

The world's most popular sport.

You all know how much I study demographics, metrics and analytics. It's a keen interest of mine and we teach a workshop on the topic. It's one that drives lots of decisions both from a marketing perspective and from a business focus. Companies use that data to set prices and to focus on hundreds – perhaps thousands of trends. Things like the price of gasoline, coffee and pharmaceuticals are all driven by metrics and analytics.

So here is an interesting perspective that merges three of my personal passions – a) demographics/analytics – b) human resources and c) sports – specifically soccer – since many of you know that I'm a former college soccer player, all of my kids have played soccer throughout their lives into adulthood and I've been a coach for more than 30 years having coached more than 1,000 games.

The U.S. has about 330 million people. That seems like a lot of people, and it is when you start to think about large metropolitan areas like New York City and Los Angeles who have populations with about 10 million people each. But statistically, compared to the rest of the world the United States only makes up about 4.25% of the entire world population (330 million vs. 7.5 billion). That said, certain sports in the U.S. generate crazy amounts of revenue – this includes Football, Basketball and Baseball – the three most popular sports in our country. Look at the valuations of large sports icons like the Steelers and the Dallas Cowboys – the value of their brands are in the billions of dollars. Hard to fathom that a single team can be valued at numbers significantly higher than their actual annual revenue – but there lies the understanding of brand, brand image and the drive to protect your brand. Jerry Jones (Dallas Cowboys) and Robert Kraft (New England Patriots) know the importance of brand valuations and have invested handsomely to build teams and brands that have winning programs and as such fanatical fans willing to spend lots of money to support those teams. Just drive around our fair city on any game day when our beloved Steelers are playing – I mean when the game is actually in process. You can get anywhere you want in no time – almost everyone is watching the game – and the roads are open for free sailing. It's a passion, driven by the interest in seeing your team play and win. We all identify with our Steelers – and so do millions upon millions of black and gold fans across the country. Ben is a franchise player and his personal brand will keep him wealthy for the rest of his life – just don't knock us – or we'll drive you and your sorry disloyal self right out of town – and burn your jersey and wish you good riddance – just like a certain Raider wide receiver – go ahead AB – you know you'll never be welcome back here. I remember a certain player had one of the most popular sports restaurants here in on the Southside – it was packed all the time – until he left town to chase more money – within a year the bar/restaurant was closed. You want to talk brand – I'll show you brand loyalty and value with real examples in short order. Hines Ward and Jerome Bettis got it and everyone will love them here – forever!

That leads me to one of my other passions. Soccer. Why? Truth is I was too small to play football in high school (think 5' 9" tall and 155 pounds). Although I was fairly athletic I wasn't going to stand much of a chance against a 6'3" 225 lb lineman and I wasn't going to ever dunk a basketball without the help of a ladder. Statistically it just wasn't going to happen. With decent speed and fairly decent agility I learned the game and was fortunate to have played every game at the varsity level for four years at my alma mater (Go Bearcats!). I went on to teach all four of my kids to love the sport and a couple of hundred other kids over the past 30+ years. I'm a nationally licensed coach and even passed the test to become a high school referee. At this point I can read a game and strategize defensively how to slow – and sometimes stop – the most feared opponent – just ask the state champions our little team has frustrated into tie games over the years. We may not score much, but neither will you.

What does this all mean? The U.S. Women's National Team – otherwise known as the U.S. Women's Soccer Team – just won the World Cup. That's a big deal – kind of in the U.S. – but certainly across this great big world of ours. The Super Bowl is popular in the U.S. and the Stanley Cup is popular in the U.S. and Canada. This championship is the entire WORLD!!! Millions of – let me correct that – Billions of kids – especially young girls – are absolutely in love with this U.S. team and their dominance of the game – especially over the past several years having won another World Cup just four years ago. These women are a force to be reckoned with. Athletic, fierce, smart, driven, and masters of a sport that dwarfs all of the most popular sports in our country. If you've traveled to Europe or South America – or honestly anywhere across the rest of this great big world of ours – Soccer is THE dominant sport – EVERYWHERE ELSE. In the U.S. it's the FIFTH most popular sport – trailing well behind Football, Basketball, Baseball, and Hockey. It's gained significant popularity in this country but you want to talk brand loyalty – go to a Manchester United vs. Manchester City game in

England. Think Steelers vs. Cleveland – and ramp it up 1,000 percent – 120,000 fanatical fans packed shoulder to shoulder, all standing, louder than a Ben Roethlisberger touchdown pass – for three continuous hours!!! The stadiums should have saved their money and not put the seats or benches in – if you sit down you’ll never see the game! In that sport, with that passion, our women’s team is THE TEAM – IN THE WORLD!!! They are really BAD *** !!!

Now let’s mix another passion into the formula. Human Resources. Better yet, let’s get specific within this passion, let’s talk Equal Pay! When it comes to Equal Pay the U.S. Women’s team – being the most dominant team in this sport in the world, and they’ve got that cup they’re carrying around to prove it, has a brand that’s world famous – and is much more popular than the men’s national team. What you say – you didn’t know that the U.S. has a men’s national team – they really do – and they lost in the Gold Cup on Sunday (think of a regional tournament made up of Central American and North American teams). But let’s get back to our Women’s Team. They’ve made the strongest case that they deserve to be paid at minimum, the same amount as the men who perform at the same level. Their brand is better, their performance is significantly better (No U.S. Men’s team has ever made it to the World Cup Final – ever – in the past 100+ years - yet our Women’s Team has won it Four (4) times in the past 30 years!!!), and their players are known across the world. Right now you couldn’t take any of our most popular players into any city in Europe without causing a mob scene – they’re that popular. And that includes taking them to any city in South America as well. These women are the face of a sport that has finally made its case that they deserve the same respect and position as any of their male counterparts. And, as such, they deserve, at minimum, to be paid the same as their male counterparts. Truth is, they deserve to be paid much more than their male counterparts. After all – they’re World Champions. If that doesn’t warrant it what does??? Come on U.S. we set the trends in so many things – it’s about time we do it here. It’s 2019!!! This is long, long overdue. Truth is, this should be done across the board, for every position in every profession. And you could get there in one year – all it would take is an Executive Order for an Equal Pay Audit.

Congratulations U.S. Women’s Team. I’m a fan and so are millions of others around the world! We’re proud of you – and you deserve the parity your performance has warranted!!!

Dave