



Joga com Alegria, Joga Futebol

**A journey to the Heart of Brazilian Soccer in
Somerville and the Greater Boston Area**

By

Amod Rajbhandari
Urban Borderlands, Fall 2006
Prof. Deborah Pacini Hernandez



Table of Contents

	Title	Page #
Introduction		1-7
Soccer in Brazil and Its Relation to the Brazilian Community in Somerville and the Greater Boston Area		8-16
Secrets that make Brazilian Soccer Unique		17-23
Brazilian Soccer Organization- The mystery of the missing leagues		24-41
Brazilian Participation in the Central American Leagues and other Spanish Speaking leagues		42-53
Brazilian Youth Soccer- Somerville High School		54-58
Fabio Gomez – The Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers		60-62
Conclusion and Acknowledgements		63-64
Bibliography		65

Introduction

The beautiful game or Soccer crosses all boundaries of ethnicity, race, and class. The reason for the game's popularity is obvious: All one needs is a ball, and a little space to play. Soccer today is an excellent representation of globalization, as players travel to and play with teams away from their countries, taking their own unique styles, and skills and then joining hand with players from other countries to create a blend that is sweeter than honey. I am a soccer fanatic. I love the game because it is the source of all my joys and all my miseries. I love playing soccer and it is even more enjoyable when you have good company. People tell me that when I am watching a soccer match I transform into a different person, and that is true because once I am focused on the television screen, I feel like I am inside the stadium, amongst the fanatics cheering with pride for their team. Everyday I wake up in the morning and I check the latest soccer stories, highlights, and scores from around the world before I even brush my teeth.

This adoration for soccer has indeed stemmed from my family back in Nepal who are also captivated by the high energy and appeal of this global game. I remember grand parties during the world cup and other soccer championships that we would have and all my parents' friends and relatives. We would all would gather in our house because the Rajbhandaris were the ones who had a projector and that is essential for to get the correct atmosphere of an intense soccer match up. There would be food, there would be drinks, and most importantly there would be good soccer and a room full of passionate supporters. It was in these very parties that I first discovered the players in yellow and green. They were the magicians from Brazil, players who played a rare style of football that was free flowing, yet systematic at the same way. The way they would move the ball

around the park was indeed noteworthy, but what made their game special was the individual abilities of all the players. If a Brazilian wants, he could dribble an entire team, but then that way one would lose the point of soccer because it is a team sport. What sets Brazil apart from the rest is its ability to intermingle individual ability as well as crisp team play, demonstrating flair, precision, and certain playfulness. They do this of course with smiles on their faces because when they play, they play with joy and love for the game. Watching players like Romario, Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Bebeto, Ronaldinho, Kaka, Roberto Carlos, Adriano, Juninho paint the screen with magic is a sight that I will always look forward to because it inspires me as a soccer fan and a player. I have been supporting for the Brazilian team ever since, not because they are five time World Champions, but for the culture that surrounds soccer in Brazil, the freedom of movement and the passion, and of course the dazzling soccer they play on the field, which leaves crowds around the world awestruck.

Brazil itself has captured the imagination of the world over because of its magnificent beauty and its grave shortcomings. It is a country of contrasts; it is a country with the largest disparity between the rich and the poor. It is also one of the largest industrial power houses of the modern era. These two factors combined have given Brazil the name “Belindia,” a term that highlights that the country has the economic producing capacity and efficiency of Belgium but the economic disparity of India. The mystical sandy beaches of Rio de Janeiro, the deep tropical rainforests, the *Garotas Lindas* or the beautiful girls, *Favelas* or the slums outside cities like Rio and Sao Paolo, the poverty, the desolation, and most importantly *Futebol Brasileiro* or Brazilian soccer, are just some of the things that make Brazil a fascinating place.

How do I connect my admiration for Brazil and Brazilian soccer and boil it down to Brazilian soccer activity in Somerville and the Greater Boston Area? It is apparent that there is a large Brazilian community around the Somerville Area. Through the Somerville suburban jungle, through the monotonous neighborhoods, we enter an area colored mainly green and yellow of the Brazilian flag. We see streets bustling with life with people going about their shopping speaking Portuguese. Union Square is one of the Brazilian hubs in Somerville. Similarly East Somerville is another area where the Brazilians have made a base for themselves. There are shops called *Mercados*, supermarkets filled with products from Brazil for everyone interested in anything from the trendy Havaianas sandals from Ipanema, Brazilian flags, t-shirts, music, food, candy to *Guaraná*, a typical soft drink from the country. The Brazilians are here. I was curious to find out apart from the products and people, what ideas they brought with them, what dreams, and if they carried their love for samba and soccer along at all.



When I started working on this project, I was unsure regarding the direction I was going to take because I am most interested in the artistic aspects of Brazilian soccer. I

wanted to question people about the role soccer played back in Brazil and the reason behind it being a national passion. I wanted to know the types of emotions soccer evokes in people or is it just a game they play for fun and for social interaction. However, it was of utmost importance that I write a balance of fact and poetry, reality and dreams. Joel Cohen's report on The Central American League in Somerville was helpful in gaining perspective about soccer activity in Somerville, and as a soccer fan, it was a pleasure to read about the ways soccer was helping communities, especially immigrant communities in Somerville and the greater Boston Area, organize and work towards a common goal.



Soccer is an activity that is familiar to immigrants coming from Latin America because most of them grew up playing soccer and it is an essential part of their social life. It has taken a more social role in bringing families and friends of immigrants together to celebrate. However, considering the soccer culture of the Brazilians, I was curious to see

how Brazilians are involved in organizing through soccer and whether or not they had leagues of their own. Through soccer, were the Brazilians integrating with the Spanish speaking community from Central America or were they trying to create a new identity for themselves? In addition, it will be interesting to see what are the basic issues affecting the Brazilian community and try to determine whether these issues are in turn affecting their participation in soccer activities, amongst themselves and the Latino communities around them.

Chapter 1

Soccer in Brazil

*Its relation to the Brazilian Community in
Somerville and the greater Boston Area*



Soccer – The National Passion

In order to understand the obsession of soccer amongst Brazilians, I deem it immensely important to understand the rich soccer history of arguably the foremost soccer nation in the world. Soccer is a sport that has captured the nation's hearts. The sport is so popular it has become synonymous with Brazilian culture itself. Soccer is an integral part of the notion of Brazilianess, because it serves as a social activity that all Brazilians take seriously, and competitively, because there is an internal desire in all Brazilians to be the best in world, and since arguably they are the best now, they do not intend to rest in their laurels. Such is the importance of the game that Joseph A Page writes, "The sport has played a major role in unifying both nation and community. Everyone follows the national team and takes great pride in its success. Newcomers, whether from abroad or from or from another part of the country, are able to integrate themselves into the social life of a city or town by becoming fans of local team or by participating in the game themselves"(Page 389, Joseph A Page- The Brazilians)

Since soccer is such a substantial part of social life in Brazil, most of the people I spoke to have some interesting stories to share about their experiences with soccer back home. In a story that takes us to a tiny farming town of Ipatinga in the state of Minas Gerais, Arlon Alvarenga tells me about that the Soccer frenzy has engulfed the nation and his little town shared a part of the national passion. Coming from a rich soccer background and his passion for the game, Arlon is now a senior in the Somerville High School and is the Captain of the high school soccer team. Arlon, who has been playing soccer since he was a little boy, tells me that "I did not really think about it. It was just

around me and everybody around played soccer,” Arlon expresses. Therefore, he says he mentally immersed himself into the game. “Soccer is everywhere you look in Brazil” he says and it is difficult to find someone who does not like soccer or has not heard about soccer. Soccer is advertised everywhere. “In the beaches you may see people playing volleyball but mainly people play soccer,” he continues.

Arlon came from a poor farming background and since his family moved into Somerville in the 1990s in search for jobs, they left him and his brother under the care of his grandmother. He moved to Somerville when he was seven years old but he still remembers his days back in Brazil and that has shaped the person he is now. When his brother and he were growing up, they were too poor to even have a ball so they would take some old newspapers and put them in a plastic bag, wrap it up, and play with it. They would play barefoot in the paved roads or dirt streets. The town was a poor, mainly farming based society and he refers to it as the “ghettos”. The town had one private school and Arlon and his brother were fortunate enough to attend that. Besides going to school and playing soccer, I would just work with my grandfather in his farm.

