

# Why watch the World Cup in a crowd?

What struck me about the June 22 ESPN telecast of U.S.-Portugal in the World Cup was not its status as the most-watched soccer match in the history of American television, but that so many chose to take in the drama on a big screen in a public space, whether it was Chicago, Los Angeles or New York.



*Fans cheer at a viewing party in Hermosa Beach, Calif., June 16, during the 2014 Brazil World Cup soccer match against Ghana. (CNS photo/Lucy Nicholson, Reuters)*  
In other words, it was just like 1974.

Once upon a time, before ESPN came along and used soccer and other sports to fill a programming void, fans of the real football had to fork over good money to watch the World Cup final on closed-circuit TV in a basketball arena or concert venue. In 1970, we watched Brazil and Pele trounce Italy at what is now the Baltimore Arena, on a big, grainy screen. Four years later, for the West Germany-Netherlands classic, I headed to Constitution Hall in D.C. with my brother Kevin and some of his teammates from Towson University (remember when they had a team?). The last such schlep was in 1978, when Bill Spangler, Rob Mueller and I left a perfectly good time in Ocean City to drive to D.C. to see the Dutch lose again, to host Argentina. I had no idea we were such trend-setters.



ABC, ESPN and live-streaming have made it so easy to watch from your home, phone or desk - the accompanying photo is of photographer Tom McCarthy's work station, where his Apple monitor is vastly superior to the analog TV in the Catholic Review newsroom - but how many people are going to sneak out of the office for an extended lunch and seek a communal vibe June 26, when the U.S. meets Germany in its final Group G qualifier?

I would just as soon watch the Ravens from the peace and solitude of my recliner, but then Mary suggests that we watch with our Ravens Roost, which, of course, is always more fun. Whether it is U.S. soccer, an NFL game or the Sunday Mass that precedes it, the species craves community. Digital tools allow some to craft their own reality; they don't always trump tribal instinct.