

# Cheering for the home team

*By: Peyton Zeigler*

I'm not really a soccer person. I don't get it. It's 90 minutes of cross country with a ball contained on a 120-by-90-meter field. It's not my first choice when I scroll through the sports channels on TV. I appreciate the skill, technique, and stamina needed to play, but ever since I peaked in the sport in second grade, I've moved on to playing and watching other things. Some of my favorite sports moments have been from soccer games even though I don't watch it very often. I've been lucky enough to pick the right games to watch. I'll watch big events like the World Cup or Olympic soccer to keep up. Last summer I studied in London and saw England lose to Iceland in a pub. I was having fun cheering with the locals until I remembered what could happen when Brits get angry at soccer matches. When I was 14 I saw Landon Donovan score in extra time against Algeria in the World Cup, and I get excited any time the US Women's National Team is on TV.

In Oregon, everybody plays soccer in elementary school. I played in second grade. In youth leagues everyone plays every position for the same amount of time, but I remember playing goalie the most. And I loved being the goalie. While kids ran around kicking each other's shins, I sat on the ground picking grass until they ran my way. I was almost a head taller than everyone on the field. If I reached my arms out like Michael Jordan in that one poster it would cover half the goal. One time I dove and saved a ball and felt like the queen of the field. I definitely deserved my Capri-Sun at the end of that game. Even though I didn't play after that year, I owe a lot to soccer. It was one of the first sports I ever played. It helped me understand teamwork and sportsmanship. I made new friends that I kept for years after that. I switched to fall basketball and then volleyball when I was old enough, but I'll always remember that one year of second grade soccer.

Oregon is a soccer state. It's home to the 2015 MLS Cup champion Portland Timbers and thousands of college, high school, and youth leagues around the Willamette Valley and beyond. But, the colleges in Oregon are not ranked among the top schools in the nation. The University of Oregon, my alma mater, only has a women's team. Oregon State, our rivals up north on I-5, has both men's and women's soccer, but neither are anything special.

Nevertheless, there I sat on a chilly Tuesday in September watching an OSU men's soccer game against Syracuse University in New York. I put this game on my calendar after I

looked up the schedules to see if any Oregon teams were coming out here. I had a whole plan: I'd wear the brightest Oregon gear I owned to irritate the Oregon State fans that were there. But I forgot I was nearly 3,000 miles away from Corvallis and my home. I grew up in Albany, about 15 minutes away from OSU's campus. I grew up a Duck fan, about 45 minutes away from UO's campus. It's easy to cheer against the Beavers. They have almost a loser mentality. They want to be "Giant Killers," and they're satisfied with mediocrity for an entire year just to win one big game. I think they were talking for years about their win against #3 USC in football after it happened in 2006, it didn't matter whom they lost to.

I sat on the cold metal stands with my notebook, jotting down thoughts. *OSU in white. SU in Orange/Navy stripes.* I watched clumps of jerseys run back and forth across the field. *Half 1-1.* Looking around it was hard to see if there were any Beaver fans in the stands. It was normally easy for me to tell. OSU is the only orange team in the Pac-12 and a lot of the west coast. *Might be the only Oregonian here.* That's not new to me now. When I first got to Syracuse and throughout the summer I was constantly reminding people that Oregon did in fact exist in the northwest corner of the United States. I think people get it now, even if they still say *Or-e-gone.* I'll tackle that problem the rest of the year (it's *Or-i-gun* by the way).

*'Cuse scored on PK.* OSU received a yellow card and SU took advantage going up 2-1. Later in the game SU got a yellow card and OSU capitalized tying it. The stands made a collective groan except for one fan waving cheerful fists in the cold air. *I found one!* There was one fan in the stands cheering for OSU. I felt oddly connected to her. I guess we had something in common: we were both cheering for Oregon State. I sat staring into space for a second, disgusted with myself for having such thoughts. But maybe this was more than cheering for my rival. Maybe it was cheering for my home. I only became home sick when college sports started again. I missed the familiarity of warm Oregon nights. The heaviness of a backpack full of jackets and rain gear in case Oregon decided to rain. Watching the white jerseys with the nutria-like logo on the left shoulder made me realize these things. It gave me great pride that people were saying "Oregon" out loud, even if they said "state" right after. People were talking about my home, about the west coast. For the first time I cheered for Oregon State. For the first time I envied them. When the game was over, even though they lost 3-2, they got to go back home. They got to go back to my home. They got to go back to Oregon.