

The 2019 Major League Soccer season bore witness to an awakening of angry and politicized supporters who found power to be had when people unite and get organized. After MLS banned political signage in its stadiums and explicitly named the Iron Front logo, supporter groups across the league staged various protests, ranging from defying the ban to a full-section mid-game walkout. This zine collects two articles written in the midst of the season, before the league eventually capitulated to the demands of SGs and dropped the ban.

The league continues to meet with various supporter groups in conversation about how to proceed with further regulation in regards to political signage and human rights issues, so what happens next remains to be seen. But one thing is for sure, and it's that supporter groups have established their collective power through organizing together and staying true to anti-fascist principles.

Want to get involved? Join your local supporter group, start your own, and start attending games! In the spirit of soccer for all, let anti-fascism run free from the streets to the terraces!

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FOOTBALL



AGAINST FASCISM

The Growing Anti-Fascist Tendency in U.S. Soccer

years following the killing of Mulugeta Seraw.

In 2015, a neo-nazi bonhead gang called the Hammerskins threatened to march on Seattle, and was met by a massive march co-organized in part by people who had taken part in organizing against the Hammerskins in Seattle in the 1990s. In 2018, Hammerskins attacked a black DJ at a bar in Lynnwood, WA (just outside of Seattle) while shouting racial slurs at him. As mentioned above, soccer has long been a reflection of the world outside of the stadium. Everything is connected. The tensions within U.S. society around race and fascism are continuing to stretch ever more thin and it should be of no surprise that the ripples are being felt within traditionally more mainstream spaces.

MLS has really shot themselves in the foot on this one, given that they've built their marketing brand off of alternative subcultures made up of people who celebrate the fact that their team is primarily made up of a diverse group of professional athletes from all over the world. The Seattle Sounders have no less than sixteen international players on their 2019 roster. It is not difficult to make the logical jump that attacks on immigrants and communities of color across the globe are also attacks on the people who make up the sports team that you scream your loyalty for multiple times a week throughout the year.

I think that if there is one thing that we can take from this as radical antifascists and anarchists is that the line between politics and life is continuing to dissolve for people who previously thought they could divorce the two. Radical antifascists must also realize that we don't own "antifa" or the Iron Front or any antifascist imagery for that matter, and we should absolutely celebrate it when we find unlikely companionship and affinity in bars and stadiums while watching sports. Every cultural space must be made hostile to the presence of fascist ideologies, but we have to be ready to accept that there are some spaces where people have already been working on creating antifascist spaces and that they might not need our help, just our presence and our voices.

MN: Would just add that some of the fascists that continually show at NYCFC matches, like this past weekend, were in fact at Unite the Right in Charlottesville. So for those that may say we're being paranoid: here is actual evidence of people that indirectly participated in a hate crime and murder of another human. And yet somehow, we are the problem? "All you fascists (and apparently MLS) bound to lose."



After the Championship: a Preface

Looking back on this past MLS season, so much has happened since the following articles were published that seem important to elaborate further on. As a Sounders supporter, watching my team go on to win the 2019 MLS cup, despite being the overlooked underdog of contenders according to hot-shit commentators, was the sweetest victory after a season of bitter fighting with the league. When we (the Emerald City Supporters) took up the Iron Front flag and collectively defied the MLS ban, we did so for ourselves as a diverse group of supporters from many backgrounds, but also for our team comprised of an international cast of incredibly talented and charming players. Seattle's victory against Portland in August to claim the Cascadian Cup (a competition between Portland, Seattle and Vancouver) in Portland's stadium was not just a victory for another trophy over bitter rivals, but a victory for supporters of both teams as well for we had overcome a bitter hatred fueled by sports. The silent protest during the first part of the game (elaborated upon further in the text) followed by literally countless Iron Front flags across the stadium gave me goosebumps of joy only rivaled when watching people defy police orders and get away with it. Multiple Sounders players had our backs that day, as well as the coach, and that seemed to set the tone for the rest of the season. We would continue to fight the league head-on, and the Sounders would have our backs when asked about it by media.

At the end of season party held by the Emerald City Supporters, Sounder goalkeeper Stefan Frei made an appearance, having been elected ECS Player of the Year. He gave a short speech, praising us for our support and also thanking us for our fight, stressing the importance of the struggle for the Iron Front and urging us to continue on. Frei, born in Switzerland, considered turning down the Sounders offer and the consequent move to the United States because he was upset at Trump's election and ensuing mass-xenophobia. This connection between supporter and player is part of why we fight.

Across the globe, some of the best soccer in the world is played in Europe. It is in these stadiums that racism rears its ugly head more so than what has yet to be seen in U.S. stadiums. Black players are subject to racist taunts consisting of attendees making

gorilla sounds whenever they possess the ball. Attendees have even been seen openly giving the Nazi salute during games. The international leagues refuse to come down on the teams or their supporters in any meaningful way. In one instance, the Italian team Lazio were fined for their supporters using racist chants during a game against Scotland's Celtic FC. Anticipating the racism from Lazio's infamous supporters, Celtic FC fans displayed a banner of Benito Mussolini hanging upside down that read "Follow Your Leader." The fine handed to Celtic FC exceeded the fine handed to Lazio.

One more event from this summer that deserves some elaboration is the attack on a Sounders supporter wearing an Iron Front shirt by alt-right nationalists. When Proud Boys and other alt-Right types attempted to stoke a fight with ECS, failed, and had to jump a lone Sounders supporter to get their kicks in, security and police refrained from interfering. It took other Sounders supporters getting involved for the jumping to stop, despite police watching it all unfold. The lesson is clear; we are all we really have. Solidarity is our sharpest of weapons and our most thick of shields.

*For our team, for each other,
See you in the terraces.*

degrees of activity within the antifascist space. There is plenty of room for solidarity work as long as the anarchist contingent is respectful to others who may not be as radical, but may agree with most and have far more football knowledge. Just finding that respectful equilibrium knowing that it's your space and everyone else's too.

