

"Center Circle"
March 21, 2003
Volume III, Issue 3

Table of Contents

- 1) **Armchair Midfielder (Off-season WUSA Pick-ups)**
- 2) **In Threes (w/ U-20 MNT forward Knox Cameron)**
- 3) **Queries and Anecdotes (w/ MNT, U-23, U-20 MNT midfielder Bobby Convey)**
- 4) **Mark That Calendar (MNT vs. Venezuela – March 29)**
- 5) **The Wife of Brian (w/ Dina McBride)**
- 6) **FAN Point/Counterpoint (Who will win 2003 MLS MVP?)**
- 7) **"You Don't Know Jack (Marshall)" (MISL Trivia)**

###

1) ARMCHAIR MIDFIELDER (Off-season WUSA Pick-ups)

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.

Just like last month's dissection of MLS off-season moves, the Armchair Midfielder turns the same skeptical eye on their female counterparts.

Now on Year Three, it's as if this off-season became the right time to shake things up, with teams dismissing players that may not have lived up to expectations over the first two seasons and ushering in a new set of coaches. As a direct result, Year 3 looks all the more exciting, with the only drawback being the time away from the WUSA that the league's top players will be spending with their respective national teams in the build-up to WWC '03. (Rookies and bench-warmers rejoice!!!)

So here goes, with a list of major pick-up's and major losses, as well as a mini-prospectus, for each WUSA team for 2003, broken down into Who's UP, Who's DOWN and Who's STUCK in the MIDDLE:

Who's UP:

Carolina Courage:

IN: Jay Entlich (HC); Breanna Boyd.

OUT: Marcia McDermott (HC).

If it ain't broke... Sure, it's an old cliché, but when the shoe fits... (Sorry, I couldn't resist). Maybe it's the prospect of prognosticating the Courage's success in 2003 that makes one a bit giddy. I'm sure incoming coach Jay Entlich feels that way, inheriting a team that was the class of the WUSA in 2002 and deservedly walked away with the title. Everyone is back for the defending champs, including two of the league's best players in German forward and 2002 MVP Birgit Prinz and Norwegian playmaker Hege Riise. Then there are a trio of players from the '99 Women's World Cup championship team -- TR, Fotop and Carla Overbeck -- that stepped it up in last year's playoffs. With the addition of Canadian defender Boyd, the Courage should have the best defense in the league, anchored by 2002 Defender of the Year Danielle Slaton and also featuring Overbeck, Nel Fettig, Staci Burt and promising goalkeeper

Kristin Luckenbill, who played every minute of the 2002 season. I guess the rich get richer. (Last one. I promise.)

Philadelphia Charge

IN: Melanie Hoffman, Anne Makinen, Hope Solo.

OUT: Liu Ailing, Mandy Clemens, Zhao Lihong.

Could this be the year for the Charge? After faltering in the playoffs each of the league's first two years, it may be their turn for the title. But their overall success likely comes down to whether injury-plagued English playmaker Kelly Smith can contribute throughout the entire 2003 campaign. Teamed with French forward Marinette Pinchon, who was the discovery of the season after lighting up the league with 14 goals, Philly packs plenty of punch on paper. Smith will have to stay healthy and "Frenchie" will have to avoid a sophomore slump as a marked woman this year in order to make up for the loss of reliable Chinese midfielders Zhao Lihong and Liu Ailing and off-season castaway Clemens. Beyond Smith and U.S. WNT defensive midfielder Lorrie Fair, they're missing impact players in the middle of the field, even with the additions of Hoffman and Makinen. Although the Charge defense allowed the lowest number of goals in the WUSA in 2002 and 'keeper Melissa Moore had a fine campaign, it will be difficult to repeat last year's success, especially with the loss of defensive specialist and former Charge assistant coach Pia Sundhage gone to the Breakers. Don't be surprised if former U-21 starter Solo starts in the nets and has a fine rookie season to help the Charge make it three post-season trips in a row.

San Diego Spirit

IN: Omid Namazi (HC); Jen Branam, Susan Bush, Kerry Connors, Daniela, Christine Latham, Aly Wagner.

OUT: Carlos Juarez / Kevin Crow (HC); Mercy Akide, Shannon Boxx, Rhiannon Tanaka, Fan Yunjie.

