

STEWART LEADS U.S. OPEN; RED SOX'S CHO GETS FIRST MAJOR LEAGUE WIN • SPORTS, E1

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# WOMEN'S SOCCER TAKES OFF

## *World Cup Play Draws Throng To Sold Out Stadium*

By **LORI RILEY**  
Courant Staff Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Karen Spindel and Peggy Spickofsky sat in the shade of an umbrella next to their van in the Giants Stadium parking lot, eating hamburgers and potato salad.

Friends for a long time, long-time members of the National Organization for Women, they had never been to a big-time soccer game in their lives.

But this, the Women's World Cup, was different.

"If it was the men's World Cup, we wouldn't be here," said Spindel, the president of the Passaic County NOW chapter. "It had more to do with the idea of women playing soccer."

Apparently, all 78,972 people felt that way Saturday. It was the largest turnout at a single event

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### ■ WORLD CUP COVERAGE, SPORTS, E1

in women's sports in the world. The U.S. team obliged the American flag-waving fans by winning its first game, 3-0 over Denmark.

"This is what we always dreamed a World Cup could be," said U.S. star Mia Hamm, who had a goal and an assist. "We've seen it at the men's World Cup before. To see this crowd, and all the atmosphere around the stadium, was absolutely phenomenal."

To see Christie Pearce, a U.S. defender, a caravan of fans drove up from her hometown of Point Pleasant, N.J.

"I can't believe it was sold out," said Wendi Pearce, Christie's sister. "We were just saying the

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# WOMEN'S SOCCER KICKS

## World Cup Play Draws Throng To Sold Out Stadium

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The organizing committee started its marketing effort two years ago. The focus was on soccer clubs and the pre-teen and teenage girls who play for the clubs. The Mia Hamm wannabes, the ones who wore her No. 9 Nike jersey proudly around the stands Saturday and screamed when the teen group N Sync took the field for the opening ceremonies.

But their moms and dads and brothers came, too. So did their coaches, male and female.

"What I like about it is there's a lot of guys here," said Kevin Kilcullen of Morristown, N.J., father of son Jamie, 12, and daughter Katie, 11, both soccer players. "But it's more of a family environment. We come to a lot of football games here and today there's more children and less drinking."

Soccer balls flew through the air in the parking lot. Soccer flags — the Jersey Girls Soccer Club, the Cranford Soccer Club — marked spots where many set up tents and barbecue grills and boomboxes blared Bob Marley tunes. There was drinking, but it was friendly, not obnoxious.

One of the Danish team's sponsors, a food company called MD, had its local office in Summit, N.J., sponsor a barbecue. Everybody near the big white tent wore bright red shirts and carried Danish flags.

The Danes, an island of red in a sea of red, white and blue, ate and mingled and sang their native soccer songs. The Americans nearby responded with good-natured chants of "U-S-A."

"We're just having a good time," said J.J. Hjortthoj, an MD employee from Summit.

This wasn't the men's World Cup. No fights. No metal detectors at the gates. And a different passion, some would say. Just people who appreciate women's sports and good soccer.

The Brazilian fans might have something to say about that. A group of Brazilians from White Plains, N.Y., gathered near their bus exhorted passersby with "Ho's!" They greeted strangers enthusiastically, grabbed them, folded them into their group and took pictures.

"We will go to any sporting event," said Omar Nethersol, a Jamaican by birth, but a Brazilian, he said, in spirit. "Women's, men's. We love them. We love our team. We love the U.S. team."

A small pocket of about 30 green-and-yellow clad Brazilians occupied the upper deck, cheering on their team against Mexico. The men pounded on drums; the women wore feather headdresses and gyrated to the beat. At the men's World Cup, the entire upper deck would be filled with green and yellow pulsating



JOHN WOIKE / THE HARTFORD COURANT

**NO QUESTION OF LOYALTY** for Lea Davison, left, and Sabra Davison, both of Jericho, Vermont, as Women's World Cup soccer play got under way Saturday at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J. The U.S. team defeated Denmark, 3-0, in the first game.

.....  
*"This is what we  
 always dreamed a  
 World Cup could be."*

**MIA HAMM**  
 U.S. team star

.....  
 ing to a samba beat.

But this was more of a U.S. event, a Mia Hamm lovefest, than an international event. Plus, the U.S. women are the favorites and they win practically all the time. What American could resist?

Jennifer Fitzgerald, 10, of Cranford, N.J., was a prototypical fan. Her face was painted red, white and blue. She wore blue Umbro soccer shorts. Her favorite player? Hamm,

of course. After all, Hamm took on Michael Jordan in those Gatorade commercials and even flipped him on his back in a karate sequence. The message the little girls took to heart: Be Like Mia, not Mike.

The media is getting the word out. About 600 credentials were issued for the opening game. Four years ago at the World Cup in Sweden, 50 reporters showed up, including only a handful from the U.S.

The next World Cup, president and CEO Marla Messing said, will be even better.

"This is going to help the development of women's soccer around the world," Messing said. "The next country will invest a lot more in it because of what we did."

But in four years, will American newspapers send reporters overseas to cover the Women's World Cup? Possibly, but not likely in the

droves they sent them to Giants Stadium Saturday.

In the past, there has also been talk of a women's soccer league in the U.S. Spurred on by the success of the Women's World Cup, could one survive? Given the uneven success of Major League Soccer — the men's soccer league — it's doubtful. Soccer, despite its grassroots popularity, historically has not fared well at the pro level in the United States.

Still, everybody was living for the moment on Saturday. Little girls swamped the concession stands, buying \$4 World Cup hair scrunchies and \$30 World Cup Barbies (she can kick and throw! the box boasted). They ran out of World Cup T-shirts and hats.

"It was a wonderful feeling to play in front of this crowd," Hamm said. "We have come a long way."