When you consider some of the clubs that have already been mentioned here, it seems like the ultimate goal is to wrangle the clubs away from the profiteers and have community/supporter owned teams (hello Minneapolis City SC!) or at the very least, partially community owned teams like many in Europe, South America, and elsewhere where supporters are shareholders and play a direct role in the day-to-day operation of the club. The clubs HAVE to be directly responsible to supporters as such. The old people over profit point again. This is probably the nightmare that keeps Garber up at night and makes him piss the bed.

IGD: The growth of a clearly working class, anti-racist and antifascist space in organized sports is an amazing development. What does this say about things in the PNW and possibly across the US about where things are shifting in general?

PNW: First we have to acknowledge the NYCFC supporters who have been making noise about this for years before this battle came to the stadiums in the Pacific Northwest. There is a contingent of violent neo-nazi boneheads, known specifically for taking part in the violent Proud Boy brawl in NYC last year, who have been coming to NYCFC games flying flags associated with neo-nazi ideology and intimidating other NYCFC fans before and after games. Fascism has been steadily creeping in the U.S. whether it's in the streets, cultural spaces or even sports stadiums. NYCFC supporters have identified and outted the neo-nazis who frequent NYCFC games, and the team's front office have done absolutely nothing about it. So while the Pacific Northwest might seem like an anomaly at this point in antifascist cultural organizing, this tendency towards making soccer an antifascist zone is rapidly spreading and taking root across the country.

What also has to be acknowledged is a long history of violent white nationalist movements in the Pacific Northwest, and the knowledge of this history is not limited to well-read antifascists and textbook historians. In Portland, OR the MAX train murders committed by neo-nazi Jeremy Christian in 2018 was a reminder of the death of Mulugeta Seraw in 1988 by the hands of a gang of neo-nazi boneheads. One of the biggest influencers of the contemporary white nationalist movement, Robert Jay Matthews, died in a shoot-out with federal agents on Whidbey Island just outside of Seattle, WA in 1984. Massive antifascist demonstrations in Portland, OR over the last couple of years have often been made up of people who also took to the streets in the

IGD: How should anarchists and antifascists interact with development? Does this mean zine tables at soccer matches? Should people be trying to interact with football matches in their hometown? How do we intervene if at all in this space, or is this as far as things can go?

PNW: First, I think it's important to remember that these folks inside the supporter sections are antifascists. And some of them like GorillaFC have been openly identifying as antifa for nearly a decade. They 'do' antifascism very differently than those of us who have been cultivating a more confrontational or research oriented kind of antifascism, but they aren't latching onto something they don't understand. So far, the times when successful intervention has happened seem to come from people genuinely invested in the sport and the clubs themselves. ECS in particular is very organized, and personally motivated to keep this fight going-and they are most likely only hampered by their choice of tactic and not as much by their lack of a more radical contingent. There have been points in the last few months where the knowledge and skills associated with practical antifascist street experience, or as anarchists, have been invaluable. Whether it's helping people understand that a certain amount of security is needed, like blurring photos of faces, or covering your face when you are flying an Iron Front flag, helping people outmaneuver security or regular police outside the stadium, making sure people know the names and likenesses of local fascists that may show up to a match, all these skills have been invaluable in the Pacific Northwest in the last short while.

Becoming a part of a supporter group is a fairly small commitment, even less so if you are actually invested in the game. The ways in which you can and can't help push the conflict towards a victory will be more clear inside each supporter group. As opposed to a common anarchist practice of a loose collection of people converging around an ideology and defending a particular space that they might feel indifferent about physically when it comes to violent state repression, such as a park or occupied building, this struggle is made up of people coming together to defend a space they very much care about, and a group of people that many feel is more "family" than fellow supporter. People will smell an attempt to co-opt from a mile away.

Outside of the MLS there are a number of smaller leagues, including the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), who have groups of diehard supporters and less restrictive stadiums. For people who are anarchists or antifascists as well as lovers of the sport – these might be the best places to find like-minded people who lack the structure or support to pull off their own events and protests. But working with people and not for them is paramount in this instance.

MN: Well stated. I'm not sure of tabling at matches, but there definitely may be the time and space at bars at pre/post-match gathering spots. Not everyone is down to defend against fascist violence like many of us have had to do, but there are plenty of



You Will Hear Us: Anti-Fascism in the Terraces of Pacific Northwest Soccer Stadiums

published by Puget Sound Anarchists on July 30th 2019

The Pacific Northwest is home to some of soccer's world-renowned players and voracious fans. Even those who choose to disengage from the cult of sports have heard the name Megan Rapinoe and her ubiquitous "No I'm not going to the fucking White House" quote in the last few weeks. What is little understood outside of the in-crowd is that soccer, both as a culture and as a business, is supported by a loyal and organized supporter-base. This is very much the case across Europe and Latin America, whereas the USA is beginning to catch up as soccer fever continues to sweep across the country.

Major League Soccer, or MLS, is the organization that runs North American English-language men's soccer with teams in the United States and Canada. They maintain the league, and therefore set the rules that both players and fans must abide by. They are a mega-corporation racking in absurd amounts of money as the popularity of the sport grows. Each team in the league have their own supporter groups (SG) and even that is broken down into smaller sub groups. The Seattle Sounders are supported by the Emerald City Supporters (ECS) to name one of a handful, and the Portland Timbers are likewise supported by the Timbers Army (TA). The supporter groups maintain their own customs, traditions and rivalries. Typically, they reserve the seats right behind the goal of their home team and these sections spend the entire 90 minutes of the game screaming, chanting, waving giant flags and both encouraging their players while deriding their opponents. The Front office, or FO for a particular team acts as the intermediary between the supporter groups and the MLS.

