

Blind find game in Mexico soccer league

June 17 2014, by Rebecca Blackwell



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, Italia's goalkeeper Miguel Angel Canela stops a scoring attempt by Marco Antonio Camarillo of Leones Negros, during the league final in Mexico City. Following the match, Canela was recognized with the 2014 trophy for best goalie. Camarillo, 53, was pleased with his performance as well, after scoring one goal in the final. His wife came out to watch him play. "She is afraid of me being hit, or falling, but she shares my love of football," says Camarillo. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

As nations from around the globe battle in the World Cup, a more unusual soccer championship has just been decided on a hard court in

Mexico's capital.

For 18 years, the men of the Ignacio Trigueros Soccer League for the Blind and Visually Impaired have spent Sundays traveling long distances from their homes to central Mexico City to play the country's most popular sport.

Each six-man team is allowed one sighted player or two visually impaired players who can use their eyes on the court. All other players wear blindfolds to make sure they are evenly matched.

Without their eyes to guide them, they rely on the sound of a special ball ricocheting off the boards that surround the court or is rolling at their feet. Risking collisions and falls, the players pass, shoot, defend and occasionally even slide tackle.

When the league started, players used a soda can filled with pebbles to make noise, said Miguel Angel Canela, who plays goalkeeper for the Italia team. Then they began putting ball bearings into store-bought soccer balls.

Today, Canela, a 51-year-old industrial mechanic who lost his sight in a work-related accident at age 23, makes the special balls from scratch using a mold in his home workshop.



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, Cruz Azul and Paris teams compete for third place during the 2014 finals of the Ignacio Trigueros Soccer League for the Blind and Visually Impaired, in Mexico City. The league plays a version of indoor soccer, with six people a side playing on a hard outdoor court surrounded by boards. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Jose Luis Molina, 44, a lifelong athlete who lost his sight at age 13, said positions on the pitch are fluid: "All of us like to be out front because we want to score."

Molina said his sense of orientation, as well as his ability to read his environment by sound, are well-developed after years of commuting into the capital. During the week, he sings and plays guitar as part of "Los Hunos," a respected all-blind street band that draws a crowd even on rainy days as it plays outside a central subway station.

The six-team league is a rare outlet for the blind and [visually impaired](#)

community, league president Javier Mosqueda Lomeli said. "For us, this is important because we have almost no recreational spaces. Here, we play soccer, the family comes. It's a way to let off steam after working all week."

Marco Antonio Camarillo, 53, who plays for Leones Negros, knew his wife was watching from the stands during Sunday's final.

"She is afraid of me being hit, or falling, but she shares my love of football," he said. Camarillo had several collisions during the game, but came away pleased that he was able to score a goal.



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, a player from the Leones Negros team gets help covering up his eyes as he prepares to sub in to the tournament final match against Italia, in Mexico City. Each team is permitted one sighted or two visually impaired players on the court at a time. The remainder of the players, most of whom are blind, cover their eyes with blindfolds to ensure the teams are evenly matched.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Canela said he thrives on the adrenaline.

"The goalie gets the hardest time, but I like playing rough," he said. "It hurts, it hurts. But then it goes away."

Italia eked out a 6-5 victory in the final. As the match ended, Leones Negros' Camarillo was engulfed in a group hug from his rivals on the winning team.

"On the court, as in the farthest corners of the Earth, there is rivalry, there are fights, there are spats," Molina said. "But socially, it's harmonious."



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, players leave the court after a downpour interrupted a mixed-team match following the league final, in Mexico City. "For us, this is important because we have almost no recreational spaces," says says

league president Javier Mosqueda Lomelli. "Here, we play soccer, the family comes. It's a way to let off steam after working all week." (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, supporters cheer and bang on the boards after a goal was scored by Leones Negros, in their league final match against Italia, in Mexico City. The league games every Sunday are a family event, with friends and relatives coming out to support the players and cheering raucously after every goal. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, a player scores off a penalty, in a mixed-team match following the league final, in Mexico City. Since players follow the movement of the ball by its sound, airborne shots are particularly hard for goalkeepers to anticipate. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, Italia's goalkeeper Miguel Angel Canela, 51, launches the ball back into play after a scoring attempt by Leones Negros during the league final in Mexico City. All the players risk collisions and falls, but goalkeepers endure the most. Canela, 51, says he loves the adreneline. "I like playing rough. It hurts, it hurts, but then it goes away." (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



In this Sunday, June 8, 2014 photo, Italia's Jose Luis Molina, left, 44, controls the ball during the final match against Leones Negros in Mexico City. Molina, a lifelong sportsman who lost his sight completely at age 13, says he feels comfortable playing any position. "If you form a team, you'll invite me, because I may be able to make you win." Molina's wife of 24 years, Maria Luisa Vicente says he is also a great example for their children, two of whom are visually impaired. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

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