As the league's perennial underachiever, the San Diego Spirit did all they could in the off-season to shake that tag in '03: dumped the dead weight (Akide, among others), hired a new coach (Namazi), and picked up the best player to come out of college since the league has been in operation (Wagner). With the addition of Wagner, it's not enough to say that the Spirit feature four U.S. Women's National Team players. The reality is that they possess four of the best players of the 20 that will likely represent the Stars & Stripes at China 2003 with Wagner, Joy Fawcett (arguably the best defender in the world), Julie Foudy (team captain and locker-room crack-up), and Shannon MacMillan (the team's leading scorer in '02 and owner of a ballin' brand new Chevy Blazer). But as we all know, it takes more than a few key players to win a championship, so the Spirit will have to rely on their role players -- forwards Fleeting and Zhang, midfield adds Kerry Connors and the Brazilian Daniela, and defender Kim Pickup -- to get them to the promised land, especially with what appears to be a below average back line. The Spirit also needs goalkeeper Jamie Pagliarulo to return to her 2001 form after a disappointing '02 season, and Namazi will have to prove himself as a first-time women's coach at this level.

Who's DOWN

New York Power:

IN: Tom Sermanni (HC); Shannon Boxx, Lauren Orlandos, Joanne Peters, Cheryl Salisbury, Carly Smolak, Margaret Tietjen, Christie Welsh.

OUT: Pat Farmer (HC); Linda Ormen.

Looking at the final standings from the 2002 season, it's hard not to shake one's head in disbelief. After jumping out as one of the best teams in the inaugural season, finishing third and giving up just 25 goals, New York completely fell off the WUSA map in 2003, dropping to dead last with a shockingly bad 3-17-1 record and an almost sad 62 goals against (JUST UNDER THREE GOALS A GAME!!!). Obviously

his first order of business, new Power and former Australia WNT coach Sermanni went out and grabbed a pair of promising Matildas in defender Salisbury and playmaker Joanne Peters, as well as U-21 WNT veteran Orlandos, but it still doesn't look good out on Long Island. In the nets, Sermanni must choose between often-exposed incumbent Saskia Webber or off-season add Smolak, who only has a few starts under her belt. And with Whalen and Whelchel recovering from ACL tears, U.S. defender Christie Pearce and midfielders Emily Janss and Anita Rapp will have to seriously step up their respective games in order to take full advantage of the stellar David-and-Goliath striking combo of Milbrett and Penn State scoring wiz Welsh.

San Jose CyberRays

IN: Betsy Barr, Mandy Clemens.

OUT: [none].

Like their MLS brother, San Jose is a season removed from holding the league's championship trophy, yet look to be mired in mediocrity for the upcoming campaign. After taking the title in 2001, the CyberRays slipped to fifth place in '02 and didn't make any major moves in the off-season to improve. On top of that, they are the oldest team in the league with three key players over 30: Brandi Chastain (34), Tisha Venturini-Hoch (31) and Sissi (35). Sure, they did well by picking up rock hard d-mid Betsy Barr in the draft and trading for forward Mandy Clemens, who won the Hermann Trophy just down the road at Santa Clara, but it's probably not going to be enough to get them back to the playoffs. As in years one and two, they will rely on defense, with Chastain teaming with tuff girls Thori Bryan, Michelle French and Kelly Lindsey to put the clamp down. Katia, who went on a tear last year with 15 goals and six assists, will need to repeat her '02 success and LaKeysia Beene will need to return to her 2001 Goalkeeper of the Year form for San Jose to overcome an aging midfield and make any kind of noise.

Who's STUCK in the MIDDLE

Atlanta Beat

IN: Maribel Dominguez, Conny Pohlers.

OUT: Amanda Cromwell, Lipang Wang, Sun Wen.

Could the Atlanta Beat possibly have more firepower? Despite possessing three of the league's best scorers in Cindy Parlow, Charmaine Hooper and Homare Sawa, Atlanta head coach Tom Stone went out and grabbed two more talented forwards with German striker Pohlers and Dominguez, Mexico's all-time leading scorer. Although they lost Chinese legend Sun Wen, the bottom line is that the Beat are still loaded with ammo. But questions remain: How do you get all of these players on the field? Will their playing styles mesh? And will the defense be able to support the attack-minded style of play? Having B-Scur in the nets, Nikki Serlenga clogging up the midfield, and Kylie Bivens on the back line are encouraging signs, but overall the defense may struggle in comparison.

Boston Breakers:

IN: Pia Sundhage (HC); Devvyn Hawkins, Stephanie Mugneret-Beghe.

OUT: Jay Hoffman (HC); Bettina Wiegmann.

Like the Spirit, Boston has yet to taste post-season play. Also like San Diego, they have a new coach for 2003 hoping to make an impact. And like the Spirit, they feature four U.S. Women's National Team regulars (Hucles, Kluegel, Lilly and Sobrero). But like San Diego, Boston will need to get it done on defense to make the playoffs in the near future. The Breakers are loaded on offense and will score goals in bunches. In addition to the four USA stars, they have talented internationals in 2002 leading scorer Maren Meinert and forward Dagny Mellgren and two promising additions in Hawkins and French midfielder Mugneret-Beghe, but defense wins championships, and that's where they have struggled. Boston has given up 70 goals across the first two seasons and must have standout years from Sobs and

Klugs, and Canadian 'keeper Karina LeBlanc, who is a bit suspect, to even have a shot at that elusive upper tier.

