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**1) ARMCHAIR MIDFIELDER [A Look Back: MLS Rookies]**

*A monthly column about the State of U.S. Soccer that takes a hard look at everything from the performance of the U.S. National Teams to pro soccer in the good 'ole U-S-of-A . If you're looking for a viewpoint that you won't see in a generic, nuts-and-bolts U.S. Soccer press release, you've come to the right place.*

*With all the buzz in MLS focusing on Freddy Adu, Teen Soccer Rookie, this year, what better time than now to look back at the mixed results of past classes of first-year pros. Not so much asking "Where Are They Now?" as we are "Who's Still Around?," the Armchair Midfielder checks in on how each group has stacked up over the past nine years, picking out Survivors and Castaways from each season.*

1996: Sure, technically, most everyone was a rookie in '96, but we'll stick to players coming directly out of college. While Brian McBride (#1 – dispersal) stands as the most successful top pick in league history, busting out of the gates with 17 goals and three assists in his first year in MLS, he had spent part of '95 with VfL Wolfsburg and was thus ineligible for Rookie of the Year honors. Former St. Louis kid Steve Ralston (second round - college) took the award as the Mutiny's midfield workhorse, helping Tampa to a league-best record of 20-12 by contributing seven goals and two assists. Only Jason Kreis (#43 – dispersal), Frankie Hejduk (#67 – dispersal) and Mark Chung (#6 – dispersal) stand out with McBride and Ralston as players still among the league's best. It's almost jaw-dropping to look back at the 16 rounds of the Inaugural Draft and find players that are still in the league. We count nine of a total out of 160 selected. Oh, the glory days of Tommy Reasoner (#56), Flavio Ferri (#97), Khalil Azmi (#132) and final draft pick Carlos Garcia (#160)? It seems like only yesterday. If yesterday was 20 years ago. Side note: Where is the MLS Mel Kiper; could've used him back in '96.

1997: The first real rookie bunch was not that memorable, with much of the top college players having been picked over to make up the rosters for Year One. When Mike Duhane (undrafted) runs away with the top honor, you might have a weak group. Of the 30 players in the College Draft, only Ross Paule (#11 overall), Steve Jolley (#9) and Kevin Hartman (#29 overall) are still around, with Hartman earning Goalkeeper of the

Year honors in his third season ('99). The first 10 picks were more or less a wash, with Rob Jachym (#3), Brian Kelly (#5), Temoc Suarez (#6) and Brian Johnson (#7) making only a minor ripple in the major league sea.

*Survivors: Carlos Llamosa (#8 – supplemental), Kerry Zavagnin (#21 – supplemental) and current MNT assistant coach Curt Onalfo (#16 – supplemental).*

*Castaways: Tahj Jenkins (#1), Mike Fisher (#2), Alberto Montoya (#5).*

1998: The next class of incoming collegians was perhaps the best in league history and helped fuel the first year of expansion. The original group of 36 players has produced two players that appeared for the USA in the 2002 World Cup – Clint Mathis (#6) and Pablo Mastroeni (#13) – as well as four current MNT pool players in Chris Klein (#4), Jeff Cunningham (#9), Wade Barrett (#12) and Ben Olsen (P-40, undrafted). The rest of the first round produced a number of players who ended up being solid pros for years to come, from top picks Leo Cullen (#1) and Richie Kotschau (#2) to Tyrone Marshall (#11). Pro-40 poster boy Bennie O grabbed the trophy after scoring six goals and appearing in 43 of 44 matches in D.C.'s draining, but bountiful season.

*Survivors: Mike Petke (#8), Matt Jordan (#10), Carey Talley (#14), Joe Franchino (#30).*

*Castaways: Ben Parry (#3), Josh Keller (#7).*

1999: For every good draft year there has to be an off year, and '99 was it. While Heaps (#1 overall) lived up to advance billing by taking the award while helping the expansion Fusion make the playoffs, the majority of the wannabe pros ended up just that as not a single player from the second or third rounds ended up sticking around. Current U.S. MNT pool midfielder Richard Mulrooney (#3) was a great find for the San Jose Earthquakes, helping them to an MLS title after two years of maturation. Forward John Wolyniec (#7) has bounced around as a reserve with a few teams, but has emerged with his original MetroStars team as a classy finisher at times and earned some caps to boot.

