

"Center Circle"
Issue 39 - April 29, 2005

Table of Contents

1) Armchair Midfielder	[Elected Hall of Famers]
2) In 3's	[w/ WNT Defender Heather Mitts]
3) That's What You've Been Doin'	[w/ former MNT Defender John Stollmeyer]
4) Gear Galore	[U.S. MNT Travel Pack]
5) Mark That Calendar	[U.S.-England]
6) Get to Know Me	[U.S. WNT Head Coach Greg Ryan]
7) Famous Fans	[w/ Drew Carey]
8) You Don't Know Jack (Marshall)	[Champions League]

1) ARMCHAIR MIDFIELDER [Elected Hall of Famers]

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.

Last week when three of the biggest names in U.S. Soccer history – Tab Ramos, John Harkes and Marcelo Balboa – were elected into the Soccer Hall of Fame, reporters and fans alike tossed around the words “pioneer” and “legend” to describe all three former MNT and MLS players. But what exactly did these three men do to be called pioneers and legends? Well, we'll tell you how and also let you know what we remember most fondly about each future Hall of Fame inductee. Oh, and as an added bonus, we're supplying you with footage of a few of their most memorable goals with the national team.

Tab Ramos

The MNT Numbers:

Years – 11 (1988-1990, 1992-2000)
Caps – 81
Starts – 70
Minutes – 6306
Goals – 8
Assists – 14
Points – 30
Cards (Y/R) – 9/0
Record – 38-29-14
World Cups – 3 (1990, 1994, 1998)
World Cup appearances/goals: 9/0
World Cup qualifying appearances/goals: 15/3

Why He's a Pioneer: Being part of the first team to qualify for the World Cup in 40 years is probably cause enough to get a player into the "U.S. Soccer pioneer" club, but Ramos did so much more to help bring the world's game back into the consciousness of the American public. While his on-the-field contributions can never be questioned, Ramos was one of the first U.S. soccer players to cross into the mainstream when he signed up with Snickers (and also Nike and McDonald's). Having his face plastered over the airways helped solidify that soccer and its players were marketable (we know you ate your share of Snickers) and opened the doors for Mia Hamm, Landon Donovan and Freddy Adu. To be a true pioneer you have to be willing to lead the way and create a path for those that follow, something Ramos did when he was the first player signed by Major League Soccer on Jan. 3, 1995. He left a career in Spain, ventured into a league that no one really knew would succeed. His involvement in MLS helped the league set a strong foundation that has continued 10 years later.

Why He's a Legend: You might not have known that along with his 11 years with the full MNT, he played for the U.S. at the World Youth Championship in Mexico in 1993, he was on the 1988 U.S. Olympic Team and he was a member of the bronze medal-winning U.S. team which surprised European observers in 1989 during the first FIFA World Championship for Five-a-Side Football (now futsal) in the Netherlands. Impressive in itself, wouldn't you say? But he did all that before he was really even in a groove with the national team. After playing at North Carolina State, he got his first cap against Guatemala on Jan. 10, 1988. From there he played in 80 more games, being on the field for more than 6,300 minutes, scored eight goals, and notched 14 assists. He is one of only 10 players to ever compete in three World Cups and became the first to pull off that feat along with Marcelo Balboa and Eric Wynalda when he took the field in France in 1998. Want something even more impressive? During his time, Ramos was considered the best American playmaker to ever step on the field.

What We Remember: When someone talks about Tab, what's the first thing that comes to mind (and saying the sugar-free soda does not make you funny)? We remember a lot of memorable moments in Ramos' career, but two stand out the most and they can be divided into good and bad. The bad came during the 1994 World Cup when Ramos was brutally elbowed by Brazil's Leonardo along the sideline during their second round game and had to leave the game with a fractured skull. While Leonardo's crushing blow is remembered by the millions of Americans watching that July 4 game due to its savageness, what shouldn't be forgotten is that before the Brazilian lashed out, Ramos was one of the best players – if not THE best – on the field. He was such a nuisance to Brazil he might have actually been able to keep a star off of Brazil's jersey (okay, maybe a stretch, but with Tab they might have been able to at least force penalties). The good came on Sept. 7, 1997, in Portland Ore., during a 1998 World Cup qualifying match against Costa Rica when his blast from 25-yards out into the lower right corner provided the U.S. with a 1-0 win and kept them on their path towards France. Along with being one of the most remarkable goals in U.S. history, you had to love Tab's follow through, running over the endline, around the goal and not letting a single teammate catch up to him until a good ten seconds later.

