

Coaches -- Here, There & Everywhere (Except New York!)

Women's National Team

US Soccer did not take long in hiring a head coach for the Women's National Team. The three-person committee of Mia Hamm (she gets top billing), Dan Flynn and Sunil Gulati decided that former Swedish star Pia Sundhage (pronounced Soond-hahg-eh) was the perfect choice to take over for Greg Ryan who compiled an impressive record but could not guide the women to the World Cup title, which I'm guessing Gulati, US Soccer President, feels is owed to the U.S.

Before discussing Sundhage, let's put some closure on Ryan: Yes, he deserved to be let go because of the Hope Solo fiasco. He clearly lost the team with his decision to sit her and start a very rusty Brianna Scurry. His match tactics were also questionable. But perhaps we were all spoiled by Tony DiCicco after having been spoiled by Anson Dorrance. When DiCicco stepped down after winning the World Cup, most of us thought the team's success would continue. I thought DiCicco's assistant, Lauren Gregg, should have been given the job. Instead, former WNT standout April Heinrichs was named. Heinrich's match tactics were even worse than the man who replaced her, Ryan.

Again, I thought Gregg should have been named.

But no, Mia, Flynn (US Soccer secretary-general) and Gulati, picked Sundhage. Sundhage, 47, earned 146 caps for Sweden and scored 71 goals in those matches. Her most recent job was as assistant coach for the Chinese National Team. She was also an assistant coach for the Philadelphia Charge and head coach of the Boston Breakers, both of the defunct WUSA. So she has a tremendous playing background and a solid coaching background. The USA players' response has been positive.

I am not 100 percent behind the decision, but will wait to see how the team plays. Sundhage was only given a one-year contract. And her status relies on her getting the USA qualified for the 2008 Olympics. Obviously, if they don't qualify, she'll be unemployed. If the USA doesn't qualify for the Olympics, Sundhage should consider another profession. Fact is, the USA should not only qualify for the '08 Olympics, they should, at the very least, compete for a medal.

Galaxy Score

Red Bull Still Looking...

There was no surprise when the LA Galaxy let go of Frank Yallop. Yallop never really had a chance in what is now and will be for a long time, the David Beckham Era. The Galaxy needed a "name" coach and they got one -- former Dutch star Ruud Gullit. Great move.

At the same time Red Bull New York Coach Bruce Arena, former US National Team coach, stepped down, resigned, was fired (pick one, doesn't matter). They finally make the playoffs, actually play well despite losing to the New England Revolution, get a start player in Juan Pablo Angel (THE BEST PLAYER IN THE MLS), and out goes Arena.

The Red Bull franchise was supposed to make a difference. When the Austrian company took over the franchise, soccer fans in the area were excited, hopeful that things would change. And they started to. The Red Bulls actually played some good soccer. Certainly watchable soccer. Still, attendance was not good. You could have shot a fire hose into the stands and not gotten anybody wet.

So where do they go from here? Rumors are running rampant that so far they have two coaching choices: Former MLS Star and former MLS Coach of the Year Preki, and Juan Carlos Osorio of the Chicago Fire....Zzzzzzzzzzz! Yeah, those two guys will excite all 14 Red Bull fans in the area.

How about using some of that Red Bull money and going after Jose Mourinho. He'd be an instant hit. He'd draw fans and sponsors. He's as big a name in soccer circles as David "the Disappointment" Beckham. And unlike Beckham, Mourinho would actually take part in games.

Speaking of Becks...

While his MLS playing career has been nothing short of disappointing, Beckham has done wonders in the fund-raising world. He recently staged a charity game for victims of the tragic wildfires in California and raised more than \$90,000. Becks and many of Galaxy mates took on the Hollywood Football Club, which featured one Anthony LaPaglia, star of the CBS television show "Without a Trace," as the goalkeeper. Wherever LaPaglia travels he makes sure to pack his Goalkeeper gloves! For the record, Becks and crew won the match, 10-4. Well done, Mr. Posh Spice!

Other Items

Brazilian standout Kaka was the runaway winner of the 2007 Golden Ball, formerly known as the European Footballer of the Year. Kaka, who directs the AC Milan attack, received 78 of 96 first place votes. He beat out Man U's Cristiano Ronaldo. The beauty of this award, as opposed to such American athletic awards, is that it isn't always won by goal scorers. Last year's winner was Italian center back Fabio Cannavaro.

The Euro 2008 Draw was held recently and, just like World Cup draws, there is indeed a Group of Death. Group C features defending World Cup Champion Italy as well as World Cup runnerup France, Holland and Romania. Not an easy match anywhere.

Group A features Switzerland, Czech Republic, Portugal and Turkey. Group B has Austria, Croatia, Germany and Poland. Group D is defending Euro Champion Greece, Sweden, Spain and Russia.

Notably missing -- England. More on that later.
Action gets underway June 7 with the finals set for June 29 in Vienna.

For whatever it is worth, here are my picks (top 2 in each group move on to the quarterfinal round)

Group A -- Portugal, Czech Republic
Group B -- Germany, Croatia
Group C -- Holland, Italy
Group D -- Spain, Greece

Quarterfinal Predictions: Portugal over Croatia, Germany over Czech Republic, Holland over Greece, Italy over Spain.

Semifinals: Portugal over Germany, Holland over Italy

Final: Portugal beats Holland, 2-1 on penalty kicks.

Where, Oh Where are the English

Knocked out in qualifying that's where. But not surprising, either. The defense was suspect and the goalkeeping stinks! And also not surprising was Steve McClaren being released as coach. Which brings up this...

What to Do, NSCAA. What to Do

Every January, the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA), the largest "coaching" organization (not just soccer coaches!) in the world, hosts its annual convention and annually draws some of the world's top coaches who conduct field clinics or host seminars. This year's featured coach is -- WAS? -- McClaren. Will he show? Stay tuned. Heck, I want to see him run a session -- as long as it is not on defending or goalkeeping!