*Survivors: Chris Brown (#5), Bobby Rhine (#6), Evan Whitfield (#11).*

*Castaways: Jason Moore (#1), Andrew Mittendorf (#8), Matt Chulis (#9).*

2000: Another bumper crop for the future of MLS, this collective was full of standouts from the U.S. Under-20 MNT and Under-17 MNT Classes of '99, as well as Under-23 MNT players that would later play for a bronze medal at the Sydney Olympics later in the year. Leading that group today are three former U-20 back line mates and current U.S. MNT defenders in Nick Garcia (#2), who appeared in all 32 games before helping Kansas City to an MLS Cup title, Carlos Bocanegra (#4), who won the award for helping the Fire advance to MLS Cup final that year, and Danny Califf (#6), who stepped in and played all six matches at the 2000 Olympics. Youngster Bobby Convey (#12) became the league's youngest signing and youngest player to compete, appearing 22 times for D.C. and collecting two assists. Sasha Victorine (#11) and Peter Vagenas (#23) both went on the play important roles for the U-23s as they advanced to the medal round and have been steady performers for L.A. ever since.

*Survivors: Adin Brown (#3), Rusty Pierce (#14), Eric Denton (#19), Jon Conway (#28).*

*Castaways: Steve Shak (#1), Travis Mulraine (#8), Peter Byaruhanga (#15).*

2001: The 2001 rookie class has yielded some solid players, but hardly the type worthy of All-Star status or National Team call-up. U-17 and U-20 standout forwards Santino Quaranta (#8) and Ed Johnson (#19) showed promise after lighting up each youth level, but have not lived up to expectations. Brian Mullan (#9) broke out last year with San Jose, but saw little action in L.A. Mark Lisi (#3) and Ryan Nelsen (#4) were starters straight away with D.C., but on a team that found comfort in the darkness of the cellar over the last

three seasons. A pair of late Fire picks – Jim Curtin (#29) and Henry Ring (#33) – are now making their impact, but the Fire have struggled early this year. Rodrigo Faria had eight goals and two assists for the MetroStars to win Rookie of the Year, but has found it difficult to commit himself as a professional.

*Survivors: Jose Burciaga, Jr. (#12), Eddie Robinson (#20).*

*Castaways: Ali Curtis (#2), Isias Bardales, Jr. (#11)*

2002: This year was another one where beyond the first round of the draft is a Death Valley of soccer dreams. A trio of U-23s – Brad Davis (#3), Kelly Gray (#5) and Kyle Martino (#8) – showed well in their first year and have significant roles with their respective teams two years later. Martino proved to be a promising playmaker, racking up two goals and five assists for the Crew to win Rookie honors over Davis (4 g, 3 a; 11 pts.) and Gray (2 g, 5 a; 9 pts.), who put up almost identical numbers for their clubs. Defender Daouda Kante (#11) and midfielder Shalrie Joseph (#14) are now in Steve Nicols' rotation and have helped the Revs get to the playoffs each of the last two years.

*Survivors: none*

*Castaways: Luchi Gonzalez (#6), Mansour Ndiaye (#7), Carl Bussey (#9)*

2003: It's tough to judge this class with just a year removed, but a number of players made an immediate impact in 2003, led by second round sleeper Damani Ralph, who ran away with Rookie of the Year rewards after ringing up 11 goals and six assists to get to the Fire to the MLS Cup. Ralph's remarkable year overshadowed excellent seasons from potent Revs scorer Pat Noonon (#9; 10 g, 7 a; 27 pts.) and former U-20 stars and current Metros teammates Ricardo Clark (#2; 3 g, 1 a; 5 pts.) and Mike Magee (#4; 7 g, 2 a; 16 pts.). The verdict is still out on top pick Eskandarian, whose three goals and two assists were only disappointing in comparison to the unusually high output of Ralph and Noonan. A third Metro, former U-17 Eddie Gaven (#12) is poised to have a strong sophomore season after seeing little of the field as a rook.

*Survivors: Todd Dunivant (#6), Doug Warren (#14), Logan Pause (#24).*

*Castaways: All of the Top 20 picks are still in the league.*

2004: No brainer. In what is already looking to be a relatively weak class, Freddy (#1) is the obvious cream of the crop, beginning to position himself as the Rookie of the Year by scoring last weekend and pushing for a full 90 minutes to strut his stuff. U-20 stalwart Chad Marshall (#2) will have to anchor the back line for the Crew if "Down goes Fraser!," but not until late picks like Josh Gros (#44), who has two assists in three games for D.C., and Jeff Parke (#60, or last overall), who started in place of an injured Eddie Pope in the Metros opener, do we see players that might have an impact on their team's success this season. But beyond those four and possibly some other to emerge over the year, it could be one of the most disappointing classes in recent memory ... but you never know who will grab the opportunity and show they belong at the pro level.

