper behavior on the fields. Now he says only 10% of each season sees any kind of problem, and he attributes this to an increase in education about the rules.

In terms of cultural barriers, Marcos feels it is difficult for Salvadorans to adjust to the United State's legal system because it is a different way of living than back home. In El Salvador, public land rarely has as many (if any) rules and regulations for the public, while in the US specific rules are set up for most situations, including behavior at public parks. Additionally, the law enforcement in El Salvador is not trusted or respected by the public because the police break and manipulate the law in instances of political and military repression. In the US it is necessary to follow and respect the law, and there are serious consequences for breaking these laws.

Throughout my interviews I got a sense of the role soccer has played and currently holds in the lives Latinos in Somerville. Latinos such as Roberto and Jose Velasquez, and Amilcar Lopez remember playing soccer every day in the streets back in their native country. For Jose Velasquez playing soccer functions as an expression of his national pride. He also sees differences in the way soccer is understood in American culture compared with the passion, devotion and respect Salvadoran culture holds the sport. His ideas were supported by his brother's anecdotes of Latinos coming from all over the US and even Canada to watch the professional Salvadoran team play at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Marcos Garcia explained to me the cultural differences that require CORES to educate Latinos how to

follow the laws of public parks so they can continue using them for soccer games. All of these cultural attitudes and behaviors set a backdrop for the social functions the soccer leagues fulfill for the Latino community in Somerville.

Creating Communities for New Immigrants

In each of my interviews I asked about the relationship between recently arrived immigrants and the soccer leagues, and every time I was told they serve as a place to make friends, meet new people with similar interests, and essentially develop a community for yourself while one is trying to settle down to a new life in a foreign land. In one instance, Roberto Velasquez described his own experience as a recently arrived Latino in the Boston area in the early 1980's. After playing soccer in at Franklin Field, he remembered going with his teammates to a player's apartment in Jamaica Plain to hang out and talk about sports, politics and family for hours. Marcos Garcia adds that many people join the soccer league to meet people.

Soccer is a popular sport. If someone just arrived from El Salvador and he wants to see some friends of his, he's coming with me and I know where his friends are, so I bring him to the soccer game, and that's where he meets again with all his friends. I think we use the sport as like a community reunion between members of the Latino community in general.

Marcos recognizes the soccer league as a festive sort of activity that involves meeting new people, reuniting with old friends, and bringing everybody together in the process.

In addition to forming and strengthening communities based on similar interests, Marcos Garcia described another method of community building based on education and respect for rules that protect the group. In the biweekly sessions held by CORES to educate people about

the rules and regulations for each soccer field the league uses, Latinos are coming together to protect their community from making unnecessary mistakes. Out on the field, people are watching out for everybody, reminding each other of rules to watch for such as not bringing a dog to the soccer game because pets are not allowed on the field. In this way the soccer league brings people together not only out of a shared interest for the sport, but also as a community concerned with the well-being of the entire group; one that works together to create a safe environment for everybody to share.

Cultural Diversity of Leagues

Discussing the history of Latino soccer leagues, Marcos Garcia mentioned the function of cultural diversity in creating unique multi-national communities on the soccer field. These communities changed as the immigrant populations increased so much that the the Latin American Soccer Association could not serve everybody that wanted to participate. In the beginning, Marcos emphasized that the Latin American Soccer Association consisted of teams and players from all across the globe including Jamaica, Ethiopia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Peru, and Colombia. Despite this diversity of cultures, the league was still very small. These soccer games provided the only opportunity for these people of all different cultures to enjoy spending time together in such large groups. Athletes would bring their families, food and drinks, and would usually spend all day at the park watching and playing games, and hanging out. Marcos felt everybody treasured these Sunday afternoons, as during the week most people were busy working. I asked him to compare this experience with that of the Latino soccer leagues in Somerville today, and he responded they are totally different. Because the Latino population has expanded so much, the Latino soccer leagues now exist within a network of

leagues across the State, where Latinos have the opportunity to travel all over to play soccer with hundreds and sometimes thousands of people watching. This contrasts sharply with the Latino American Soccer Association, which had one small community of people meeting in one localized spot every week. According to Marcos this change started to take place in the early nineties when levels of incoming Latino immigrants boomed, and the necessity for a larger and more developed soccer league emerged.