For years a large Iron Front flag has hung at the soccer stadium Providence Park in Portland, OR, proudly displayed by the Timbers Army whenever their team plays at home. As is custom, the Timbers Army sits behind one of the goals and along with the normal flags and soccer paraphernalia, the widely understood symbol of anti-fascism has prominently flown. The three arrows have been visible even on national television broadcasts, until earlier this year. Since 2016 Portland has seen the invasion of far-right bigots into the downtown corridor time and time again, and it has been home to some of the most intense racist and far-right violence. The mayor and the city officials lambaste the far-right while allowing them entrance, safe passage and police protection. Inside of this growing assault on antifascism, the MLS decided to clamp down on the Iron Front flag being flown by the Timbers Army. The Front Office (FO) of the Timbers issued a formal warning to the Timbers Army for violating the MLS' Fan Code of Conduct for displaying a political flag. There had been much back and forth between the Timbers Army and Timbers Front Office, with the former providing details on the history of the Iron Front logo and the implications of anti-fascist imagery. Inevitably the Timbers Front Office declared the Iron Front a political organization, and thus three arrows pointed down and to the left as a political symbol, as such banning it from being used on flags in Providence Park not just during MLS games but also during National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) games. The Timbers Army published the letter from Timbers FO, warning Timbers Army members to "take heed."

During the 2017 season, this conflict between supporter group and league was only beginning to simmer. At a match in Vancouver, B.C. between the Vancouver Whitecaps and the Seattle Sounders, two ECS members were evicted from the terraces for displaying a two-pole (typically a small-to-moderately-sized painted-cloth sign held up by two poles) that read "Anti-Fascist, Anti-Racist, Always Seattle." Security in the stadium had been instructed by MLS officials to remove the two supporters due to MLS' Code of Conduct that prohibits political language. When approached by security, the ECS members refused to hand over their sign, and were kicked out of the stadium.

When news of this broke, Emerald City Supporters stood by their members and at the next Sounders home-game, the entire ECS section was flooded with two-poles that read "Anti-Fascist, Anti-Racist, Always Seattle." The Sounders FO would go on to release an official statement in support of the ECS and the language of the two-poles, in direct opposition to MLS policy, stating that support of human rights was not political language. For the time being, both FO and supporter club were united against MLS policy. The happy union would not last long though.

One of the best rivalries in the MLS is between not only the Seattle Sounders and the Portland Timbers, but also between their respective soccer clubs Emerald City Supporters and the Timbers Army. The stadiums do well to keep the rival clubs apart at games, and interactions before and after have led to more than one scuffle. On Sunday, July 21st, Seattle played host to Portland in only the latest iteration of the bitter rivalry. The Portland Timbers won the July 21st match 2-1, and a fight nearly broke

authoritarian forces know them by name, the numbers game is just too complicated for them now. It does seem like outside of the supporters section there is a show of support from many, certainly not all.

Any interesting point to add: MLS and the different club's front offices have essentially radicalized hundreds if not thousands of people by this idiotic stance. I've talked to many supporters who at one point didn't even come close to having radical revolutionary political backgrounds and had know clue what the symbol was; they are now full on down with the cause. So once again, keep stepping on those rakes MLS.

IGD: Where do you see things going with this ongoing tension?

PNW: This would have never been an issue if the MLS would have just ignored the Iron Front flags. There is a long history of their presence in MLS, and the conversations happening about antifascism on social media, in stadiums and bars across the country, just wouldn't be happening like they are. So ironically enough, as anti-fascists we have MLS to thank for giving us the strongest platform of all—repression. That being said, I've been so excited about the commitment to ideals that soccer supporters have exhibited this year. MLS has two options, to either capitulate to the demands of the supporter groups and set a precedent for creating a huge anti-fascist cultural space, or continue to repress anti-fascists and attempt to steel itself against a rising monster that has only begun to awaken, politicized American sports fans. It would be absolutely fantastic to see members of support groups start showing up to participate in the mass antifascist mobilizations and utilize their numbers and energy. At the time of this writing, the post-season is under a month away and things will start to change as teams drop out of the play-offs and supporters focus on getting their team to the MLS Cup, so things are changing and developing rapidly. Will these support groups take their energy for activism into the streets once the season is over, or will they wait until the next season starts to resume pushing back against MLS? We'll have to wait and see.

MN: Many of us tried some of the above connecting with different orgs or unions like the IWW, to minimal success. That was then however, and this is now. There has already been more inter-organizational and political coalition building so we think/hope the energy will continue far outside of the stadiums.

then forced their hands to act to where we had bigger men stepping on arm rails in the all-standing supporters section, sometimes over much smaller people, just to grab a sheet. If it weren't physically dangerous to those looking next to them and seeing a dude's crotch, it would have been a comical sight. There was also of course MLS clip board guy jotting down notes and taking photos to likely try to track on social media and pass up the hierarchical chain to the mafia Don di Garberi.

Supporters were peaceful and non-confrontational. As previously mentioned, a number left "voluntarily" rather than choosing to escalate the situation. Their politeness, however, should not be confused for weakness.

IGD: How widespread is support for antifascism and also displaying antifascist symbols within the broader population of football supporters? Is it limited to just the support groups or is it broader?

PNW: It really varies from stadium to stadium. One of the things that has kept me coming back to Sounders games over and over again is the ECS section specifically because of how prevalent antifascist imagery is on people's clothes, patches, even stickers on the drums that keep tempo for the chants and on the capo stands. While the ECS section is just a fraction of seating in the stadium, it's the most vocal section. It's hard to say how much the ECS protests are even on the radar of those who don't sit in the section, but the most recent walkout definitely sent ripples through the stadium. What's clear is that ECS is pushing the issue, and soccer fans are having first-time conversations about antifascism and the history of the Iron Front.

But not everything works in our favor. Some people tried to take over the capo stand after ECS walked out in response to several of their members getting escorted out of a match for flying the Iron Front flags, and they were shouted down by the few ECS members who stayed behind to make sure that didn't happen. These people were upset about the walk-out and genuinely felt that it had disrupted their game-day experience. The supporters who sit opposite of ECS, called the Sound Wave, are usually full of people who come to games from the wealthier suburbs East of Seattle, and they attempted to start the "Boom Boom Clap" known from baseball games. It was a very bad look, super distasteful. MLS is not MLB, and that these supporters had to resort to a stadium-initiated "chant" from another sport shows their lack of creativity and solidarity with other supporters.