From the little money he would earn he would buy old soccer shoes and although they were dirty and ripping away, they were good enough for him to play at the time. The game was an important part of his life in Ipatinga and for his friends, who also lived in the similar circumstances. He says that soccer was the only thing keeping him sane because he was not doing so well in school either. He would fool around and wait for that moment for that final bell to ring so that he could run back home, grab his ball and go play with his friends. “After school, my brother and all my cousins would get together

and go to the streets, grab rocks, and set up our goal posts to go play soccer. We would play from 12 in the after noon to about 7 at night,” narrates Arlon.

Fabio Gomez, another Brazilian immigrant from Piracicaba in São Paulo, Brazil, who was about 22 when he moved to the states, shares his childhood experiences, and explains how soccer was a social activity where he would meet his friends and play many a friendly yet competitive games. He also has some fond memories of playing soccer day and night with his friends. He says that in a five miles radius, you would find five or six sights for you to go play soccer. He would spend his weekends playing soccer, in leagues, and tournaments. However, he thought that the interesting bit about the game is the after game bonding. This is a part of Brazilians soccer tradition. After you play the game, you would go outside and spend hours talking about the game and the tricks and moves that took place in the game. “The winners would make fun of the losers,” jokes Fabio.

Daniel Brasil Becker, a Brazilian- American studying at Tufts University, has some fond memories of his travels back to Brazil and taking part in the national passion. He now lives in Somerville, Massachusetts. He grew up in Brookline Massachusetts, but went back to his native land and spent a couple of months out of the year in Campinas and Porto Alegre in Brazil throughout his childhood. He was born in America. His parents moved to American in 1984 and he was born in 1986. Until he was five years old, his parents were not sure if they wanted to stay in the US, and therefore, he would go back and forth from Boston to Porto Alegre. He recounts that every single time he went back, his soccer would get ten times better. Especially from the memories of his younger days, he remembers once having a birthday party with a theme based on his favorite local club in Porto Alegre called Internacional. When he would go back between ages five and

ten to Porto Alegre, he would play a lot of soccer. He would wake up every morning at 8 am and “by 8:15 I would go play soccer on an asphalt court,” says Daniel. It was in a nice condominium but even within the condominium he had a private soccer court. He would be play barefoot “...to improve your game,” he says. Therefore, he would play barefoot to about 11 a.m. when the sun made it too hot for one to walk without shoes. He would then go to the pool, and then go grab a bite to eat and meet family but, as soon as it was cool again outside, he would go and play soccer again. “Every time I would go to Brazil and repeat this soccer routine, my game would improve tremendously and I would go up a division in his school in Boston,” Daniel tells me regarding the soccer atmosphere and the amount of time people generally spent playing soccer there.

The National Team, their success and losses



Soccer does indeed serves as a means of unifying Brazilians because soccer is a game that has been accepted by every part of Brazilian society, the rich and the poor, the

strong and the weak. We are familiar of the growing economical, political, and social problems in Brazil and most of the times people are worried of the situation that their country is in. However, Brazilians appear to be confusingly optimistic largely because of the success of their beloved national soccer team. The Brazilian national team has tremendous powers to unite the Brazilian population all over the world. One of the main reasons is because Brazilians love to win, and when they know that they are playing a game of soccer, a game that they have adopted and perfected, they are going to win at any cost. In addition to that, the Brazilian team represents Brazil's rich diversity and their entire reason of existence by displaying firstly, their love for the game, and secondly, the mixture of races that is so much a reality of modern Brazil.

Fernando Silva explains that everyone in Brazil wanted to become soccer stars when they grow up. In his father's day, in the 50s and 60s soccer was much bigger because it was Pele's generation. Pele is arguably the most famous soccer star to ever wear the yellow and green. Joining the national team when he was just seventeen, he dazzled audiences with his footwork and agility. Due to him Brazil was also enjoying a period of good international victories. However, in the 70s with introduction of activities like handball, volleyball, jujitsu, basketball, beach volleyball, and Futsal, people started following other interests. In his father's day, every weekend, people went to the watch all kinds of amateur games. Nowadays, things are more centralized with many big clubs that have fanatical support. In spite of intercity rivalries, the national team's participation in the World Cup brings the entire country together.

During the World Cup or when during matches against neighboring rivals Argentina, mass hysteria takes over every Brazilian city and village. Fernando explains

with an expression of complete bewilderment that streets are deserted and the situation is so bad that even the stock market stops functioning. One should not expect to take public transportation because the buses and trains stop working. All the shops are closed, the busiest places, like downtown Sao Paolo, are completely deserted. Simply he says, “The country stops.” The situation is so bad that the spokesperson for the government requests people not to use much energy while they are in their homes. Everybody is inside and they use up a lot of energy, and this way he says the country is risking a blackout, which would not make many people watching the crucial matches very happy. In Brazil, the national team keeps everything together and makes people forget about all the problems there are in Brazil.

The effects of the National Teams victories in the World Cup could be felt here in Somerville and the greater Boston area as well as many Brazilians would parade, show their delight, and pride for their soccer and their culture. Arlon recalls that when Brazil won the World Cup in 2002, everyone rushed to Revere beach and there was a massive Brazilian Parade. There were people waving their flags and everybody was playing soccer and the celebrating with their families. It is indeed a sight to marvel at when a population so far away from home manages to latch on to their devotion to their team and country.

Daniel adds that around the World Cup, people around the greater Boston Area come together like crazy. The time of the World Cup is when Brazilians really come together, in victory or loss. In 1998, when Brazil reached the final, “we had already established that we were going to gather in this big plaza and we had already fixed up the sound systems so that there would be parties after the games. Even after the loss, there

would be women who would bring in their husbands, sons, boyfriends, brothers there as a display of Brazilian national pride and solidarity in the community. However, I remember it was a very pitiful display of national pride because we had just lost the World Cup to France and at least the men were sad and not in the mood to celebrate at all. So the women were dancing to samba while the men were sitting around and sulking,” says Daniel.



These plazas were the Brooks plaza which is on Brighton Avenue and now recently there is a new spot called the Osco drug store plaza which is in front of café Belo, a chain of notable establishments within the Brazilian community. Café Brazil was the first Brazilian restaurants to be established and that is a big hub for soccer fans. People would bring their families and watch soccer while they eat and drink around Brazilians. In 2002, they would have immense parties in these plazas with the World Cup games being shown in large screens with hundreds of supporters cheering for Brazil. In 2002, the Brazilian establishments have indeed grown and there a lot more people coming together to support their team. During the 2006 World Cup, there was an even bigger Brazilian gathering, all this happened, and he liked to go to Café Belo because he

is strongly associated with the people there, and enjoys the festive atmosphere. We do know by these memories and thoughts shared by the Brazilians about their absolute joy for soccer, did not come as a surprise to me because I was aware of the National team successes and the soccer culture that is engrained in every Brazilian heart. The issue at hand is whether this love for the game is also carried to the states by Brazilians into the states.

Chapter 2

The secrets that make Brazilian soccer unique

Ginga- Alma do Futebol Brasileiro

The Brazilians are indeed talented players who have wowed audiences around the world. Some factors make the Brazilian playing style unique and they range from social, economic, geographic, and most importantly a Brazilian desire to be the best at the game. The most impressive part about Brazilian Soccer is that it is a result of a culmination of various aspects of Brazilian culture. Janet Lever in her book *Soccer Madness* writes, “If you ask Brazilians what best symbolizes their special culture, the answers typically are some combination of spiritualism, samba, and soccer. Each of these Brazilian creations demonstrates how regional practices can disseminate to unify a nation. They are the topics of conversation; they involve activities and organizations that attract diverse groups; and they provide common symbols of devotion.” Such is the power of these activities in Brazilian society and it is not surprising that they have invented a brand of soccer that is magical to watch.

The obsession for soccer is such that children growing up look towards their favorite players for inspiration and the adults look towards Brazilian soccer starts with a sense of national pride. This is partly because of the rich soccer history that Brazilians have and partly because of the saying, “The English invented soccer but the Brazilians perfected it.” They are the undoubtedly, the best team in the world, winning five World Cups throughout the generation, and at the same time being the country to export the largest number of soccer stars in the world. Fernando says that the number of people who play soccer in Brazil is phenomenal. Brazil has 180 million people who all want to play soccer, and that is the reason they have such a good soccer federation, team, and

institution. He does not think that the people think much about the number of people who are dedicated to the game of soccer in his country, and thus they just somehow assume that Brazil is the best soccer nation in the world. The results of such devotion and fanaticism for the game can only result in fruitful wins for the national team, and for the thousands of Brazilians playing in Europe, all around South America, North America, the Middle East, and Asia.