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## **“BEHIND CLOSED DOORS”**

*A section that will let you get to know the real personalities of your favorite Men's, Women's and Youth National Team players through various funny and unique first-person accounts. In this issue, you'll find:*

### **2) IN 3's (w/ WNT defender Christie Rampone)**

*What's it going to be? Door number one, door number two, or door number THREE?!? Okay, so this section has less to do with “Let's Make A Deal” and more to do with the Multiple Choice section of an*

*SAT test. "In 3's" peeks inside the head of a select National Team player as they pick one of three choices for 25 questions about personal tastes and pop culture.*

Personal:

Favorite place that you've lived: Hoboken, N.J., Point Pleasant, N.J., or Orlando, Fla.?

"No offense to the family in Point Pleasant, but I loved living in Hoboken. I was living there at the right age, in my mid-20s before I was married, and there were just a lot of things going on. It's not a place to settle down, but it's a place to have fun, go out whenever you want, have dinner whenever you want; and it's 10 minutes from the city."

Best activity for night out w/ the hubby: Dinner and a movie, sporting event or comedy club?

"Definitely sporting events. Of course, that means I actually have to be home to do something with him. We go to hockey games and Yankee games, which are the best. He's such a big Yankee fan, so it's enjoyable because he's excited and in a good mood, unless they lose. That's when the date ends early."

Favorite leisure activity while on the road with the team: grab a movie, hit the mall or lay out?

"It's probably grabbing a movie, because I don't get to do it that often when I am at home. I actually go to movies a lot when we are on the road, at least once per trip."

Favorite type of magazine: celebrity gossip (i.e., *US Weekly*), fashion (i.e., *Cosmo*) or home improvement (i.e., *Martha Stewart's Living*)?

"It's actually *People Magazine*. I have a subscription. I like keeping up on the celebrity gossip and it has the only crossword puzzle that I can do."

Soccer:

Best all-time U.S. WNT defender: Carla Overbeck, Joy Fawcett or Brandi Chastain? You must pick one.

"If I have to pick one, it would be Joy. She is a machine. She's very composed and consistent. I love playing with her, and I have learned so much from her. It will be sad when she is done playing."

Best U.S. Women's National Team player from the State of New Jersey other than yourself: Heather O'Reilly, Saskia Webber or Staci Wilson?

"It's Heather O. She has a lot of potential to be around for a long time. I have to give her props even though she's from North Jersey and we all know that South Jersey people are more chill. She tries to pretend she's a Shore girl, but the accent gives it away."

Best way to tie keep your hair out of your face while playing: ponytail, pigtails, or hair band?

"I actually do the tight ponytail or the braid, but sometimes, if it's really windy, I combine it with the pre-wrap hair band. I actually have a lot of hair so most of the time it doesn't want to cooperate. Sometimes I even mat it down with some skin lube."

Favorite soccer kick: PK, free kick or corner kick?

"I don't get to take any of them."

Other Sports:

Best point guard in the WNBA: Sue Bird (Seattle Storm), Ticha Penicheiro (Sacramento Monarchs) or Nikki

Teasley (L.A. Sparks)?

"I like Sue Bird. She's got a great handle, she's super competitive and can hit the outside shot as well."

Best player in college b-ball: Alana Beard (Duke), Diana Tuarasi (UConn) or Shereka Wright (Purdue)?

"I haven't really been watching much, but I was super impressed by Diana Tuarasi. She can do it all. She can hit the three, she can drive, she rebounds, she just finds a way to win. I think she would have been a great soccer player as well."

Favorite Sports Team from New Jersey: Nets, Devils or MetroStars?

"None of the above. It's the Montclair State Red Hawks baseball team."

*[Editor's Note: Rampone's husband Chris is the pitching coach at MSU.]*

TV:

Best Thursday night NBC sitcom in re-runs: "Cheers," "Seinfeld" or "Friends"?

"'Friends.' I actually have the whole series of 'Friends' on DVD from the first episode through last season. I can play my own re-runs."

Favorite female "Friends" character: Rachel, Phoebe or Monica?

"Rachel, because she is the All-American girl. She's pretty, funny, and has worked her way up. She's genuine. And she's from Long Island."

Favorite home improvement show: "Trading Spaces," "While You Were Out" or "Clean Sweep"?

"I want to be on 'Trading Spaces,' but I wish my husband would be on 'While you Were Out,' so I could come home to a new bedroom. My husband bought me the 'Trading Spaces' books for Christmas. It gives you great ideas for your own house."

Movies:

Best depiction of the New Jersey mob: "Good Fellas," "Copland" or "The Sopranos"?

"I don't personally know any 'connected' guys in New Jersey, but I love 'The Sopranos' and I gotta believe that it hits close to home with some guys in Newark and Bayonne."

Favorite movie genre: action, comedy or drama?

"Comedy. I like a good laugh and need to get away from reality after a hard day of training."

