

IN FOCUS: THE SCIENCE OF BASEBALL

KEEPING SCORE

U.S. team's impact will reach far, wide

PASADENA, Calif. — Thirty years from now, a woman running for president of the United States will be asked about the defining moment of her childhood. And she will answer, without missing a beat, "The 1969 Women's World Cup soccer tournament."

If it's not a female presidential candidate, it will be a female CEO of one of the nation's most successful Fortune 500 companies. Or the top-ranking woman in the military. Or the female chancellor of one of the great universities.

It's going to happen. In 2029, an important woman will look back on the fact that, for the first time in a non-Olympic year, she watched and cheered for women who looked like she did when she grew up. She will say the World Cup showed her that sports could be as inviting to her as they had been to her brother. She will look back and say that after the summer of 1969, she never felt silly or unpopular or out of place playing sports.

That's how significant the past three weeks have been to girls and women in this country, and, indirectly, to boys and men. To think on a scale of lesser proportion is to miss the impact of an event that will be viewed for years to come as one of the country's most surprisingly successful sports stories, no matter what happens Saturday in the Rose Bowl.

"We're at the epicenter of a big rock being thrown into a huge pond," said Michelle Akers, the 33-year-old heart and soul of the wildly popular U.S. team. "We don't know what the ripple effect will be."

She is right. We don't know. But we can try to guess. It's the rare sporting event when in the week leading to the final, "Who will win?" is only the second-most asked question, behind the runaway winner. "So what happens next?" But women's soccer has turned the mainstream sports world upside down this month. So it's not a surprise the massive press corps surrounding this event now is grappling with a concept that wasn't on its radar screen even a week ago: that of a professional women's soccer league.

There may or may not be a U.S. women's professional soccer league in 2001. U.S. Soccer sent out a press release Thursday saying it is looking into the idea, which is a no-brainer of a public-relations move. This league wouldn't appear in 2000 because the U.S. national team has a prior commitment, the Summer Olympic Games in Sydney.

Talk about perfect timing: The U.S. women will be gone from the sports world for only a few months before regrouping for what certainly will be a national barnstorming tour heading into the Olympics. It's doubtful they'd sell out, or even try to play in, the biggest stadiums. But after picking my way through hundreds of energized, autograph-seeking little girls and boys with their parents at U.S. practices this week, I'm not particularly certain of anything anymore in sports.

The only thing that would keep these women in the national vanguard this summer would be a pro league. It's too bad that next week a Charlotte franchise featuring Mia Hamm can't play a Chicago team led by Brandi Chastain because people would pay to see that game.

Will they come in 2001? Who knows? Victories by the USA on Saturday and in the Olympics would help. So would more of those Nike and Gatorade commercials. This team and its remarkable job of sweeping into the culture quicker than any national U.S. sports team in memory. The Americans quickly transcended their sport, then approached a kind of mythical status reserved only for beloved Olympic teams, like the 1980 men's hockey team that upset the Soviet Union and won the gold medal.

Where the women go from here is uncertain; it likely will be a lucrative place. But already they know theirs is a remarkable achievement. It's the rare sporting event where victory is declared before the final game is played.

Jon Saraceno is away. His column returns Monday.

20th Century THIS DAY IN SPORTS

The Washington Redskins were born in 1932, although no one knew it then. They were founded by George Preston Marshall was awarded an NFL franchise in Boston. Playing at the same park as baseball's Braves, the team took the same name. In 1933, Marshall moved them to Fenway Park, home of the Red Sox. Then, they became the Redskins, and for two seasons were coached by a Native American, William "Lone Star" Dietz. By '36, Marshall was so upset by the media interest he moved the NFL title game against Green Bay to New York's Polo Grounds. When Boston papers were more interested in a high school field hockey game than the Redskins' loss, Marshall moved to Washington.

Founder: George Preston Marshall

Also on this date

1942: Five days after being bearded and carried off the field, Negro League and future Hall of Famer **Willie Wells** hits for the Newark (N.J.) Eagles wearing a construction worker's hardhat that he modified.

1966: At Murlfield in Scotland, **Jack Nicklaus** wins the first of his three British Opens and joins **Gene Sarazen**, **Ben Hogan** and **Gary Player** as the only golfers to win all four of golf's modern grand-slam events.

