

A Hot Game

As the song of the 80s goes [The Heat Is On](#), the U.S. men facing Holland was a great game, and boy was the heat on the boys of the red, white and blue with tons of action before screaming stadium fans in the stands--along with millions back home glued to their TV sets/handheld devices or together in a watch party. We hanged tough for 82 minutes, but once Holland exploded with their third goal, passion hit the streets of Holland, and we began to think of tomorrow.

It must be hard for the United States players, but the path is not dismal--they are young, and the quality they served up was nothing to be ashamed of. Twelve years ago, the American team with Clint Dempsey and Gregg Berhalter captained by Claudio Reyna made it out into the round of sixteen but only the wonder team of 2002 made it beyond. I also remember [Waka Waka](#), sung by Shakira. Here is the starting line that made it to the round of 16 in 2022: **Pulisic, Weah, Musah, Adams, McKinney, Robinson, Zimmerman, Ream, Ferreira, Dest, Turner our goalie; Sargent was out with an injury**, Kellyn Acosta with a yellow card did not play; subs in the second half were Reyna, Wright, and Morris. (Adams, Ream, the oldest at 35, (Yedlin sat out this one), Dest, McKennie all played with yellow cards and luckily none got kicked out.)

Soccer is a team sport, not like track and field where the individual is the one who is the main part of the plan, however, heart to heart, any sporting team needs a key individual to catapult the team to victory. The Lakers with Magic Johnson and Kobe Bryant, The Celtics with Larry Byrd. Joe DiMaggio of the NY Yankees. Tom Brady of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Brazil of the old days with Pele, just to name a few.

Chris Pulisic almost hit a home run, but he is young, and in 4 years, barring injury, he and his teammates will be back. Who will be the next Babe Ruth-Michael Jordan-Tom Brady-Magic Johnson all rolled up into one in four years from now? In the game before a packed 40,000, the U.S. gave it all it had, however, this was a knockout round, no room for ties or almosts.

At the half, the U.S. found itself behind by 2 goals and in a dilemma even though upon observation, they outplayed the *Oranje*, especially in the first 10 minutes. None was better than at the 2 min mark when an unbelievable stroke of luck hit. Near the Dutch penalty box, the ball bounced away from the Dutch goal but this loose ball went to Captain Tyler Adams who instinctively chipped it back up and over the taller foes that suddenly landed at the feet of Chris Pulisic who was not offside. But, when he took his left footed shot, it was so weak the goalkeeper was able to whack it out. For such a gifted player, I had never seen him hit it so weakly. Such a pass was like a gift, but he missed. Near 8 mins, the U.S. made a daring run on the left side and got very near the goal posts, but the centering pass was headed out by the

taller defense.

Unfortunately, about 2 mins later Holland made a long run on their right, our left side which I had considered our weakest side and they did not miss. Dumfries outran Adams, passed to the center in a low cross to Memphis Depay who stuck the first goal. From then on, a wily Dutch defense slowed down the tenor of the game to their advantage. People do not know that the orange machine likes to play a methodical approach, no speed stuff *ala* Japan, Spain or the U.S.

At the 42 min mark, Tim Weah, however, was able to take a mean kick on target, but a 6 foot 8 in Dutch goalie leaned enough to block it. The first 45 minutes was given one minute extra. Then with barely 55 seconds left, it was a repeat, the Dutch attacked via our left side, got within 20 yards of the box, made a centering cross to Daley Blind who took no prisoners and slammed it in; the Americans had fallen asleep and left their guard open, and just like that were down by two. Up to now, in this World Cup the U.S. had never fallen behind in the first half.

In the opening second half, the U.S. came roaring back, however.

Around the 50th min mark, there were like two early attempts: in one, McKinney made a careful running attack through the left side, kicked to the right with the ball finally winding up at the feet of Dest, who made a run to the center, but his following kick sailed high and wide past the goal posts. Almost a minute later after a super save by Musah who dived to keep the ball from going out, he made a daring pass and after a series of kicks and passes, the ball got to Pulisic who made a short run toward the center and kicked it but again his kick was too, too weak and it fell into the ground and into the hands of the opposing goalie.

Less than a minute later, again the U.S. did a fast attack via the left flank, Reyna out-smarted the foe, passed it to McKinney in front of the box, dead center, but the wicked shot of the red-white-blue haired kid McKinney was too hard, and it rose about a foot above the top of the goal posts and missed.

For the next part of the half, the U.S. tried and tried again to tie the game, but again the name of the game were miscues and misses. I did not realize it during the game, but something resonated in me later after the game, why in heaven's name was Pulisic's kicks looking so weak? Then, it hit me. He was in the hospital, right? I remembered back in my junior year, I was 17 and I was taken to the hospital, had spent some time there, and when I came back was weak as hell and literally puny worthless when I rejoined my soccer team. Maybe the exact same thing happened to Chris, I thought. His stay was much shorter than mine, I was out for at least 3 weeks, he less than a full week, but that was enough to turn the strength of his legs to well, mushy in scoring strength without him realizing it, or at least the public not knowing about it. Oh, he was able to run up and down and jump, much better than me, and in 2022 Pulisic was 21 not 17, but he showed no real strength against the orange machine. Could such a little time in the hospital weaken him enough? Whatever the case, America's team did not fold over against a much superior team who had an unbeaten streak coming into the match. Time after time, the U.S. team made promising forays, once Pulisic broke free but his center pass was too weak and his quick pass fell behind his two running teammates. Reyna came into the game as a sub for Ferreira. In the 76th minute, everybody went wild when Pulisic sent a cross in front of the Dutch goal and it ricocheted off Haji Wright--another sub who came in--who scored the lone American goal. All America saw a chance to tie. I was reminded of the big hit [LA COPA DE LA VIDA](#) song--to live and to win the heart has to have passion AND LUCK. The United States had a chance. We were the second youngest in the World Cup and were in the game, until, a 26-year old Denzel Dumfries,

left open literally in front of our goalie Turner, slammed the shot in. Netherlands advanced. The orange machine were unbeaten in 14, and advanced to the round of eight to play the winner of the England vs Senegal game which England did win by an astounding 3-0. The world saw outstanding matches in the other round of sixteen, Japan vs Croatia, Portugal vs Switzerland, South Korea vs Brazil, France vs Poland, Argentina vs Australia, and Spain vs Morocco. We had no shortage of fans throughout the U.S. match, as seen here from News4JAX and Good Morning America. Wait til 2026.