

## A proper pub, not a sports bar, for the World Cup



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Four Green Fields, Colin Breen's Irish pub at the edge of downtown Tampa, is as authentic as any you might wander into for a pint in County Clare.

Thatched roof atop, warm pubby feel inside, corned beef and cabbage on the menu, traditional music onstage. Notable sports jerseys from different parts of Ireland hang from the rafters, and there's even a soccer ball from the '94 World Cup when Ireland was in it. (More on the Cup in a minute.)

Breen is persnickety even about the proper temperature of the fat brown Guinnesses they pour for the downtown lawyers and college hipsters who fill the well-worn stools. The city's very-Irish mayor has been known to tip a glass here.

In short, this is not the place into which a neophyte might wander on St. Paddy's Day for a foamy Bud Light dyed kelly green. Or for a bevy of flat-screens blaring the day's big football, basketball or baseball games. Or for a single TV off in a quiet corner even, just to check a score.

Breen Does. Not. Do. TV. Here. He likes sports as much as the next guy, he says, but to him this is counter to what pubs are supposed to be about: talk, laughter, music and drink.

Which brings us to the World Cup, the international men's soccer championship playing out to millions of fans around the world from Brazil. This is the once-every-four-years showcase of the world's most popular sport — and yes, it is so, no matter how hard an avowed Bucs fan might argue the point.

How fun it is when soccer invades this way. The unfamiliar get a look at what all the fuss is about. The already-diehard — people from other countries to whom this is the only real football, people who have grown up on soccer, fans who love the grace of it, locals with deep Rowdie roots — today, at least, their sport is front and center here.

And on this, even a man with pub-related principles relents.

There is something of the spirit of a pub in the Cup, after all. So during these weeks when balls are kicked across pitches as the world watches, a single big screen fills the Fields' stage normally crowded with musicians. From speakers pours the roar of crowds and whistles of refs. Even during a workday lunchtime match this week, young men stood at the bar European fashion, hoisting pints and watching the Netherlands win. A bald baby sat on his nanny's lap, waving a small soccer ball. (Chile fan — he must have been disappointed.)

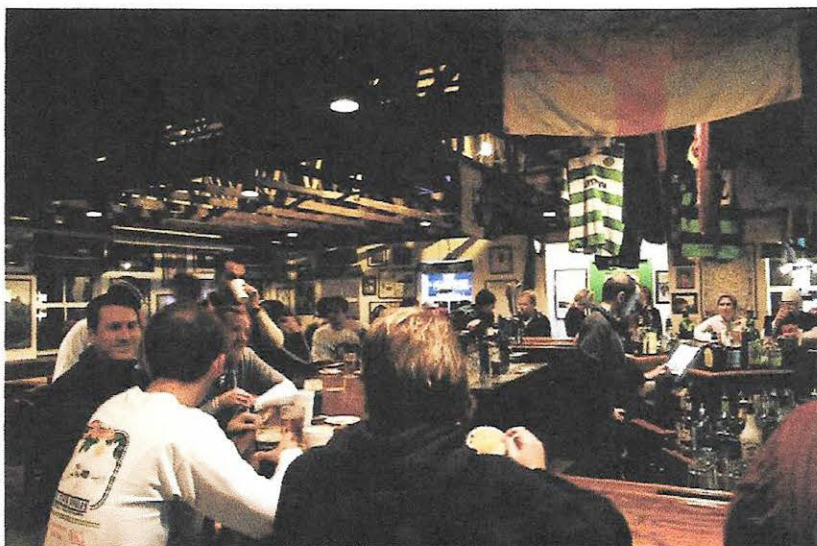
Naturally, the two United States games thus far have been standing-room-only. You want excitement, NFL fans? How about that first match in which we scored 32 seconds into the game against Ghana and everyone went wild? Or that heartbreaker where Portugal tied it up in the last seconds? How can a kicked extra point begin to compare?

"It is pretty exciting," Breen says of it all.

The United States plays again Thursday at noon against formidable Germany. I wonder how the rate of hookey-playing will compare to our Yankees spring training games.

Breen has softened in recent years, allowing TV appearances for some other events he deems "related to the pub in some sense" — Irish sports, Premiere League soccer, that sort of thing.

But if this is like World Cups past, when the last seconds of the last game are up, Breen will pull the plug, making it a pub for pub's sake once again.



LUIS SANTANA | Times (2010)

*The owner of Four Green Fields likes sports, but to him pubs are about talk, laughter, music and drink. So you won't find any televisions here — usually.*