Add Link to Goals

John Harkes

The MNT Numbers:

Years – 13 (1987-1990, 1992-2000)

Caps – 90

Starts – 89

Minutes – 7805

Goals – 6

Assists – 11

Points – 23

Cards (Y/R) – 17/0

Record – 41-33-16

World Cups – 2 (1990, 1994)

World Cup appearances/goals: 6/0

World Cup qualifying appearances/goals: 21/0

Why He's a Pioneer: At the age of 20, John Harkes wasn't thinking about being a pioneer when he stepped on the field against Egypt in South Korea on June 8, 1987. He just wanted to win. A tenacious player that left every ounce of energy out on the soccer field, Harkes was a pioneer by showing the players that would come after him what it meant to play hard and bring passion to the game. That passion helped him open one of the biggest doors for American soccer players – the one across the Atlantic. Harkes actually ripped the door off its hinges when he joined Sheffield Wednesday in 1990 and brought the phrase “First American to...” into the lexicon of English broadcasters. His impressive stint on the big island might not have totally changed the British belief that Americans would ever be good enough to play “their game,” but he did at least give the U.S. ammo in the debate. Over ten years later, players like Claudio Reyna, Tim Howard, Jovan Kirovski, DaMarcus Beasley, Brad Friedel and Kasey Keller have all (or at least should have) given Harkes a “thank you” as they walked through that busted door.

Why He's a Legend: After a career that included 13 years with the Men's National Team, stints in Europe and coming back to be a founding father for Major League Soccer, Harkes' legacy was set in stone. Not only did he play in two World Cups, compile 90 caps and 7,800 minutes of play, score six goals and notch 11 assists, Harkes received the highest honor on the national team when he wore the captain's armband. A symbol of your ability, work ethic and leadership skills, wearing the captain's armband for your country is a special honor and one Harkes deserved during his time with the MNT. Harkes' legendary status was cemented with his awe-inspiring performance in England. Unsure of what to expect, he had an amazing run with Sheffield Wednesday and later stints with West Ham, Derby County and Nottingham Forest. In his first year, Harkes helped Wednesday capture the English League Cup championship to get promoted to the English Premier Division and scored a 35-yard one-timer past former English national team captain Peter Shilton to earn Goal of the Year in 1990. A year later

he became the first American ever to play in England's hallowed Wembley Stadium when he helped Sheffield Wednesday capture the League Cup title over Manchester United. He also became the first American to play in a UEFA Cup match in 1992 and, in 1993, became the first American to score in a F.A. Cup Final, notching Wednesday's consolation goal in a 2-1 loss to Arsenal.

What We Remember: You can talk about all the U.S. matches and his impressive games in Europe, but if there's one thing we remember about Harkesy it was his two championships with D.C. United. Partly because many of us may not have seen his games in England, but more so because of how impressive it is to win two straight championships (and get to the final the next year). With all the parity in MLS now, the chances of another team ever getting to three straight championship games and winning two in a row down the road is slim to none. Harkes was D.C. United. Yes, they had a number of incredible players on those teams (Agoos, Diaz Arce, Etcheverry, Moreno, Pope and Sanneh), but Harkes was their leader, the captain who led the team to those first two MLS titles in '96 and '97.

Add Link to Goals

Marcelo Balboa

The MNT Numbers:

Years – 13 (1988-2000)

Caps – 127

Starts – 118

Minutes – 10,457

Goals – 13

Assists – 4

Points – 28

Cards (Y/R) – 12/3

W-L-T – 40-46-42

World Cups – 3 (1990, 1994, 1998)

World Cup appearances/goals: 8/0

World Cup qualifying appearances/goals: 10/0

Why He's a Pioneer: Like Tab Ramos and Eric Wynalda, Marcelo Balboa helped pave the growth of U.S. Soccer by helping the U.S. Men qualify for three straight World Cups, but his most indelible mark was his style of play. A tough-nosed defender who tackled hard, but also had a flair to get into the attack and create havoc for opponents inside the penalty area, Balboa (similar to Alexi Lalas) brought an added boost to the U.S. offensive attack. While many defenders go through their career hoping to get one or two goals for the national team, Balboa garnered 13, good enough to average one a year during his career. Balboa was also instrumental in getting people interested in the game without even touching the ball. The American people can be fickle, but they like talented players with unique looks and Balboa was one of the most noticeable players on the field with his long, black hair. During the '90s when non-soccer fans started to get interested in the

sport, Balboa was one of the players that people responded to (again like Lalas, see goatee). Ask your mom about the '94 World Cup. He also was one of the MLS founding fathers when he helped the league kick off in 1996, playing for the Colorado Rapids.