Furthermore, they say every Brazilian is born with *Ginga*, a quality that distinguishes a Brazilian player from players from the rest of the world. The basis of all soccer movement stems from *Ginga*, a term that most Brazilians cannot put into words but can show through their movements. *Ginga* is a fire; a fire to succeed, a fire to create, and a fire to move with fluidity. *Ginga*, which literally means rocking back and forth or to swing, is the fundamental movement in capoeira, a martial art performed by African slaves during the time of the Portuguese reign in Brazil. How *Ginga* helps in setting apart Brazilian players from Europeans and other nationalities, is because the Brazilian bodies are built are so different, is the presence of *Ginga*. Europeans are bigger and tougher but they are not as agile and quick as the Brazilians. “The agility comes with Samba and Capoeira,” confirms Fabio. A person, who does *Capoeira*, usually knows how to play soccer. Fabio has done some Capoeira and his master always told him that any *Capoeiristas* or Capoeira athletes can play soccer. “They may not be the best,” he says, “but they certainly know what to do with the ball because if you do Capoeira you are already an awesome athlete.”

Arlon thinks that Brazilian soccer has that rhythm going on just like a samba. Players move freely, calmly, and without stress. These movements are improvisations

based on the situation of the game. *Ginga* is a Brazilian term but it has many meanings. If you talk about skills, *Ginga* is how you move the ball and do all your tricks. For Arlon though *Ginga* is just pride and passion for the game. He feels *Ginga* is related to emotional rather than physical ability. He says, “Brazilians love soccer and for us is like football for Americans, but ten times more. We have so much passion and love for the game that we just want to do our best.”

There is something about the Brazil, its tropical environment, sandy beaches, deep rainforests, that its images are romanticized all over the world. There is beauty, human and natural. All these things put together would explain the playfulness of the Brazilian players on the field. The sway of the samba, a musical style which is a mixture of Afro-Portuguese population mainly from Angola, and it serves as a basis of all Brazilian artistic body movement. The influence of Samba in Brazil is wide and hundreds of people rush to join the *escola de samba* or samba schools to prepare for the massive Carnival in Rio de Janeiro. As much as samba is an institution, its effects on Brazilian players on a *futebolista* or soccer player is quite visible when he performs on the pitch. Daniel is an aficionado of the Brazilian School of soccer thought and he traces the beginning of this style back when Afro- Brazilians started playing the game. He says they knew that they were going to be playing against white people and therefore they could not tackle them during the game. That is where the beginnings of the swaying movement originated. It is a fluid game and could not be hit by the white players and you cannot hit them back then there could be serious repercussions outside the pitch.

There is also something about the tropical climate, the sun, sandy beaches and the festive attitude of the people that adds volumes to the game. “The Samba and other

Brazilian music styles contribute to the Brazilian soccer”, says Fabio. Samba music and the dance require freedom of expression, creativity and the most importantly a swaying movement of the body that is not evoked by any other style of music. “Brazilian music performance styles requires one to have agility and rhythm and you can see that when you see a Brazilian soccer player. Everything has a part to play: the music, the culture, the upbringing, where Brazilians played when they were kids, climbing trees. You can see all these manifested on a soccer field,” says Fabio.

The agility of a Brazilian athlete is further strengthened by Capoeira, Brazilian dance form that requires energy, focus, creativity, and flair, therefore an excellent transition into playing soccer the Brazilian way. Other factors contribute to make soccer such a dominant sport and show why Brazilian players are so good. According to the people I have spoken with, this art form arises from the most desperate of situations. Daniel feels that there is a social cause like the fact that when kids in Brazil are growing up then your idols are all the soccer players. He thinks for most of the people living in poverty and desperate in Brazil, a society where there is little opportunity for following career paths for a chance for creating a better life, soccer is the only path way to a fulfilling and prosperous life. In Brazil most of the time all career paths are blocked out, the opportunity to make it big is almost exclusively left to soccer. People would put all their efforts on the prospects that maybe he will make it big, and there is a one in a thousand chance that is going to be true. This makes sense because the Brazilian media is a constant force in promoting soccer in Brazil by raising soccer players into heroes fighting all the evils of societies and scoring goals for a living.

The downsides to Soccer madness

There is indeed a national craze to be soccer players, but is this craze necessarily good for Brazil and its people? Fernando Silva is a Brazilian immigrant who moved into Somerville when he first moved arrived in Massachusetts from Cristioma in the south of Brazil, in the Gaucho region. He says that in Brazil, kids quit school because they see a future to become soccer stars, but then by the time they are 21, their clubs cut out 80% of the players. Then, with no education but a dearth of talent in soccer, they have to settle for a job at a supermarket, or some other low level job. Many kids try to become soccer players, many go to the Middle East or Asia to play soccer. At the same time, the success of stars like Ronaldinho, Pele, Garrincha, Roberto Carlos, are examples for them to follow because not only were these stars successful, they represent the true identity of Brazilian soccer in world stages as being a game of the people, a game about heart. That is why the craze to look for the opportunities to play soccer will never die out.

Daniel also thinks that Brazil's obsession with soccer might be counter productive for Brazil. They are not going to better the situation by becoming soccer players. Although it contributes to sell soccer players to Europe, just like we sell other goods, all the products can be used internally to improve the situation there. Therefore, training Brazilians so "that they can kick leather around as beautiful as it is, and this one thing that hurts me. I love soccer but knowing that this is a route to continuing impoverishment is definitely a factor that has been stuck in the back of my mind," says Daniel.

Futebol Arte

Daniel feels that Brazilians are always optimistic in spite of their plight. He says that Brazilians are people who do not like to be miserable. Brazilians do like to play

soccer as a result they put a lot of effort into it, and they are indeed good with that ball. They will enjoy having fun with that ball. Brazilian soccer is unique, although there are impoverished people all around the world, and in Latin America, Brazil is a special case of the being an extreme version of *Joga Bonito* or play beautiful and playfulness.

In Brazil soccer is an art form called Futebol Arte, which Portuguese for Soccer art. Brazil is a unique place, and that is what contributes to make Brazilian soccer unique in the world. Daniel remembers reading about art and how he learnt that some of the most impressive and important art comes out in periods of intense emotional distress and periods when nations are going through a period of internal strife and war. Pablo Picasso's work became famous in the light of the civil war in Spain. Similarly, in Brazil, soccer is an art, and that is what it is called Futebol arte and maybe that has something to it. Out of this misery that people live in, there comes an artistic expression that comes out of it; it is unique and is creative.

It is special because a player's performance in the field, his skill and his determination are characteristics admired by everyone in society. In a Brazil's context, soccer seems to be the one sport where skill on the field is indeed a factor that cannot be controlled by the wealthy and elite. That is why there is such an upsurge in the commitment towards soccer by the poor because at times, that is their only way towards earning a living.

Chapter 3

Brazilian Soccer

Organization

The Mystery of the

missing leagues

Initial enquiries

We have indeed established the fact that Brazilians are obsessed with soccer game in addition, they would go to various lengths to incorporate it into their lives, and or rather the tendency to kick a ball is so natural for them that this action is not planned but engrained in their mindset. Reading about the report on the Central American Soccer leagues in Somerville, I was curious to find out if there were similar organizations that were formed by the Brazilians who have made Somerville their home. I also learnt through these reports that the leagues are not just institutions where immigrants come together and play soccer but also come to make friends and socialize, and make connections, and for an immigrant who has just arrived into the United States, this is his means of orientation to life here and introduction to many community members. My quest was indeed an important one as it could lead me to the epicenter of Brazilian organization because they are known to focus around a game of soccer in the park.

I first questioned Arlon, whether he knew about any Brazilians leagues that happened around this area because he has been involved with a lot of soccer activity in and around Somerville High School. However, he did mention to me that the he could not actually see the impact of soccer in Somerville at all through the years he has been here. Soccer is not a popular sport in the United States because the popularity of games like basketball, and American football make it difficult for soccer to be established. Therefore, he says that the Brazilians, who are coming in, do not see any potential in the game and so they are not motivated to participate.