MN: It may not be terribly broad, but as mentioned, for MNUFC there is precedent and a long history of the IF and AFA flags going back to NASL days. They were also seen in the transition to MLS at the U of M. MCU, which has always had very small numbers, took the brunt of the team/security ire and consequences a few years ago. It's been cool to see the numbers and solidarity rise to the point that even though the

out between the two teams on the pitch as the referee blew the final whistle. Yet more importantly, a large Iron Front flag was seen waving not only in the ECS section, but as well in the TA section on the opposite end of the stadium, blatantly rejecting the MLS' Code of Conduct that had banned such imagery. As one ECS member stated on twitter, some things are bigger than rivalries.

Within the following week, the Sounders FO would issue a formal warning to ECS for violating MLS Code of Conduct. The warning outlined potential outcomes for supporters flying the Iron Front flag, including but not limited to expulsion from games and 3-game suspensions. In the Sounders FO statement to ECS, they likened signs stating support of the Iron Front as the same as stating support for organizations like Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys, mirroring infamous alt-right talking points such as "Antifa are the real fascists!" ECS expressed their dismay at the statement, and urged their members to contact Sounders FO, season ticket holders to contact their ticket representatives, and for ECS members to get in touch with each other to brainstorm and share ideas for continuing to share a commitment to anti-racism and anti-fascism. "Just like the Iron Front symbol, the Emerald City Supporters stand for the oppressed and the persecuted."

The response was immediate as Twitter exploded with statements from season ticket holders declaring they had cancelled their automatic-renewals, ECS members declaring their total dismay and disappointment in MLS and Sounders FO.

Statements of solidarity from anti-fascist soccer clubs across the world were also shared. ECS members, Sounders fans and soccer fans abroad derided the notion that something as obvious as standing against racism, fascism and bigotry is inherently political; or that it could fall anywhere near the same designation as the talking points of white supremacists. They likened being an anti-fascist to the most basic notions of fighting for the human dignity of those around you. And they spoke to the rise in far-right violence with the understanding that Antifa and anti-fascism are a method of keeping each other and whole communities safe. They were unified in their message, that these are not "politics" but the very basic stance of decency that they choose to live by, and they will not be silenced.

Most unprecedented however are the statements of support and solidarity between Sounders and Timbers fans. At the end of the ECS statement, ECS states that they have partnered with TA leadership to fight the ban on the Iron Front flag. As the Timbers Army wrote on twitter, MLS has done the impossible and united Sounders and Timbers fans under one cause: anti-fascism and anti-racism in the terraces.

All of this is happening amidst the backdrop of a wave of violence performed by white nationalists, sometimes murderous, across the streets of the U.S. and Canada alike. To top it all off, MLS has recently signed a partnership with Chik-Fil-A, who has pushed forward anti-LGBTQI legislation, and MLS fans across the league are livid. While Trump echoes Ted Cruz's calls to label Antifa a terrorist organization, a truly

ridiculous claim, everyday people are gathering under the banner of their beloved soccer teams and using sport as a wagon to also carry messages of anti-fascism, anti-racism, futbol sin fronteras. Sports are not meaningless, and they aren't the most important past-time either. They are simply reflections of what is happening in the world, and soccer has performed this task the world over since its inception. One ECS member defines the role of supporters as "A counter culture once inspired to express themselves in the face of a societal norm, now arriving to the aid of a society in danger of attacks to basic human rights. This is happiness at stake, and what better to defy anything that challenges to take that away than a like-minded force of nature standing shoulder-to-shoulder beside you?"



resulted in the violent attack on a Sounders fan previously mentioned, ECS leadership were forced to take their planning offline so as to prevent further infiltration and harm to ECS members.

MN: We were inspired by the significance of the 33minute idea and also chose it. However, rather than silence before, we started singing a MN version to the tune of Bella Ciao and brought out all the IF force at that time. Conversations led to direct actions of IF flags and banners (including a "capture the flag" of huge rainbow IF passed around as security chased it) raised in direct defiance of the policy by folks conscience of the consequence of being kicked out. It should be noted many white folks with some level of privilege were willing to take the fire to protect their POC, LGBTQ, and other marginalized comrades. Others were more creative and worked the loopholes. Since shirts were ok, a few made huge multiple person snuggie-like IF shirts that took up 2 rows. Some wore IF pieces they deemed to be "capes," "bibs," and even "pashminas" when MNUFC employees and security antagonized them. Babies were even outfitted with arrows. In addition, Red Loons also called for a boycott of all in-stadium purchases. If it's just a franchise and money is all that matters, we thought we could start by hitting them there.

IGD: How is security enforcing these bans and how are people dealing with security?

PNW: It is yet to be seen how security will enforce these bans since they are fairly new in the Pacific Northwest at the time of this writing, but people have had a couple of different responses to dodging security. Sneaking banners and flags into stadiums is a decades-old practice of soccer fans, easily done by simply wrapping your flag or banner around your torso under your clothes as you walk into the stadium. Banners and flags are all inspected to make sure they meet stadium requirements, but it doesn't require a lot of brains to get around that. In multiple instances across the league, fans have played "hide-and-seek" with the Iron Front flags, displaying them until security takes notice, only to roll them up and pass them down the row or into another part of the section. This adds an element of fun to a sometimes otherwise stressful act of protest in a scene where your senses are already overloaded by the game and the thousands of fans cheering along beside you, as well as it gives everyone a chance at participating without retaliation. It has been really inspiring to see the commitment and creativity emerge in these acts of resistance.

