



COURTNEY MORONEY, 6, TRIES OUT A VUVUZELA.

## Nobody Offside at Coop de Ville, Island Focus of Football Fever

By IVY ASHE

For one month every four years, much of the world speaks the same language: Soccer (or football in its non-American dialects). It's a language of footwork, free kicks, and yes, flops, and on Saturday, June 26, native speakers and new learners alike have gathered at Coop de Ville in Oak Bluffs to watch what Sam Dean-Lee of Hartford, Conn., deems "the biggest game in U.S. history." The United States men's soccer team, fresh off a thrilling last-minute victory over the national Algerian squad's tough defense, is playing Ghana for a chance to reach the quarterfinals of the 19th World Cup.

A half an hour before the game actually starts, the small tented Dockside Harbor patio that is the Coop — the restaurant is just 600 square feet, "including the kitchen," says owner Petey Berndt — is already nearing capacity. Before long, space reaches standing-room-only levels beneath the tent, and Mr. Berndt, who is dressed for the occasion in a navy USA jersey and baseball hat signed by Brazilian soccer star Elano (a gift from a customer), begins turning patrons away. Most stick around outside anyway, leaning against the tall wraparound counters for a glimpse of the action inside.

And yet despite the crowd, one table situated at the back of the restaurant remains unoccupied for nearly all of the next two and a half hours. This table will also be unoccupied the next morning, and most of the afternoon after that as well. Not coincidentally, it is the only spot with no view of either of the two televisions mounted on the wall. Even Tony Somois, head chef at the Coop de Ville for the past 18 years, and his kitchen crew have a better view; they have a TV set up in the back to keep track of the games in between serving the masses.

After nearly two decades of prepar-

ing wings, burgers and stuffed quahaugs, Mr. Somois is well versed in keeping his customers fed and happy during mad rushes, but at times like these, food seems to be an afterthought. One hundred (give or take) anxious faces are angled upward, watching as U.S. striker Landon Donovan puts away a penalty kick to even the score 1-1. The rise and fall of the crowd's collective voice reaches new peaks as those who weren't already standing leap to their feet and roar, fists raised towards the sky in triumph. Mr. Dean-Lee begins high-fiving everybody in sight. In the true spirit of this South African-hosted Cup, someone grabs a vuvuzela horn from the bar and begins blasting off long celebratory drones.

"It was crazy," says Coop de Ville bartender Garry Metters the following morning. He is joined by just 15 other people in the restaurant — virtually nothing compared to yesterday's mob, but an oddity nonetheless considering that it is 10 a.m. on a Sunday and the Coop is not allowed to serve alcohol for another two hours. The United States, despite the heroics, lost its match in overtime ("We played great, though—what can you say?" said Mr. Berndt afterward), and today Mr. Metters has turned his attention to his home coun-

try's team: England, which is fighting for its own quarterfinals spot against a goal-happy German squad.

He is unsurprised by the devotees who have shown up for this early matchup — "If England is playing at 5:30 in the morning, you get up at 5:30 in the morning" — and notes that this incarnation of the World Cup is rousing more interest than usual among the American crowd.

"Of the five World Cups I've seen in the States, this has the biggest following I've ever seen," he says. "People are much more educated, people are much more into it... it definitely feels that people understand it."

He continues: "We've been a soccer bar for years. People laughed at us when we played soccer [on TV] on a Sunday... now we're reaping the benefits."

Indeed, with increased understanding and knowledge of soccer comes a desire to be around others who are equally knowledgeable — a definite factor, observes fellow England fan Darren Gilbert of Oak Bluffs in explaining why the Coop has become



HELEN DELIMA CELEBRATE BRAZIL'S SECOND GOAL WITH SOME STUFFED TOY SWINGING.

such a go-to destination for soccer viewing. Mr. Berndt and the rest of the staff are all self-described soccer fanatics — the Coop de Ville even has its own team in the Vineyard summer soccer league.

"We live by football," sums up staffer Brendan O'Neill, who is a season ticket holder for the local team in his off-season home of Cádiz, Spain (despite not actually being in Cádiz for part of said team's season). Across the restaurant from Mr. O'Neill, Mr. Gilbert is bemoaning the powerful German offense — England has lost, its spirit seemingly sucked away by an early disallowed goal. Mr. Metters, meanwhile, reluctantly pencils "Germany" into the winner's bracket of a giant poster on the side wall of the restaurant, and returns to his post behind the bar with a soft tongue-in-cheek chant of "Let's Go, Red Sox."

Perhaps the truest sign of the Coop de Ville's success as a soccer hub is the flood of Brazilian fans that gather in the restaurant for Monday's game against Chile. For these fans, el jogo bonito is a way of life, not simply a once-every-

four-years occurrence. Furthermore, the mere possibility of losing, or becoming dispirited, is laughable. Even the color of the omnipresent Brazilian jerseys, a brightly optimistic yellow, appears to radiate utmost confidence. Such confidence can come only with the security of past successes — Brazil has won five World Cups, more than any other country — and breeds high expectations. By halftime, Brazil is leading 2-0, yet Oak Bluffs resident Vani Pessoni, a medical interpreter at the hospital (she points to the pointer clipped to her belt loop, noting that she is on call but is "still trying to be here for all of the games") is not entirely satisfied.

"I'll take this score: I'm happy," she says, but adds that "they can do better." Ms. Pessoni is on the edge of her seat the entire match ("I'm a freak... I get way too into this"), leaping up and hugging her neighbors with each successive goal and burying her face in her hands in agony as opportunities are missed. She is by no means alone; the aura of security that bathes the mainly Portuguese-speaking crowd does little to diminish its enthusiasm and delight

of Coop viewing, also believes Argentina is doing well, but "wouldn't like to put my money on anybody right now."

Spectator Luis Lopes is certain that his team can reach the World Cup final, which will be played Sunday, July 11 at 2:30 p.m. The opponent, he believes, will be Argentina, South America's other powerhouse team, but he is somewhat unsure about Brazil's ability to hold up against the Argentinian squad. Mr. Gilbert, who has returned for another round



PETEY BERNDT'S COOP DE VILLE IS FOOTBALL CENTRAL.

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