When questioned whether he knew of any Brazilian Leagues, he was quick to point out that all he had participated in were games called *Raxaos*, a slang for a pick up

game that one could play anywhere, at Foss Park, Broadway, or even at Conway near market basket. The pick up games are a typical type of soccer played in Brazil because Brazilians tend to play wherever they can find space, and if they have a couple of players, they are ready to go. During the summer and the fall he has seen people play in Foss Park, a park on Broadway in Somerville. He mentions that *Raxaos* are not limited to Brazilians but to all nationalities, which made sense to me at the time because Somerville is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, and soccer is a universal sport. However, I was more interested in finding out if the Brazilians were trying to organize a league exclusively for themselves in Somerville because I thought that with an official league, could mean solidarity and community pride.

A few Brazilians do have small clubs, says Arlon. He knows this because his brother played for one of the clubs called Esportivo Club. They do have games, but they are friendly games rather than competitive ones, a kind of an amateur league. The soccer community in Somerville is still in its infancy. It seems like with the information I got from Arlon, things have not reached the scale all nationalities can have their own leagues. It is more of a mixed bunch of people passionate about soccer and coming together to play friendly games.

The Pelada

The discovery of *Raxaos* was indeed a breakthrough for me because I found a truly unique Brazilian practice of soccer organizing. In my conversation with Fernando, he gave me some vital information about this truly Brazilian activity. *Pelada* another word for a *Raxao*, literally means naked and refers to pick up soccer games played in the

beaches when you don't wear shoes or a shirt. According to him, many Brazilian pick up games are organized that involves people from this area. *Peladas* happen in Cambridge, maybe 5 times a week. In order to organize a *Pelada*, one has to hire a gym and that may cost anywhere between \$100-200. These games usually involve about 20 people.



Fernando explains many *Peladas* are organized within the Brazilian community, and there are some good *Peladas* where some people have been showing up continuously for 5 years, but some are not worthwhile. However, he does mention that all these *Peladas* are usually exclusive and limited to Brazilians because “Brazilians like to play with Brazilians”. Brazilians, he says, are very particular about things. He does say that he has played with some none Brazilians in *Peladas* and they never came back because it is intimidating when one is surrounded by Brazilians who are so serious about their soccer. These *Peladas* are very competitive and there are a few that everybody wants memberships to but they are extremely difficult to be a part of. The game is played indoors, and usually they play in facilities in and around Boston. These games are played

with the rules of Futsal, a type of soccer that is played indoors and with a different type of a ball that does not bounce like normal soccer balls.

To become a member, one has to pay \$20 per month. However, I further learnt that with the membership to these Peladas come added responsibilities and, if not fulfilled, one can lose one's status in the game and in the Brazilian soccer community. Some Peladas require a particular skill level for a person to participate. If the organizers see that a person is not good, they do not call him back again. Therefore, it is it is tough to get the respect from the players. They will curse at you and make you not want to come back and play with them ever again. Fernando has participated in many soccer games around Somerville, he has played Central Americans, Africans, Irish, Italians, and he has never seen this type of competitiveness like when he plays with the Brazilians. When he played with Central Americans or with Americans, he was always encouraged by his coaches. Even if he had a bad day in the field, he would be encouraged so that he would be better the next game. However, he says that the Brazilians never tell you that you are playing good. There is no encouragement, but then if you play badly, they will not be happy with you. "If you play bad they let you know right away," says Fernando affirmatively. They will stop passing the ball and victimize you. If you play good, have shots at the goal, dribble a few players, and do not make mistakes, they will not say anything and that is a sign of their approval. If you do not play well, then they will tell you what to do and they will always complain about your performance. "They are very critical, but again I am Brazilian and we thrive on competition," says Fernando.



After a long discussion about the critical attitude of the Brazilians, he mentioned that he enjoys every minute of these highly competitive games. Brazilians thrive on competition, and the more the competition the stronger is their desire to succeed. Peladas are cults and you might even need recommendations from players to join certain games. “Brazilians are very calm and they do not force the ball and try to shoot at every chance,” says Fernando. They knock the ball around and the build up the game. The point behind these Peladas is to have fun and the Brazilians understand this. They play safe and clean which is the Brazilian way.

I was invited by Fernando to watch a Pelada in Cambridge one evening and I was nervous as to what it would be like. He told me that a Brazilian named Chris was in charge of organizing this particular Pelada and Fernando enjoys going there because he gets to play with all his friends. We arrived in Cambridge, and the game was supposed to happen in the gym of the King Open School. I went inside to find people arriving and warming up for the game. A flurry of Portuguese was all I could hear and suddenly a

group of players would start laughing about a joke which was beyond my comprehension. I finally met Chris, the organizer and he promised me that he would speak to me right after the game, and I thought it was a great idea because he had to go attend to the players and play the role of the organizer.



The rules of the game were simple, yet the rituals were fascinating. There were 20 players, and the task was to divide them up into four teams of five and the way they did it was by assembling the players together and asking them to pick these coins marked with numbers from one to twenty. The players who chose from numbers 1-5 would be in one team, the next from 6-10, and so forth. Each team was given a different colored bib, namely, yellow, green, red, and blue. The teams would stay as it is throughout the night. This selections process prevents the best players from being in one team.

The length of the game varied because once two teams take the court, they would play for the first ten minutes and change teams, or the team that scores two goals first will stay on and compete against the next team. This way the players stay fresh and better yet

everyone gets to participate, which is the essence of the *Pelada*. The main point is to be able to score two goals as fast as possible and this task requires excellent team coordination. The game was fast paced and one had to be quick in movement and thought. There is indeed a need for a good defense and a quick counter attacking offence. The players ran up and down the field, left and right. One cannot afford to dribble because that way, the defense might be left vulnerable if you lose the ball, because this is a very counter attacking game.

There was an air of playfulness. I could see that each of these players enjoyed the game, yet they were competing not as friends but as rivals. The ones scoring the goals might taunt the others; frustrating them and making them lose their focus, a professional strategy to make sure you control the game. One cannot keep the ball for too long for risk of losing it so there was constant passing all over the court and the players displayed exceptional skill in doing so. In order to score, a quick dribble and shot would do the trick and it is all left for the players to improvise using their imaginations. I quickly began to understand the object of the game. The team that played like one succeeded and the ones who did not move the ball around as much did not.

After the game, I talked with Cristiano Fernandez, the founder and organizer of this *Pelada*. He came to Massachusetts all the way from Sao Paolo Brazil about 8 years ago. The *Pelada* was created 6 years ago and whenever they had some time of from work, they organized *Peladas* and thus they began. They started with about 10 close friends coming together to play, and now they have grown and remained in the scene for six glorious years. Chris, as he is usually called, says that the *Pelada* is the way Brazilians socialize and meet their friends. When he arrived in the States, he called some of his

friends and decided to meet for a game of soccer. The most interesting part of the game is definitely the after-game chit chats where Chris and his friends would sit down and catch while sipping one a few beers. This he says nostalgically is a tradition he brought along with him from Brazil. “That is why soccer is the number one sport in Brazil. We are known for soccer, and the activity brings the community together,” says Chris.

There are Peladas like the one I witnessed everyday of the week in the gym of the King Open School, everyday Monday through Sunday. Brazilians come between 7 and 10, but Chris does not necessarily go to these Peladas because he wants to be with his friends. The Pelada he says is a natural thing in Brazil. Every state has *Peladas*, they might call it Raxinho, Batebola, Jogabola, Joga Pelada, but it all essentially means the same; A group of friends coming together for a game of soccer. This way he keeps in touch with all his friends and they all enjoy the after game talks and jokes.

Where are the Brazilian Leagues?

Peladas are organized and there are many Brazilians participating in it. However, there was no evidence of a registered and formal Brazilian League or tournament and this was a view shared by most of the Brazilians I spoke to. Everyone had their own distinct ways of looking at the mystery of the missing Brazilian Leagues. Marcos Garcia, the director of CORES Boston and the director of the Central American League, did have some insights into the possible cause of the situation. He has been involved in soccer organizations in Somerville and all over the Greater Boston area for many years. I thought he would be an excellent resource. “About 3-4 years ago, there were three leagues, but because they had a lack of organizers, those three leagues have disappeared”

says Marcos. In order to make a league, one has to have a plan. His Central American League used to share fields with the Brazilian Leagues, but now he does not know where they went. He heard that there were many disputes because soccer, he says, is a fan based sport and people are passionate about it. Disputes are common, he says.