Funniest female actress: Julia Roberts, Reese Witherspoon or Sandra Bullock?

"It's gotta be Julia Roberts. I love her as an actress, I love her laugh, and she's just so talented. I would see just about any Julia Roberts movie."

Hottest young Hollywood hunk: Orlando Bloom, Colin Farrell or Ashton Kutcher?

"I must skip this question on the grounds that I am a married woman and my husband might read this. I don't look at men that way--anymore."

Music:

Favorite Jersey musician: Bruce Springsteen, Bon Jovi or Billy Joel?

"Bruuuuuuuuuuce."

Favorite pop starlet: Jessica Simpson, Christina Aguilera or Britney Spears?

"Pass on all of them."

Favorite singer-songwriter: Jack Johnson, John Mayer or Dave Matthews?

"I am not very big music person, but I have my MP3 player and am starting to listen more. I like Dave Matthews."

Favorite kind of music: rock, hip-hop or country?

"All of the above. Honestly, I listen to them all, I'm just not big into rap."

Food:

Favorite "street meat" to grab in Manhattan: hot dog, slice or gyro?

"It's always a slice. It's not a good night in NYC unless you get a slice of pizza to end it. There are so many good pizza places in New York that you can't really go wrong."

Favorite type of non-American food: Mexican, Italian or Chinese/Asian?

"It's actually Indian. I am a picky eater, but for some reason I love Indian. I like the sauce/chicken/rice combinations with a little nan cheese bread on the side."

Better dessert: Cake, ice cream or pie?

"TCBY yogurt is actually my fave. I always go for the white chocolate mouse with the Oreo cookies on top. I would eat it every day if I could."

Best burger-and-fry fast food: McDonald's, Burger King or Wendy's?

"I like Wendy's grilled chicken sandwich, plain with cheese. I don't eat too many burgers, though."

Best American-invented condiment: ketchup, ranch dressing or spray imitation butter?

"I'd have to go with ketchup. You could have a salad without ranch, but you can't have fries without ketchup."

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### **3) GEAR GALORE (U.S. Men's National Team Pullover Windbreaker)**

*In a new piece for 2004, we engage in some shameless self-promotion by spotlighting a different U.S. Soccer product each month, from the newest Nike apparel to all kinds of other exclusive U.S. Men's & Women's merch.*

How's that saying go? April showers bring May flowers?

Well, it's April. And it rains. Maybe still a little chilly, but not cold enough for the heavy coat. Hmmm, what to do...

Our friends at Nike have just the ticket, with the Springtime essential: a good rain jacket.

The official Nike U.S. National Team Pullover Windbreaker incorporates Nike Clima-Fit technology, meaning it's lightweight, breathable, but still wind and water resistant. This rain jacket features mesh lining, side pockets, back vent and a straight waist and is 100% polyester.

The U.S. Soccer shield is embroidered on the left chest, with the swoosh logo embroidered on the right

chest. To show your support for the U.S. Men from Spring to Fall, the rain jacket is the perfect outerwear, with "USA" embroidered big and bold in red across the back.

The Nike U.S. National Team Pullover Windbreaker, which retails on the U.S. Soccer Store web site for \$60, is a favorite among all of the players for its effectiveness in moderate rainfall and its casual, but sharp look wearing it when the weather's just fine.

<http://www.ussoccerstore.com/us20205603.html>

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#### **4) "QUERIES & ANECDOTES" (w/ U-19 WNT goalkeeper Ashlyn Harris)**

*Off-the-wall Questions and Answers, Queries and Anecdotes from U.S. Under-19 Women's National Team goalkeeper Ashlyn Harris.*

*Harris is one of the rising young stars on the world scene after performing so well at the 2002 U-19 Women's World Championship at the tender age of 16. Now, she is in a different role as a leader of the 2004 U-19s as they roll towards CONCACAF Qualifying for the 2004 U-19 FIFA Women's World Championship. Harris, who was on track to become a professional surfer before dedicating herself full-time to soccer, takes a moment to talk about her experiences with the U-19s, tasty waves and how former U-19 teammate Heather O'Reilly got the better of her in paintball.*

CC: What's the best beach to surf in SoCal?

AH: "The only place I've been is in San Diego, but I don't remember the beach. There were good waves there, about three or four footers, but I heard you can get some good waves in Huntington Beach. I don't have time to surf when I am in California because I am always at a training camp."

CC: Is there really any good surfing in Florida? Be honest.

AH: "Of course there is! Satellite Beach and Cocoa Beach are chill. When there are waves there, they break really good because of the reef."

CC: Did you ever watch that reality show "Surf Girls"? You could take those girls easy.

