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FIFA World Cup in North America

U.S. Soccer Growth, Arizona Opportunity,
and the Business of the Game

The 2026 FIFA World Cup places Canada, Mexico, and the United States before the world as an integrated North American region. Even amid political and trade disputes among the three countries, the tournament reveals a more enduring reality: North America continues to function as a shared economic and cultural space. In the United States, the timing coincides with notable growth in soccer. Sports & Fitness Industry Association data show that outdoor soccer participation reached 16.8 million Americans in 2025, up 15.8 percent year over year, while indoor soccer reached 6.6 million, up 10.5 percent. Major League Soccer figures also show that the league sustained major audience strength in 2025, ranking as the second-highest total attendance season in MLS history, with 11.2 million fans and an average of 21,988 per match. The World Cup is accelerating a U.S. growth trend already underway.

Executive Takeaway

- **North America is the platform:** The 2026 World Cup is presenting Canada, Mexico, and the United States as a shared soccer region at a moment when the sport is gaining measurable momentum in the U.S. market.
- **Arizona already has the audience:** Mexican, Mexican-American, Hispanic, youth, women's soccer, and international fan communities make Arizona a soccer-relevant market even without hosting World Cup matches.
- **The business opportunity is market organization:** Arizona's advantage will come from connecting soccer demand to hospitality, sponsorship, Mexican soccer, youth development, sports tourism, real estate, and cross-border partnerships.

In Memoriam: Raúl Borja Navarrete: The Arizona Institute for the Americas notes with sadness the passing of Raúl Borja Navarrete on June 21, 2026, in Mexico City. A distinguished figure in Mexican soccer, he served as president of the Mexican Football Federation in 1998 and as Director General and Vice President of Pumas UNAM. He was also remembered for his lifelong passion for Mexican sporting and cultural traditions, including fútbol and bullfighting. His passing has special meaning for the Institute. Raúl Borja Navarrete was the brother of Adolfo Borja, Mate Borja's father, and therefore Mate's uncle. He was also the uncle of Jesús Rodríguez Dávalos. Mate Borja and Jesús Rodríguez Dávalos are Founders and Executive Directors of the Arizona Institute for the Americas. We extend our condolences to the Borja family and honor his contribution to Mexican soccer.

Current Scenario

Recent developments highlight three clear dynamics.

1. Soccer is becoming a national growth market in the U.S.

The United States is becoming one of the sport's most important growth markets. Participation is rising, domestic leagues are expanding, and the fan base is younger, more diverse, and increasingly attractive to sponsors and media platforms.

2. The World Cup creates a short-term event and a long-term business test

The 2026 FIFA World Cup brings unmatched attention to soccer in North America. However, the strategic question is what happens next. The markets that benefit most will convert temporary attention into repeat attendance, youth participation, brand activation, community programming, and durable sports infrastructure.

3. Arizona is already part of the North American soccer moment

Phoenix is not a World Cup host city, but Arizona is not outside the tournament's business geography. The World Cup is unfolding as a North American event, and Arizona sits within the same soccer ecosystem shaped by U.S. market growth, Mexican fan culture, MLS–Liga MX integration, youth participation, hospitality, and live-event demand. The state's relevance is not based on hosting matches; it is based on the audiences, venues, clubs, and businesses already participating in the soccer economy.

Top Developments

1. Soccer is entering its strongest U.S. growth moment during the North American World Cup cycle

The 2026 FIFA World Cup arrives at a moment when soccer is no longer a marginal sport in the United States. Participation, fandom, media attention, and commercial investment are all rising at the same time. Recent participation data show that more than 23 million Americans play indoor or outdoor soccer. The U.S. has 62.5 million fans, one of the largest globally. In some recent measures of fan preference, soccer has even moved ahead of baseball as America's third-favorite sport. The World Cup is therefore not creating the soccer market from zero. It is accelerating an existing shift.

Why this matters: Soccer is gaining cultural relevance before the largest World Cup in history reaches North America. For Arizona businesses, the tournament is a market-entry window for sponsorship, hospitality, youth programming, fan events, media activation, and cross-border engagement.