Why He's a Legend: Balboa is a player you'd call a legend just by looking at his stat sheet. The heart of the U.S. defense, the "Iron Man" started the 100-cap club, becoming the first to pull off the feat in 1995 and is still the third highest with 127. He's compiled just under 10,500 minutes of play, 13 goals, and four assists. At the highest level, he played in 10 World Cup qualifying matches and eight matches in three World Cups (tied for third highest in U.S. history). During his remarkable career with the MNT, he also won U.S. Soccer's Male Athlete of the Year twice, one of only three players to be honored twice. With all those impressive statistics, Balboa's "legend" is probably something that isn't recorded – bicycle kicks. Balboa says he would practice "on my parents' bed when they were not home with a balloon or a nerf ball," and it appears the practice paid off as he became known for his aerobatic, over-the-head attempts, connecting cleanly on two memorable shots in his career. The first with the U.S. MNT in 1991 in the CONCACAF Gold Cup and the second in 2000 with the Rapids against the Columbus Crew, which won goal of the year honors. Yet, the bicycle kick that everyone remembers is the one he missed (read the next graph).

What We Remember: Has any missed shot ever been more burned into the memories of soccer fans? The U.S. beat Colombia 2-1 in the biggest victory ever for the U.S. at that time and while the majority of the post-game talk was about the own goal and Earnie Stewart's winner, no one could stop thinking about the "what if." As in "what if" Balboa's bicycle attempt late in the game would have gone in instead of whistling just wide of the left post? Greatest World Cup goal ever? We know it's a moot point since it didn't go in, but soccer fans still get giddy thinking about it.

Add Link to Goals

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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/ U.S. WNT Defender Heather Mitts)

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.

Heather Mitts can be tough to track down. Between playing with the Women's National Team to doing sideline reporting for MLS broadcasts or cheering on her Miami Dolphin quarterback boyfriend A.J. Feeley, the former ESPN Page 2's Hottest Female Athlete always seems to be doing something active. Luckily, we were able to track Heather down and...you know, speaking of being lucky, how lucky is that Feeley dude? Who in the world can throw five interceptions in a single game and still be happy when he goes home? We'll tell you who – the guy dating Heather Mitts. Man, that lucky...oh...ah, sorry. Back to "In 3's." We tracked Heather down and found that besides having trouble choosing between three choices she has a soft spot for ice cream, loves to play squash and (sigh) calls meeting A.J. as her favorite non-soccer moment. Damn that guy!

Miscellaneous:

Favorite place you've lived: Cincinnati, Ohio; Gainesville, Fla.; or Philadelphia, Pa.?

"That's a hard one because if I don't say my hometown, people will say 'that's messed up!' I know this is the first question, but I can't answer it. I've had wonderful experiences in each of those places and appreciated each for what they offered me."

Best thing to do when skipping class in college at the University of Florida: hit the beach, go shopping or sleep in?

"Sleep in, because we had workouts at six o'clock in the morning. I always thought, 'how am I supposed to go to class and function when I have to get up at 5:30 in the morning?' But I was dedicated and very disciplined. I didn't miss class very often. My dad would be proud."

Job you'd most like to be doing with your advertising degree if you weren't playing soccer: directing commercials, copywriter or graphic artist?

"I would actually say what I am doing right now, pursuing a career in TV. It's a challenge and something you really have to work hard at."

Using your keen advertising eye, what was the best humorous Super Bowl commercial this past January: careerbuilder.com ad with the monkeys, guy jumping out of plane for Bud Light or Pepsi ad with Puff Daddy?

"I liked all of them, but I think Puffy takes the cake. It was so Hollywood."

Most exciting non-soccer moment: Running with bulls in Spain, meeting A.J. Feeley or graduating from college?

"Although my dad will be upset that I am not picking option three, it was probably meeting A.J. There have been many great moments with A.J. since then as well, but meeting him was very unexpected so that's one of the reasons it was so special."

Most attractive woman you beat out to win ESPN.com Page 2's Hottest Female Athlete for 2004: Anna Kournikova, Jenny Finch or Jamie Sale?

"All three are beautiful and great athletes. I didn't vote."

Favorite way to enjoy the beach: lay out and read a book, go for a run/walk or try to surf?

“I don’t really go in water that is above my waist thanks to a shark attack I witnessed close up when I was 13, so I really like to “veg” on the beach.”