Washington Freedom

IN: Kelly Golebiowski, Gao Hong, Sandra Minnert.

OUT: Anne Makinen, Pu Wei.

Which Freedom team will show up in 2003: the team that limped to a 6-12-3 record in '01 and started slow in '02 or the Mia Hamm-inspired squad that tore through the second half of the '02 season and came within inches of a league championship? Like fellow finalists the Courage, the Freedom didn't make many moves in the off months, and they look to be quite capable of getting back to the final. Different from last year, they will benefit tremendously from a full season of the services of German defender Steffi Jones, Chinese midfielder Bai Jie, U.S. goalkeeper Siri Mullinix and Hamm, who proved to be the biggest impact player in the league in her role coming off the bench to lift the team to an 11-5-5 record. It should be a treat to see what she can provide across an entire season now that she's 100% healthy and back at the top of her game, especially alongside 2002 Rookie of the Year Abby Wambach (10 goals and 10 assists). The Freedom will be hurt by the loss of assist leader Wei and Makinen in the midfield, but the addition of Australian forward Golebiowski and German defender Minnert, along with quality goalkeeping (especially with the addition of Gao) should be enough to get them to the WUSA final four.

###

“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 THREES (w/ U-20 MNT forward Knox Cameron)

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 Threes” 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.

This month, we give the rapid fire treatment to U.S. Under-20 Men's National Team forward Knox Cameron. The 6'3” kid from the Bronx, N.Y., provided three goals and four assists in 2002 and is one of head coach Thomas Rongen's most dangerous choices at forward heading into the 2003 FIFA World Youth Championship, which was scheduled for March 25-April 16 in the United Arab Emirates but has been postponed indefinitely. Last year, the Univ. of Michigan standout had a breakout year with 10 goals and three assists and led the Wolverines to the Big 10 Tournament final. But for now, he sits in the “In Threes” hot seat:

Best big city in the U.S.: LA, NYC or Chicago?

“NYC, no question. I live near there, plus it's the city that never sleeps.”

Most macho vehicle: sports car, SUV or big ol' truck?

“A sports car. Moms can drive SUVs. It's just cool to own a sports car.”

Best date activity: movie, theatre, or comedy club?

“Comedy Club. It always breaks the ice.”

Favorite type of movie: action, comedy or drama?

“Action for sure, just for the adrenaline rush and excitement.”

Undergarment of choice: Boxers, boxer-briefs or tighty-whiteys?

“Boxer briefs. That way you get the best of both worlds. And my girl likes them.”

Best late night talk show: “Tonight Show,” “Late Show” or “Daily Show”?

“The ‘Late Show,’ because it is filmed in New York, and Letterman is the man. Without a doubt he’s one of the funniest of all time.”

Best late, late night talk show host: Conan, Kilborn or Carson (Daly)?

“That’s a tough one, but I gotta go with Conan. I love the way he is able to make fun of himself.”

Funniest animated series: “Simpsons,” “South Park” or “Spongebob Squarepants”?

“I’d have to go with the ‘Simpsons,’ but I’m a big ‘Beavis and Butthead’ fan. I’m a little weirded out that Bart’s voice is done by someone’s mom.”

Best Thursday night NBC sitcom in syndication: Cheers, Seinfeld or Friends?

“‘Seinfeld’ for sure. That is the best group of comedians ever assembled on TV.”

Best SportsCenter anchor: Kenny Mayne, Dan Patrick or Stuart Scott?

“Stuart Scott. He came up with the newest catch phrases and now everyone uses them.”

Hottest male superhero love interest: Lois Lane, Vicky Vale or Mary Jane?

“Lois Lane. The other two can’t really compare.”

Best Sci-Fi or Adventure series: Star Wars, Star Trek or Lord of the Rings?

“‘Star Trek.’ That is a flat out classic. I always watch the reruns. TNG (The Next Generation) is the best.” *[Editor’s note: Anyone who refers to one of the “Star Trek” series by its acronym (i.e., DSN for Deep Space Nine) is an even bigger dork than when we just thought that he was a casual fan.]*

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

“I don’t see any of them as comedians. So you gotta go on looks, and Julia is the one. She’s my favorite all-time female actress.”

Best rapper-turned-actor: DMX, Eminem or Ice Cube?

“Ice Cube, for sure. ‘Friday’ is my favorite movie of all-time. He’s been doing it for so long, he’s the man. DMX is my favorite rapper, but Ice Cube as a whole is a better actor.”

Best Caucasian marital arts master: Steven Seagal, Chuck Norris or Jean-Claude Van Damme?

“Jean Claude. I don’t know if it was him or the camera tricks, but the helicopter kicks in ‘Bloodsport’ were ridiculous.”