AH: "First off, those girls spent most of the time crying. They needed to get over themselves because they were scared to surf six-foot waves. I couldn't even bear to watch that. It was horrible."

CC: If you got your arm bitten off by a shark like young surfing star Bethany Hamilton did in Hawaii, is there any way you'd get back out there on the board?

AH: "Let's put it this way, if I ever even saw a shark when I was out there, I would be scared to even get in a bathtub, let alone get back in the ocean to be shark food."

CC: Word is you're also good at paintball. What's your best paintball story?

AH: "Heather O'Reilly and I were hanging out in Orlando and decided to go play paintball laser tag. We are two very competitive girls and there were about 15 little boys in there and we were thrashing everyone. The funniest moment was when the countdown to the end of the game started, and she was beating me by two points, and we both tore around a corner on a full-out sprint and ran smack into each other – hard – and just broke down laughing. She beat me by two points, but we both walked out of their sweating. We weren't going to let any little boys beat us."

CC: Do you think you'll ever play in front of almost 50,000 people again like you did in the '02 U-19 World Championship final?

AH: "I hope to. I want to. I love that environment. I love coming into a stadium and not being able to hear someone yelling at me from 10 yards away. There are probably going to be some huge crowds if we play Canada in the CONCACAF qualifying tournament, so I am looking forward to that."

CC: What does that do to your nerves when you walk out for warm-ups in front of a hostile crowd that big?

AH: "Nervous is a good thing for me. When I really care about something, that's when I get really nervous. I just get in my zone and get focused and worry about what I have to do on the field and not get caught up in the crowd yelling at us."

CC: What's your best off-the-field memory of your time with that group?

AH: "There were just so many good times, but I have to say I will never forget when Megan Kakadelas thought that the Australian fans, who were yelling 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!' all game, were cheering for Leslie (nicknamed 'Ozzy') Osborne."

CC: What was it like going up against the new "triple-edged sword" of Heather O'Reilly, Lindsay Tarpley and Kelly Wilson every day in practice?

AH: "It was nerve-wracking at the beginning, but it helped make me into the player I am today, not only with their play but with their leadership. They just tested my limits every day at practice. They are wonderful people and so talented as players."

CC: How does this U-19 team compare to the one in '02?

AH: "It's got its differences, but the biggest thing is that we are all in it for one big goal – to make it to end just like the '02 team did. These girls have the heart and the motivation, so there is nothing really that different. You are surrounded by 18 of the best teenagers in the country and you are all working toward one goal."

CC: Do you and Rachel Buehler and the other players from the original U-19 squad feel like wise old veterans now having been through all of this before?

AH: "We do actually; and the other girls look up to us because of it. We've been through the cycle, and the hard times and the good times, so we are trying to make it better for them so they have a great journey just like we did. I hope we can provide some leadership through qualifying and hopefully onto the World Cup."

CC: Last Halloween the entire team dressed up in costumes for that day's training, and you were the big hit with your Spongebob Squarepants get-up, complete bright yellow undies. How many times have you worn this since then – less than or greater than 10 times?

AH: "WAY more than 10 times. You must understand; it's not that I have just one pair, I have like four pairs. In fact, I have one pair just dedicated for games."

CC: What was the worst or most restricting costume from that day and that game?

AH: "The worst costumes were the sumo ballet dancers that the staff dressed up in, but I have to give them credit for going all the way on that one. The one that might have been the most difficult to play in was Yael Averbuch's cow suit. She had udders coming off her. That was hilarious, but how are you supposed to play with udders?"

###

## 5) “MARK THAT CALENDAR”

**[MNT vs. Mexico – Wed., April 28 – 7:30 p.m. CT**

**Live on Telemundo / Fox Sports World / HDNet / PHILIPS MatchTracker]**

*A stern reminder about an upcoming U.S. Soccer-related event, whether you plan to check it out live and in person, on the “telly” or that wacky world wide web.*

Is there a USA-Mexico match that isn't hugely important? Answer: no! They all are.

Of course, victories like the USA's World Cup triumph over the Tricolores in 2002 count for a little more. OK, they count for a lot more. OK, they count like no other victory ever could!

The score line from the USA-MEX rematch that was ridiculously billed as “Revancha en la Cancha” read 0-0 at the sold-out Reliant Stadium in Houston. Even if they had stole a win that day, the only way to revenge a World Cup knockout round defeat is to win a World Cup knockout round rematch, and that ain't happenin' anytime soon. For now, Mexico will have to continue to enjoy their 4-0 shellacking of the U.S. U-23s in Olympic qualifying down in Guadalajara.