Food:

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

“All of it. I like food.”

Favorite meal to make yourself: Pasta, a big salad or steak?

“I cook, but it’s usually healthy stuff. It’s not too exciting. Usually, A.J. does the grilling and I am in charge of sides, like corn, green beans, salad and asparagus.”

Favorite craving you indulge in every once in a while: chocolate, ice cream or cake?

“Definitely ice cream. The flavor depends on the mood. If I’m in Cincinnati, it’s black raspberry chip. I had green tea ice cream at a Sushi place last night. It was really good. Then the other night, I had plain old vanilla with strawberries, blueberries and whipped cream. I guess it’s not really once in a while. I’ve had ice cream three times this week, but usually it is just once a week.”

Sports:

Favorite sports team in Cincinnati: Bengals, Reds or UC Bearcats?

“It’s a tie between the Reds and the Bengals. If I had to choose between both winning a world title, it would be the Bengals winning the Super Bowl. Who-dey! Who-dey think they’re gonna beat them Bengals!”

Best championship you’ve been involved with: winning Ohio high school state title in 1993, winning NCAA championship in 1999 or winning Gold Medal in 2004 Olympics?

“The gold medal in 2004 for sure. It was a lifelong dream to be part of an Olympics, and to actually win a gold medal, and do it in the fashion that we did, and to be a part of the team that I was on, well, that makes it that much more special.”

Best player on the Miami Dolphins other than A.J.? Jason Taylor, Zach Thomas or Chris Chambers?

“I think I’d have to say...(she pauses in thought)...Jason had a good year last year so I’ll go with him, but all three are very valuable to the team.”

Favorite sport to play other than soccer: tennis, softball or golf?

“You didn’t say squash as one of the options. I play squash with my dad and we have great time. He whips me. But otherwise, golf. I don’t play often enough, and I lose a lot of balls, but I still have a great time driving the cart.”

All three of these teams advance to the NCAA Basketball Final Four in 2006, who are you cheering for to win: Cincinnati, Kentucky or Florida? [editor’s note: Heather’s dad played basketball at Kentucky.]

“I have to go with the alma mater and say Florida. I bleed orange and blue. I root for Kentucky when they are not playing against Florida.”

Who is your favorite non-Dolphin NFL quarterback – Brett Favre, Donovan McNabb or Tom Brady?

“Donovan McNabb, and I like his wife too. I like the Eagles and Donovan is good peeps.”

Hardest thing to watch happen to A.J. during a Miami Dolphins game: get crunched by a 240-pound linebacker on a short run, throw an interception or get mud and grass all over his face after a sack?

“All of them. C’mon! What kind of question is that?”

Of the magazines you’ve been in, which do you read the most often: Sports Illustrated, Maxim or FHM?

“Definitely Sports Illustrated. I’ve been reading it for a long time. I just got a subscription for A.J., for my dad and step-dad last Christmas. It makes a wonderful gift.”

Superstitions on day of game: Have one, have more than one or don’t have any?

“Used to, now not so much. I just figured I am going to control my own performance. I don’t want to be superstitious, there’s just no reason to be. If you go out and play hard, everything else will fall into place.”

Television:

Reality show you’d like most to be on: “Survivor,” “The Amazing Race” or “American Idol”?

“I would have to say either “Survivor” or “Amazing Race.” I like challenges and both are chock full of those, although “American Idol” would be quite the challenge since I have a horrible voice. Having to deal with Simon’s comments would be tough.”

If you were on “The Amazing Race” who would you most like to compete with: your sister, either parent or U.S. WNT teammate?

“I think I’d have to say a WNT teammate. I’d take Christie Rampone because of her athleticism, but I think it’s a mix of athleticism, friendship and I think she’s a smart little cookie so I think she’d be good at the Amazing Race.”

Best looking male actor: Brad Pitt, George Clooney or Denzel Washington?

“Brad Pitt. End of topic.”

Music:

Favorite musical artist: Dave Matthews Band, John Mayer or Jason Mraz?

“All three. Can’t choose. It’s whatever you’re in the mood for. They are similar but all a little different.”

Worst young female that has recently released a music album: Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton or Hilary Duff?

“Paris Hilton”

If you were a rock and roll star instead of a soccer star, what would you be: lead singer, drummer or lead guitarist?

“That’s a tough one. I’ll go with guitarist. I don’t know why, but you told me I had to choose one so I pick guitar.”

