

Soccer gets 'Americanized'

United Press International

DALLAS — Despite periodic claims to the contrary, good old American ingenuity is not dead.

Take an idea and make it better. That concept helped make this nation great and it's nice to see there are those who still believe that way — even if a lot of them happen to be from England, Yugoslavia and other parts of call instead of from Wisconsin or North Carolina.

What they have done is take the sport of soccer, put it through a grinder and come up with a different sport that looks about as much like soccer as baseball does cricket.

This was made necessary because the traditional version of soccer was creating as much popularity among Americans as the measles.

There was a widespread belief among the limited number of soccer enthusiasts in this country 20 years ago that once all the boys and girls who were playing the game on school grounds grew up, they would pack the stadiums to watch other people play.

That turned out to be a myth. Soccer may touch off wars and civil disobedience in other parts of the world. But thus far the great majority of U.S. citizens don't have the hang of it yet.

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— Dallas Sidekicks Coach Gordon Jago

"Soccer, in its regular form, is a great participation sport in this country," says Gordon Jago. "The number of youngsters playing the game increases every year. But it has not proven to be a great spectator sport."

As a result, soccer was sent to the workshop. The size of the field was reduced, the number of players on the field was reduced, boards were put around the whole thing and a roof was put over the entire thing.

Indoor soccer has caught on in selected pockets around the country — notably St. Louis, Kansas City, Wichita, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and Cleveland.

Now it is trying its hand in Dallas, where competition for the sports dollar is fierce and the word "soccer" usually touches off little more than a yawn.

Dallas' Lamar Hunt may have

founded the American Football League and may have been the key factor in creating the financial windfall pro tennis players now enjoy, but when it came to soccer he knew when he was whipped. He got out of the sport four years ago after having tried to make a go of it for more than a decade.

Jago is coaching the Dallas Sidekicks in the Major Indoor Soccer League. He is a native of London, but is now a citizen of the United States. He has seen the indoor game grow, having coached the Tampa Bay franchise to an MISL title.

"It (indoor soccer) is a good product," Jago says. "People come out and watch it. We have sellouts. We have to assume that since the crowds have been so good in so many places that the game is a good one in its current form."

"I still think the traditional game can succeed in this country. But it

may take two more generations to do it."

One of the problems that has plagued the outdoor game still haunts the indoor version. More than half of the players hold citizenship in a country other than the United States (the soccer hotbed of St. Louis leading the way with American players).

But on the plus side there is a lot more scoring, the action is paced much faster and, in an attempt to spice things up, pyrotechnics and lasers draw wholesale use in the various arenas.

The Dallas franchise is owned and operated by the same group that owns the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, who have enjoyed tremendous success. Norm Sonju, president of both clubs, admits there was a selfish reason for bringing the defunct New Jersey franchise to town.

"We wanted to protect our investment in the Mavericks," Sonju said. "We didn't want another ownership coming in to fight us over dates and marketing at the arena."

"But we did some research on the league and thought the MISL might be a good investment."

Sonju got to the heart of the matter.

"The main thing," he said, "is that it's as American as apple pie."

Welsh's Cav fans thinking bowl bid

United Press International

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — George Welsh, who is making Virginia fans delay their thoughts of basketball season with his Top 20 football team, was named UPI's College Football Coach of the Week Wednesday.

Welsh won the award for the Cavaliers' 27-7 upset of then No. 9 West Virginia last Saturday.

The victory propelled the Cavaliers into the 19th spot in the UPI rankings and awakened bowl scouts to the progress Welsh has made in three years at a school where losing football teams were tolerated because basketball season always followed.

No more. The Cavaliers (6-1-1) have not lost since a season-opening 55-0 drubbing by Clemson. With games remaining against Atlantic Coast Conference foes North Carolina State, North Carolina and Maryland, Virginia has a shot at the ACC title and a bowl bid. Virginia is the only Division I-A team to have never played in a bowl game.

The Cavaliers were not expected

to defeat the Mountaineers and certainly not on the road, where West Virginia had just defeated powerhouses Boston College and Penn State.

But Virginia, with a week off, entered the game mentally sharp and without injuries and caught West Virginia still relishing its first victory over Penn State since 1955.

"We played outstanding defense in the second half, we controlled the football on offense with a strong running game and we neutralized their kicking game," Welsh said. "I think they were down and that's understandable. They had to play with a lot of emotion the past two weeks."

"You need to play with emotion. You don't want to be too high and you try not to be too low. But, if you play with emotion, you don't let it get out of hand."

Welsh will never be accused of losing emotional control. He has a college town that hasn't seen this much success since the 1940s. He has bowl scouts coming to watch a team that has only had three winning seasons since 1952.

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