



The Black Track

Office of African American Affairs

THE BLACKEST WORLD CUP

World Cup

The World Cup is here, and it's a hot topic in the media. Sports media has magnified the conversation about increased diversity in this year's Cup. Specifically, the media is talking about the increased number of Black players in the World Cup. This article will review the history of the Black presence throughout the World Cup and soccer. We will highlight, Tyler Adams, the first Black captain in World Cup history, and mention other players that have also paved the way for other aspiring Blacks to enter the sport's field of soccer.

Lately, we hear many conversations starting with "representation matters," and soccer is no different. The first official World Cup was in Uruguay in 1930, and the tournament has been held every four years (with exceptions for interruption due to the Second World War). (Football history). There were no African teams or Black members during the start of the first World Cup.



"It's important for us to make sure we educate people on what has come before them"

Desmond Armstrong



The integration of Black soccer players into the game did not come fast, but it did come. Desmond Armstrong and Jimmy Banks became the first Black players born in the United States to play for the USA at a FIFA World Cup in 1990. (Lewis, 2020) In the World Cup cycles of 1998 and 2002, there was an increase in Black players on the national team, such as Tony Sanneh and Carlos Llamosa. In this year's 2022 FIFA World Cup, the US men's national team voted for Tyler Adams to be their permanent and first Black team captain in World Cup history.

Black history notes that there were three other Black men said to have cleared the path for a Black presence in soccer: Andrew Watson, Robert Walker, and Arthur Wharton. Andrew Watson was the first Black soccer player at an international- level. Watson had a long career in soccer, beginning with the Scotland Maxwell football club in 1874 and ending in 1892. In a cup series, not the World Cup, Watson was even picked as the team's captain, which was unheard of in the field of soccer history at the time. (Goff, 2022)

Robert Walker was the first Black player to appear in a national soccer cup final in 1876, the Scottish Cup final. Walker played alongside Andrew Watson. Then there was Arthur Wharton, the first Black player to sign a professional deal to play soccer. Wharton's soccer career ended after 17 years in 1902. (Goff, 2022) Wharton is the most known of these soccer pioneers but they all paved the way for future Black soccer players.

Some people enjoy watching the recent 2022 World Cup. It's probably safer to say that many people liked watching the World Cup based on the reported 1.12 billion people that watched the final between France and Croatia in 2022. (Burns, 2022) So, tune in and enjoy the game, also reflect on the increased presence of Black soccer players. Team USA and their new captain Tyler Adams lost in round sixteen but our presence is still there. Stay tuned for next year's game

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