BORN: **Nile Kinnick** (1918), the 1939 Heisman Trophy winner for which he was named; his football stadium for him. He was killed in a 1943 Navy training flight; 1968 Heisman Trophy winner **O.J. Simpson** (1947).

DIED: **Arch Ward** (1905), the Chicago Tribune sports editor who created baseball's All-Star Game, as he was leaving to cover his 22nd midseason classic.

Quotes of the century

"Because it is against the policy of the Redskins management to broadcast nonsports news over the stadium's public-address system."

— **George Preston Marshall**, on why the crowd at a Dec. 7, 1941, Redskins-Eagles game wasn't told of news bulletins from Pearl Harbor.

By Tom Weir
Source: Total Football: Chaser's 1989 Sports Calendar of Events; The Baseball Timeline; The Baseball Chronicle

Players put own spin on hitting

Batters keep alert for any little edge

By Devra Maza
Special for USA TODAY

"Hitting starts with the heart."

That's what Anaheim Angels slugger Mo Vaughn believes. "It's about your competitive nature — that you can't be beat. When you step up to the plate, you understand that this is war."

With baseballs flying like bullets, it's an apt analogy, and this year's All-Star Game hitters are all armed with dangerous bats. In a season of incessant hits and homers, it seems as if the batters know what's coming on every pitch. Some of them do. That's because they've figured out one of the secrets of hitting: the spin.

"The way the ball is rotating is the way the ball will move," ESPN analyst and Hall of Famer Joe Morgan says. "The spinning seams show the rotation."

"If a batter can see the spin on a pitch, then he will know which pitch it is and be able to adjust his swing."

To test his theory, Morgan took a poll at last year's Hall of Fame ceremony to see who "saw spin." The results surprised him. Brooks Robinson, Billy Williams and Frank Robinson said they saw spin. Others, like Eddie Mathews, didn't.

"Ed Williams said he always saw spin on the slow curve, but he said that's the only time he actually looked for it. Other than that he was just looking for speed," Morgan says. "That was amazing to me because you know the speed by the spin. How can you judge one if you can't see the other?"

Intrigued, it seemed appropriate to ask some of the game's greatest what they look for when they step into the batter's box. Like Morgan's poll, the results were eye opening.

The Texas Rangers' Rafael Palmeiro always looks for spin. "You have to," he says. "Otherwise you couldn't hit."

"Being that every baseball known to man that has ever been thrown, besides a knuckleball, is spinning, spin's pretty damn important," the Baltimore Orioles' Will Clark says. "If I don't see spin on a baseball, I'm screwed."

Atlanta's Chipper Jones explains the language of spin:

"If a ball's spinning backwards, then it's a fastball. If you see a dot in the middle of the ball, then it's a slider. If it spins over the top, then it's a curveball. A splitter kind of tumbles, so a lot can be given away by the rotation."

San Francisco Giants great Barry Bonds thinks spin is a bonus. "Yeah, you see spin, but it doesn't tell you how to react. Positioning determines that. The main objective is to pick up the baseball. I'm looking for it in my zone. Other than that, I don't want to touch it."

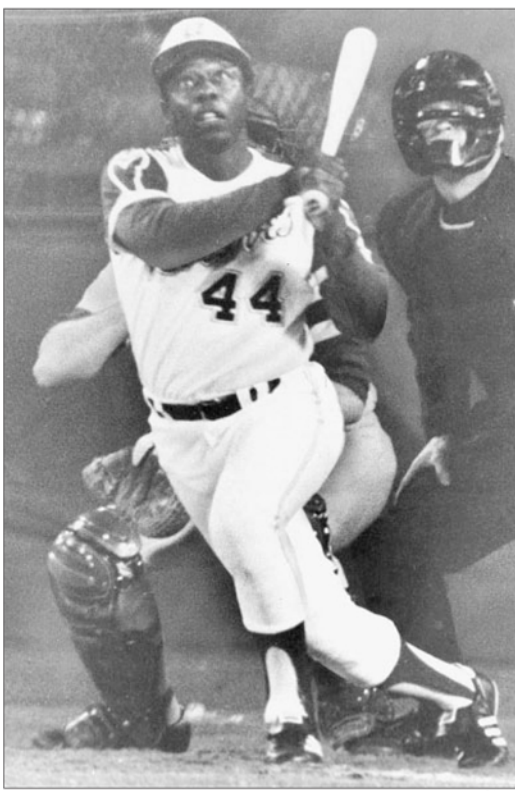
Seeing is everything

All hitters, even ones who don't look for the spin, try to see the ball as soon as the pitcher cuts it loose.

