

Soccer fans thank Father Sun Myung Moon and Mother Hak Ja Han Moon for being generous supporters

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The great Brazilian soccer player Pelé once called it "the beautiful game." Rev. Sun Myung Moon called the sport the "game of peace," for soccer, motivated in the right way, has the power to bring harmony in a troubled world.

Those of us who follow the game of soccer would like to thank Father Moon and Mother Moon for being true benefactors and generous supporters of the world's most popular game. They invested time, effort and substantial funds to lead soccer in a new direction as a catalyst for peace and unification. Although Father Moon was a very busy man, working on numerous projects to bring world peace, he took time out to invest in soccer and the world is a better place for that.

While the FIFA World Cup is the largest single-sport event in the world, its motivation and purpose is ultimately a commercial venture focusing on individual national interests. Father Moon created soccer tournaments that promote peace and encourages soccer clubs, and those involved in the game, to go beyond their individual interests and help serve others in the wider community. His aim was to make the sport a vehicle for bringing peace and inspiring young people to live for the greater good. In this sense, Father and Mother Moon are forerunners in championing soccer's potential for bringing about world unity beyond individual club and national interests.

After the success of the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea, where the South Koreans stunned the world by reaching the semifinals, Father Moon established the Peace Cup, an eight-team club soccer tournament held in Korea every two years. He consulted Pelé and FIFA, soccer's governing body, and urged them to help in the project. Dutchman Guus Hiddink, who had guided the Koreans at the World Cup, returned with his club, PSV Eindhoven (the Dutch champions), to win the first-ever Peace Cup, defeating French champions Lyon. Hiddink called the Peace Cup a "very prestigious event and one of the best tournaments in the world."

The Peace Cup was not Father Moon's first venture into soccer. In 1989, he founded the Ilwha Cheonan soccer club, which now plays in the city of Seongnam. The club won seven Korean League championships. They were crowned the Asian champions in 1996 and runners-up in the Asian Champions League in 2004. Perhaps it is no accident that the team founded by Father Moon has been so successful.

The motivation behind all of Rev. Moon's projects was to live for the sake of others, which is after all the very essence of winning team sports. Father and Mother Moon also established soccer teams in Brazil's Sorocaba of Sao Paulo and the CENE team in the impoverished Pantanal region, which continue to be successful despite their short histories.

After the tremendous success of the 2003 and 2005 Peace Cups, which involved men's clubs, in 2006 Father Moon founded the women's Peace Queen Cup, involving national women's teams from eight nations. North Korea was invited to the 2006 event, but due to political fallout surrounding the North's nuclear program, they had to decline at the last moment. The North Koreans sent an unusual and rare letter directly to Father Moon, expressing regret and asking for his understanding of their absence at the event. The letter commended his efforts to bring about unification of the divided nation.

The United States women's national team, winners of two World Cups and two Olympic gold medals, won the Peace Queen Cup in November 2006 at the Seoul World Cup Stadium, beating Canada. It was a beautiful occasion to see Father and Mother Moon hand the trophy to Kristine Lilly, one of the greatest women players ever, who has competed in a record 317 games for her nation. "The tournament was excellent, from the stadiums we played in to the hospitality of the Koreans and the games, which involved some of the top teams in the world," said Lilly, the event's MVP.

The Peace Queen Cup was the biggest women's soccer event ever in Korea, and after the Women's World Cup and the European Championship, it is the premier competition among women's teams. The prize money was the largest ever after the World Cup. "We got more experience here than we could have in a hundred games playing against youth teams," said Vera Pauw, the Netherlands' coach. When asked by a reporter what he thought about the Peace Queen Cup, Canada's women's team coach Even Pellerud did not hesitate to answer: "Fantastic!" said the coach. "I can't imagine another event like it. At every level it was organized perfectly." "We are very happy to win the first Peace Queen Cup and hope to get invited back," said U.S. coach Greg Ryan.

One can imagine him having been a great soccer player in his youth. In my mind, I see him as an attacking and creative midfielder, controlling the game, setting up plays and scoring goals. I would not have been too keen to play against him, as I'm sure he would be a tough defender to get past.

I would much prefer to play on his team. No doubt Father Moon would have been a great soccer player in his day, but as we know he sacrificed his individual desires to follow the path of religion to bring about world peace. Because of that, he truly is the Pelé, the Diego Maradona, the Ronaldinho, and Ji Sung Park of world soccer and world peace.