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## State to host international soccer tournament

By Brandon Shields

While soccer is still well behind baseball, football and basketball in popularity in Alabama and the United States, it is becoming more and more popular, and the largest soccer event outside the Olympics and World Cup is coming to Alabama.

The national women's teams from Argentina, Canada, Mexico Trinidad & Tobago and the under-21 national team from the U.S.A. will all be competing in the 2007 Futbol Internacional tournament that will be making stops in Birmingham, Huntsville, Decatur, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery and Mobile April 22-28.

Nichelle Gainey, president and CEO of Silverstone International, which is bringing the competition to Alabama, said she wanted to give people in the state a chance to see some of the top soccer competition in the world.

"In 1996, the Olympics were in Atlanta, and some of the games were being played in Birmingham, but not a lot of people from Alabama were able to see them because tickets were bought four years in advance," Gainey said. "This is giving soccer fans here a chance to see some of the best teams in the world and possibly future players in the World Cup and Olympic Games."

Gainey said she had a few people question her why she thought the tournament should be played in Alabama.

"I had people ask me why not in Florida or New York or somewhere," Gainey said. "They asked my why in Alabama, but I ask why not in Alabama."

"I am an Alabama A&M graduate, and I think this is a great opportunity to showcase Alabama to people from other countries, because each team will be accompanied by business leaders and public officials from their home countries."

The Alabama Youth Soccer Association will be hosting the tournament along with Silverstone International, and AYSA director Scott Spencer said this will be a good chance for the younger generation of soccer fans in Alabama to see how some of the best in the world play the game.

"Every soccer fan in the state and surrounding states will be able to see one of the largest international soccer events in the world," Spencer said.

General admission for the games are \$16 per person, with children under 4 being admitted for free. Tickets and game information can be found in the Internet at [www.2007futbolinternacional.com](http://www.2007futbolinternacional.com).

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