When I asked Chris whether there were any Brazilian Leagues he said that when he first came to Massachusetts, the Brazilian tournament was considered the best league in the area. They were strong, influential, and well respected, but then slowly they started losing all that their predecessors had worked for. A league is organized during the summer months. This tournament is called the Liga Brasileira and it is made up of 12 teams, but sometimes there are just 8 to 10 teams depending on the numbers. He says that some do not want to play because most of these tournaments are not organized well. Few come in time because they do not really care about the times they are scheduled for. Fernando adds that these tournaments traditionally have had a tendency to finish early because of fights and mismanagement.

When asked if Brazilian families came and supported these leagues, they said that they did not want families coming to these tournaments because there are too many fights and it is a bad influence on the children. The Hispanic leagues are always family oriented according some of the Brazilians I have spoken to. There is general sense of appreciation of the efforts the community is making to organize, come together and have a good time like a big family. On the other hand, Fernando and Chris both voice their opinions saying that they feel bad for the misrepresentation of the intentions of the Brazilians community. They feel that they are losing their space and that is not what they have come here to do. The Hispanics are very organized and have gained the respect of the larger Somerville

community, but the Brazilians are a little behind because of bad behavior. Every match they fight for the ball. Chris feels that he would rather spend time with his family than go to a tournament that is poorly organized and the members do nothing but fight with each other.

Another reason, according to the Brazilians, why these leagues have started going down, is that Brazilians are very busy working. People are here primarily to work and often cannot make time to play tournaments week in and week out. The Brazilians who come here are more interested in working. It is understandable that you come to foreign land to look for a better living but then you will only pursue soccer if you want a professional career. Players do not want to spend time playing for 2-3 months of soccer anymore because they are missing potential income earning jobs. For the same reasons Daniel feels that Brazilians have to adapt to a North American view of time is money, where they do not have free time to play soccer. Therefore, whenever they have time, they do not like to enter tournaments choose to play *Peladas* as opposed to tournaments because the tournaments are too rigid to suit their working hours. Brazilian immigrant day laborers may have an employer who gives them certain work days and decided for them the days they have free. They might tell them a few days in advance and that contributes to make it difficult to organize. "I think that is related to the facts that by large Brazilians do not have documents plays in and because of these irregular hours and uncertain job openings they would only play for a month, making it impossible for a league to be created.

There is yet another cause for the disinterest in creating formal leagues is that Brazilians are bound to get injured playing soccer. Being in a foreign land, sometimes

undocumented, they have to be careful and not get hurt because that could prove to be fatal for them and their families. Chris expressed his concern over the fact that he might be risking a broken leg if he participates in tournaments. Players tend to get rough because they want to win at any cost. If he gets hurt, then he has to pay for all his medical bills and will not receive any workman's compensation because he did not injure himself while working. He was concerned of the fact that he has to work, and he did not want his family to bare the brunt of his injuries. Therefore, whenever his friends get together to play, he makes it clear that nobody is allowed to play rough. The repercussions of an unnecessary tackle could mean an expulsion from the *Pelada* and the termination of the person's membership. He does not want anybody hurting anyone. "This is one of the reasons why this *Pelada* is still going strong after 6 years. There is respect amongst us friends," mentions Chris.

The matter of injuring oneself while playing soccer is a matter that Daniel found interesting and true as well. Most Brazilians, because they are primarily here to work, take 2-3 shifts a day and by the end of the day they are probably tired. It is clear that they want to earn money quickly and in a short period. In this time, if they could be in serious problems if they break a leg playing soccer. The Central Americans do indeed have their leagues, but then some Salvadorians at least have TPS (Temporary Protected Status), which is some sort of documentation and some form of stability. The Brazilians, for the most part, are poor. Some of the people in the community are entrepreneurs, but the bulk of them are not and they do not have the resources to invest in their own ventures. Therefore, if they injure themselves, that would cost a lot of money, leaving them helpless and unable to sustain themselves without being a drag onto their family, and due

to poverty, this is a huge burden on the family. A broken leg might mean a trip back to Brazil, and that is not at all a desirable situation for them.

Brazil Legal

Investigating further regarding the various reasons as to missing leagues in Somerville, I met Ader who is the owner of Brazil Legal, the only soccer shop in the city of Somerville and he is proud of the fact that it is Brazilian owned. He is from Governador Valadares, in the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil. When he first came here and was involved with some soccer activities, he did not find a place where he could buy soccer shoes or soccer gear. He had to call an online soccer gear website and order online. We did not have any stores near our community. He thought he could do something about this. He slowly started getting some soccer balls, soccer boots, indoor soccer boots, and uniforms from Brazil and thus began his business.

He mentioned to me that there were no Brazilian Leagues in Somerville because the cost to put a league together is high and it is difficult to get sponsors for such a venture. I mentioned to him that the Central Americans do have leagues and if he could reason why the Brazilians were choosing not to make Leagues. He said that the Central American community is strong and they are successful in pulling some sponsors. "It is not easy to put together 10-20 teams because it involves investments and the Brazilians are not willing to make that kind of financial agreement now. They prefer to play for some other leagues rather than starting their own leagues," says Ader.

There have been a couple of indoor leagues about 3-4 years ago and Ader used to participate in them, but now they have disappeared because it costs a lot of money to start leagues like that. The cost to operate a gym for a day of a league costs \$9000 for 2

months. This cost to rent the gym excludes the other costs like paying the referee or hiring the police for protection. They used to have these leagues in Arlington, Cambridge and it was not worth their while sustaining it because of the financial burdens that they were facing. That is why the Brazilians were content on joining the Hispanic Leagues or the Central American Leagues, and other private leagues.

If one chooses to start a private league and collects about 10-20 teams from the greater Boston area, then one has to continue to invest in the future of the League because the continuity of a league makes it a worthwhile experience of everyone participating. According to Ader, the Central American Leagues and the Italians are much more organized than Brazilians in that sense. When they decide to open leagues, they make sure that all the games happen in one day and they are very particular about timing and the general organization of the league. As Marcos Garcia pointed out, starting a league is not an easy task as one has to start taking responsibilities seriously and think about all the organizational decisions one has to take. “As a Brazilian, I would say that we do not want to take responsibility to take care of a league. We are more interested in playing soccer more than the organizational aspect of it,” claims Ader.

“I would like to make a league given the opportunity because it is as you say a good representation of the Brazilian population here,” Ader mentions with hope that his countrymen will fulfill this dream one day. However, in reality this dream is a distant one because as we have heard before, Brazilians come here only to make money, and thus they plan to stay here for 2-3 years and they want to go home as soon as they have achieved their goals. “Brazilians are not like the Mexicans or El Salvadorians who want to establish themselves here,” says Ader. For the Brazilians, Massachusetts is not an ideal

place to live because of the weather. It is true that there are many opportunities here but then, the weather can prove detrimental to their willingness to live here. “Brazil is so warm and hot that they do not feel like spending years here,” says Ader.

The Brazilians do not have a League because they do not plan to stay here for a long time and thus there is no point for them to be organized because they need continuity for their survival. Therefore, if there are no Brazilian leagues then they go and play for the Hispanic leagues. If they do play for Hispanic leagues then they do not have an incentive to make their own leagues because they are happy playing in those leagues and at the same time being paid to play. In addition, if they are offered jobs by someone, then they readily accept and so that deters them from playing soccer. They leave everything that they have and follow the person who is paying them whether they are offered to go to North Carolina or to Florida. “There are a large number of Brazilians coming in for sure, but then there are many who are going back to their homes,” says Ader.

The theory of cyclical migration

Listening to Ader’s views, I was convinced that the cyclical migration theory was the single most important factor in the mystery of the missing leagues. However, Daniel proposes another reason countering my views, saying that the Brazilians have started settling in the area as opposed to them being cyclical migrants. Part of the reason why the Brazilians started to settle, according to Daniel has much to do with documentation issues. Brazilians for the most part come here without documents for the most part of their time in the United States according to him. “There was a law passed in Brazil that if you

stayed in the United States for six months without documents then you cannot enter the country legally for another 3 years, says Daniel leading to something. “If you stayed over a year then you cannot enter for at least 10 years,” he continues. Historically, Brazilians have been known to come to the States with documents, but it is only recently that they have started to cross borders through Mexico so that they can go back home when they have stopped working and earned enough money to go home. “Therefore the Brazilian population started to become vibrant and present here after the law was passed. It was apparent that the Brazilians were trapped in the United States,” he states. The documentation issue might be a reason as to why there is no official Brazilians league. “If you want to make official and Brazilian, that could be a great scouting ground for INS or ICE. This could be a wonderful sting. That might be a little paranoid but to some extent true as well, they would feel risky making your own official leagues,” Daniel says.

