

# NORTH AMERICAS BIGGEST SOCCER GAME

## The Pros by John Cairns

American professional sports are usually glamorous and captivating. Until 1977, however, soccer was an exception. This season the game left its infancy for the virility of manhood.

The North American Soccer League is now alive and thriving. Fans finally realized the league's attractiveness and convenience. They appreciate Pele, George Best and other of the world's greatest players. Balance was an added feature, leaving a host of teams in contention. Attendance consequently soared. A record was set at a Cosmos playoff game when 77,691 turned out. 56,256 watched the Seattle Sounders eliminate Los Angeles. The championship game was also a financial success. Amid rain, 35,548 crammed into Portland's old Civic Stadium. They were treated to a grand finish to a spectacular season.

The drama was at its peak. The New York Cosmos were a team on which owners had showered millions. They had routinely defeated Tampa Bay, Fort Lauderdale and Rochester. The Sounders were no-names and the definite underdogs. Vancouver, Minnesota and Los Angeles had fallen at their hands. Pele's pending retirement added to the emotion for he, more than anyone, had made the league successful. The spectators were torn. They wanted the great player to leave with a bang, but also for the Sounders to be champions. They were almost disappointed on both counts.

The break came when New York cleared the ball upfield. Tony Chursky, the Canadian in goal for Seattle, gathered it in and rolled it toward a defender. The Cosmos however, intercepted and scored. Seattle tied it, but New York's Giorgio Chinaglia later headed the ball into the net.

The Cosmos held on and ended as two to one winners. Pele at last had the elusive championship. His teammates carried him off on their shoulders and he did indeed retire in a blaze of glory. Was it the greatest moment of his long career? Maybe. Was it soccer's finest moment in North America? It certainly was.

The Baltimore Orioles are

baseball's most surprising team. They lost proven stars as free agents and yet they're in the pennant race. Despite forfeiting a game, manager Earl Weaver deserves credit. His secret is a balance of youth, age, hitting and pitching. Even without Brooks Robinson, he has plenty of leaders. Ken Singleton has a superb on-base percentage. Alonza Bumbry is hitting .307

while Lee May and rookie Eddie Murray bat in key runs. Short-stop Mark Belanger plays flawlessly behind proven pitchers like Jim Palmer and Rudi May. Baltimore has won five of the last eight pennants and another is within reach.

With the acquisition of Dave Kingman, New York Yankees are even more loaded with talent. They could however only split twelve games

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