"I am looking for the release point every time," says the reigning American League MVP, Juan Gonzalez of Texas. "I put my weight on my right leg to stay back and use more of my hands so I can get a longer look."

"I don't see spin," says San Diego's Tony Gwynn, the ultimate contact hitter. The release point tells you what's going on. Depending on where a pitcher's hand is when he lets go, sometimes you see something. If you see a lot of white, it's usually a fastball. You might see a shadow on a changeup.

"You follow from the angle of release and you track the ball in. Then somewhere between



A legend: Home run king Hank Aaron says he got clues from a pitcher before the ball was released. Starting this year, an award named for Aaron will go to the best overall hitter in each league.



Always thinking: The Angels' Mo Vaughn believes each situation provides clues to the pitches he'll get. "When you step up to the plate, you understand that this is war," he says.

the time he lets it go and the time he gets it over the plate my eyes tell my brain 'I need to do this,' and I do it and it works. "When it does, it's a beautiful thing."

Padres hitting coach Merv Rettenmund marvels at Gwynn's ability to concentrate. "He sees the whole picture out there at all times, but he still focuses on the ball. He can even see the pitcher's fingers on it and no one else can do that."

Except Hank Aaron. "There was absolutely nothing, once I got into the batter's box, that could distract me from focusing on what I had to do," he says. "I could see, before the pitcher released the ball — from just the way he gripped it or a certain way he held his wrist — whether it was going to be a curveball or a fastball."

Aaron is skeptical about players who say they see spin consistently. "From 60 feet, at 92 miles an hour, there's no one can tell me 'I can see a dot on the ball.' Your eyes just aren't that good. At least my eyes weren't."



Alert: The Rangers' Juan Gonzalez says, "I am looking for the release point every time."

well, it seems like the pitcher's arm is just going in a blur and all of a sudden the ball's right in front of you."

Going to the ball

So how does a struggling slugger slow down a ball?

"You do it with your mechanics," St. Louis hitting coach Mike Easler advises. "The biggest thing I teach is balance. Your feet, your knees, your hips; everything's got to work together to stay slow. Once you can do that with authority day in and day out, then you become dangerous."

Philadelphia's Scott Rolen has learned that lesson. "If I'm quiet in the box and not moving around, I can actually see spin. But when you're pulling your head and doing stupid stuff, you get into trouble."

"When you get comfortable, you see the ball better," the Cardinals' Willie McGee says. "You start trusting your hands and you wait longer."

"The longer you play," the Astros' Jeff Bagwell says, "the easier it gets to recognize the spin."

Hall of Famer Frank Robinson can tell when a hitter's

not seeing spin. "You see a lot of check swings then. When a hitter's in a long slump, he doesn't even see the release point. The better the hitters see the spin, the quicker they can react." Arizona's Matt Williams knows that spin is a gift.

"If you could see the spin every time, you'd hit .400. You only have half a second from the time he releases it to determine what the pitch is, whether it's a ball or strike and whether you're going to swing."

Some don't look for spin. "I just see the strike and don't worry about anything else," the Cubs' Sammy Sosa says. "You can see from the movement when it's his fastball and when it's his breaking pitch. But wherever it is, you have to watch the ball."

Sosa's teammate Mark Grace agrees. "I'm just looking for the ball out of his hand and then I'm going to it."

"I think you try to simplify it, like you when you're younger: see the ball, hit the ball," the Yankees' Derek Jeter says. "Every pitcher has different deliveries and different motions and you just try to ignore that and look for the release point."

"The way I hit, the baseball always dictated what I did with it," Hall of Famer and Angels hitting coach Rod Carew says. "That's why I always track the ball to see what it's doing and allow it to tell me if I should pull it or go the other way. If I should swing or take it."