Chris’s story about how Brazilians never come on time and are not particularly fond of schedules and structures is interesting, and I was wondering if there is actual evidence of this thought. The question that comes to mind after hearing these stories is whether there is a cultural or circumstantial cause for the mystery of the missing leagues. I asked Daniel if he thought Brazilians were indeed not used to structure and rigidity. Besides studying at Tufts, Daniel is a Brazilian community organizer in Brookline, Somerville and Jamaica plain. He does believe that there is without doubt a sense of carelessness about Brazilians and although they love their soccer, he does not know if they necessarily want to structure themselves. This is an interesting revelation and I probed further and wanted to know more because this could be the decisive factor in the disappearance or absence of the leagues.

Brazilians are day laborers and so when they are not working they enjoy this sense of fluidity, not lack of responsibility. “I am Brazilian and I never get anywhere on time. It is my heritage and that is why I think that it is difficult to organize them because to put a schedule and asking them to follow does not work. “Even for political or social organizing, it is a difficult job”, claims Daniel. “There may have been social resistance movements in Brazilian history and even if there has been any, they never make the text books,” emphasizes Daniel. Political organizing has been hidden from the population, the people are not aware of their organizing potential, they might feel disempowered to organize, and this is what we might be seeing in the population here in Somerville and the greater Boston area.

Culture is derived from circumstances; Brazilian culture is derived from Brazilian circumstances. Therefore, back in Brazil, Brazilians forget the value of time in an economy that might not work. Time may not essentially equal to money because the economy as a whole does not respond well. The migrants here are not upper class and they are probably, lower middle class families, much more likely the working class Brazilians. Once they are here, circumstances intermingled with culture to ultimately exacerbate the situation. This creates a new culture on its own. “Brazilians who come here come from a culture that is less associated with organizing and structure,” claims Daniel. When they are here, they are forced to create a structure for themselves. The barriers that have been created around them makes it that much harder for them to overcome the barriers that they have a choice to overcome. Therefore we must remember that their choices are highly dictated by circumstances. Therefore for Daniel, Brazilians who have not lived in the States, organizing around soccer takes a completely new light,

and it is not the same as living in Brazil because soccer a big part of social life in Brazil, and takes on a more free flowing representation. The circumstances here are different, that is the beauty of the situation, and I say that it is actually quite remarkable that they have done some organizing, whether be it *Peladas* in the park, considering all the various issues immigrant populations have to face.

“If Brazilians cannot organize around the most concrete of passions, if they cannot organize around the central pillars of Brazilian identity, and that shows something about the vulnerability of the Brazilian immigrant population.”- Daniel Brasil Becker.

With all that I have discussed in this chapter, it is very clear that Brazilians are indeed in a difficult situation regarding all the problems they face in Massachusetts today. Humans are essentially the same; we choose to do certain things but then many of our choices are based on the things that we cannot control. Brazilian circumstances dictate whether Brazilians organize around the things that they are as passionate about as Soccer. Maybe the mystery of the missing leagues was not a mystery at all but just a blurred version of reality that I have failed to acknowledge.

Chapter 4

Brazilian Participation in the Central American League, and other Spanish Speaking Leagues in Somerville

Soccer- the Universal Language

The simple fact that soccer is the universal language is evident when we look at it in the context of Somerville. Soccer is indeed not limited to the Brazilian community and that was proved by Joel Cohen's rather detailed report on the Central American League and the way they have organized soccer. The Brazilians do not have a league, yet they are one of the largest immigrant groups participating in soccer activity around the Somerville and the Greater Boston Area. In the same light, one could look at how the Central Americans and Brazilians are similar and different in many aspects and this could help to explain why one group is more organized than the other.



In my conversation with Marcos Garcia, I found out that many Brazilians participate in these leagues, especially in the Central America, which then led me to believe that the presence of an already established league could indeed be another deterrent in the creation of a new Brazilian League that may or may not last beyond one season. The Central American Leagues is one of the largest Leagues in Somerville,

registering more than 800 players every season. I could be sure that for the love of the game, Brazilians would be participating in these leagues. Hence I went to pay a visit to Marcos and question him about this issue.

Marcos Garcia explains why his league seems so appealing to attract not only Brazilians but players of all nationalities. Somerville is one of the most diverse cities in America, and it is only understandable that this league has evolved into something more than just a Central American League, but a League that celebrates soccer with an international outlook. “He created the Central American Soccer league in 1994 with the idea to promote soccer because it is a healthy activity,” Marcos asserts. This year they finished off successfully, and we have the participation of 25 soccer teams and he did have a large participation from the Brazilians community. In his own experience in Somerville for the past 20 years, Brazilians do not tend to mix with the larger Latino community, and so he feels that his league has served as an excellent way for the Brazilians to interact and mix with other Latinos. He does acknowledge the fact that Brazilians speak Portuguese, but the language barrier should not serve as a dividing factor, but a uniting one because they come from South America.



The Central American League is a welcoming League and Fernando, did not waste time in telling me that they did make him feel welcome, and has good memories from playing with every Sunday. He played in a team from Somerville. He says that although most of the players in the league were Central American, each team had one or two Brazilians. “You could see that they were the taller players with longer hair,” jokes Fernando. He feels it was a good experience because they respected him even if he had a bad day. They were always encouraging, even if you made some wrong passes and did not do anything right. They would put him on the bench and would not say anything. However, he says that in contrast, while playing with Brazilians, if he made a mistake, “they would scream at you at tell you that you were a horrible player, and that you should go kick watermelons rather than soccer balls,” mentions Fernando, but then he mentions also that playing with Brazilians and with Central Americans are two different experiences and that he enjoyed both for what they distinctively added to his game.

Fernando understood that he was playing with the Central American league, on foreign turf for people who spoke a different language, but they were very welcoming and respectful. “Even amongst themselves they were very respectful,” says Fernando. The Central Americans have a league in Lynn, Somerville, Dorchester, Springfield, Cambridge, Lowell, and each league has 2-3 divisions. “They are indeed very organized. They have organized the league in such a way that everybody gets to play a little bit,” something that Fernando feels is an important part of soccer in the immigrant community.

On the same note, Marcos, ensures me that he does not want soccer activity to be exclusive to one community, but for everyone to enjoy because his main objective is to promote soccer anyway he can. For this he says that in the last 3-4 years the number of Brazilians participating in the league has been going up. He says that they join the soccer teams because they feel that they can understand each other and it does not matter if they speak Portuguese, because, soccer is the world sport and a universal language; you speak with your feet rather than words; you use gestures rather than your voice. “They hang out together, and they even have the same color of skin and they play soccer together, they feel that is not what they have you know,” verifies Marcos. Soccer has given a platform for the Portuguese speakers and the Spanish speakers to come together and celebrate the game they enjoy so much. In addition, that is why the players, who play for the first time, come back again because they feel welcome. Marcos says “there are a large numbers are Brazilians, Cape Verdians, we have Bosnians, and we have people from Africa, Colombians, Argentines, Peruvians, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Salvadorans, and Costa Ricans. There is a rich diverse culture. There is a rainbow out there that is

made unique because you do not find in any other activities only in soccer,” to conclude the state of soccer within the immigrant community.



When asked how many Brazilians participate in the league, he says that there are many nationalities integrated into the various teams, but out of 25 teams that participate, the numbers of Brazilian players vary from 1-3 players per team. He further reveals that the Brazilians are chosen to play for these teams. “People want to see them play because everybody thinks that Brazilians are good soccer players so people look for them. Moreover, the Brazilians think highly of the Central American League, they choose to play here,” says Marcos. The Brazilian contingent comes from many different cities and just Somerville. Usually the players who are chosen are very good, one player he does know personally is a striker called Leo, who is an exceptional player and a lethal striker. He usually scores many goals and that is why people want to see him play.

It was interesting that Brazilians were chosen to play for these teams and when I mentioned this to Chris, he confirmed that many Brazilians participate in the Central American Leagues but he personally stopped playing because he was afraid that he would

get hurt while doing so. “When you are in a league then you have to give a 100 percent because you are spending your entire Saturdays and Sundays playing. Then that is difficult because you are already very tired working 60-70 hours a week and so only some people choose to play in the tournaments and most come and play Peladas so that you have time to spend with your friends and you are not getting tired before work. You also have the weekend to spend with your family and that is very important to us,” says Chris. He also mentions that for the same reasons, many of his friends stopped playing for the Leagues contrary to what Marcos told me the number of Brazilian participants in all organized Leagues, including the Central American League is actually going down.