For the Cotton Bowl clash on April 28, that game will be relived for a number of players on both sides. The familiar U.S. trio of DaMarcus Beasley, Bobby Convey and Landon Donovan will all be there, as will Mexican defenders Mario Perez and Francisco Rodriguez, and dangerous midfielder Diego Martinez.

Despite losing five of their last seven games to the U.S. (all by shutout), it is hard ignore the underlying current within the USA-Mexico rivalry that Mexico has regained some momentum with their recent performances, a feeling which was buoyed by the team's appearances as the fourth-ranked team in the most recent FIFA World Rankings.

That said, expect 2002 World Cup vets Eddie Pope, Frankie Hejduk and Josh Wolff to be geared up to help the U.S. continue its recent dominance on home soil, where Mexico has failed to score in five consecutive matches. The player that CONCACAF fans love to hate, Cuahetemoc Blanco, is expected to be back in green, white and red along with Korea/Japan 2002 goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez, as they try to stop the current U.S. streak.

After creating the lone goal and playing well in his MNT debut, a 1-0 win over Poland on March 31 that marked the USA's first win in Europe in the Arena era, forward Conor Casey will be making the long trip from Germany to spear the U.S. attack in Texas.

Fans can follow the April 28 match, which is being presented by Budweiser, at 7:30 p.m. CT LIVE on Telemundo, Fox Sports World, HDNet and on ussoccer.com's MatchTracker, presented by Philips Electronics.

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## 6) SUPERSTAR!!! (w/ the Igwe Family)

*A monthly feature about a U.S. Men's, Women's or Youth National Team player whose performance or potential calls for that bright, shining spotlight. This month, it falls to YNT brother-sister combo of Amaechi and Chioma Igwe.*

### **All in the Family**

Lisa and Tony Igwe know their daughter and youngest son are talented soccer players. But they never could have imagined the phone calls they got on back-to-back days in early March.

Their only daughter, 17-year-old Chioma, received a call from the U.S. Under-19 Women's National

Team Coordinator Cindy Wolf inviting her into camp for the Philips Lighting Invitational that was to be played at The Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif.

Then, just a day later, their youngest son, 15-year-old Amaechi, received a call from John Hackworth, an assistant coach with the U.S. Under-17 Men's National Team, inviting him into U.S. Soccer's Residency Program.

Two kids. Two calls. Two Youth National Teams. All in two days. To say the least, it was a bit of a whirlwind 48 hours for the Igwe family.

"It was pretty amazing," said Lisa Igwe, admitting that while she's excited and proud of her children, she'll miss them when they are away from home. "It was definitely a great week."

So how does a daughter and a son get called into U.S. National Teams in the same week?

It's all in the family.

Their father, Tony, was born in Jos Plateau, Nigeria, and played for youth national teams beginning when he was just eight years old. In 1968, he represented his country in the Olympic Games in Mexico City and wore the captain's armband for the Nigerian National Team during its World Cup qualifying tournaments in 1969 and 1973. In what he calls the most memorable moment in his soccer career, Tony also went head-to-head with Pele as the Nigerian National Team played against Santos at the National Stadium in Lagos in 1972.

At the age of 22, Tony moved to the United States and enrolled at the University of San Francisco, where he played from 1975-78, leading the Diamond Dons to the NCAA Division I National Championship all four years and helping them capture two titles (they actually won three, but were later disqualified from the 1978 title).

Since then, Tony has coached at Stanford University, Menlo College, and is now the head coach of the men's and women's team at Chabot College. During all this time, he's also been running camps year-round and his children were always right by his side, soaking up everything like a sponge.

"I babysat the kids and took them with me wherever I went, and they would play soccer," said Tony. "They were always around soccer."

It appears to have rubbed off.

Chioma recently led her high school team, Notre Dame-Belmont, to the Central Coast Section championship title last month, setting up the first goal in a 2-1 win over Presentation. This year, she led the league in scoring, was the league MVP, was named a high school All-American and signed to play at the University of California – Berkley.

Amaechi has been playing with older kids his entire life and been involved with his Regional and State ODP Teams. Last year he was the only freshman (there were also no sophomores) on the 2002-03 Bellarmine College Preparatory varsity team that reached the CCS championship. In fact, he is the first and only freshman to ever play on Bellarmine's varsity squad.

And not to be forgotten is the oldest son, Kelechi, who is playing at Santa Clara and was an integral part of the Broncos run to the Final Four last year in the NCAA Championship.

Chioma was actually called into a U-19 training camp in early March at The Home Depot Center, but said getting invited back into camp for the Philips Lighting Invitational was much more exciting as the U.S. gets a chance to play international competition.

"One of my goals is to play well to get invited back for the World Championship, because it has been one of my dreams to play in a World Cup," said Chioma.