Says the Phillies' Mike Lieberthal: "It's a guessing game. I look for how the ball comes in."

For Baltimore's Harold Baines, it's a matter of experience. "Being in the game as long as I am, you know the general area where they're going to throw the ball. Eighty percent of pitching is away, so I look for a ball middle-away."

"Hitting is not easy," the Rangers' Ivan Rodriguez says, "but if you concentrate, you're going to hit the ball hard pretty much all the time."

And that leads to seeing spin. "When I'm in that zone," the Dodgers' Gary Sheffield says, "I know I'm going to get two hits and possibly whatever else comes with that."

The 'inside' game

"I can tell based on what the pitcher wants me to do because of the situation — the guy on base and the outs — if I'm going to get more gas or more breaking balls," Vaughn says. "It's the game inside the game."

And because of the changes that game, an abundance of clues are stitched into each one — a pitcher's arsenal, his stuff that night, how he's gotten that hitter out before — and can be calculated into the computer that is a hitter's brain.

"But you better not be doing that when you're up there," Bonds says. "If you don't have it already in your computer, you're dead."

"Hitting is timing and coordination," Hall of Fame pitcher and CBS analyst Don Sutton says. "Successful pitching is disrupting that."

Whether it's by changing speeds or arm slots, "the more things you give a hitter to look at, the harder it is for them to get comfortable," Dodgers ace Kevin Brown says.

Adds Vaughn: "Some days you've got to walk back to the dugout, put your helmet down and internalize why you got beat. I don't care who you are, sometimes you just have to say that pitcher was better than me today and that's the way it is."

But hitters still hope for the days when, all works, whether it's the spin, the release point or just the best of all guesses.

On those days "you're just doing everything right. You're positioned right. Your ball early. Bonds says, 'You're having success and you're enjoying the ride.'"

Screenwriter Devra Maza is writing a baseball movie called *The Show*.



Sports

FRIDAY, JULY 9, 1999

SPORTSLINE

A QUICK READ ON THE TOP SPORTS NEWS OF THE DAY

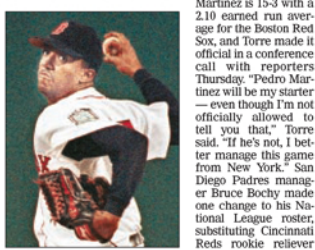
7BASEBALL/AMERICAN Coverage, 3-4, 6, 15C
Chicago 6, Kansas City 5
Toronto 11, Baltimore 6
Tampa Bay 3, Boston 2
New York 3, Detroit 2
Cleveland 9, Minnesota 2

NATIONAL Coverage, 3, 5-6, 15C
Montreal 4, New York 3
Los Angeles 11, Colorado 8
Chicago 9, Pittsburgh 4
Atlanta 5, Florida 2
Cincinnati 8, St. Louis 5
Arizona 8, Houston 7 (11)

BASKETBALL/WNBA Coverage, 10, 15C
Utah 81, Washington 65
New York 84, Cleveland 49
Sacramento 74, Houston 63

SOCCER/MLS Coverage, 13, 15C
Tampa Bay 2, San Jose 1

WISE DECISION: New York Yankees manager Joe Torre wiped out what little suspense remained and named Boston's Pedro Martinez as the American League's starting pitcher for the All-Star Game on Tuesday at Fenway Park.



Best bet: Red Sox pitcher Pedro Martinez will start at Fenway.

elbow. Williamson is 7-3 with a 1.55 ERA and 10 saves. (Advice for ill-informed All-Star watchers, 6C)

FILLED UP: The 24-man roster for the USA's Pan Am Games baseball team was named Thursday, mixing veteran professionals such as infielder Craig Paquette with top young prospects such as left-hander Mark Mulder, an Oakland A's farmhand. The Games begin later this month in Winnipeg. The USA's first game is July 26. The USA must finish first or second to secure a berth for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia. (Roster, 15C)

SAFE RETURN: Greg Norman's stolen golf clubs have been returned, just in time for the British Open next week. James Jankowski, 22, who apparently stole two sets of customized Cobra clubs from Norman's garage July 3, returned them earlier this week after realizing they were the Australian's tournament clubs. "I don't think he knew at the time he'd stolen the tournament clubs of Greg Norman," Jupiter Island (Fla.) police officer Bill Smith said. Norman said in a statement he was "very pleased to get my tournament clubs back." Jankowski, who had worked on Norman's roof about a week earlier, was arrested Wednesday night and charged with grand theft and a probation violation.