For the Brazilians who play for these leagues however, there is sometimes a financial remuneration given to them by team managers for their services. This was a phenomenal discovery because nobody is usually paid when playing for an amateur league, and it is interesting to see what the effects of this would be on Brazilian participation in the Central American League and on the formation of their own League, where there would be actually spending money rather than actually earning any. Chris says that

the Brazilians see that the Hispanic leagues are organized then they play only if they are paid. They tell the organizers or the teams that they will play only if there is remuneration because they are indeed committing time and effort. That is why many Brazilians have stopped playing in these Leagues, because they realized down the line that they are not good enough to be paid and so they do not play these tournaments, in addition to protecting themselves from getting unnecessarily hurt because of the risk they are taking.

Fernando says that he was paid when he played for the Central American League, but not as much as the other Brazilians. He says that the rule in the team regarding this was that if he scored a goal, they would pay him. Therefore whenever he scored a goal he was paid, but for a defensive midfielder like him, he was not in a position to score goals like a striker would. "They pay \$25-50 for the goals and if you score the winning goal, then they might pay you even more depending on the contract," asserts Fernando. When I asked him if there is a danger involved in such payment in amateur leagues, he said that it is a little risky because once you go into college then if people found out that you were paid to play soccer then you were disqualified from participating in the college leagues. "I know a few players who get paid 500 dollars a day. These players switch from one team to the other and play these games to get paid so much money," says Fernando.

Ader also confirms the fact that many Brazilians are paid to play for the Central American league. This happens because these leagues are bigger and stronger than the Portuguese, Italian, and Brazilian combined. "There is a lot of money involved and some players are paid. This is an amateur league and there should not be payment involved, like in my league none of the players are paid because it is against the rules," says Ader. Private leagues, like the Central American League can afford to pay and so the Brazilians

players make money playing for these leagues. They get paid 200-300 dollars a game and sometimes even more, depending on your performance and your contract. There thus an evidence of complex contract agreements in between the Brazilians and in one sense their employers or team managers.

When I asked Fabio regarding this issue, he mentioned that he has many friends who would rather play for Spanish leagues rather than Brazilian leagues although the level of soccer would be higher in the Brazilian leagues. “This is because the Spanish guys pay them to play. So they think that if, I am playing anyways, I might as well be paid,” says Fabio. The details of the payments vary most of the time depending on the contract that the player signs with the different teams he plays for. “It all depends on the deal but sometimes they get paid per game or some of my friends have been paid for each goal he scored or if the team wins. It all depends on the deal,” says Fabio. However, he does not feel that there is anything wrong with being paid for playing but rather it is a matter of pride for the players who are so good that they are being paid to play. “It is a matter of pride that Brazilians are getting paid,” he says.

However, it is certain that in a pure Brazilian league everybody is Brazilian and there are no favorites. That puts a question whether there is an incentive amongst the Brazilians to create a League at all because they are being paid to play for Hispanic Leagues. When I asked Fabio whether all Brazilians were in it for the money, he said that they are not all in it for the money because it is difficult to generalize everyone into one category. “I know people how play two-three games on a Sunday in different leagues. They play one in the morning and another one in the afternoon. They spend their Sunday playing soccer. These players do not go out at night just so that they are ready for the

next day's tournament," he says. However, it is difficult to know the intentions because each person has his issues and his own circumstances for his behavior. Many Brazilians would play for a Brazilians if they did get a chance.

Daniel says that if some Brazilians are talented and teams want them, then because they do not want to risk their health and wellbeing, they play only if they are going to be getting some money. Furthermore, we do know that Brazilians love the game and would go to various lengths to play it, but then this discovery does shows there is a change in their mind set when they come to the US. Daniel explains that Brazilians actually do not come from a culture that says time is money but then here they are absorbed into a culture that says time is money and their goal for coming here is to work a little amount of time and get a lot of money, a typical North American approach.

Brazilian and Central American organizing

When I proposed a question to Daniel as to why the Central Americans had managed to make a League and why the Brazilians were not initiating the beginning of a league of their own, he mentioned that various similarities and differences could explain the situation between the two communities. Brazilians and Central Americans are both immigrants and linguistically and culturally are separated from the North American structure. Further more, they are marginalized because they are poor. Salvadorans and several other populations have TPS and have other forms that make their population more stable. Brazilians are mainly here for economic motives, but the Central Americans migrated here because of the civil wars and other political issues that have ravaged the

country. “In a way, Central Americans are more likely to be willing to form a community because they are in a sense political refugees,” says Daniel.

His experience with Brazilians who were political exiles, as sung by Caetano Veloso in his song *Aquel Abraço*, talks about people who were forced out of their country. There is a much stronger connection with their homeland if one is in a situation like that, and that is not so much the case for Brazilians here because they came here by choice, for economic reasons so that they can make their lives better. Central Americans had to leave because of political turmoil. “I think that makes them want to reconnect with the community. I think Central Americans are prone to organize because they saw it happen in their streets. They are more likely to politically organize here for the same reasons. In Brazil, these things have been largely covered up but on the other hand, Central Americans are more aware of how to politically organize and how to socially organize. Brazilians have had this hidden from them,” says Daniel, who clearly distinguishes between the different circumstances of the two immigrant groups and the possible differences in their desires to organize.

Brazilian participation in the various Hispanic Leagues may seem materialistic to some, but I believe that it is difficult to say why they would ask for remuneration to participate as each individual has their own experiences and circumstances that have to be considered while he makes his choices. Our choices are highly dictated by our circumstances. However, when we think about this matter in terms of Somerville soccer organizing, I think any interaction between the two immigrant groups is better than none. Both groups need to work together in harmony and the best common ground to socially gather is a soccer pitch. Daniel would love to see Brazilians participate in the Central

American Leagues not as mercenaries who are paid but then as people who play because they like playing soccer. He believes that since both immigrant groups have so much in commons when speaking of the Latino immigrant experience, it would be nice to see a Central American League featuring Brazilians where both these communities play together in harmony because that is the essence of soccer, the beautiful game.

Chapter 5

Brazilian Youth

Soccer

Somerville High

School

Somerville High School Soccer Team

Youth Soccer in Somerville: Soccer in the Somerville High School is indeed an interesting part of the soccer activities in the city. The Somerville High School soccer team is mostly comprised of mostly children of immigrants who have been playing soccer in their native countries. The mixture of languages and culture are perhaps what makes Somerville high school soccer so unique. I recently discovered that Brazilians have been a large presence in the Somerville High School team and I had the pleasure of speaking with two members of the team both from different eras, but both confirm that the connection with the Brazilians and the Somerville High School is strong. For these players, and students, soccer was an excellent transition into their new communities and a way of socially connecting with people. From these stories, we can see what the Brazilians immigrant schooling experience is like in Somerville High School.

Fernando was Captain of the Somerville High School team in the 1998 and 1999 season and says that these years were some of the most enjoyable and interesting experiences in his life. The first few months in a new country, he could not speak the language very well, playing soccer for Somerville high school made a lot of difference in his integration into the American high school system. “Even though there was a large immigrant population in Somerville, you still want to be friends with them,” says Fernando. It is still difficult because when you first come in you only begin to know the people from Brazil but then as time passes by, things change. “After school we go to for Pizza or coffee, you make friends like that,” points Fernando. There are a few Americans in the team and you get to know them a little. A year later you find that you have plenty of friends and you know the language pretty well.

He says that they had an American coach called Mark, and he had been head coach of the high schools soccer team for about 4 years. He had a successful high school program compared to other city school teams because city schools usually do not have a good soccer program. Compared to the city schools, the suburban teams did well because the parents and student alike are very involved and thus they are usually able to get a good budget for the soccer team. The soccer teams of the city schools in Somerville, Cambridge, East Boston, Medford, Alston, Brighton, are made up of children of immigrants. Therefore, the parents cannot be as involved as the parents living in suburban towns because they are working 3-4 shifts a day.