MN: Direct antagonism from MNUFC staff (presumably on orders from the front office) and stadium security that is run by Wess Security, who look like former bouncers that are hammers looking for nails. There was a meeting between at least one of the SCs and Wess, so they had an idea of what was coming and seemed to accept it initially. Once MNUFC staff started barging into the supporters section, it may have

put up a banner in stadium thanking its supporters for rushing to kick out a Nazi group not far away. And I'm sure the league planned on getting owned by Kareem-Abdul Jabbar in The Guardian.

It's also been atrocious in MN. From the initial bootlicking language, to the multiple people that were either kicked out or "voluntarily left," some double speak meaning they were polite and didn't fight security or the team staff, but still meaning they had no agency, it has been the continued digging of a tragic self-inflicted hole. The PR team then claimed only 1 person had been kicked out and went after media reporting otherwise, when there were clearly at least 10 people at the Black Hart bar across the street from the stadium singing Wonderwall in exile. Gaslighting.

IGD: How was the recent protest where fans waited 33 minutes before making noise organized? How did different clubs come together to pull this off?

PNW: As a member of ECS who does not hold any position of leadership, I'm not actually at liberty to speak on how this protest was organized, but I can talk about my experiences as a participant. When ECS travels to support the Sounders at away-games that are within driving distance, they'll rent out a couple of charter busses to drive everyone down to the stadium. The silent protest was announced to ECS members on the bus on our way to Portland, but Timbers Army members had already been talking about it that morning on twitter so it wasn't too much of a surprise. The plan was that both the Timbers Army and Emerald City Supporters would remain silent for the first 33 minutes of the game, to symbolize the year when Adolf Hitler banned the Iron Front in Germany, 1933. After the 33rd minute, Iron Front flags were going to be let loose throughout both of the sections. Solidarity and discipline were the high orders of the day.

The most striking element of it though was that it was announced that if anyone in either section was removed for flying an Iron Front flag, that both Emerald City Supporters and Timbers Army members would walk out in solidarity with each other. There had also been communication with Sounders players Stefan Frei and Cristian Roldan, who supported our cause. Despite the bitter rivalry between Seattle and Portland which has sometimes resulted in scuffles between fans as well as brutal plays on the pitch, it was clear to members of both teams and supporter groups that solidarity is our strongest weapon in showing the league that we are not to be messed with.

It is important to note that ECS used to be able to openly discuss and plan actions like this on their members-only messageboard, allowing for more transparency and a stronger sense of consensus to take place within the group. When Jason Rantz publicly wrote about ECS plans to march to the stadium wearing Iron Front shirts, which



MNUFC supporters defy the ban

Three Arrows Down: How Soccer Supporters Built An Antifascist Space Within the Sport

published by It's Going Down on September 26th, 2019

While clashes between antifascists and the far-Right have captured national attention, at the same time a sizeable antifascist and anti-racist current has been growing within soccer stadiums and through Supporters' Clubs across the US. This summer however, soccer fans in the US flying antifascist symbols, banners, and flags were met with a ban by the MLS (Major League Soccer) on "political" symbols. Despite the ban, different groups of Supporters' Clubs organized and came together to resist the ban, continuing to fly antifascist flags and symbols and even organizing demonstrations and protests in the stadiums.

In the week following this interview being completed, MLS officials announced they would be meeting with Emerald City Supporters, Gorilla FC, Timbers Army and the Independent Supporters Council to discuss the Fan Code of Conduct, specifically in regards to the league's ban on political signage and the ban on the Iron Front symbol.

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This is as a huge victory for countless supporters across the league who risked suspensions and fines for fighting the ban. This serves as another reminder that consistent anti-fascist working-class solidarity rooted in our cultural spaces can have huge impacts. Supporters established cultural anti-fascist zones, and when facing pressure from both corporate overhead as well as street-thugs, they banded together across rivalries to prove the sanctity of their spaces and keep them as such. Anti-fascists and anti-racists of many varieties would do well to learn from this struggle.

What follows is an interview conducted with anarchists involved in antifascist currents with soccer fandom and supporters clubs in Seattle, WA and Minneapolis, MN.

IGD: There’s long been a trope within the US that soccer as a major sport has “never caught on.” Based on your understanding, how big currently is MLS (Major League Soccer) and has its popularity grown in recent years?

PNW: What’s interesting about the popularity of American soccer vs. other more conventional American sports is that MLS teams see a huge amount of popularity when the stadium they play in is located in an urban center. When the Seattle Sounders joined the MLS in 2009, they were the one of the first American MLS teams to have a stadium in the core of the city they represented, and in their first couple of seasons shattered MLS attendance records. This sent a message to the dollar-signs-for-eyes heads of MLS, and it was shown that Seattle had refined the model of how to bring in new teams to the MLS: new fans meant new money. When the Portland Timbers joined



Timbers & Sounders players express solidarity with each other and the supporters

an example of how the officials are out of touch with the supporters they so desperately need and use for marketing. Joe Roth, one of the majority owners of the Sounders up until summer of 2019, made off-color comments at a Season Ticket Holders meeting in 2015, calling Guatemala and Nicaragua “cocaine distributors.” These are not things that diehard supporters who pay hundreds of dollars every year to watch their team can easily forget.

The story in Portland has largely been the same, clear violations of the ban throughout the entire Timbers Army section, up until halfway through September when three Timbers Army members received 3-game suspensions each for violating the ban. Perhaps most notably of these three was Abram Goldman-Armstrong, the owner of Cider Riot!, a cidery in Portland. In 2011 when the Portland Timbers had been elected to join the MLS league, the Timbers used a picture of Abram Goldman-Armstrong wearing a Timbers shirt, spiked mohawk, and holding two axes over his shoulders in a clear appeal to Portland’s punk subcultures in hopes of attracting a loyal following. The MLS has built their brand on alternative subcultures across the United States, and now it wishes to squash any attempts at being held accountable to the shoulders it stands on. These inconsistencies have sewn mistrust between team front offices and their supporters, emboldening resistance all the more.