Most Talented Latin Bombshell: Christina Aguilera, Paulina Rubio or Shakira?

“Shakira. She came on the scene with the Latin flavor, but she seems like a rocker. She can do a little of everything and seems to have a good musical sense about her.”

Hottest country girl-turned-pop star: the blonde Dixie Chick, Faith Hill or Shania Twain?

“Shania Twain. Sometimes the Canadian accent comes out and it’s a turn-on.”

Best music channel: MTV, MTV2 or VH-1?

“MTV2, because it’s all music and MTV gets a little too carried away with their TV shows.”

Best rap style: West coast (Dre, Snoop), Midwest (Nelly, Eminem) or East Coast (Jay-Z, DMX)?

“East Coast for sure. Rapping was all about lyrics and east coast rappers are all about lyrics.”

Best rap/hip-hop producer: Dr. Dre, Timbaland or the Neptunes?

“Oh man Wow. Timbaland. You can’t put his style into words. When you hear one of his songs, you can’t pinpoint that it’s him because he is so unique and so different. He switches his style so much you never know what he’ll do. And he has produced almost all genres of music.”

Best guy mag: Maxim, FHM or Details?

“Maxim. They find a lot of new hot girls that no one has ever really looked into.”

Best music mag: Blender, Rolling Stone or Spin?

“Rolling Stone. They have a little more credibility on their side.”

Best sports mag: ESPN the Mag, Men’s Digest or Sports Illustrated?

“ESPN the Mag. It’s a lot more hip and cool to the younger generation. But nothing beats the SI swimsuit issue.”

Best video game system: Xbox, PS2 or GameCube?

“NO QUESTION!!! PS2. It’s got the best games, the most games and nothing beats the controller. FIFA 2003 is my favorite game, and Real Madrid is my favorite team because they are unreal.”

Favorite leisure activity: watch TV, play video games or read a book/mag?

“Playing video games. I can’t remember reading a book on my own without it being assigned.”

Best cola: Coke, Pepsi or Dr. Pepper?

“Pepsi. They’re all the same, but more stars have advertised for Pepsi, so we’ll go with them.”

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

“Italian, because it tastes good AND it’s healthy. But nothing beats Jamaican food.”

Best late-night food: burrito, slice or gyro?

“Gyro, although I should be cutting down on all of that. Nothing beats a nice late night sandwich at 2 a.m.”

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

“McDonalds. It’s something about that clown. I’ve heard too many horror stories about the other restaurants.”

Best American-invented condiment: ketchup, ranch dressing or McD’s “special sauce”?

“Gotta go with the ketchup. It’s traditional, and you can dip just about anything you want in it. But the green ketchup freaks me out.”

###

3) “QUERIES AND ANECDOTES” (w/ MNT, U-20 MNT midfielder Bobby Convey)

Off-the-wall Questions and Answers, Queries and Anecdotes from U.S. Under-20 and full Men’s National Team midfielder Bobby Convey.

Still just a kid (although he’ll turn 20 in two months), Convey already has three MLS seasons under his belt and is expected to be a major part of a D.C. United team that will feature a pair of thirtysomethings in Bulgarian legend Hristo Stoichkov and longtime U.S. hero Earnie Stewart. As with most of his career, he’s currently pulling more than triple duty with club and country, as he’s a leader on the U.S. Under-20 and Under-23 Men’s National Teams and a promising young player on the full U.S. Men’s National Team. But no matter what the team, the Philadelphia, Pa., native and owner of a home in the Virginia suburbs, seems to find a way to succeed. In January, he became the last of the trio of U-17 MNT Class of 1999 standouts to win the Chevy Young Male Athlete of the Year award, having helped the U-20s punch a ticket for UAE 2003 by providing two big assists in the qualifying tournament and also emerging as a leader for D.C. in the pro ranks. Having watched Landon and Beaz arrive on the world stage at 2002 Korea/Japan, his eyes are wide with excitement about following in their footsteps at both the 2004 Olympics and the 2006 World Cup.

Center Circle: After finishing fourth at the U-17 level at New Zealand '99, the same group of players went on to make up the U-20 team, but only finished 13th of 16 teams at Argentina '01. What do you think was the difference in the team's lackluster performance at the U-20 event and how much of it had to do with having been in full-time residency for the '99 tourney?

BC: “Full-time residency was a great success for us going into the Under-17 World Championship. It gave us an opportunity to play together and to be the best we could be as a team and as individual players. I think what happened at the Under-20 world championship was that there were players who weren’t focused on playing; they were focused on getting European contracts. They were not staying focused on the team, and they didn’t think that playing well as a team and advancing in the tournament would help their careers. They cared more about themselves and their contracts.”

CC: Would it be safe to say that the group over-achieved in '99, only to underachieve in 2001, or was it just the luck of the draw?

