

U.S. soccer win a fitting tribute

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By Jared Emerson Sports Reporter | 0 comments

It was over as soon as the Star Spangled Banner was sung.

A sellout crowd of 23,881 joined the 11 Americans on the field in singing the National Anthem of a nation remembering the 11th anniversary of a tragic event.

It's hard to make sports sound important when remembering Sept. 11, but there's something special about cheering for a team representing your country rather than where you go to school.

On Tuesday night, the U.S. Men's National Team beat Jamaica in a World Cup qualifier in Columbus, Ohio to put the U.S. in a tie for first place in the qualifying group.

The anthem ended amidst cheers and chants of U-S-A as the American and Jamaican players met at the center circle for a moment of silence. And then, it was time to go to work.

Except this time, it seemed different. The Americans seemed to play with more passion than usual, pressuring the Jamaican National Team.

Maybe it was because the U.S. needed to beat Jamaica to get the American's World Cup qualifying back on track, or maybe it was something more.

On Tuesday, a few hours before the game, U.S. captain Carlos Bocanegra took to twitter to express his feelings about playing on Sept. 11.

"Very proud to represent our country on 9/11," Bocanegra said. "Thanks to all who serve and protect. Remembering those who lost their lives."

It's impossible to play a game, especially when representing your nation on the international stage, on Sept. 11 and not feel some sort of pressure.

"It's such a sad and important time in our country's history," goalkeeper Tim Howard said. "Hopefully that will spur us on and give us inspiration."

The U.S. played inspired soccer in the first half, completely dominating possession and taking numerous shots on goal. Somehow Jamaican goalkeeper Dwayne Miller made multiple saves and the U.S. hit the goalpost on three of its first six shots.

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Despite the action, the most memorable part of the first half belonged to the fans.

Each fan was given an American flag upon entering Columbus Crew Stadium. As the game entered the ninth minute, every flag was waving as the crowd chanted and cheered. The cheer ended in the 11th minute, another tribute to the victims.

The American Outlaws, a U.S. soccer supporter's group, orchestrated the cheer and spread the word via social media.

I think everyone wanted the Americans to score at during those two minutes, if not because they wanted the U.S to win then because they were interested to see if the stadium would sustain the ensuing celebration that was sure to happen if they scored.

It seemed like a night where the U.S. was destined to win, and although it took Americans until the second half, they did just that.

Forward Clint Dempsey was fouled from a little more than 25 yards out in the 54th minute. His attacking partner Herculez Gomez stepped up and sent a curving free kick past a diving goalkeeper and into the back of the net.

Gomez, instead of going into a self-glorifying celebration, ran toward the crowd pulling his shirt forward so that everyone could see the U.S. Crest emblazoned on the chest.

The U.S. defended against the Jamaican's efforts to tie the game and the American's held on for a much-needed 1-0 victory on a special night.

Maybe I'm going a little over the top, but I felt quite a bit of pride for a victory that happened on the anniversary of an event that meant to defeat us.

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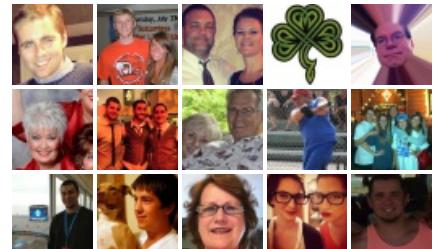
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