MN: The wake up call and watching the team FO’s continually own-goal themselves in the PR nightmares they now find themselves is pretty fun to watch. The same week fans are being kicked out for antifascism around MLS cities in the US, Borussia Dortmund

It's unclear if the person assaulted that day was an ECS member or not, regardless, they were attacked for the Iron Front shirt they were wearing, so we can deem it an ideological attack. For anyone who saw the video, it's very clear that he wants nothing to do with his attackers who get in his face. It's after the march has ended, and they find this guy basically alone—a point that many in ECS were quick to point out. The attack itself galvanized the supporters into understanding that their stance did in fact have material enemies, and that the MLS had sided with those enemies. In all, the attack at the stadium was something that ECS and other supporters thought would eventually happen, and while many people call themselves antifascist this was their first interaction with far-right violence in a space they consider their own and previously felt safe in. It is clear that it helped swell the numbers of people supporting the stance that ECS has taken to continue to fly the Iron Front flag.

MN: Solidarity again. We've been lucky for now, and want the space we've created to continue to be unwelcoming to hate filled people and protect our comrades from marginalized communities that again, it bares repeating: built the entire MNUFC supporter culture. The FO picked a fight they cannot win.

IGD: How have the teams themselves responded to the controversy?

PNW: Rather poorly, even from an objective perspective. One of the first statements that the Sounders front office released in regards to the Iron Front ban included a sentence that equated “antifa” with Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys, trying to stress that they would also ban members of those organizations from flying banners or signs with their image. Sounders officials won no praise for this statement as ECS members were quick to point out the fallacy in equating both sides, and surprisingly enough released an apology and retracted their statement.

The players however have responded differently. In August 2019 Portland hosted Seattle for the MLS “Rivalry Week,” an attempt to market regional rivalries that are sometimes fabricated by the MLS. Minutes before the match started, players from both the Timbers and the Sounders teams took a group photo around two plaques that read “Anti-Fascist, Anti-Racist” and at half-time multiple players swapped jerseys with players from the other team in a clear show of solidarity with the organized conduct of the rival fans. Timbers defender Zarek Valentin was seen wearing an Iron Front shirt as he walked into the stadium, and Sounders goalie Stefan Frei even gave a thumbs-up to the Portland fans! There were no official warnings, bans or anything like that from the officials in the stadium, despite many clear violations.

At the most recent Sounders home-match (at the time of this writing), multiple members of ECS were kicked out of the stadium for flying Iron Front flags, resulting in a section-wide (hundreds of people) walk-out in solidarity during half-time. This is

the MLS in 2011, as well as Atlanta United in 2017, they were given new stadiums in their urban cores, and the environment at those games is intoxicating to say the least. Much of this is covered in Matt Pentz's book, *The Sound And The Glory*.

This American urban-centric sports fanaticism contradicts much of corporatized sports leagues across the country. While NFL, MLB and NBA have fans and followers in every corner of the US, MLS has failed to reach much fanfare in rural and even suburban residential areas. This could be due to the large cultural rifts in American society between urban population centers and rural residential areas.

MN: When some of us hear “never caught on” we may immediately add a qualifier like with “old white people” or “conservative white people.” The conservative Right in the US actually called it a “Socialist European sport” (American Enterprise), so there is this deep history of resistance to soccer from the right-wing already embedded in US mainstream political discourse. Add to that the fact that the majority of kids, youth (access is another tragic story), and adults that play it here are immigrants, refugees, or generally people of color, and you have the brewing of a conservative nightmare. It was tough for me as a kid where all my family knew was the sport and it was all I wanted to play and talk about. Fortunately we were able to connect with other recent immigrant families and carve out space.

In terms of growth, it's grown exponentially. My family attended a match the inaugural MLS season after the US hosted the World Cup in Kansas City (then the Wiz) invite 1995 and a few thousand people at the NFL football stadium seemed like a big deal. Empty seats all around us. Very different than matches we attended in South America where you were lucky to find a seat, let alone keep it in the inevitable beautiful chaos. The growth can be well exemplified by pro-soccer in MN. There were numerous iterations of pro-soccer in MN pre-MNUFC stretching back to the 70s MN Kicks days. They would sell out 40k at Metropolitan Stadium where the Vikings also played where the Mall of America now resides (including beating the infamous NY Cosmos with Pelé playing). From there the history is a bit up and down and I first got plugged in during the mid 2000s NASL days when they were the MN Thunder under the legendary Buzz Lagos (father of MNUFC Sporting director and former player Manny Lagos). Back then at “The Jimmy” (St. Paul Central High James Griffen Stadium), we were thrilled when a few hundred people showed. So to see it evolve from that to the National Sport Center (NSC) team versions in Blaine packing into the thousands up to and after the 2011 NASL championship win, the re-brand to MNUFC after nearly losing the team to bankruptcy, the move to MLS and the record breaking jump to 50k at the U of M's TCF Bank Stadium, to a 20k soccer specific stadium in the middle of St. Paul has been an incredible journey.

Between The Jimmy and Blaine days, supporters built a culture of diversity, respect, and inclusivity with POC communities and particularly around folks that are a part of the LBGTQ community. Compared to other sports fans in the TC, we were seen as weirdos and we wanted to keep it that way and build a safe space for one and all. With

those positives, as the son of a recent immigrant and a POC, anyone with functioning eyes can see that the majority of faces in the stands are about as white as a "Snow Opener" match in March. There is a lot of room for improvement in outreach to marginalized communities across the TC, many of whom are soccer obsessed, but as with the rest of the country: Liga MX (or fill in the blank home country or European league) > MLS.

IGD: How connected is football culture in other countries to the US? Is there a big influence or crossover?

PNW: Many MLS fans also follow leagues and teams from across the world, and being a part of the supporter culture is just as, if not more, important as following the team itself. Part of this is scheduling, as the MLS season ends just after the English Premier League season has begun. Also, simply put, MLS is not regarded as anywhere near the best soccer league in the world, so diehard fans get their kick of strategy and play by studying teams and players all over the world.