BC: “At the Under-17 level we played well and had a lot of good players on the team. We did less than we thought we could do, though. We thought we had a chance to win, and then we lost in the semis on penalty kicks. We did better than people expected, but not better than we expected. At the Under-20 level, yes, we underachieved.”

CC: How realistic do you think it is for you to make the 2004 Olympic team and the 2006 World Cup team? Are those in your sights as mid-range goals in your young career?

BC: “Yes, those are my goals right now, and I think they’re very realistic.”

CC: How inspiring has it been watching your ex-U-17 teammates Landon and DaMarcus go on to such success on the full Men's National Team level, especially at last summer's World Cup?

BC: “It was definitely exciting to watch them play in the World Cup and do well. I’ve played with them before and with the Men’s National Team, and now I know that if I work hard and play well I can make the team and play with my old teammates again.”

CC: What do you think of the skill level of the group that has assembled for the first three U.S. MNT friendlies of 2003, compared to the 2002 World Cup team?

BC: "Right now with the full MNT we brought in a lot of younger guys, and Bruce is trying to get in as many guys as he can and then get a core of players and give them experience, so that when it comes time to qualify everyone will have some experience at this level."

CC: You're entering your fourth year at D.C. United. What have been the best and worst parts of your professional experience?

BC: "The best part was the last 7-8 games of last season. I got put in the middle of the field and was able to run the team. I got some goals and we did well and I gained the respect of my teammates. They had the confidence to play with me and that I was able to help the team do well. The worst part was having a team good enough to do well in my first year – we were good enough to make the playoffs and make a run at the Cup - and we didn't even make the playoffs."

CC: Do you have any regrets about missing out on the high school or college experience that someone your age might normally be enjoying?

BC: "No. I have no regrets on missing out on anything in high school, because I basically get to do anything they get to do, but I don't have to go to class. I have to go to my job – training – but I still get to hang out with kids my age. I've got a great job right now, and I have no regrets at all."

CC: What's in store for D.C. United fans and MLS opponents this year, with all of the new blood that joined the club in the off-season?

BC: "This year so far we have a lot of good players on the team, and everyone is focused on winning this season. We have guys that have played in World Cup and guys that have played in MLS Cup. We are more focused, and we know that we have a team good enough to win games and make the playoffs, and that is what we want to do."

CC: Where do you think you'll fit in on the field with all of these talented players and off the field with all of these dynamic personalities?

BC: "So far all the new guys have been great. We've all been hanging out together, going to dinner and everyone has the same goal on the field, and when you share the same goal you can gel with people. I'll probably end up playing left midfielder, but I like playing in middle. When we put out all the new players we have, I'll probably have to play out wide."

CC: Do you ever sit there listening to Ray Hudson in his pre- or post-game speeches and think to yourself "I have no idea what he's talking about" or do you just laugh at all of his unusual analogies and similes?

BC: "I just laugh at him all the time, because he is hilarious. He's a good motivator with everyone, and he knows how to rile the guys up and get everyone ready for the games. He has been pretty good so far this year being serious, but he is a colorful guy. Hopefully we'll see this year if any of the new guys buy into it."

CC: What's it like to be a home-owner as a teenager?

BC: "It's definitely great to be able to go back to D.C. and have my own house to go home to. To know that I was able to build it at a young age is great. It is also great to be able to have my family stay with me when they come down. It's an awesome opportunity to know I had the chance to do that at a young age."

CC: What's your favorite thing about Washington, D.C., the city?

BC: "It's pretty cool driving to practice every day and driving by the monuments, Arlington cemetery, the White House and our government. You don't think it's a big deal, but when other people come to visit they're amazed by it and you start thinking about how great it really is. Not a lot of people get to drive by such historic things every day."

CC: We talked to Ben Olsen about his budding art career. Have you seen any of his paintings? If so, give us an honest evaluation?

BC: "Yes, and I asked him to paint one for my house, but he won't do it because he thinks I'm joking. Ben's very artsy and is constantly inviting me to go to art shows with him."

CC: What's the most embarrassing thing you've ever done, aside from forgetting your passport at the CONCACAF Under-20 qualifying tournament?

BC: "I try not to embarrass myself."

###

4) "MARK THAT CALENDAR" (MNT vs. Venezuela – Sat., March 29 – 1 p.m. PT – ESPN2)

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.

Thanks a lot, Dubya. Just as the U.S. Men's National Team was gearing up to face one of its best opponents in a 2003 schedule that has featured Argentina and will include Mexico, Brazil and Cameroon, the gung-ho boys in beige start bustin' bunkers and putting the rest of the world on alert. Obviously, soccer takes a back seat, but it's a bit disappointing that our mix of young up-and-comers and 2002 World Cup vets won't have a chance to match up against Japan's almost entirely World Cup-vet squad on Saturday.

