

# Examining the connection between sport and global relationships

## The Great Game Lab at ASU highlights the role sport plays as a positive force across borders

By Megan Neely, ASU News  
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Right now, the world is turning its attention to the United States as it hosts the 2026 FIFA World Cup. It is the first of the two largest global sporting events coming to American shores in the next couple of years, the second being the 2028 Olympic Games hosted in Los Angeles.

It also provides an opportunity to explore sport's role in shaping America's relationship with the rest of the world — and one lab at Arizona State University has a head start.

The [Great Game Lab](#) was established as a place to explore the global convergence of sport, media and geopolitics, as well as how the U.S. connects to the rest of the world through sport.

“We want to help audiences who are concerned with how America engages with the rest of the world understand that sport is a very important piece of that puzzle,” said [Andrés Martínez](#), special advisor to ASU President Michael Crow and a professor of practice at the [Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication](#).

“When we launched this a couple of years ago, it was an effort to both curate a lot of what was already happening at ASU in terms of courses, but also to connect with like-minded folks across the university who were interested in these global connectivities.”

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Martinez and [Victoria Jackson](#), a clinical associate professor in the [School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies](#), co-founded and co-direct the lab together on the belief that cross-border sporting ties have a positive impact throughout the world and have the power to create empathy, mutual respect and understanding.

“We want to use the globalization of sport to help our students connect dots and gain a better understanding of the world by using the power of sport as a vehicle to do that, leveraging something they're already very passionate about,” Martinez said.

Historically, as Jackson teaches in her courses, sport was a means of reinforcing a separate and distinctive American identity. Americans developed their own games that no one else played, including the U.S. version of football.

But things changed in recent decades with the rise of soccer in the U.S. and the spread of American sports elsewhere, as evidenced by the recent World Baseball Classic or by bringing the National Football League to stadiums in England or Germany.

The lab has a library of projects focused on these current events that signify a global sporting convergence of historically significant moments that can be used as educational content.

The [Mixed Zone blog](#) curates different insights from roundtable discussions to commentaries on recent news, while the “[Set Piece](#)” video series invites guests to talk about these formed connections, including former U.S. soccer stars [Landon Donovan](#) and [Julie Foudy](#), and President and CEO of the Green Bay Packers [Mark Murphy](#).

“We try to make a lot of the things that we create available to anyone anywhere in the world. We've recorded a pretty nice library collection full of these 'Set Piece' videos, which are short, 20-minute conversations with people whom we consider to be protagonists in 'the great game,’” Jackson said. “These people whose work shows efforts to bridge the gap and connect us across borders through sport.”

To celebrate the World Cup, the lab's [Great Game Cities project](#) partnered with New America's [Us@250 Initiative](#) to explore how U.S. cities came to be World Cup hosts and how they connect to the world through sport. Also supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Great Game City fellows traveled to Atlanta; Kansas City, Missouri; Los Angeles; Philadelphia; and San Francisco to tell their individual stories.

In Atlanta, the project [partnered up with WABE](#), the local PBS and NPR affiliate, and multimedia journalist Julien Virgin to document all the different sporting threads that live in the city in a docu-series, dating back to its history of hosting the Centennial Olympic Games in 1996.

For Los Angeles, a [collaboration with Wanderland Studios and Matt O'Connor-Simpson](#) dove into the rich history of soccer milestones seen in the city, such as the 1999 U.S. Women's National Team's World Cup win at the Rose Bowl and establishment of the Major League Soccer and National Women's Soccer League teams in recent expansions.

The series is already reaching far beyond the U.S. with events and screenings in several cities that include the attendance of embassies and consulates. Their most recent co-hosted event in Los Angeles featured a screening of the city's film and a conversation with the Pacific Council, PBS SoCal and the British Consulate.

In the future, Martinez and Jackson hope to continue bringing visitors to campus beyond the events they do to provide students and other guests with first-hand accounts of what this industry has done and can continue to do for the U.S.

“Every time those people come and either lead a class or are in an interview-type conversation in my sports in U.S. history classes, everybody is so into it, which really shows there's an appetite for this kind of global awareness in sport within our student body right now,” Jackson said.

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## Explore multimedia from the lab

[Mixed Zone blog](#): Curates recommendations, roundtables, commentaries and more

["Set Piece" video series](#): 20-minute chats with sports professionals

[Great Game Cities project](#): Explores how U.S. cities came to be World Cup hosts

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## Main image

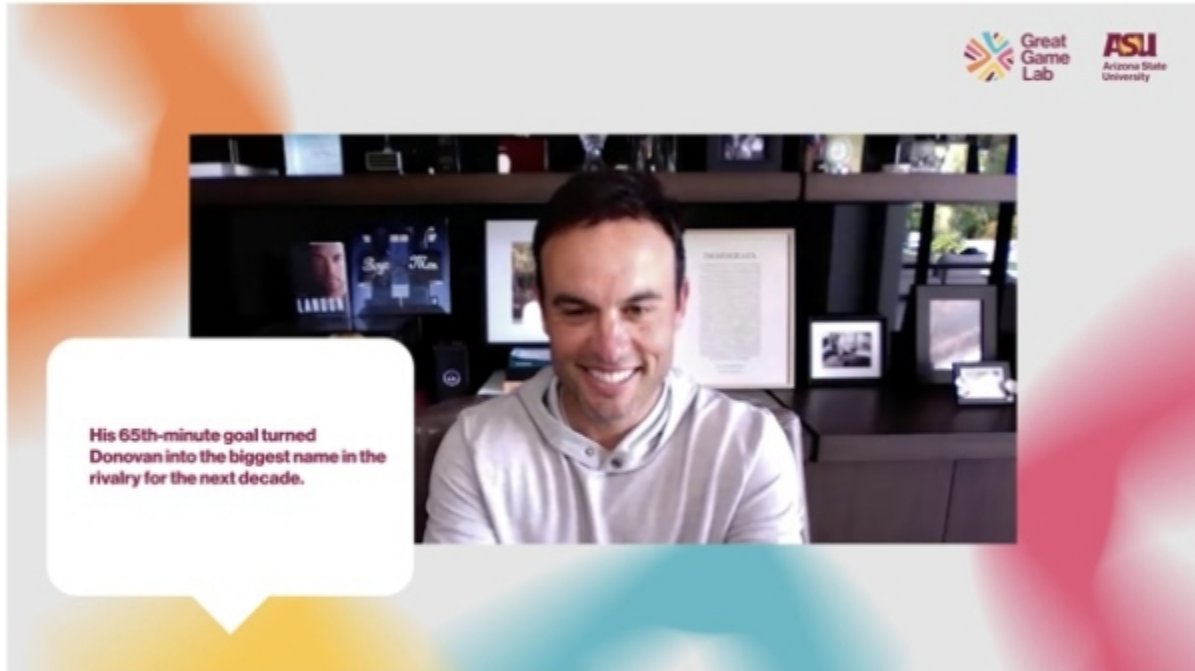


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## Text image(s)



# Set Piece



## A Legend Weighs in on Legendary Rivalry

"A Set Piece with Landon Donovan" features the former U.S. soccer star talking about how rivalries and relationship shaped him, both as an athlete and as a person.