

WORLD CUP: Many gather to watch final on Germain Arena's big screen VIDEO/PHOTOS

By NICK KRUEGER

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ESTERO — In the 116th minute of the 2010 World Cup final, Spain's Andres Iniesta volleyed a Cesc Fabregas pass in the penalty box and buried the opportunity he had fought for the entire game.

During the build up to that moment, fans rose from their seats as Spain's counter attack was on. They cheered and chanted Ole as the seconds ticked off the clock following the goal. Faces painted in red and yellow howled triumphantly.

And that was just the scene inside Germain Arena.

The predominantly Spanish supporting audience watched Spain win its first World Cup in its first appearance in the tournament's final game against the Netherlands, 1-0, at the arena on Sunday afternoon.

Univision's local affiliate, WUVF, presented the game to an estimated group of more than 1,500 on a mammoth 56-foot wide screen. The dramatic conclusion to the game was a fitting end to a day of celebration that began hours before kickoff.

"It was a success. We would have liked a bigger turnout, but the teams that made it (to the final) weren't as appealing to the Hispanic community," Univision production manager Jose Fernandez said. "We're happy with the result. This was a big event in this area."

The two European teams in the final may not have been as popular with a local following more committed to Central and South American nations, but enthusiasm for the game itself and good humor within the soccer culture brought an authenticity to the watch party.

During the pre-match tailgate, fans gathered in the arena's parking lot for live music and a parade. Prior to the doors opening, the drums and steps of Danza Azteca, a Guadalupeana dance group, drew the eyes and ears of those waiting. Inside, spectators decked out in jerseys, scarves and balloon hats blared their now infamous vuvuzelas.

"We decided to come down here to witness the game on the big screen," Melisa Cifuentes of Naples said. "It has been the most amazing experience. Cheering with everybody and watching Spain win was awesome."

The balance of fans was decidedly tipped in Spain's favor, but handfuls of Dutch supporters showed to watch Holland go for its first World Cup title as well.

Fons Romme, 21, a student and intern in Cape Coral, came by himself to watch his home country. While he presumably left disheartened by the outcome, prior to the game he was happy to boast about his team, and watch it in as close of an atmosphere to the likes of European gatherings as could be found locally.

"It's not a question of if they're going to win, but by how much," he said of Holland. "There are a lot of people here, but I think that I am one of the only people from the Netherlands."

Not lost on the occasion was the American soccer fan, represented by Robert Smith of Cape Coral.

Donning his Navy blue USA jersey, Smith and his wife came to watch the game with a group of people passionate enough to pay admission for something they could have very well watched at home for free.

"My wife asked me why couldn't we just stay home and watch the game on TV," he said. "She was a little unhappy because it was kind of cold in there, but it was great watching it on the big screen."

The next World Cup is set to take place in Brazil in 2014, but given the success of Sunday's event, Fernandez hopes that there is more opportunity for similar watch parties in the future.

"The World Cup only happens once every four years, so we will have to wait and see," he said. "We'll do some other events and festivals. Our goal today was to reach out to the community."



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