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Kickin' It in the Florida Grass – A Tribute to the Tampa Bay Rowdies and a Celebration of World Cup Soccer [An Exhibit from June 2002 through Fall 2002]

James Anthony Schnur,

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As most of the world watches the World Cup soccer matches, long-time residents may remember our region's first professional sports franchise, the Tampa Bay Rowdies. The Rowdies joined the North American Soccer League (NASL) in 1975. For the next decade, the team played outdoor soccer at the old Tampa Stadium.



While the Buccaneers struggled during their early years, the Rowdies attracted many loyal supporters, known as "Fannies." During its inaugural season, the team owned a 16-6 record (.727 winning percentage), and would continue to carry a winning percentage for six of its ten years in the NASL. Crowds of 20-30,000 packed the stadium to see great soccer, dancing routines by the team's cheerleaders (the "Wowdies"), and the popular fourth of July fireworks that brightened Tampa's summer skies.



During the 1980s, the Rowdies also played in an indoor professional soccer league with games at the Bayfront Center. By the early 1990s, declining attendance and financial difficulties within the soccer league led to the team's disbandment. Though the Tampa Bay Mutiny played a few seasons of outdoor soccer between 1996 and 2001 as part of Major League Soccer (MLS), the Mutiny failed to capture the widespread fan support of the early Rowdies teams.

The Rowdies hosted a successful youth soccer program known as "Camp Kick-in-the-Grass" and players frequently visited schools throughout the Tampa Bay region to offer soccer demonstrations.

While the world enjoys the action in Japan and Korea, we can remember the days when the Rowdies played on our summer "field of dreams."



Verse from the Rowdies popular theme song:

“The Rowdies run here . . . the Rowdies run there
They kick the ball around
The Rowdies run here . . . the Rowdies run there
Then they fall on the ground
Ohhh . . . the Rowdies . . . The Rowdies . . .
The Rowdies aaarrreee . . . a Kick in the Grass”

**Kickin' It in the Florida Grass—
A Tribute to the Tampa Bay Rowdies and a
Celebration of World Cup Soccer**

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