UNDER REVIEW: The U.S. Justice Department has finished gathering evidence and is deciding whether to seek indictments in the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics bribery scandal. Salt Lake spent \$800,000 on 14 International Olympic Committee members, including travel expenses, entertainment, gifts and scholarships for their children, and cash payments. Ten IOC members resigned or were expelled, and two former top Salt Lake bid officials lost their jobs in the scandal. The FBI reportedly questioned at least four IOC members in May. Investigators also have looked at whether Salt Lake violated its tax-exempt status or if recipients failed to pay taxes due on payments.

BET AND BREAKFAST: Bettors at Lone Star Park now can place wagers on their way to work without leaving their cars. The Thoroughbred track in Grand Prairie, Texas, will open four drive-through service lanes Friday morning, minus the speaker boxes used by fast-food restaurants. "This is just something that will make life a little easier," track spokesman Darren Rogers said. Bettors also can cash winning tickets of as much as \$100 at the windows. Lone Star Park is the second track to offer drive-up betting, following Keeneland in Lexington, Ky. It also offers cash machines for bettors and a playground and picnic area for families.

Written by Gary Graves with staff and wire reports

USA SNAPSHOTS®

A look at statistics that shape the sports world

Pig 'pens

The Baltimore Orioles and Kansas City Royals have blown a major league-leading 20 save chances this year and are on pace to break the record for blown saves in a season (statistic has been kept only since 1989).

Note: Through July 7

St. Louis, 1998

N.Y. Mets, 1997

California Angels, 1988

Montreal, 1991

Source: Retrosheet Relief Man

By Scott Bosack and Quan-Tan USA TODAY

How does he do it?

Hitting a moving spherical ball with a cylindrical bat is the most difficult skill in sports. Top hitters of today and yesterday discuss the secrets. In Focus, 3C



Watch closely: The Yankees' Derek Jeter focuses on the pitcher's release point to home in on what pitch is coming.

USA learns to love a soccer team, 1A

Marketers expect short shelf life, 1B

Chinese pride transcends politics, 12C

Starting lineups, head-to-head, 13C

Final approach: Let it loose

COVER STORY

Goalkeepers: Don't expect any handouts

By David Leon Moore
USA TODAY

PASADENA, Calif. — Out of communist China, which seems so cold and humorless and is officially godless, comes goalkeeper Gao Hong, a woman with a mischievous little smile who is considered something of a merry prankster on China's World Cup soccer team and is among the 1% of Chinese who are Christian.

Gao (pronounced G-ow) has hardly been tested in China's impressive march to Saturday's Women's World Cup final. Her greatest contribution so far? Making her teammates laugh.



By Phil Suter, AP

Out of the upper-middle class suburbs of the American upper Midwest, and off the playing fields of the red, white and blue U.S. youth soccer revolution, comes goalkeeper Briana Scurry.

A black woman who calls herself "the fly in the milk" of the U.S. women's soccer team, Scurry has been an athletic backstop for Team USA's somewhat leaky defense, especially in a 24 semifinal win against Brazil. Her greatest contribution so far? Saving her teammates' butts.

It is good to get to know these two women on the eve of the final, which is perhaps the most anticipated women's sports event in history. Gao and Scurry are the only two players on the field who will be allowed to touch the ball with their hands. So the outcome of the greatest celebration of women's athletics we have seen in some time could well be up to them.

They can handle it.

Emphasize the pressure on them, and Gao will just smile that shy smile of hers. You know she has a good set of hands, and you also suspect that she has something up her sleeve.