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3) “THAT’S WHAT YOU’VE BEEN DOIN’?” (w/ Former MNT Defender John Stollmeyer)

What ever happened to what’s-her-face? Did you hear about so-and-so? Dare we ask, where are they now? And more importantly, WHAT are they doing now? Inquiring minds want to know. So we give you “That’s What You’ve Been Doin,?” a piece that will reacquaint you with a former National Team player or coach, from their exploits on the field for the USA to their current line of work or play. Are they coaching? Are they playing the stock market? Read on and find out.

John Stollmeyer looked around him and happily took it all in. It was the summer of 1990 and in front of him was the Leaning Tower of Pisa. His family was gathered around him drinking cappuccinos and espressos at a small Italian café and enveloping all of them was the passion of the 1990 World Cup.

Stollmeyer was one of the 22 players who traveled to Italy for the 1990 FIFA World Cup, the USA’s first World Cup in 40 years. Between 1986 and 1990, Stollmeyer appeared in 31 games for the U.S. Men’s National Team, including games in the World Cup and the ’88 Olympics.

At 42, Stollmeyer is retired from the professional ranks, but still keeps in shape, playing in a men’s indoor league in Indiana. Despite being retired, he still has soccer injuries, as he and his friends have yet to move into the Over-40 league, and instead play against college players and semiprofessionals in the Men’s Open League.

“We still don’t lose,” said Stollmeyer, laughing. He still loves to play the game, despite recently having a second surgery on his right ankle, which has nagged him since his professional days. “We haven’t moved over (into the Over-40 league) yet. It would be too easy. We look like a bunch of old bums at times, except we all know what we’re doing.”

Stollmeyer is also the Vice President of Investments at Smith Barney—a financial firm that provides brokerage, investment banking and money management services. But Stollmeyer’s most important job is that of “Dad.” He and his wife, Jill, have five children who range between ages 8 and 18, four of whom they adopted from Russia after having a child and deciding that they wanted more children.

Fortunately, Stollmeyer's job allows him to be flexible enough to participate actively in his children's lives, which works out well with his wife, who is an anesthesiologist. As with any doctor, she has to be on call and sometimes works longer hours than he does. He is the one who makes sure everyone makes it to school on time and get to all of the doctor's appointments during the day. He also is no stranger to making dinner and fixing snacks for five hungry kids.

"We balance a lot of things," said Stollmeyer. "What's nice is that the kids can look at me to do things and help with things like laundry or if they want food. They're not afraid to come and say, 'Hey dad, we need this, that or the other.' I'm involved with them more."

That involvement includes coaching his youngest daughter Cassidy's rec league team and his son Jake's Under-12 travel team. He also catches as much soccer as he can on television and is following the U.S. Men's National Team's World Cup qualifying campaign, keeping an eye on the program that he helped marshal into a new era. Remembering what it was like to be there.

"Having been through that multiple times and understanding the pressure and what goes on in those games, I do love watching those games still," said Stollmeyer. "And when we're playing well it's a lot of fun to watch."

"I really enjoy watching them play. The difference between when I played with the national team and how the national team plays now is that they seem to have more encouragement to attack and go. Players like Landon Donovan and DaMarcus Beasley and those guys, they can attack as well. We had players like Tab Ramos that could, also, but it just seemed a little different back then."

As a professional, Stollmeyer toiled away in the ranks of the Major Indoor Soccer League as a member of the Cleveland Force before a short stint with the Arizona Condors of the American Professional Soccer League. It was too late for the NASL and there was no MLS in sight. At one point, he even considered a jump across the pond to play in Europe, receiving offers from Glasgow Rangers and a few other clubs, but decided against the move when realizing he could make the same amount of money playing in the U.S.

"It wasn't like it is now where you could make a real living by going to Europe," Stollmeyer said. "If you come out of college now, there's a future in the game and you can play for five or 10 years as long as that league continues to hang in there. If you're good enough, you can go overseas for a couple of years, make some good money, come back and still have something here."

"Back when I came out, they weren't looking at the American players as guys that could do the job. Overall, from a life standpoint I thought I should just stay here. As much as I love playing, I didn't think that going abroad would be the best thing to do."

But staying in the U.S. didn't mean that Stollmeyer didn't get a chance to see the world. As a member of the national team, beside travelling to Seoul, Korea, for the Olympics in 1988 and to Italy for the 1990 World Cup, Stollmeyer participated in the 1980 World Youth Championship in Australia and traveled to 24 different countries with the National Team. According to Stollmeyer, who has played in every World Championship except the World Indoor Games, it's the World Cup experience that counts the most because it is the defining moment in a player's career.