MLS teams will also host international teams from around the world to play a "friendly," a match that has no impact on either of the teams' standings in their respected leagues. This is supposed to encourage broader international following for each team and is in reality a large marketing ploy, but regardless, the chance to see a team play from abroad who you'd otherwise never get to see can be quite exciting.

Further, these international friendlies can be great opportunities for supporters to bridge international borders that otherwise hamper efforts to connect with each other. Teams from Europe generally have much bigger and stronger supporter clubs than US teams, and when they have politicized clubs the impact is felt. For example, the Seattle Sounders international friendly earlier this year was with Borussia Dortmund from the Bundesliga, Germany's top soccer league. Later in the year, Borussia Dortmund received international recognition for winning their league's competition for the best anti-racist supporter section and banners. ECS members were quick to point out that an entire league had a competition around anti-racism, while MLS has been busy wringing its hands and banning supporters for various politicized banners.

One more example is the St. Pauli FC team and their international league of followers. St. Pauli gained notoriety for their punk aesthetic and anti-racist politics, and continue to be a loved soccer club the world over. They played a spate of games earlier this summer in US, including a game against the minor league team the NY Cosmos, whose supporter group Brigada 71 are loud anti-racists with "FUCK ICE" banners. These games give an opportunity for different supporter groups to come together and strengthen a culture of anti-racist and anti-fascist ideas within the realm of soccer.

while walking to the game by himself well after ECS had marched into the stadium. The Proud Boys yelled at him "Why don't you like Donald Trump?!" before punching him and throwing him to the ground. This violent attack was clearly an attack on antifascism but also a message to ECS, and supporters across the MLS were given further validation for their fight against fascist policies in the stadiums. ECS and TA organized an action with each other at the next Sounders-Timbers game in Portland in defiance of the ban, which we can discuss later. Many other supporter groups across the league responded in similar ways, such as blatantly violating the ban with Iron Front flags and other banners. Some of the other most notable examples were LAFC's supporter groups (too many to name) flying an Iron Front flag in their stadium as well as anti-ICE banners. Atlanta United supporters brought in multiple political banners and were violently assaulted by stadium security as they were ejected from the game. All of these acts breathed new life into the fight against the ban.

MN: We saw what was happening in Portland and for a brief moment believed our club would be the exception of profit over its people, considering all WE had built. Considering the memories we have of what it once was pre-MLS. A history that was celebrated when Allianz Field was inaugurated, that many in the FO would surely love nothing more to revise and erase from collective memory as they put the dollar first in every decision since the MLS move (not to mention coaching decisions with the 2 remaining old-school NASL players; hearts to Ibarra and Kallman). It was disappointing, disheartening, and dangerous when the decision came down from the MNUFC FO. Resistance immediately started between the SCs, and as mentioned earlier, WW stepped up with a powerful statement in a big way. That gave SC's the license to move forward with actions.

IGD: What role did the attack by Proud Boys and militia members on a Sounders supporter wearing the antifascist logo have on the broader scene of football supporters?

PNW: There was already a growing sentiment among Sounders fans and ECS in particular that the ban itself was going to bring about some kind of rightwing backlash. People were explicitly concerned that the MLS condemning antifascism would embolden the far right to show up to games, or to become more active in the games they might already attend. The events that preceeded the March to the Match that day are important also. A local Alt-Lite figure in the PNW, Jason Rantz, revealed ECS' intention to have an "Iron Front" march during the march to the match. He supposedly gleaned this from the aforementioned private ECS message board, which ECS itself was none too happy about. Rantz published a typical article deriding "antifa" taking over soccer and making it something it's not, announcing the plans ECS had made. This is presumably where the local crew of Alt-Right thugs heard that Century Link was the place to be that day.

IGD: Have the mass antifascist mobilizations against Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys since 2017 played a role in the growing antifascist current within PWN football culture? We'll talk about the Proud Boys attack on Sounders supporters in a bit, but wanted to get your take on the over all picture.

PNW: Soccer supporters in the Pacific Northwest are very much aware of the danger present from everyday fascism in the region and the necessity to oppose it, in large part thanks to the mass mobilizations against Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys in recent years. That isn't to say though that soccer supporters are a monolithic identity, because there are even members of ECS who don't care about the Iron Front ban or the silent protest during games. But the history of white supremacist violence in Portland very much weighs heavy on supporters' hearts and minds. The ECS is a very diverse group of devout supporters, and it shows in their opposition to the creeping fascism within soccer. The mass antifascist mobilizations against Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys since 2017 have had an impact on society at large in the Pacific Northwest, as it has become incredibly common to overhear people discussing or informing each other about which far-right provocateurs are out in the street on any given day. Soccer has long been a reflection of the world outside of the stadiums. As much as the MLS may wish to conform soccer to other American leagues like the NBA, MLB and NFL where the only form of political expression allowed is extreme patriotism via military jets and the national anthem (to name a few gestures), the corporate heads have one hell of a behemoth to tangle with when it comes to the diehard supporters of soccer teams across the country.

MN: All solidarity to the SGs in Cascadia. We've been lucky that nothing has happened outside of bullshit on social media, but we know certain people are emboldened by these policies and some of us that were at the 4th St. Precinct Occupation (of Jamar Clark's murder by police) remember armed fascists rolling up looking to kill. It may never happen around MNUFC, or something could go down next home match due to these policies.

IGD: How did the clubs and people respond to the initial ban on the Iron Front?

