Papa Cass chronicles what went wrong for the United States in the World Cup, calling for coach Bruce Arena's head in the process. Cassano also hits on how even casual soccer fan's national pride took a hit with the loss to Ghana, and even mentions to poke fun at the French ... an easy way to get on my good side.

Visit the Papa Cass weblog at http://papacass.blogspot.com/

The universal truth of sports: losing, in any form, sucks.

Go ahead. Try to hide your disappointment over the U.S. soccer team's early World Cup exit. Wrap yourself in a facade of American cowboy machismo. Tell everyone that soccer is for weenies and Euro-trash.

Make believe that you didn't, not once, check your computer at work to see the score of Thursday's game against Ghana. You might not have been able to tell Ghana from Angola from Burkina Faso on a map, but you knew one thing. The U.S. was losing to their team. And it sucked.

Because, even if you aren't a rabid soccer fan, national pride was still at stake. We all knew the rest of the world wanted to see the rich Americans bounced from the tournament. And they got their wish.

Even if all that didn't get under your skin, the thought of jubilant French fans celebrating America's exit across eateries in Paris had to do it.
Sad to say, but the U.S. soccer team came into the World Cup bearing all of the stereotypes the world holds near and dear about America. Our team was overconfident and hype-driven based on what now appears to be a lucky run in the '02 Cup. They arrived in Germany like rock stars. Soccer pundits seriously considered them a threat to advance to the second round or farther.

Then, when the ball hit the pitch, all the high-polished shine came off, and America was once again exposed as a third-rate soccer power.
(I will once again allude to the image of smug French fans toasting America's exit with bottles of Zima. Yeah, that's right. Zima. They probably put lemon twists in them, too.)

America's players spent most of three games out of position, on their heels, and constantly having to dig out of self-made holes. The players looked almost complacent, like they were satisfied that they had apparently arrived as an elite international soccer team.

Maybe they looked past the first round, anticipating later round matches with Brazil, Germany and England. Maybe they thought they could afford to look past the first round.

But elite reputations are not built on one run. In America, soccer success is so few and far between that a second-round appearance is cause for hype. To Brazil, a second-round exit would be humiliating. It's all relative.

The U.S. team became big fish in a small soccer pond, and were ill-prepared mentally for the level of competition the World Cup provides. Much of that blame should be placed at the feet of coach Bruce Arena, who almost certainly won't be back when World Cup qualifying begins anew in 2008.

Arena has done a good job in eight years, but I am in the camp that believes that eight years is too long, and a fresh perspective is needed from the manager's seat. And there's no rule, outside of nationalistic ego, that states the next coach has to be American. If we want to be able to compete with the like of Brazil and the European powers, why not mine their coaching ranks? It has worked wonders for some of the smaller nations in this year's Cup, many of which were far more competitive than the U.S. team.

I think the U.S. has the talent pool to hang with 90 percent of the world's elite soccer nations. As much as 2002 was a positive aberration, this year was a negative aberration. It might take a new coach, and some new players, to make sure that U.S. soccer reaches its full potential when the scene shifts to South Africa for the 2010 World Cup.