

SPORTS

Grab a Seat

Our global sports guide takes a pass on US football.

BY SHANNON SIMS

For millions, the obsession begins about now, as the cooling air and browning leaves harken another season of football in North America. Some fans will don jerseys and hibernate in TV dens while others will watch the adrenaline-fueled body blows in person, inside shiny, modern coliseums filled with restaurants and shops and any number of opportunities to drop a dime.

Contrary to at least some fans' notions, of course, the National Football League isn't the only game on our globe. In fact, while much has been discussed about a mysterious decline in US football fan spectating, many other countries' sports leagues are doing just fine. But it does take a true sporting connoisseur to keep track of all the leagues out there. Few executives pit-stopping in Tokyo will know to check out, for example, a Yomiuri Giants game. And fewer still will try to witness the All Blacks, which happens to be a New Zealand national rugby team whose world dominance is unprecedented.

All of which may be a shame, since pro sports outside the US can be a ridiculous bargain. (Prices at some US venues have jumped 50 percent even since the recession.) And besides, sporting experts say it's hard to calculate the true value of something as intangible as a sporting event. "It isn't always the marquee matchups that matter most," says Paul Swaney, who reviewed 500 stadiums for his website Stadium Journey. Think atmosphere, nice ushers, good viewing lines—all in plenty of supply across the globe. ●

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THE WIDE



CHINA: BASKETBALL

The Chinese Basketball Association is where many former star NBA players move once their careers start to arch, and it's where some of China's best homegrown talent get their start. Ticket prices to a Beijing Ducks game start at \$12.



JAPAN: BASEBALL

Baseball is huge in Japan, and the must-see rivalry pits the Yomiuri Giants against the Hanshin Tigers—think of it as Japan's version of Yankees versus Mets. For about \$50 you can see a great league rivalry while enjoying some Asahi beer and a bento box in the Tokyo Dome.



NEW ZEALAND: RUGBY

Despite the fervor in England over rugby and the soaring ticket prices, New Zealand remains the top-ranked country in the world in the sport. But you'll pay to see the All Blacks play: sometimes more than \$500 for a ticket. Is it worth it? Fans say the Auckland atmosphere more than makes up for it.



AUSTRALIA: CRICKET

At least in one part of the world, ticket prices are dropping. This year, Cricket Australia, the national league, dropped its ticket prices for the season, which means it is now possible to see a match for \$30.

WORLD OF SPORTS



RUSSIA: ICE HOCKEY

Each year, Russia's national ice hockey team ranks among the world's best. The best place to catch some of these top-ranking players is with the Saint Petersburg team, SKA. SKA stands for "Sport Klub of the Army," and in fact the team was originally made up of Leningrad military officers. With game attendance high, ticket prices for this peek into Russia's history and favorite sport hover around \$100.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: BASEBALL

The professional season starts in October and lasts until the end of January, which means you can see players from Major League Baseball in the Dominican leagues. Games are often played at the massive Quisqueya Stadium in Santo Domingo, where ticket prices average just \$5.



BRAZIL: SOCCER

There are no shortage of soccer games being played at any moment in Brazil, which means there are plenty of tickets to choose from on any given week. For just \$10, you can usually get a ticket to see Botafogo, one of Rio de Janeiro's most beloved teams, play a home game.



GHANA: SOCCER

In recent World Cups, Ghana has made a strong showing for the future of African soccer. So it should come as no surprise that the soccer matches played in Ghana can be some of the best in the continent. In the capital of Accra, it is possible to catch a game between rivals Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko for anywhere between \$2 and \$22—a small price to pay for a chance to see some of the country's World Cup—quality players.