Further reading: [Fox Sports](#), [Sports Illustrated](#), [Reuters](#), [Sports & Fitness Industry Association](#)

2. Phoenix Rising gives Arizona a professional platform for long-term soccer growth

Phoenix Rising FC is Arizona's highest-level professional soccer franchise and the 2023 USL Championship winner. The club gives Greater Phoenix an existing professional platform with match-day operations, sponsorship potential, youth development, academy programming and an established fan base. Its role during the World Cup cycle, including local watch-party activity, also shows how an existing club can organize soccer interest beyond isolated events.

Why this matters: Phoenix Rising is part of Arizona's soccer infrastructure. As U.S. soccer continues to grow and the United Soccer League moves toward a more ambitious national structure, Phoenix Rising gives Arizona a credible platform from which to expand the state's soccer strategy.

Further reading: [Phoenix Rising FC](#), [Phoenix Rising Youth](#), [United Soccer League](#), [Axios Phoenix](#)

3. MLS and Liga MX are deepening North American soccer integration

The growth of soccer in the United States is increasingly tied to cross-border integration with Mexico. Leagues Cup has become the clearest example. The 2026 edition will include all 18 Liga MX clubs and 18 qualified MLS clubs, with 54 Phase One matches built around MLS-Liga MX competition. This is more than a tournament. It is a commercial platform connecting clubs, media rights, sponsors, travel, merchandising, and fan bases across North America. The opportunity is not only to attract games, but to position Arizona as a practical platform for U.S.-Mexico soccer-related business, including sponsorship, fan engagement, media activation, hospitality, and cross-border programming.

Why this matters: Soccer is becoming one of the most visible forms of North American market integration. For Arizona, this matters because the state sits directly between U.S. sports markets and Mexican fan culture.

Further reading: [Leagues Cup](#), [Major League Soccer](#), [New York City FC](#), [Concacaf](#)

4. Arizona is already a proven venue for high-profile Mexican soccer

Arizona's soccer market is not hypothetical. The return of the América-Chivas Clásico Nacional to State Farm Stadium in Glendale, in October 2025, showed that Mexican soccer can generate major fan interest in the state. For Arizona, this type of event is especially important because it connects live sports, tourism, hospitality, cross-border identity, and corporate sponsorship in one platform.

Why this matters: Arizona does not need to wait for a World Cup match to prove soccer demand. Mexican soccer already brings international-level fan culture to the Valley.

Further reading: [ABC15 Arizona](#), [Club América](#), [Burn City Sports](#), [State Farm Stadium](#)

5. Phoenix is participating through the local soccer economy despite not being a host city

Phoenix will not host World Cup matches in 2026, but that does not remove Arizona from the soccer opportunity. Arizona Athletic Grounds in Mesa is serving as the Türkiye Men's National Team's official Training Base Camp, bringing team operations and fan activity into Arizona even without match hosting. At the same time, local World Cup activity is already visible across Greater Phoenix through watch parties, bars, restaurants, and soccer-centered community events. Phoenix Rising's World Cup watch-party network and Phoenix-area venues promoting match-day gatherings show how local businesses can use the tournament to create consumer activity across the Valley.

Why this matters: The right argument is not that Phoenix will receive host-city economic impact. The stronger argument is that Arizona can capture spillover and community-based value. The World Cup gives Arizona a short window to organize its soccer audience and convert temporary attention into recurring business activity.

Further reading: [Oxford Economics](#), [Phoenix Rising FC](#), [Phoenix Magazine](#), [Fox 10 Phoenix](#)

6. Arizona's soccer fan base is built around Hispanic, Mexican, youth, and international audiences

Arizona's soccer opportunity is rooted in its audience. The state is more than 30 percent Hispanic, and people of Mexican origin represent the dominant share of Arizona's Hispanic population. Phoenix itself is about 42 percent Hispanic. That demographic reality gives soccer a strong cultural foundation. At the same time, the broader U.S. soccer audience is younger, more diverse, and increasingly attractive to brands. The combination

of Mexican fan culture, youth participation, international communities, and family-based sports consumption gives Arizona a durable soccer market.