In fact, he remembers the café in Pisa as vividly as he remembers playing host Italy in a 1-0 loss after a 5-1 beating by Czechoslovakia in their first game. The smoke and flare from the stands is still clearly visible in Stollmeyer's memory, as are the cheers from the Italian crowd when the U.S. left the field.

"When I was on the field and we were pressing, the crowd had actually changed who they were rooting for," Stollmeyer said. "Not that they wanted Italy to truly lose, but they were so upset that they were only beating us by one goal and not trouncing us like Czechoslovakia. They cheered for us as we went off. We weren't being booed. That experience, to be able to walk away from the World Cup like that, was kind of cool.

"The World Cup is what, I say, any one of us would have, and still would, trade our careers for and do it again, even knowing we would get beat. It was the one thing that you went after in your career. If you had the ability to make it that far and play in a World Cup, that was the peak and nobody could take that away from you."

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4) GEAR GALORE (U.S. MNT Travel Pack)

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

Which of the U.S. Men's National Team games are you going to in the next three months?

How about going to check out the new Soldier Field in the Windy City. Or why not be one of the lucky fans to see Landon and the boys play their first-ever match in Salt Lake City. Heck, why not take it up a notch by heading out of the country and venturing down to Panama City, Panama (at least less stuff will get thrown at you there than Mexico), or make it a multi-destination trip and hit Seattle, then Foxboro and hopefully East Rutherford as Bruce looks to capture his second CONCACAF Gold Cup.

No matter where you end up going, you'll need to go in style, so purchase the U.S. MNT travel pack. What is it? Well, really, it's whatever you want it to be (so be creative buddy).

We'll give you some ideas: Try a hat, blanket and jersey. Or how 'bout a scarf and a polo hooded sweatshirt. Maybe a warm-up jacket, replica socks and a Nike Freestyle soccer ball to kick around while tailgating.

The options at U.S. Soccer Store are endless! Okay, maybe not endless, but we're not taking the time to figure out the total number of options. Math hurt our brain.

Oh, and we figure we'll help you out with getting to the MNT games as well with a link to purchase tickets and flights. We are like, super nice.

<http://www.soccertravel.com/>

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5) "MARK THAT CALENDAR"

U.S. Men's National Team vs. England

[May 28 at Soldier Field in Chicago, Live at 2 p.m. CT on ESPN]

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.

The British are coming! The British are coming!

That's right, our friends from across the Atlantic that speak the same language (close, at least) are coming to the good 'ole U-S-of-A to take on the Men's National Team at Soldier Field in Chicago.

What does that mean? Well, besides seeing a number of rental cars driving on the left side of the road, a few more patrons at your local "pub" and the high school cashier at Subway getting confused as to why so many people keep telling him in a weird accent, "I wanted *chips*, not chips," it means U.S. Soccer fans will get to see some of the best soccer players in the world live in action (and hear REAL English accents), instead of on Fox Soccer Channel.

The Memorial Weekend match-up kicks off at 2 p.m. CT and over 35,000 tickets have already been sold. Of course if you can't get to see the match in person, you can catch it live on ESPN and Telemundo. The U.S. has only won once out of the five previous matches, so come out and cheer on the U.S. as two 2002 World Cup quarterfinalists battle it out on our soil.

Tickets range in price from \$28 to \$95 are available to the general public through ussoccer.com, by phone at 312-559-1212 and at all Ticketmaster ticket centers throughout Chicagoland (including Carson Pirie Scott, Coconuts, Hot Tix, FYE, Tower

Records, and Ritmo Latino stores). Groups of 20 or more can call U.S. Soccer at 312-528-1290 or obtain a group order form at ussoccer.com.

Click here for more ticket information:

<http://www.ussoccer.com/events/report.sps?iEventID=17143&categoryid=85>

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6) “GET TO KNOW ME” (w/ U.S. WNT Head Coach Greg Ryan)

You’re doing your daily reading on ussoccer.com and you come across a name you don’t recognize. First thought: “Who is that?” Second: “What’s their deal?” Possible third: “Is that the same Jim/Mary/Bob that I dated in high school?” Well, you’ll find your answers here. We want you to be up-to-date on all the newest players and coaches that make their way to the full and youth Men’s and Women’s National Teams, so sit back, read on and get to know one of our newest members.

Greg Ryan has been a busy man since being named the fifth head coach in U.S. Women’s National Team history on April 8. In between fielding a pile of congratulatory emails and phone calls, catching up with players in his National Team pool, watching U-15 and U-16 Girl’s National Team training sessions at the Home Depot Center and starting the search for a U-20 Women’s National Team head coach, Ryan has been formulating and refining his own thoughts on the direction he wants to take the U.S. Women’s National Team.