There were 18 players in the Varsity team and out of those 18, there were no US born players. On the team, there were 2 Portuguese players, 4-5 players from Central America and the rest 11-12 players were Brazilians. In the starting line up, 8 of them were Brazilians. Some of the Brazilians were here for about 7-8 years. Some had just arrived just like he did, and so most of the Brazilians could not speak any English. “The communication with the coach was indeed a tough task,” says Fernando. In his second year, he mentions that there were 9 Brazilians out of the starting 11, leaving space for two none Brazilian.

There were three Captains in the team because the coach wanted to make sure that everyone felt like they were equal. There were two Brazilian Captains and they made sure that they convey the coach’s messages to the players. Some of the players did not respect the coach’s tactical decisions at first because they felt that he was not knowledgeable about the game. They behaved with the coach but did sometimes disagree with his tactical decisions. “Being Brazilian, we have grown up playing soccer and

watching soccer and we felt like we were not playing up to our tactical potential,” says Fernando. However, people loved the coach though, a nice person and an understanding man. He understood that people were just arriving and he gave them their space. “In the beginning it was difficult to understand the coach because of the language barrier we faced and to try to figure out what he wanted the players to do,” he says. They loved the environment because everybody was friendly.

When Arlon joined the Somerville High School team his freshman year, there were many Brazilians who played for the teams but then as time went by, the team started getting worse and worse because of the way the team is managed. Therefore, Brazilians do not think it is worth their while to play for their high school team, and so over the years, he has noticed that there are a hundred less Brazilians who want to play soccer in Somerville High School. In his freshman year, the entire team was Brazilian, but now there are only 4-5 players including him who are Brazilians. The team itself during my freshman was very good. They made it to the playoffs only to be defeated in the Semi Finals by St. John’s Prep. This year through his experiences, Arlon expressed his dissatisfaction with the way the team was managed and so he says that the other Brazilians or rather anybody else who would love to play soccer would not like to play. Therefore the number of the Brazilians in the Somerville High School team is going down because Brazilians are interested in playing soccer and when there is a management team that is not passionate about the game, then it does not seem worth their while to participate.



Going forward, most of the immigrant high school students according to Fernando wanted to play soccer in college. However, the absence of legal documentation prevented them from applying. They knew that this would hinder their chances of going to college. Some of my friends did not do to well in school for this reason. Many of Fernando's friends missed opportunities to go to college through soccer scholarships even though they were qualified as players to do so. He has been following Somerville high school and he talks to the coach and find out how many kids are going to college.

Many good Brazilian players come along and express their desire to play in college, but they cannot because they overstay their visas and they are not able to get a student visa to go to college.

Another issue came up influenced the Brazilians participation in Somerville high school soccer. In the early 90s to the mid nineties most of the Brazilian community was located in Somerville. Therefore the Somerville High School always had newcomers who were interested in soccer and who were in very good shape coming straight from Brazil. However, Fernando explains that as a city it was getting more expensive to live. People started to move to more periphery cities like Everett. Everett has a large Brazilian community now due to this. Therefore, Somerville High School is missing the opportunity to get some new talent from Brazil and that explains the current form of the team which is not doing that well. There are few immigrants coming into the city now because of the rising costs. An immigrant family earning minimum wage cannot afford to buy a two bedroom apartment for \$1200-1300 while one can move to Everett and pay \$1000. All these factors played a role in influencing the soccer participation of Brazilian immigrant children in Participating in the Somerville High School team.

Chapter 7

Fabio Gomez

The Massachusetts

Alliance of

Portuguese Speakers

MAPS and the soccer match

Fabio Gomez is currently working with MAPS, the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers, and a non-profit organization that helps the Portuguese speaking immigrants based in Cambridge, MA. He is also currently working on a project for the creation of a youth soccer program for children of Portuguese speaking families from Portugal, Brazil, and Cape Verde. For the past three years, they have been organizing a match between the players who speak Portuguese and this year, he was in charge of putting together a team of Brazilian players to face the Cape Verdians.

The first year there was a Portuguese team participating in this match at the Gillette stadium. MAPS was invited to make a Brazilian team and Fabio applied for the job, but soon found out that the other coach applying for the job was more qualified than him was also applying. However, it since the other coach could not make it, they offered him the job and I told them that I would do my best with the time given to me. He told them “I cannot guarantee any results or anything but I can put a team together.” He just had three weeks to prepare for this and it was a challenging task. It was an interesting experience because he is just 28 years old and had no experience coaching adults because he had just coached kids. He said the players questioned his experience to be their coach because a coach it usually an older man and I had only coached kids soccer. However, he says that it was a good experience even though they lost the game. He did mention that there were some Brazilian players from Somerville were involved in the team, apart from many cities around the Greater Boston Area from Everett, and Framingham.

He mentions that soccer is a new venture for MAPS, and they were going to be involved in a soccer youth program for all Portuguese speaking youth from Brazil, Portugal and

Cape Verdians. This is in partnership with the US soccer Foundation that gives grants to organizations that enrich life through Soccer. He says that if they see that you have a good program, they will give you a grant. We are hoping to organize this program and apply. This Program is for all Portuguese speakers.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

My research over the past 2 and half months on Brazilian soccer in Somerville has taken me through a labyrinth of discoveries, encounters, and realizations. The Brazilians I met and talked to in Somerville and the greater Boston Area, come from various cities and backgrounds, from impoverished townships in Minas Gerais, the southern Pampas bordering Argentina, to the commercial hubs of São Paolo and Rio de Janeiro. I started out making a project on Brazilian Soccer participation in Somerville and slowly began to learn intricate details about the lives of these immigrants who have traveled miles to come and earn a better living for themselves and their families.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me put this project together. My dear friend Rachel Boillot, fearless photographer and journalist extraordinaire, who I spent many a times venturing through the streets of Somerville searching for telling images for this project. Thank you Professor Deborah Pacini Hernandez who never failed to keep us searching deeper and aiming higher. My classmates who were a source of inspiration and strength through the semester, and I will never forget this experience because of them. Sebastian Chaskel, who helped me correct the project even though he was back home in

Colombia. This project would not have completed without the fascinating stories of the following people:

1. Arlon Alvarenga
2. Fernando Silva
3. Fabio Gomez
5. Ader
6. Marcos Garcia
7. Aru Manrique
8. Daniel Brasil Becker

Thank you all for making this project worthwhile and taking time out of your busy schedules to speak to me.

It is interesting to note that Brazilians who have been playing soccer their entire lives, professionally and none professionally, have all expressed that their lives have changed drastically since they came to the states. In Brazil, they played soccer everyday, in the streets, indoors, outdoors, in their back yards, and in the courts. They told me that it is not possible for them to do so because the New England social structure is very different and that they had to adapt the way they lived their lives. America is a land of opportunity indeed but it is not for the faint hearted. It is a land where the tenacious survive and reap the fruits of their harvest. Brazilians cannot afford to play soccer all the time because of the simple fact that they have to work. Some work 2-3 shifts a day, leaving them exhausted by the end of the day and unable to participate in their favorite pass time.

They do manage to play once every week and some manage to participate in the various local leagues, including the Central American League, and the Somerville League. Some manage to get together a group of friends and play Peladas, a pick up game that comes from the streets of Brazil. All these stories show the connections the Brazilian community has with their country's favorite sport and shows the role soccer plays in the lives of these immigrants in a foreign land where the weather and the attitude of people can be disorienting for them. It is interesting to see how Brazilians have managed to make a community for them here and in a time when immigration policies in the US are top priority, time will decide the fate of the Brazilians in Somerville. In the mean time, these Brazilians are always willing to share their stories about soccer, and its importance in their lives and how they are using soccer in Somerville and the Greater Boston Area to establish the Brazilians identity far away from home. It has indeed been an honor and a pleasure interviewing and recording the stories of these Brazilians who as Daniel put are in a vulnerable position where their circumstances have led to their decisions, and so far the decisions not to make leagues but play in Peladas, not to organize but to be flexible is the basic vibe in the Brazilian neighborhoods of Somerville and the Greater Boston Area. The Brazilians just for being Brazilian will continue to add a color in these streets as their wonderful green, yellow, and blue flags, and with it maybe in the future, grace the soccer world here with a league they can call their own. My Brazilian friends and I will be waiting for that day.

Bibliography

1. *Soccer Madness (Brazil's Passion for the World's Most Popular Sport)* – Levers, Janet
Waveland Press Inc.

Copyright 1983 by Janet Lever

Reissued 1995 with changes by Waveland Press Inc.

2. *The Brazilians*- Page, Joseph A (1995)

Addison Wesley Publishing Company