Why this matters: Arizona's soccer strategy should not target only generic sports fans. The strongest opportunity is segmented: Mexican and Mexican-American fans, Liga MX followers, U.S. national team fans, youth soccer families, women's soccer supporters, university students, international residents, and hospitality consumers. Businesses that understand these audiences can use soccer for sponsorship, tourism, community engagement, and long-term customer development.

Further reading: [U.S. Census Bureau](#), [Data USA](#), [ABC15 Arizona](#), [Sports & Fitness Industry Association](#)

HERE'S THE CHALLENGE

Turning World Cup attention into Arizona strategy

For Arizona, the opportunity is to use current soccer momentum to support the continued growth of the state's soccer economy.

The key question: Which organizations can convert the World Cup moment into durable value for Arizona's business, tourism, sports, and cross-border ecosystem?

Mistakes to avoid

- Treating the World Cup as only a one-month entertainment event
- Assuming Arizona cannot benefit because it is not a host city
- Ignoring Liga MX, Mexican soccer, and Mexico-facing fan communities
- Using generic sports marketing instead of segmented audience strategy
- Waiting for MLS instead of building the broader soccer ecosystem now

Where Arizona firms can realistically compete

- Hospitality, restaurants, bars, and fan experiences
- Year-round fan experiences around clubs, national teams, international matches, and major soccer events
- Youth soccer programs, academies, clinics, tournaments, and facility partnerships
- Sports tourism connected to regional tournaments, training camps, visiting teams, and preseason activity
- Sponsorship and brand activation for Hispanic, Mexican-American, youth, women's soccer, and international audiences
- Cross-border soccer programming with Mexico, Liga MX-linked events, universities, and Latin American partners

How the Arizona Institute for the Americas Can Help

Soccer growth creates opportunity. Business leaders need to understand which opportunities are temporary, which are structural, and where Arizona has a credible advantage. The Arizona Institute for the Americas supports decision-making by translating the soccer moment into regional strategy.

Service Area	How It Supports Business Decisions
Strategic intelligence briefs	Identify developments affecting Arizona sports, tourism, and hemispheric markets
Market opportunity assessments	Evaluate where soccer-related growth is actionable versus speculative
Sports-tourism analysis	Connect soccer to hospitality, events, visitor spending, and regional branding
Hispanic and hemispheric market strategy	Support engagement with audiences connected to Mexico and Latin America
Sponsorship and partner mapping	Identify credible partners across clubs, venues, brands, schools, and community groups
Arizona-Mexico engagement	Build cross-border programming tied to World Cup momentum and long-term soccer culture

Editor's Note

The 2026 World Cup gives North America an extraordinary soccer moment, while the United States is experiencing one of the strongest growth cycles in the sport's domestic history.

For Arizona, this matters because soccer can connect Phoenix with Mexico, Latin America, youth culture, immigrant communities, tourism, hospitality, women's sports, and regional development. Arizona is not a World Cup host city, but it is a soccer-relevant market with real assets.

About the Arizona Institute for the Americas

The Arizona Institute for the Americas is an independent strategic intelligence institute focused on hemispheric developments that shape Arizona's economic and geopolitical exposure. We support organizations in interpreting hemispheric developments and turning regional opportunities into concrete collaboration, investment initiatives, and sustained business projects.

Contact

Contact us to discuss how your organization can expand its regional strategy and strengthen its position in the Americas

Jesús Rodríguez Dávalos

Co-Founder & Executive Director – Strategy and Partnerships

jesus.rodriguez@arizonamericas.com

Miguel Sigala

Co-Founder & Executive Director – Research and Editorial Direction

miguel.sigala@arizonamericas.com

Rhett Price

Associate Director – Research and Strategy

rhett.price@arizonamericas.com



Website: www.arizonamericas.com

LinkedIn: *Arizona Institute for the Americas*

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