But ladies and gentleman, out of the dark comes the light, and it bringeth...Venezuela. "Huh?" you ask. Try a country that Bruce likes to refer to as the most improved national side in all of South America. Try a team that won four of their last five games in the last round of CONMEBOL World Cup qualifying. Yes, it's true: Venezuela isn't just for Latin beauties and baseball anymore.

The U.S. and Venezuela have met just once, almost 10 years ago, with the U.S. giving up a 3-0 lead and stumbling to a 3-3 draw at Copa America in Quito, Ecuador on June 22, 1993. But this time Venezuela will face a U.S. team that is ranked in the Top 10 in the world and will feature as many as 10 players who were part of our summer to remember at Korea/Japan 2002. Kasey, Earnie and Frankie are back in the mix for this one, so don't be surprised if this one feels and looks like a World Cup qualifier. With the Confederations Cup and Gold Cup coming up in June and July, respectively, not to mention the Mother of all Rematches on May 8 against Mexico in Houston, it's time to get down to business no matter who the opponent.

And if that's not enough incentive, then maybe you'd just like to check out what John "Turducken" Madden calls "the finest football stadium in the country" and see what it looks like with a real carpet. U.S.-Venezuela kicks off at 1 p.m. PT at Seahawks Stadium, live on ESPN2 and online with ussoccer.com's MatchTracker, presented by Philips Electronics.

###

5) SUPERSTAR!!! (w/ Dina McBride, wife of MNT forward Brian McBride)

Normally a monthly feature about a U.S. Men's, Women's or Youth National Team player who demands

that bright, shining spotlight, this time it's a little story about what it's like to be the WIFE of one of the USA's big-time players.

A Superstar in her own right, Dina McBride has been jet-setting back and forth across the pond, with a child in tow and one in the oven, to support her man. In honor of this, we hand the pen/mic/floor to the Arlington Heights, Ill., native so she can fill in the last few months of life in the spotlight in merry ol' England.

The Wife of Brian

“It all happened so fast, just before Christmas. There had been talk for a long time about possible loans and transfers with Brian, so it was hard to know what to take seriously. In this case, it happened in a matter of days. When we found out the offer from Everton was serious, I knew we would never turn down the opportunity. We don't know how many chances he'll get to do something like this, so it wasn't ever a question about him going. Even though I was pregnant at the time, it was still a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we weren't going to pass it up.

I wasn't going to England until the end of January, so my daughter Ashley and I were listening on the computer when Brian played his first game against Tottenham. When he scored a goal, the next thing we knew our phone was ringing off the hook. Everybody must have been listening that morning! For him to get a chance to play right when he got over there and have success right away was really exciting. He called right after the game and was so thrilled to score, and at the same time disappointed they didn't win. At that moment, I knew the sacrifice we had made was worth it.

The second week was even crazier. Even though I already knew the result, to get to watch him score two goals on television made us very proud.

We planned on me going over for a month, because I had to be home for regular checkups, ultrasounds, and other things throughout the pregnancy. I wish it could have been longer, because the hardest part of the whole experience has been the time we are apart. With the time difference, one of us always tried to call before we went to sleep or first thing in the morning.

I knew about all the publicity Brian was getting before I made my first visit to England, but to see it in person was something else. The first game I went to see at Everton was Feb. 1 against Leeds. As we arrived, there were lines of people out by the parking lot. Everybody was flagging him down, talking to him and asking for autographs. They already had made posters of him! People were pulling me aside, asking me all kinds of questions: Were we staying? Did I like it there? It was wild.

Everyone at the club went out of their way to make us feel welcome. Steve Watson's wife came and picked me up that day, since the stadium was almost an hour away and we had no idea where we were going. She took us to the game, and introduced me to everyone. The other players' wives asked if we wanted to get together for dinner, or have our kids play together. At Goodison Park they have a players lounge that you can visit at halftime and after the game, and the team provides nannies to take care of the kids so you can go sit in the stands and watch the game if you want. They certainly do a great job of making you feel comfortable.

While the fans in Columbus are awesome, I wasn't prepared for the experience of a game at Everton. The fans are singing and chanting the entire game, and the noise is deafening – it's an amazing rush. I remember how special the atmosphere was at World Cup games this past summer, and in England it felt like that every weekend.

This was my first time living overseas, and it was a really great experience, but there were definitely a lot of things to get used to. I remember the first day we were there, we were trying to keep ourselves awake to get used to the time change, so we decided to head straight to the mall. I'd look at clothes and think how cheap they were, and then I realized that once you converted from pounds to dollars it wasn't as cheap as I thought!

I think the hardest part for me was that I was afraid to drive! I wasn't quite ready to tackle that one. Thankfully, we lived about five minutes away from Eddie and Mari Lewis, so we spent a lot of time with them and their daughter Giselle. It was really nice for our kids to be able play together, and it made the transition to a new life much easier.