Chioma said Amaechi was happy for her and would even help her prepare for the camp, but she knew deep down he was hoping for a call of his own.

"He's been wanting to go (into Residency) for as long as I can remember," Chioma said. "He was so excited when he got the call, he couldn't even talk."

Amechi probably couldn't have predicted he'd get Hackworth's call that day and get invited into U.S.

Soccer's Residency. If for not other reason, because his name says so. In Nigerian, Amaechi literally means, "who can predict tomorrow?"

"They called me two weeks before and told me that I was going to go to a camp in May," said Amaechi, who will begin Residency on April 9. "So it was kind of unexpected. When they called I thought they were going to talk about the camp, but they told me I was going to come into Residency in a few weeks."

While Amaechi dreams of one day playing for Arsenal – his dad says his favorite player is Thierry Henry, even to the point of shaving his head to have the striker's hairdo – he is now looking to the near future and accomplishing goals during his time in Residency.

"I'm really excited," said Amaechi, who has been able to comeback after shattering his ankle last year at a Regional camp. "I'm glad I have another opportunity to improve my game. My first goal is just to get into the starting eleven."

The soccer success the family has had isn't lost on Amaechi and Chioma.

"I think we all kind of help each other a lot to achieve," said Amaechi. "I think that is a big part of our success today."

"It's very cool," added Chioma. "How many families can you say have multiple soccer stars? The hard work does pay off."

In the coming months, the Igwe household will be a little bit more quiet with two kids off in college and the youngest living in Bradenton, Fla., getting the best soccer training in United States. And while their mom will miss them and said she's trying not to really think about it, she's overjoyed they are getting to do something they love.

"It's a great experience for (them)." Lisa said. "A once-in-a-lifetime chance."

*[Editor's Note: Chioma played in all four matches of the Philips Invitational, helping the U-19s to second place. She'll be hoping to make the squad when the U-19s head to Canada to try to qualify for the FIFA U-19 Women's World Championship and defend their title. Amaechi remains in Residency in Bradenton, where he'll hope to help the U-17s qualify for the 2005 FIFA U-17 World Championship in Peru.]*

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## **7) "POINT/COUNTERPOINT" (Who will be the Best Team in MLS in 2004?)**

*In this playful piece, we pose a question or make a statement about something in soccer that will be opined about, agreed and disagreed on, by YOU, the reader. No more so-called experts giving safe, politically correct answers. Those days are over. Instead, we've opened the floor to everyone out there in Cyberland to throw in their two cents.*

*In March, we asked y'all, based on off-season moves and the first weekend of league-wide action:  
**Who will be the Best Team in MLS in 2004?***

*To say you believe the hype is an understatement, as most of you had a player with zero professional experience leading a team that didn't make the playoffs in 2003 to the top of the league. It seems people in D.C. are perhaps as unrealistically optimistic about United's chances. Of course, these opinions were given before D.C. dipped from their 2-1 opening win over San Jose by drawing with L.A. and letting up in a 3-2 loss to the MetroStars. Wiser heads prevailed after watching Week Three and the MetroStars made a late push as the top answer.*

D.C. United:

“Wow. I was blown away by the outstanding first day of the new season. The soccer was class, the atmosphere everywhere was exciting and importantly, the stands were shown to be full of fans. The club which has the best of everything was and is D.C. United. They always have had the potential fan base to fill their stadium and now with a team of outstanding U.S. National Team stars and other quality players, they can't help but be successful and keep playing before sold-out stands. I have been a soccer fan all my adult life, but I haven't been this excited about a new season for a long time. Barring injury problems, I expect D.C. United to lead the way to the playoffs and go for another championship.”

--David Chapman / 62 / Albuquerque, N.M.

“As a Fire Fan, I would hope that Chicago would succeed. However, with all of the attention (and sell-out crowds) that follow Freddy, D.C. will end up on top. There is something about all of the fanfare that lifts a team to excellence (except in Real Madrid's case, there may actually too many stars (and egos) to go around on that team). We should all hope for the success of Freddy and his United teammates. MLS is the future for young American soccer players. Let's hope that Freddy paves the way for all of them. Good luck Freddy and good luck MLS. Even though I anticipate D.C. United will take it all, I will be cheering for the Chicago Fire.”

--Randy Payne / 40-ish / Mobile, Ala.

“D.C. United will be best this year. Moreno's return set fire in the stands and only burned brighter with him on the field. Adu's presence brings more excitement both for the sport and his talent at 14. Nowak's got the right touch for leading the team into victory. His ability to maximize the line up is key.

How else are they going to earn a new stadium?”

