



++Industry Brief

The Growth and Stagnation of US soccer

The global soccer economy has evolved into one of the world's most powerful and influential industries, generating hundreds of billions of dollars annually through broadcasting rights, sponsorships, player transfers, merchandise, tourism, and infrastructure investment. Whether called **fútbol** or **soccer**, the game has become a truly global commercial enterprise that transcends geography, language, and culture while producing immense economic value. From the English Premier League and European giants to emerging leagues in Africa, Asia, and North America, the business of soccer is increasingly driven by media exposure, fan engagement, strategic investment, and global brand development, all of which are market fundamentals. Understanding the economic environment of soccer is essential for investors, policymakers, and sports organizations seeking to capitalize on one of the fastest-growing industries in the world.

In the United States there has been the resounding question of the soccer economy's impact on player quality; producing underachieving US international teams, and the MLS being considered by some as an "Unc(le) league". In other words, the MLS might resemble a pre-retirement stop for aging international players and a developmental "B" league for US players, in contrast to the rest of the world. At least in the United States, this could be seen as growth to a level of stagnation. Is it the result of market saturation, or a high-risk economic plateau that's ripe for novel innovative adjustments?

One of the most talked about negative contributing factors to soccer in the US is the youth pay-to-play model. In the US, youth soccer's current industry landscape remains marketed by a "soccer-mom" culture that places the sport at the level of country club tennis and golf. Ultimately pricing out an extensive pool of potential home-grown talent, that eventually undermines the young athlete's performance demands from the pro level, which many say that we're witnessing. A type of pro-sports speculator might predict that US soccer risks losing its value over time due to this. Baseball and basketball are US-born sports with a deep US cultural history and can easily make pivots to foreign players and not lose value. With soccer, not so fast, remember the "Unc(le) league" label?

According to [Aspen Institute's Project Play survey](#) the primary cost for youth sports from '19 to '24 was travel and lodging. In an article published by The Athletic, it was noted that the current US model is designed to make adults money at the expense of youth development and inclusive participation. The mindset of short-term instant gratification over long term growth, is where a club's winning record becomes more important than youth development. Keeping up with the Jones's never works. This exploitative process at the youth level may be hurting US soccer's overall product.

For US soccer to continue to grow and develop in a way where its pro leagues and national teams evolve into a competitive powerhouse in the world, investors may need to consider innovative models that emulate a Walmart approach over a Sachs approach to the youth soccer economy. Also, consider reshaping the way soccer is marketed and televised in the United States.