PNW: ECS responded by marching into their next home-game with screen-printed Iron Front shirts, which wasn't in violation of the ban that was only limited to signs and banners, yet it sent a strong message of unity all the same. What is important to note though is that it was on this day a lone Sounders supporter wearing one of these Iron Front shirts was jumped by a crew of Proud Boys and other alt-right provocateurs

MN: The "crossover" idea is interesting and a fairly new development though the CONMEBOL (South American) lens. 10 years ago, the path for talented players from S.A. was always to play at the top in-country league and hope to get scouted by a huge first division European team where they would then make their mark, generally lay waste to their European competitors, and make shit tons of money with which they have no idea what to do (and sometimes make poor life and career-killing decisions). Not many CONMEBOL national leagues took the MLS seriously, and most S.A. domestic leagues in terms of talent, are equivalent or far better than the MLS. However, with the growth of MLS in terms of quality and perhaps more importantly, financial compensation for say an 18 year old from Uruguay, it is attracting far more attention from CONMEBOL eyes. Who wouldn't want to be single and pretty damn wealthy and partying in LA, NYC, or, you know...St. Paul? In addition, with the success in particular of Atlanta United, which looked like a CONMEBOL team in MLS clothing, and the transfer of its stars like Almiron to the EPL, MLS has flipped the script in the eyes of some scouts as a pipeline for talent that may not be ready for the "direct-to-Europe" transition.

IGD: How do the support groups for the various football teams operate and how are they organized? We're speaking primarily about the Pacific Northwest, in particular, how large are these support groups? In general, what do they do?

PNW: ECS, or the Emerald City Supporters, is a supporter group for the Seattle Sounders. They are essentially a private organization with open doors, anyone can pay a fee online or at a home-game for membership and get access to a members-only online messageboard, exclusive merchandise, as well as tickets to games at a lower price. Support groups facilitate the tifo, short for the Italian word "tifo" which refers to the phenomenon of supporting a team. This includes chanting, scarves, confetti, flares, smoke, banners and flags in the supporters' section of the stadium, typically right behind one of the goals. Most visibly, support groups organize pre-match displays that are huge banners put on display that sometimes literally cover the entire height of the stands to display painted images and messages of support for their team. Support groups also coordinate traveling to away games, which can involve multiple busses full of supporters for games only a couple hours away, or even crews of supporters flying out as far as across the country together. ECS membership is currently over 3700 people.

Another activity that ECS specifically does is leading the pre-game March To The Match, a very fun and rowdy march from a park a couple of blocks away from the stadium lead by ECS chant-leaders. This march is about amping up the supporters and getting everyone ready to cheer on the team for the full 90 minutes of the game, and is generally done so with lots of chanting and singing and sometimes even flares! This



ECS march to the match behind a banner reading “A United Front”

march is usually lead by a large ECS banner, but in recent weeks has been lead by a large banner that reads “A United Front” to symbolize the cross-league movement to fight fascism.

MN: Beyond this, the SGs and especially their subgroups serve as a semi-community with many of the members staying on for years and years. They provide a type of subculture that extends far beyond the games themselves. They create a space inside the stadium and out for people to find one another and create friendships. This has become the most apparent as individuals, either membership or leadership, who have been targeted by the MLS policy, are supported by groups like ECS and the smaller sub-groups.

Not much to add, pretty similar, but in MN the structure is a bit different. We have the Wonderwall (WW) organization which is an umbrella organization that deals with the financials, front office (FO), and other logistical things for all of the affiliated SGs which are: Dark Clouds (DC, since Thunder days, thus the name), Red Loons, True North Elite (TNE), and Dark Glitterati. These also have their own boards and organizational structures and act independently with regular meetings with WW. They are also two charity groups: Silver Lining and Keepers of the North (tied to DCs and TNE respectively, Red Loons and others also participate) that regularly volunteer at charities and NGO’s throughout the TC community. There are also independent SG’s outside of Wonderwall such as Mill City Ultras and Fist of the North Star. In terms of size, DC is the largest as it’s been around since back in the day, but anyone can join any SG.

IGD: How and when did the controversy over banning political flags and banner and the “Iron Front” logo start?

PNW: The Timbers Army (TA), the supporter group for the Portland Timbers, had been flying the Iron Front flag at home games for years. In fact, it goes back to pre-MLS NASL in the early 2000s where you could commonly see a flag or two being flown proudly. It was great, you could see it hanging behind the goal on national television broadcasts of the game. In 2019, MLS issued an update to the Fan Code of Conduct, which contained new language prohibiting political signs in the stadiums. Immediately supporters and clubs alike rang alarms, noting that the vague language would eventually lead to clamping down on any kind of dissent within supporter culture.

During a Timbers vs Sounders game mid-2019 season, one of the most contentious rivalries in the league, Iron Front flags were seen from both the ECS and the TA sections, a clear defiance of the ban as well as a show of solidarity with each other despite the rivalry. MLS issued formal warnings to both supporter groups, and that’s when the rest of the league, and really the minor leagues and the women’s league as well, took notice and started taking part in defying the ban. Some of the controversy lies in the language of the policy that bans the Iron Front logo, which MLS insists is a political sign that’s been “co-opted by the violent political organization antifa.” Anti-fascist soccer fans across the country have been quick to counter that being anti-fascist and anti-racist is not a political stance, but rather advocacy for basic human rights.

MN: The hypocrisy around this is so blinding it’s hard to know where to begin. Suits in an ivory tower completely separated from the supporters that are the life-blood of these clubs and are likely tied to both corporate sponsors and either of the two capitalist political parties probably had words with their pal Donny Garbage to let them know their money doesn’t fit with liberty, solidarity, and equality for all. Very fine people. On both sides. That they thought they could get away with such a decision with no consequences is telling of the privilege and disconnection of these individuals; they really thought we’re the same as some NFL or MLB nationalistic and militaristic orgasm of “stick to sports” fans.

There is a photo floating around Twitter and social media of an earlier NASL version of the loon mascot we call Fotfot, aka PK, back at the NSC in Blaine holding the side of an Iron Front flag sometime between 2014–2016. To be clear: the fucking mascot is holding the IF flag. For MNUFC to decide to get in line and enforce the MLS policy, when this easily could have been ignored by having them embrace their mascot of old, they decided to dig a never ending hole of stupidity with the announcement in early September 2019 after a friendly where a couple supporters were told they couldn’t wear IF shirts on the pitch. Like the league, it was vague, arbitrary, and unclear and led to a meeting with Wonderwall, who it should be said, put out a very strong statement drawing a line in the sand and denouncing the team’s dangerous and hypocritical decision.