It was interesting to be on the other side as a foreigner. We were the ones getting stares because of our accents, or when we would use a word and no one knew what we were talking about. For example, when we went to restaurants we would try to order soup, and I guess they don't call it that because we could never find it! Of course, after a week Ashley sounded like she was born there, calling me 'mummy' and saying 'cheers' instead of 'thanks'. Everyone really got a kick out of that.

I didn't get a chance to go to any other games than Brian's, but it seemed like soccer was on television 24 hours a day. I watched more games than I ever have in my life! That part was really fun.

We got a chance to go to London for a weekend. It turned out to be great timing, because it was our anniversary and Valentine's Day when he had days off. The drive down wasn't bad, but the traffic was unbelievable. I thought I knew what traffic was like coming from Chicago, but this was the worst traffic in history. London was such a fun place to be. To be honest, we didn't really go on any tours of the city; we spent most of the time shopping! We also had a chance to have dinner with the Kellers one night, who we hadn't seen since the World Cup.

Since Brian has done so well, everywhere we go the question is whether or not he plans on coming home. We've talked about it a lot, and the main thing for us is being together as a family. With the friends we already have in England and the people we've met, I certainly felt like it was something we could do. For us, it always has to be the right situation for our family and the future. I've told Brian from day one that I would never want to be someone to stand in the way of opportunities that he'll get in his career, and we want to be as supportive as we can. So if he wanted to do it, and he felt it was right for us, we weren't going to say no.

It's been a pretty amazing year, and certainly we feel blessed. For Brian professionally, with the World Cup and his success with Columbus and in England, and at home with the baby coming, we really don't know what else could possibly happen. Through all this, when it comes to his work on the field, he's so hard on himself. Even after he scored two goals against Sunderland, he'd say 'I didn't play as good as I could play,' or 'I need to do this better.' Finally I would tell him 'Hey, can't you just be proud of yourself for a minute?' I think he knows that he's gotten to live out some of his dreams this year, and he knows how proud we are of him."

###

6) "POINT/COUNTERPOINT" (Who Will Be the 2003 MLS MVP?)

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 talking heads 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.

For the March issue, we asked you: Who will be the 2003 MLS MVP (and why)?

To be quite honest, the responses were pretty much in agreement. It looks like a three-man race between a trio of U.S. Men's National Team strikers that not only share great summer memories from Korea, but own the dubious distinction of having their MLS careers dampened by injuries that have prevented them from putting together a standout level of play across an entire 32-game season. From McBride brimming with confidence from his recent EPL stint, to Mathis's attitude adjustment as captain of the U.S. team, to Wolff's change of scenery, you're all high on these talented, but snakebit stars.

Before we get to the responses, I must say one thing to the person who picked former A-League star Brian Ching to be the best player in MLS in '03: Brian Ching will not be the best player in MLS in '03. Don't get me wrong—I love the A-League. But playing against the Los Angeles Galaxy at a packed Home Depot Center is a lot different than facing the Cincinnati Riverhawks at the sold-out Hamilton County Fairgrounds. But I digress... The following is a sampling of your picks for 2003 MLS MVP:

Brian McBride:

“McBride will have what most in the world would consider a full season of soccer once MLS is complete with the addition of the loan time he did at Everton. His impact there has shown his ability on the world stage so he should be able to carry that over into the MLS season. No team needs a player more than the Crew needs McBride. With the addition of Frankie Hedjuk in the back to bolster a progressive fullback front, McBride should be the focus of an offensive-minded Columbus team.”

--Andrew Smock

“With all of his success at Everton, I think this is going to be the year of Brian McBride. In the past he has not performed as well in MLS as he has for the National Team, but I think he is ready to have a breakout year. He is going to surprise a lot of people (the Crew faithful included) and take home the title of MVP.”

--Sara Nac / 17 / Columbus, Ohio

“I say Brian McBride returns from loan to Everton with even more confidence and mystique--and a few more tricks up his sleeve--to finally help bring the Cup to Columbus.”

--Gian Petersen / 35 / Oakland, Calif.

Clint Mathis:

“The 2003 MLS MVP will be Clint Mathis. He will finally be able to play his first full season since being injured and still winning the MetroStars team scoring title two seasons ago. In addition to that he is surrounded by more weapons than ever, and he is at his best when being able to control ball distribution as well as creating his own shots. Not only that, but his MLS contract is up soon, so he will be motivated to show MLS he is worth keeping, as well as showing the big foreign clubs he is worth bidding on.”

--Kevin Pugliese / 23 / Nutley, N.J.

“I project Clint Mathis as the MLS MVP for 2003. He has the skills to dazzle the crowd, the motivation to make this his year in the MLS, the fellow players to support him and the coach to keep his volatile personality in check.”