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SPORTS
FINALTHE ART
OF HITTINGALL-STAR
SLUGGERS SHARE
THEIR VIEW FROM
THE PLATE, 3CMatt Williams: Hitters
'have half a second,' 3C
By Ken Levine, APUSA
TODAY

NO. 1 IN THE USA . . . FIRST IN DAILY READERS

HOME BOUND

THE IDEAL
VACATION
SPOT?
FOR SOME,
IT'S THEIR
OWN BACK
YARD, 1DWEEKEND
EDITION

FRI./SAT./SUN., JULY 9-11, 1999

NEWSLINE

A QUICK READ ON THE NEWS

WALL STREET: Dow Jones industrial average falls 60.47 points to 11,266.89; Nasdaq index rises 28.82 points to 2,771.86; 30-year Treasury bond yield dips to 5.99%.

► Japan's Nikkei average falls 66 points, 0.4%; to 17,901 at 1 a.m. ET today; yen is 122.82 per dollar. Hong Kong's Hang Seng index rises 39 points, 0.3%, to 14,266.

AMERICAN KHRUSHCHEV: Sergei Khrushchev, left, son of the Russian Cold War icon Nikita Khrushchev, will become an American citizen Monday. His new life as a Rhode Island suburbanite, he says, is so good he wants to make it official. 4A.

Khrushchev: Not bluffing
when he says, 'I like it here.'

EXECUTION: Florida electric-chair execution set for today is postponed after blood is seen on chest of electrocuted man Thursday. 3A.

MEDICAL DROP: Air Force jet heads to South Pole to deliver medicine to female worker with a potentially cancerous lump in breast. 3A.

POVERTY TOUR: President Clinton wraps up tour of impoverished areas of USA in Watts section of Los Angeles, calls for investment in future workforce. 5A.

TERRORISM THREAT: United States is vulnerable to terrorist attacks, report says, citing bureaucracy, lack of coordination and old technology as factors. 11A.

CHICAGO GUNS: Prison time will automatically be sought for people carrying guns without permit. 3A.

INVESTMENT HOT LINE: From how to get started to how to retire. Experts dole out advice for investors. 3B.

TODAY'S DEBATE: Tobacco ruling. In USA TODAY's opinion, "Florida tobacco verdict marks shift in attitudes on smoking. Real solution to smoking lies elsewhere." 14A.

► "The judge should never have permitted this trial to go forward as a class action," Robert A. Levy says. 14A.

MONEY: Toyota is turning down chance to settle Justice Department deal in pollution-detection computers case. 1B.

► Megaplex race putting pinch on theater operators. 1B.

► Sales of pickups cooling, automakers haul out desk. 1B.

► United States opposes Japan's manipulation of yen. 1B.

SPORTS: Ed Dougherty takes early lead in U.S. Senior Open; Hale Irwin still in the hunt. Golf. 1,14C.

► New York Rangers sign Theo Fleury. NHL. 1,2C.

LIFE: 10 great places to . . . rule an island. 3D.

► Chrysler concept cars fuel fantasies. Test Drive. 10D.

► Coming clean with soup-making secrets. 11D.

► American Pie a little bit tart. Movie reviews. 12,14E.

COMING NEXT WEEK



All-Star guide
Previewing the big ball game. Looking over the rosters and tales of Boston's 'Green Monster' wall in Fenway Park. Tuesday

'Green Monster'

Ad Track rewind

A look back at the past six months in ads. Monday

Written by John O. Buckley

Inside USA TODAY 5 SECTIONS



Crossword 12D
Editorial/Opinion 14-15A
Lotteries 12D
Marketplace Today 12-13D
State-by-state 12A
Stocks 4-6,11-14B

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USA SNAPSHOTS®

A look at statistics that shape the nation

Top scorers in women's soccer

In the short history of Women's World Cup soccer, the USA's Michelle Akers leads in career goals, including two this year. Top career scorers:

Michelle Akers, USA
Ann Kristin Aarones, Norway
Heidi Mohr, Germany
Linda Medalen, Norway
Hege Riise, Norway
Bettina Wiegmann, Germany



Source: Women's World Cup

By Scott Black and Quan Tian, USA TODAY

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIP

Women's shining moment

90,000 fans will watch USA vs. China Saturday

► Heat on goalkeepers, 1C

► Marketers lukewarm, 1B

► Teams, head to head, 13C



All smiles: The World Cup team clowns for the camera in Claremont, Calif., Thursday. ABC will broadcast the final against China at 3:30 p.m. ET Saturday. Players ID'd on 2A.

Will interest continue beyond game?