According to Marcos, Salvadorans do not make up the majority of the Central American Soccer League, and even at the league's inception the players came from Brazil, Guatemala, and Mexico as well as El Salvador. In addition to these countries there are now players from Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, and Cape Verde. Marcos feels the players do not mind playing for teams that represent places other than where they are from, and that the fans do not care if the players on the team they root for are not from the same town. He recognizes the special ability of sports to bring people from all nationalities together to enjoy themselves in a situation that is both a cultural reunion for immigrants meeting again in a new country, and an event that thrives on cultural diversity. In his own words,

Soccer is a very unique sport because it unifies nationalities. There is a melting of one, one unit, because they want to play and enjoy the game. I think that's only the unique you see because that's where all the nationalities, the premier league, the Italian league, the Spanish league, all the teams play with a lot of player from other parts of the world, and that's how it made those leagues strong and unique. The competition is a very high level of competition because all the soccer team who play at the professional level has good players from all parts of the world, especially Latin America, also from Africa, England, France, Spain and Italy. So the sport, I think it's like unique source of unifying people. It doesn't matter what nationality, even if it doesn't speak the language, they speak the language of the ball to play soccer.

In the face of an incredible cultural mix that occurs at these soccer games, new communities are formed and nationalities united by the soccer ball.

My interview with Lucas Santos added that the teams are named after specific towns in El Salvador as a number of the players and fans are from El Salvador. When asked how a Brazilian playing for a Salvadoran team might feel in terms of national pride, Lucas responded they actually enjoy special treatment from fans. When a non-Salvadoran athlete is playing, he is usually the star of the team or a very good player. They are usually very popular with the fans, and get lots of support from the crowd. On the team Lucas plays for currently, there are players from Brazil, Peru, Cape Verde and Guatemala in addition to El Salvador. Lucas explained that players from different countries have differing skills and attributes on the soccer field. For example, players from Brazil are very skilled in passing and are great strategists. Cape Verdeans are very quick, good at dribbling and fast runners. On the other hand, Salvadorans are considered good, tough defensive players who can really kick the ball. While Salvadorans generally have more physical strength than other players, they are considered weaker dribblers. Despite the different styles of play, Lucas feels the teams are quite cohesive and get along great. Lucas remembers four years ago (1999) when there were only 2 Cape Verdean players in the entire league, both of them recruited by his uncle. At the beginning of the next season, only about 5 Salvadorans were available to play for his uncle's team, so they asked the Cape Verdean players to ask their friends to join. That year the majority of the team was Cape Verdean. Despite the lack of Salvadoran players, the fans were very supportive as the team went on to the league championship where they lost 2-1. From Lucas' descriptions, it seems that team lineups are very unstable due to players varying levels of commitment, because after the mostly Cape Verdean team made it to the finals, most of the players were unavailable to play the next season. That season apparently spurred the Cape Verdean interest in the Latino soccer leagues because now they play for a variety of teams. Lucas pointed out that fans usually cheer for the team that

represents their hometown in El Salvador, regardless of whether or not most of the players are from there. More recently he has been seeing fans cheering for teams that do really well or are fun to watch, rather than supporting their hometown. Also, on any given team there are players from different towns in El Salvador, and they bring fans from each of their hometowns as supporters on the sidelines.

For the past twenty years, soccer leagues across Massachusetts have been bringing people of all nationalities together, starting with the Latin American Soccer Association in Dorchester. The cultural diversity is astounding, with immigrants from all over the globe coming together to enjoy themselves while playing soccer in the company of likeminded people. Marcos' and Lucas' comments on the relationships between players and fans, and the cultural lines that are crossed in playing for a team that represents a country other than your own, or rooting for a player of a nationality different than your own, demonstrate the sport's ability to bring people together and promote unity, strength and happiness.

Social-Networking Function

In a number of interviews, the soccer games were mentioned as serving a social-networking function for immigrant men. Amilcar Lopez mentioned that meeting people through the soccer leagues was a good way for a newly arrived immigrant to network and find better employment opportunities. While this did not happen to Amilcar himself, many of his close friends (he did not mention specific examples) were able to find better jobs through the people they met at the soccer games. I asked him what kind of community his soccer team created for these newly arrived immigrants, and he responded that the soccer league provided a crucial place for new immigrants to meet people. He explained when you first arrive here in the US, one of

the first things men do is join a soccer team or find out about the league, because this is where you meet people and start to make a new community for yourself. The soccer league provides a unique opportunity combining a genuine passion for soccer, and the potential benefits in social networking.

The role of women in the soccer league came up in conversation with Roberto Velasquez who recognized the absence of Latino women playing soccer in Somerville, and the traditional belief that women are not supposed to play sports. Mr. Velasquez does not agree with this idea, and supports the emergence of the Women's World Cup games. Even though the Latino women do not play, Mr. Velasquez expressed that they come to the games to watch their husbands, brothers, children and friends play. Most of the women stand on the sideline and sew, as well as talk with friends and enjoy watching those they know on the field. He described his own early days of playing soccer where his wife, mother-in-law, sister and son would all come to watch him play. When he wasn't playing they would talk to their friends around the field, and if a good play was made they would make noise of appreciation or disapproval (depending on which team they were cheering for). While some folks join soccer teams or attend games to make connections that could lead to future employment opportunities, some women on the sidelines use the opportunity to sew and chat with friends.