--Kevin Etzel / 47 / Irvington, N.Y.

Josh Wolff:

“If Josh Wolff remains healthy, he could have a breakthrough year with Kansas City. Wolff could finally be the forward target that the Wizards have been missing since Miklos Molnar retired. With a crafty veteran like Preki (who still makes the prettiest passes in the league), and a great crosser in Chris Klein, Wolff could rack up the scoring stats and possibly steal the MVP this year. For Wolff to make it through a full season uninjured is a big IF, however.”

--Rob Stoddard / 29 / Kansas City, Mo.

“Josh Wolf will be MVP because he will finally complete the season 100% healthy. He's got all of the

tools: dribbling, speed, shot, anticipation and vision, to make a major contribution to KC. I feel he will lead the league in scoring. This will be his breakout year.”

--Derek J. McCracken / 40 / Pittsburgh, Pa.

Others:

“MLS. Period. If these players all match up to their expectations then the real winner will be the fans and MLS. The level of play will step up a notch this year. On the heels of a great 2002 and the U.S. Men's National Team success in Korea, the MLS will prove once and for all that this league is worth mention with the likes of all the major soccer leagues of the world. As for the player who will come out and prove that he is the tops. I have to go once again with Carlos Ruiz. There wasn't any one player in MLS in 2002, who showed more consistency and drive. When the Galaxy needed goals, he was there to notch them. We aren't talking about poached goals. These were world class strikes by a player who showed his true heart through and through. He has the speed, stamina and strength to take on anyone and make a goal out of absolutely nothing.”

--Daniel Bona / 40 / Danvers, Mass.

“I believe that by the end of the season Earnie Stewart will show us exactly what he's been doing in Holland. His leadership, skill, savy, and determination will give us a glimpse of what this league will need to be successful. Earnie Stewart will be the 2003 MVP.”

--Ted Wagner / 34 / Charlotte, N.C.

“I believe that the MVP for the MLS in 2003 will not be a high powered, and often threatening goal scorer. Nor will he be one of the brave men who tend the goal between the posts. Value is not always gauged by points, instead it is the ability to play on both sides of the ball, offensively AND defensively. Effectively providing opportunities for his teams success. Judging with those criteria in mind, my vote would be for Pablo Mastroeni of the Colorado Rapids. I believe he fits that description well, which makes him a very valuable player. Perhaps the MOST!

--Curtis White / 29 / Lisle, Ill.

Thanks to everyone for the responses to the March question. As you know, the odds of being printed are better if you keep it under 150 words so that we can put as many as 10 opinions on display each month.

Now it's WUSA's turn. The April question: Who will be the 2003 WUSA MVP (and why)?

Can “the legend” finally live up to her billing as the world's best player across an entire WUSA season? Will Tiffeny Milbrett get the Power back on track and pour in 20 goals to again lead the league in scoring? Or will it be a foreign player who will again turn heads, as Hege Riise, Bridgit Prinz and Marinette Pinchon have done across the first two years? The stage is also set for a dynamic player like Aly Wagner to have a phenomenal rookie season and prove why she was the number one pick.

Okay, that's all the help you're getting from me. It's your time to decide. E-mail your BRIEF, but well-crafted response to 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.

###

7) “YOU DON'T KNOW JACK (MARSHALL)” (MISL Trivia)

Think you know your soccer trivia? Well ... try us. We'll see how far back your knowledge of Team USA and U.S. Soccer extends. And 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.

That's right. IT'S INDOOR SOCCER TIME!!! Though often overlooked by the casual soccer fan and sometimes overshadowed by their outdoor counterparts, the fact is that the Major Indoor Soccer League is the longest-running single professional league in our great land with more than 15 years of history. After operating from 1978-1992, the league had a rebirth in 2001 to replace the National Professional Soccer League and is back going strong with eight teams and two more to join for the 2003-04 season. With the 2002-03 MISL Playoffs kicking off this weekend, here's your chance to catch up with some quick-and-dirty league trivia.

Questions:

Q1 (1 of 4): Which team has won the most MISL titles?

Q2 (2 of 4): Who are the defending MISL champions?

Q3 (3 of 4): In 2001, what league did the MISL merge with to form a new single-entity professional indoor soccer league?

Q4 (4 of 4): Who is the all-time winningest U.S. indoor soccer coach?

Answers:

A1: San Diego Sockers, with eight titles ('83, '85, '86, '88-92).

A2: Philadelphia Kixx.

A3: World Indoor Soccer League, or WISL.

A4: U.S. Futsal National Team and Milwaukee Wave coach Keith Tozer, with 529 victories (combined regular season and playoffs) in 19 years.

###

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

We want feedback. No, really. Positive, negative, indifferent--we take all kinds. Reach us at: centercircle@ussoccer.org.