Coming off a highly successful four games at the Algarve Cup in Portugal, where Ryan led the team to four wins and the tournament title, he jumps cleats first into the ever-increasing competitive atmosphere of the women’s international game.

Now, Ryan will be charged with keeping the U.S. at the top of the world. No one is saying it will be an easy task, but he is looking forward to an exciting and, yes, fun challenge.

“I’m looking forward to building off our success in Portugal and continuing to develop this young U.S. team,” said Ryan. “One of the most important aspects of developing a new team is building chemistry between our talented young players mixed with some of our very talented experienced. I’m looking forward to our training and games as that is vital to developing chemistry and helping accelerate the development of the young players.”

Ryan takes over during one of the first “transition” years in U.S. Women’s National Team history, as some of the world’s most recognizable and accomplished players have retired.

How do you replace a Julie Foudy, a Mia Hamm, a Joy Fawcett?

You don’t says Ryan.

“You don’t replace those women because they are each unique and outstanding soccer players in their own way,” said Ryan. “However, we are in the process of building a new team with players who will bring their unique qualities to the games. I am confident that these players have the talent to enjoy the same kind of success experienced by the previous generation who have stepped aside.”

Some may say Ryan’s trip to the top of the U.S. coaching ranks was meteoric, but in fact, he is a 15-year veteran of the Division I women’s college game and was one of the country’s most respected collegiate coaches before becoming the U.S. Women’s National Team Staff Coach for the Western Region in 2002 while taking on some scouting duties for the U.S. women. He joined former head coach April Heinrichs’ staff as full-time assistant in 2004 heading into the Olympic Residency Camp and helped build a 28-2-4 record, the best ever in a calendar year.

That run also included an Olympic gold medal in Athens, Greece, an invaluable experience on Ryan’s coaching journey.

“It really began two years ago when I was scouting for the U.S. Women’s National team at the South American qualifying in Brazil, the Asian qualifying in Thailand and in Europe,” said Ryan. “That experience of scouting really helped me understand how to be successful at the international level. Being part of April’s staff was also great experience because I got to participate in the day-to-day planning of a residency program to prepare the team for the Olympics.

“My role at the Olympics was to scout our opponents and make recommendations on how to compete against each team, so it gave me confidence and a feel for how to match up and defeat international opponents. To enjoy great success by winning the gold at the Olympics was a phenomenal end to that experience.”

Ryan is blessed with a large pool of talented young players, some who have proven themselves in the international arena, and numerous others who are anxiously waiting for their first shot at the full Women’s National Team.

With such a large group of young talent, perhaps this is the perfect time to mold a new team with a new attitude and new style. Although the main goal remains the same: win and win a lot.

“The exciting part of coaching is taking new and young players and mixing them with veterans and creating a wonderful and successful product on the field,” said Ryan. “My goal is to play a very aggressive and dynamic attacking style of soccer and I believe we have the players to do that.”

Ryan is the first coach in U.S. Women’s National Team history to have played professionally in the NASL, logging six years in the league including five with the Chicago Sting. He feels his playing days as a professional will help in coaching an increasingly professional group of U.S. Women’s National Team players.

“Professional soccer is a very difficult and hard world with real consequences for winning and losing, just like there is for success and failure with the Women’s National Team,” said Ryan. “My whole playing career depended on my ability to succeed in an extremely challenging environment. I believe the environment of the U.S. team is increasingly competitive in that sense, as there are more talented teams around the world and more players competing for every spot, but I believe our players will embrace this challenge.”

Let the fun begin.

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7) FAMOUS FACES (w/Drew Carey)

A new section that’s all about name-dropping. While Hollywood is the hot spot for big-time movie stars and rock-n-roll artists, we know that it’s just a matter of time before they start catching wind of the beautiful game being played just a few miles away in at The Home Depot Center in Carson. And when they do, we’ll be there to snatch them for a few questions red-carpet style in a section called “Famous Faces.”

The first “Famous Face” has been seen hovering around the U.S. Men’s National Team ever since their first final round qualifying match in Trinidad & Tobago. We assumed Drew Carey was there for Carnival until he told us he had actually come down for the game and didn’t even know the country-wide party was going on (sure Drew, we’ll play along). Carey met the team and has since been traveling everywhere the U.S. has played, including Mexico and Birmingham, Ala., and he’s planning on following the team all the way to Germany. Why? Well, first because he can. And second because he loves soccer! Read on to find out how he got into the game, what he admires about the players and what he’s planning on doing to his hair for the World Cup.