In addition, in an interview with Ana Velasquez (wife to Roberto Velasquez) conducted by Elexia McGovern and Cecilia Do Santos, soccer games were described as a place for Latinos to meet future spouses. For example, Ana met her husband Roberto at what she described as a community picnic/soccer tournament. She explains that the weekend soccer picnics are a common place for Latinos, specifically Salvadorans in and around the Somerville area to meet. She and Roberto married and moved to Somerville, where she worked some part-time jobs and

he worked in a factory until she was pregnant with her first son (Interview with Ana Velasquez 10/19/2003). Throughout my interviews I found that the soccer games provide a platform for a number of different social functions that help Latinos secure their position in the US, as well as make social circles and meet potential spouses.

Additional Services

Some players are paid to play for soccer teams. Lucas Santos mentioned some coaches offer star players a sum of money for each game they played, trying to attract them to play for their team. Jose Velasquez described his own personal experience with being paid to play for a team. In the early 1980's Jose was playing every Sunday at Franklin Field in Dorchester for the Latino American Soccer Association alongside immigrants from Guatemala, Cape Verde, Haiti, Honduras, and El Salvador. While playing for this league, team owners from a different league that Jose referred to as the Italian league recruited him to play for one of their teams. The owners would pick Jose up from his house and drive him to play for their team, paying him up to \$30 for every goal he made each game. Jose noted there were a few other Latinos playing beside him on this team for the Italian League. He also mentioned an additional Portuguese league that recruited and paid Latinos from the Latino American Soccer Association to play for their teams. Jose explained that the Portuguese league paid each player more money than the Italian league because they had a tighter knit community with better organized fundraising events. Apparently a lot of the money to pay for these players came from donations and fundraising events within the community; according to Jose the Portuguese community around Boston in the early 1980's was more invested in its soccer league and more willing to make small but meaningful donations to its players. In response to the \$30 per goal Jose claimed to have been making, I asked if some

players tried to use money made from playing soccer for these different leagues as a main source of income. He answered that some tried, but overall it is too difficult to make enough and that players would get tired if they try to play for too many teams willing to pay.

In addition to being paid to play, players in the Central American Soccer League are provided with a basic form of health insurance protecting them if they are ever injured on the field. Marcos Garcia explained that all soccer leagues in the state are affiliated with the Massachusetts Soccer Association and the US Soccer Federation. In the Central American Soccer League, part of each team's registration fee goes to these organizations which provide very basic health insurance plans for the players. As registration fees are either covered by the team owner, or by community fundraising activities, the players never have to pay for their insurance and are usually in some way compensated for medical bills that come as the result of a soccer injury. I was unable to find out the exact insurance plan that is offered, and further research could determine the effectiveness of this system in helping out immigrants who are injured while playing soccer. Jose Velasquez remembered an instance when he broke his leg playing for a Somerville Italian league in the early 80's. While injured he could not work for five or six months. Luckily for him, the team owners had been paying him about \$130 a game as supplemental income (which he had saved), and were also paying for health insurance so that Jose could receive adequate medical care.

Finally, various personal accounts have described the soccer leagues as providing Latinos with a physical and emotional release at the end of their busy, overworked week. Roberto Velasquez emphasized the difficulties for Latinos moving to a new country, especially without knowing the language. He described that for newly arrived Latino immigrants, playing in Latino soccer leagues is a great source of joy as it provokes memories and feelings of life back in their

native country. Also, playing soccer provides an opportunity for Latinos to escape the troubles of their difficult lives and to just enjoy themselves. Amilcar Lopez told a similar story. Once in the US, playing soccer for the Latin American Soccer League provided Amilcar with a unique outlet for having fun that helped him get through his long weeks of commuting between UMASS Amherst (where he was attending classes) and Dorchester. He would spend five days a week taking classes and travel for the weekends back to Dorchester (Franklin Park), just to play in the soccer games. His dedication to the Latino soccer league is an example of the kind of passion and dedication Latinos have for the sport, as well as an example of the kind of emotional release it provides new Latino immigrants working hard to be successful in a foreign land.

III.

