

SOCCER NOTES

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Getting kicks from a restart

BU grads banking on Rowdies revival

By Frank Dell'Apa, Globe Staff | June 24, 2008

The Tampa Bay Rowdies, among the most successful teams in the North American Soccer League before the league folded following the 1984 season, are about to be revived, thanks to the investment of Boston University graduates Hinds Howard and Andrew Nestor.

"That was a special time in soccer, with the Cosmos and the rivalries they had with the Rowdies," Nestor said yesterday. "You can't recreate that. But there is a strong fan base in Tampa."

Nestor, 25, becomes one of the youngest sports team owners in the United States, his Citrus Ventures merchant bank and venture firm paying a \$350,000 franchise fee to join the United Soccer Leagues. Nestor grew up in Quincy, played soccer at Boston College High School and for South Shore United, then met Hinds at the BU School of Management. Citrus Ventures advises early-stage businesses, specializing in media and sports.

The Rowdies played home games at Tampa Stadium, continuing to field a competitive team after the NASL folded. The Tampa Bay Mutiny, a Major League Soccer team from 1996-2001, also called Tampa Stadium home before moving to Raymond James Stadium. Nestor plans to construct a 7,500-seat soccer-specific stadium in Hillsborough County.

The Rowdies (Rodney Marsh) and the Mutiny (Carlos Valderrama) featured high-profile, stylish players. The Rowdies paved the way for other professional sports franchises in the Tampa area. The Mutiny were a league-operated team, failing to attract local investors.

"The Rowdies couldn't make it because of the league they were in," Nestor said. "The Mutiny had Valderrama and they were well-supported but the main problem was the venue - they were paying an obnoxious amount of money to play and none of it was coming back to them."

Nestor grew up a Revolution supporter and said he considered investing in a USL team in New England. But, after completing a year of due diligence, Nestor settled on Tampa, and said he plans to move there soon.

"We realize it's a risk but we believe in the league and in the sport," Nestor said. "Tampa has as good a market as you can find for a soccer team. Even though there are risks there are tons of upside."

The Rowdies are scheduled to begin play in 2010.

Easing them in

Four US players made their World Cup qualifying debuts as starters in a 1-0 victory over Barbados in Bridgetown Sunday.

Defenders **Jay DeMerit** (Watford) and **Drew Moor** (FC Dallas) and midfielders **Sacha Kljestan** (Chivas USA) and **Danny Szetela** (Brescia) were in the starting lineup for the US. The Chicago Fire's **Chad Barrett**, **Chris Rolfe**, and **John Thorrington** made their qualifying debuts as second-half substitutes. **Brek Shea**, an 18-year-old FC Dallas left wing-forward, was on the US bench.

Eddie Lewis scored in the 21st minute as the US took a 9-0 aggregate victory over the Bajans. **John Parris's** late goal for Barbados was disallowed for offside.

The US will visit Guatemala Aug. 20 in its group play opener. Other opponents in the next round include Cuba and Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago, which played in the 2006 World Cup in Germany, was on the verge of elimination before former Columbus Crew striker **Stern John's** 65th-minute goal in a 2-0 victory over host Bermuda Sunday night.

Guus wasn't cooked

Russia seemed a longshot to advance to the European Championship finals following a 2-1 loss in Israel Nov. 17. On the final day of Group E qualifiers, England needed at least a tie at home against Croatia, which had already clinched first place in the group, to finish ahead of the Russians. But Croatia scored a late goal to defeat England, 3-2, allowing the Russians to move on.

Now, Russia is preparing for Thursday's semifinal match against Spain in Vienna. Dutch coach **Guus Hiddink** guided Russia to a 3-1 overtime win over the Netherlands and has his team poised for a possible final date with either Germany or Turkey.

Andrei Arshavin, the highest-paid player (\$4.7 million annually) in the Russian league, led Zenit St. Petersburg to the UEFA Cup title. Arshavin, 27, is being courted by several Western European clubs. **Roman Pavlyuchenko**, 26, could be headed to Chelsea - Roman Abramovich has offered \$14 million to Spartak Moscow.

Hiddink, who was considered for the US national team position after the '06 World Cup, is being paid \$3.1 million annually. Croatia's **Slaven Bilic** is probably the lowest-paid coach in the Euro tournament at \$55,000 annually; Bilic has agreed to a two-year contract extension, saying it is up to the Croatian federation to determine his salary, but that his assistants must be fairly compensated. Assistant **Robert Prosinecki**, a star player as Croatia emerged in the '90s, is working on a volunteer basis, according to World Soccer magazine.

Boston connection

US women's national team coach and former Boston Breakers coach **Pia Sundhage** named former Breakers **Angela Hucles** and **Kate Markgraf** to the 18-player Olympic team roster yesterday. Goalkeeper **Hope Solo** was also named to the team, nine months after she was kicked off it at the World Cup. **Briana Scurry**, who replaced Solo in goal for the US's semifinal loss to Brazil, didn't make the roster. The US improved to 17-0-1 this year with a 1-0 victory over Canada Saturday in the final of the Peace Queen Cup in South Korea. The US's first-round Olympic opponents will be Norway (Aug. 6) and Japan (Aug. 9) in Qinhuangdao and New Zealand (Aug. 12) in Shenyang. ■