

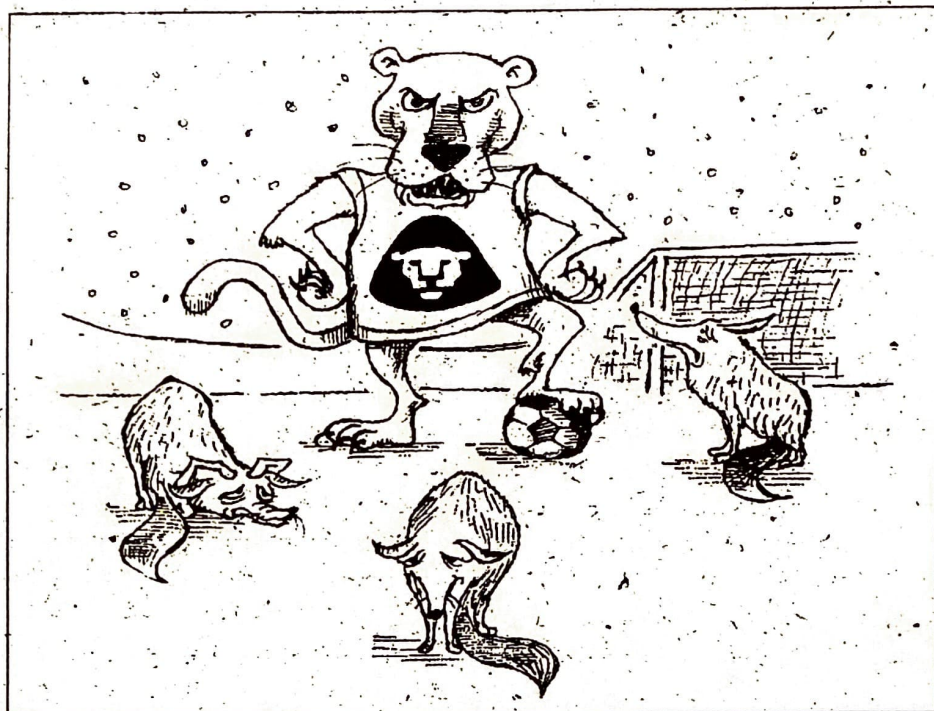
# Drought continues for city's 'Foxes'

By Brian Levinson

Guadalajara's Atlas soccer team had not won a championship in 53 years. The popular joke in the city: Why don't Atlas fans go to Mass? Because they can't stand watching the priest raise the cup. But things were looking different this year. The team was young and exciting, led by Brazilian forward Robert De Pinho. It boasted one of the best regular season records in the Mexican soccer league, and then defeated Guadalajara's other, more popular team, the Chivas, in the two-game quarterfinal late last month.

Chivas has a reputation all its own. By tradition, the team is composed entirely of Mexican players. No expensive imported stars. And despite the team's being owned by one of Guadalajara's richest men, Omnilife president Jorge Vergara, Chivas fans are considered very blue collar. Classist jokes have it that these *albañiles* (bricklayers and masons) drink a coke and eggs for breakfast. And if an Atlas fan and Chivas fan fall at the same time from a 12-story building, who hits the ground first? The Atlas fan, of course, because the Chivas fan goes down cleaning the windows.

There is, not surprisingly, a massive rivalry between the two teams, but the city did manage to form something of a united front during the semi-finals. Atlas jerseys, red and black, filled Guadalajara this past week, and young kids painted big A's on their cheeks, and wore Atlas *zorros* (foxes) around their necks. Many Chivas fans, meanwhile, pledged temporary allegiance to the Atlas



flag, if only because a victory by the Mexico City Pumas would be a geographical disgrace.

Jalisco Stadium was packed for the second and final semi-final match on Sunday. The crowd shouted "Get out of here *chilangos*" -- the colloquial term for Mexico City residents -- to the Puma players on the field, and to their dedicated fans who were collected in the southeast corner of the stadium. As the game was set to begin, Atlas fans sang "I am *rojinegro* (red and black) and that's a sentiment that will never die." One Atlas *porra* (rabid fan section) in the upper deck unfurled a large banner: "Loyalty is not based on how many championships you've won, but in the passion that stirs you up."

But Atlas, already trailing by one goal from the first game, was unable to capitalize on some early scoring opportunities, and could not penetrate the Pumas' defensive shell for much of the rest of the game. Pumas scored a motivation-

killing goal minutes before the half, then added a second in the 47th minute after a defensive blunder by Atlas.

The mood in the stadium had now changed. The Pumas *porra* waved flags, beat drums and jumped in one giant wave of rhythm. Atlas fans reverted to their more despairing playlist of songs: "Oh, but how can I not love you, if my heart is red and my blood is black?" On the field, Atlas players committed needless fouls. Juan Pablo "El Loquito" Garcia was thrown off the game after his second yellow card, leaving his team a man down for the last 20 minutes. Robert De Pinho managed to score a goal in the 86th minute, but it was a mere footnote from his golden foot.

And so, in a year when the Boston Red Sox ended their own deathly long title-less streak, the red and black Atlas Zorros were not able to muster up the same kind of magic on the soccer fields of Mexico.