Conclusions and Further Research

Conclusion

The Latino soccer leagues in Somerville and surrounding cities have provided a number of unique cultural services for the Latino community of greater Boston. Since the 1981, soccer leagues around Boston have brought immigrants of all nationalities together, developing and fortifying strong community bonds. Today, the Central American Soccer League provides Latinos in Somerville a means of congregating as a community that places equal emphasis on a passion for soccer, a need for community unification, and an arena where newly arrived immigrants can participate in significant social adjustment processes. The overwhelmingly positive and community building services the soccer leagues provide makes one wonder why the city of Somerville does not provide any support such as making available soccer fields or recognizing the positive influence the leagues have on their city. Rather the city government seems more concerned with Latino gangs that may or may not exist, and laying the groundwork for institutional racism by passing laws that allow police to arrest Latinos for simply standing in groups of three or more anywhere in the city. If the city was so concerned with Latino gangs, it would recognize the ability of soccer leagues to provide an alternative and ultimately more constructive way of spending one's free time. Hopefully city officials will realize the value in promoting community strengthening activities and allow one of Boston's largest and most popular Latino soccer leagues play in its hometown.

Limitations Further Research

One issue that I thought would pose a major limitation in my research was my lack of fluency in Spanish. Having no experience with the language, I was initially worried about

finding people first of all able to participate in an interview conducted solely in English, and secondly comfortable enough to give informative answers in English. Luckily I was able to find a number of Latinos willing to speak with me about the soccer leagues who had a high proficiency in English. They gave articulate and insightful narrations on their experiences playing soccer and working with the different leagues. My student partners Roberto and Vinny added extra comfort during these interviews—if there was ever an instance that language became a problem, they either translated my question into Spanish or translated the answer so I could understand it. However, towards the end of my research I found it increasingly difficult to find people willing to be interviewed in English. I was told by a few of my contacts that many team owners or soccer coaches were not comfortable enough with English to be interviewed. If I had been fluent in Spanish I may have been able to find more interviews with a greater variety of community members. There is the possibility that my research is biased in that all of my information comes from those that can explain their thoughts in English. In order to account for this limitation, future research into Latino soccer leagues should attempt to involve community members who do not speak English, but play a significant role in the leagues.

Time restraints prevented me from following up on every potential way the soccer leagues affect the lives of Latinos in Somerville. There are a number of issues that require further research in order to gain a more complete understanding of the relationship between the Latino community and the soccer league. For one, I was unable to interview any current team owners. From my interview with Lucas Santos I gathered that team owners spend between \$6000 and \$10000 each season on their soccer teams. It would be very interesting to see what motivations team owners have for making such large economic investments. This research

might also touch on the special value of having participated on a winning team for people (owners, coaches, players, fans) who otherwise are so marginalized.

Additionally, my research on alternative funds for Latino soccer teams is extremely limited. It would be extremely worthwhile to investigate the community fundraising events mentioned that help support the costs of running a soccer team. Lucas Santos, Jose Velasquez and Amilcar Lopez all mentioned community parties as a means of raising money, but provided no specific information as to when or where these parties occur. These fundraising events function as an additional community building mechanism, or provide another one of the few places large groups of Latinos can congregate outside of their homes and engage in a culturally festive environment.

Finally, I was unable to interview any soccer referees. In my discussion with Jose Velasquez, the issue of tensions between soccer fans and referees was mentioned. More research on the requirements for becoming a referee, the relationship between referees and fans, a correlation between fans' proper understanding of soccer rules and referee/crowd relations, and the cultural differences between Salvadoran soccer rules and American soccer rules could provide further insight into the cultural functioning of the Central American Soccer League.

Appendix A: Contacts

Marcos Garcia- Marcos is a head administrator for the community organizing group CORES, and also the lead organizer for the Central American Soccer League in Somerville. Born in El Salvador in the 1950's (he didn't give a birth date), Marcos came to the US in 1980, settling in Cambridge with his sister. Beginning with soccer games by the Charles River, Marcos witnessed the evolution of Latino soccer leagues playing in the Latino American Soccer Association, and eventually taking responsibility for the Central American Soccer League.

Amilcar Lopez- Originally from Guatemala, Amilcar Lopez came to the US when he was twenty- six. His involvement with soccer started off with playing in the Latino American Soccer Association, and he eventually owned and coached his own team within this league. Through the 1990's his participation in the soccer leagues waned, and now he runs his own insurance company in Somerville.

Lucas Santos- Lucas Santos came from El Salvador when he was twelve years old. Now twenty- one, Lucas is a star player in the Central American Soccer League in Somerville in his spare time, working for Ames Safety Envelope Company during the week.

Jose Velasquez- Jose Velasquez had aspirations of playing professional soccer for his hometown team in El Salvador until 1977, at the age of twenty-four, he left for the US. Through the 1980's Jose played in various leagues around Boston including the Latin American Soccer Association, and for five years coached a team for the Central American Soccer League in Somerville.

Roberto Velasquez- Brother to Jose, Roberto Velasquez started playing soccer in the Latin American Soccer Association when he first arrived in the US in 1980. Roberto is passionate about soccer and still follows closely the activity of his hometown team from El Salvador.