By Erik Brady
USA TODAY

A generation ago, U.S. sports pages carried few stories about soccer and even fewer about women — to say nothing of women's soccer. But this weekend the Girls of Summer own headlines from sea to shining sea.

The United States will play China on Saturday in the final of the Women's World Cup. Nearly 90,000 fans are expected to fill the Rose Bowl, the most to watch a women's-only sports event.

That makes this game, by one standard,

the most important in women's sports history. Which in turn tempts great thinkers to try to divine the bigger picture. Does all this mark a cultural sea change? Whither women's sports at the dawn of a new millennium?

COVER STORY

football game. But maybe trying to measure the moment — through tiny TV ratings or misleading marketing dollars — is to miss the point entirely, like shooting wide on an empty net.

Maybe what counts most is that these

players, through the kinetic force of their play on the field and their personalities off of it, have made a country care about them in ways that did not seem possible even a few weeks ago.

They are children of Title IX, all women who came of age athletically at a time when high schools and colleges were required to treat them fairly. That helped hone soccer skills, but federal law can't begin to explain the surge in popularity.

Government can never legislate genuine interest. That can only happen on its own, like spontaneous combustion.

Please see COVER STORY next page ►



Shush: Mia Hamm tries to quiet fans; in the photo above, she ducked behind her teammates.

First lady bucks
U.S. Israel policyBy Barbara Slavin
and Kathy Klei
USA TODAY

Israeli audience in Switzerland that she favored creation of a Palestinian state.

The policy of the United States and President Clinton is that the fate of Jerusalem should be negotiated.

Administration officials said the first lady's views were personal and would not affect U.S. policy. But the timing was awkward: her comments came just before new Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak makes his first official visit to Washington next week.

Orthodox Union President Mandell Gancrow called the first lady's response "a step in the right direction."

Ziyad Abu Zayid, minister for Jerusalem in the Palestinian Authority, said: "If she wants to run for the Senate, she should find other issues and not to try to run behind the Jewish vote at the expense of the Palestinians."

► Campaign swing, 6A

Internet gap widening
Study: Revolution bypassing poor, minoritiesBy David Lieberman
USA TODAY

The gap between those who use the Internet and those who don't is widening and becoming "one of America's leading economic and civil rights issues," the U.S. Department of Commerce concluded Thursday in a major study of Internet use.

Its report found that the Internet revolution is largely bypassing the poor, minorities and those who live in rural communities and inner cities.

"They aren't getting connected at home or at work," said Larry Irving, assistant secretary of communications and information. As the Internet becomes a key resource in education, job training, shopping and health care, it is "rapidly becoming as important as the telephone."

The report deflates expectations that the gap between the Internet's haves and have-nots would narrow significantly with falling computer prices.

It found, instead, that "the

market saturates at the high end, and low-income people still aren't able to afford services," said Tony Wilhelm, director of communications policy at the Benton Foundation.

For example, about 42% of all households have a PC. But they're in about 80% of homes in which families make \$75,000 or more a year and in fewer than 16% in which families make less than \$20,000.

Income isn't the only variable. The gap in Internet use between whites and blacks expanded to 20.7 percentage points last year (32.4% of white households vs. 11.7% of black) from 13.5 percentage points in 1997. The difference between white and Hispanic use in 1998 rose to 19.5 percentage points from 12.5.

Internet use also grows with age and peaks at 35% among those 45 to 54. But it plummets after that: Only 15% of people 55 and older are on line.

The department says its findings show that Internet have-nots do take advantage of on-

line services in public places such as schools and libraries.

Commerce's study of Internet use, its third, is one of the most reliable and one of the few that looks at Internet users and non-users alike. The data come from questions added to a Census Bureau survey in December of 48,000 households, a much larger sample than most private polls.

Some experts noted that the social divide could widen as wealthier people start to buy high-speed Internet connections. They will be able to take advantage of more sophisticated interactive services, including ones that make it far easier for people to work at home.

"Kids in affluent homes and suburban kids are going to have more familiarity with this new technology than poor kids, and kids from inner cities, rural areas and Indian reservations," Federal Communications Commission Chairman Bill Kennard said. "Not everyone is benefiting from the new economy."

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TODAY
.com