How did you develop a love for soccer?

“It’s one of the most exciting sports in the world. It’s fast, exciting, and there’s lots of stuff going on. I used to watch the World Cup all the time. Whenever I read that there was a big game on, I always tried to find it. Back then, I never understood the offside rule or anything. It was always guys just kicking a ball around, and once in a while they’d score a goal and you’d get excited. Now that I know more about the game, it’s a lot more exciting. You see what these guys go through.”

What do you admire about soccer players?

“They’re so tough. They’re always fighting. I try to tell friends who don’t know about soccer: they fight for the ball. They fight for space like basketball players fight for space under the hoop. It’s all elbows and shoving. You never say basketball is a non-contact sport. Soccer is definitely a contact sport. They’re always crashing into each other. The way some teams play – I’m not going to say who – they play so dirty. They are always throwing their spikes up, and they don’t care how they run into a guy. It really hurts! These guys really put their bodies on the line, and it’s just great to watch.”

Why did you adopt the U.S. national team?

“I’m patriotic just like everyone else. I think this is the best team we’ve ever had. I’ve already got my request in for tickets. I’m very excited about our prospects. If you’re going to root for a sport, you have to find a team to root for, and I can’t root for any team that’s not in Cleveland, so the national team is safe for me to root for. The Galaxy is safe for me to root for, until Cleveland gets a soccer team.”

Cleveland is pretty much known as a Browns town. What do your boys say when you tell them you’re also a soccer fan?

“They think it’s a good sport, they just don’t follow it as much as I do. The more you get into the players and what each guy can do, and what each team’s strengths and weaknesses are, the more exciting it is.”

You’re also a big video game fan...

“I really like FIFA 2005.”

Which team do you play with?

“I’m in career mode, so I switch every year. The first two years I was the Galaxy, then I went to Ajax, Rangers, Real Madrid, and now I’m with Man United. I think next time I’ll have to use a J-League team or something. Maybe Club America. They are my favorite Mexican team. Only because I don’t like Chivas. The MLS All-Stars played them on the Fourth of July at the Home Depot Center, and they play so dirty. I just hated them right from the minute I saw them. Playing dirty on the Fourth of July against an American team, I always root against them.”

In Mexico, did you bring a raincoat for the potential, um, liquids flying in the stadium?

“I (brought) a little umbrella (laughs). I swear, I almost dyed my hair red, white, and blue before I came down (to Mexico), but I couldn’t get to the hairdresser in time. For Germany, I’m definitely doing it.”

If you could pick one player’s jersey to wear, who would it be?

“I have so many favorite players, I couldn’t pick. That’s the great thing about it. There’s so many good players. I admire all of them for being such good athletes and playing so hard. They have so much pride and they are so good at what they do.”

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8) “YOU DON’T KNOW JACK (MARSHALL)” (Champions League)

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.

He may have jettisoned the "Jitterbug" and "Run DMB" in favor of "McDonald's" now that he makes his home in Eindhoven, but DaMarcus Beasley is at it again leading his

team into a major tournament. The 2002 FIFA World Cup star for the U.S. has established himself with Dutch side PSV that has made a remarkable run into the UEFA Champions League semifinals (where they fell 2-0 in the first leg at AC Milan last week). As PSV prepares for the nearly impossible at home this week, prepare yourself for the stretch run of UCL with this bit of trivia.

Questions

1. Which U.S. National Team regular was named "Man of the Match" after scoring the game-winner for his club in a 2-1 victory against AS Parma on Aug. 10, 1999 in an important Champions League qualifier?
2. Although they did not dress, two Americans have been on teams that advanced to the Champions League final. Who are they?
3. Nine Americans have taken the field in Champions League play. You guessed it ... name them.
4. Beasley is the latest American to make a splash in Champions League, scoring four goals for PSV Eindhoven in the 2005 campaign. See if you get name three of the four teams that he scored against. (Hint: one of these teams had an American on its roster.)

Answers

1. Claudio Reyna
2. Jovan Kirovski, Frankie Hejduk
3. DaMarcus Beasley, Landon Donovan, Frankie Hejduk, Tim Howard, Jovan Kirovski, John O'Brien, Claudio Reyna, Robbie Russell, Tony Sanneh
4. Crvena Zvezda (Yugoslavia), Rosenborg (Norway), Panathinaikos (Greece), AS Monaco (France)