--Gena Zak

“D.C. United, because they have a new coach and a new-found energy. Also they have the return of Moreno, who has already proven valuable, Stewart, Convey, Eskandarian and the possibility of Adu turning out to be what the media has hyped him to be and the desire to return to their late 90's glory. Let's not forget Petke. Oh, and I am a member of their fan club.”

--Marc Berrong

“I think Adu is mature enough to lead D.C. United to a real good year for them. Freddy might even debut in one of the World Cup qualifiers; maybe not Grenada (on June 13), but the ones that follow in the semi qualifying group. He needs the experience if we are going to use him in World Cup 2006 in Germany. Pele was only 17 when he scored 3 goals in the World Cup final in 1958. It is great that MLS finally has a 'coming star.' I look forward to follow the MLS games this year.”

--Ulf Sandstrom / Sarasota, Fla.

#### MetroStars:

“The team to beat this year is definitely the MetroStars. With continued solid defense in Jonny Walker and Eddie Pope, a strong midfield with Amado Guevara and Ricardo Clark, and a plethora of strong forwards, I think it's finally our year to shine. Add to that the new additions in Fabian Taylor and Galvan Rey, plus a strong bench and a superstar in the making in Eddie Gaven, and what you have is a scared league. Just give 'em the MLS Cup now, and save yourselves the tears and heartbreak!”

--Brian Jensen / 27 / New York, N.Y.

“My vote goes to the Metros this season. Why? Because Coach Bradley has instilled a winning spirit within the team this year more so than last year. The returning players have one full season under their belts under Coach

Bradley and are hungry to add to their pre-season trophy by adding another Eastern Conference championship and a MLS Cup to the trophy case in Secaucus, N.J.”

--*Ed Rossi*

L.A. Galaxy:

“Based on the first week's performance, I'd say the Galaxy look pretty strong. The interaction between Herzog, Kirovski and Ruiz was impressive. Dare I say, poetic? Herzog really seems (based on one game) to be the missing piece to their puzzle. Forget his goal, I was excited to see him connect the defense to the offense. The midfield actually looked like they weren't in panic mode all game. Once you include Cobi Jones and Hong Bo in the lineup, I'd say that's a pretty solid team. Of course, that's just my opinion. I could be wrong.”

--*Kevin Cook / 37 / Altadena, Calif.*

***For May, we ask you this: With a group of six forwards (Mia Hamm, Shannon MacMillan, Heather O'Reilly, Cindy Parlow, Abby Wambach and Christie Welsh) currently in Olympic Residency, who provides the best combo up top for the U.S. heading to Athens?***

*E-mail your BRIEF, but well-crafted rant to [centercircle@ussoccer.org](mailto:centercircle@ussoccer.org). PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR FULL NAME, AGE AND CITY OF RESIDENCE. Feel free to submit responses for as many months as you wish, but in the interest of sharing the spotlight, we will be giving space to different respondents from month to month.*

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**8) “YOU DON’T KNOW JACK (MARSHALL)” (MLS All-Time Rookie Trivia)**

*Think you know your soccer trivia? We'll be the judge of that. Pop quiz: who the heck is Jack Marshall? Even the trivia buffs in the U.S. Soccer Communications Department would be hard-pressed to tell you that one Jack Marshall received his one and only cap way back in 1926. Okay, that was pretty much impossible. They get easier. We give you four questions at varying difficulty levels, from 1 (easiest) to 4 (hardest).*

*As in any sport, MLS rookies have been hits and misses in their first years at the top pro level in the U.S. But for every Steve Shak, there's been a Brad Davis. With this trivia being a companion piece to “Armchair Midfielder,” these should be easy.*

Questions:

Q1: Which Men's National Team pool player set rookie records for the New England Revolution with 10 goals and 27 points in 2003?

Q2: Who are the three MetroStars players that were finalists for the Rookie of the Year award in 2001, 2002 and 2003?

Q3: Which two former Rookie of the Year winners are now playing together for the same MLS team?

Q4: Which three MLS Rookie of the Year award winners are no longer in the league?

Answers:

A1: Pat Noonan (N.E. Revolution; 2003).

A2: Rodrigo Faria (2001), Brad Davis (2002) and Ricardo Clark (2003).

A3: New England Revolution midfielders Steve Ralston (Tampa Bay; 1996) and Jay Heaps (Miami; 1999)  
A4: Mike Duhaney (Tampa Bay; 1997), Carlos Bocanegra (Chicago; 2000) and Rodrigo Faria (MetroStars; 2001).

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**\*\*\*HOW'S OUR WRITING?\*\*\***

*We want feedback. No, really. Positive, negative, indifferent--we take all kinds. Reach us at: [centercircle@ussoccer.org](mailto:centercircle@ussoccer.org).*