

By Andrew Mosier



ATLANTA SILVERBACKS
THE GOOD Finally playing at home in the newly opened ReMax Greater Atlanta Stadium has provided a boost—people are actually going to see them play. An All-Star season by forward Jason McLaughlin hasn't hurt any, either.
THE BAD With a tradition of falling apart in the second half of the season, the Backs have their work cut out for them precariously holding onto the fifth playoff spot at the season halfway mark.
UPCOMING With a swing through the Pacific Northwest to end the season, the Backs may find themselves in a must-win situation just to make the playoffs.



CHARLESTON BATTERY
THE GOOD Coach Mike Anhaeusser may have found the right combination of former MLS'ers and young guns to put the Battery back in contention.
THE BAD Some off-field troubles may have cost the Battery some points early on in the season. With the bad seeds gone, the Battery is going to have to fight to make up the lost points.
UPCOMING With only four games at home for the rest of the season, the Battery are going to have to start winning on the road in order to make the playoffs.



MIAMI FC
THE GOOD Romario may not play often, but when he does, he scores. With 10 goals in 13 games, the Brazilian icon is number two in the League in scoring.
THE BAD With a less than world-class supporting cast, Miami is beginning to feel the expansion blues as their hopes of a playoff spot begins to slowly slip away.
UPCOMING The winner of the two-game series at Puerto Rico may decide who sneaks into the playoffs and who spends the rest of the year on the beach.



MINNESOTA THUNDER
THE GOOD With 19 goals, Minnesota has proven they can score, trailing league-leading Vancouver by only five goals and have scored as many times as League-leading Montreal. But even at second to last at the midway point, they are only 15 points out of the playoffs.
THE BAD With 26 goals against, and only two wins, the once-mighty Thunder is going to have to find a way to stop hemorrhaging goals for any chance of a playoff run.
UPCOMING Facing nearly all of the clubs in playoff contention at least once, the Thunder may take on the role of spoiler.



MONTREAL IMPACT
THE GOOD Yet again the class of the league behind five goals from Mauricio Siles, the Impact are looking for a play-off bye for the second straight year, leading the league with only one loss at the halfway mark.
THE BAD An injury to Canadian International Greg Suttan has yet to see ramifications with understudy Andrew Weber backstopping the league's stingiest defense.
UPCOMING With much of the late season on the road, the Impact's precariously held position at the top of the table could be in jeopardy.



PORTLAND TIMBERS
THE GOOD Despite playing mediocre soccer at best, the Timbers are only a couple of good results from the playoffs.
THE BAD Inconsistent play and the lack of a true goal scorer is making it difficult for the Timbers to rise out of the middle of the pack.
UPCOMING The final six games of the season at home should help the Timbers secure a playoff spot as long as they can pick up some points before then.



PUERTO RICO ISLANDERS
THE GOOD With Alex Marcina finding the net consistently and a stingy backline, the Islanders are poised to make the playoffs for the first time in franchise history.
THE BAD The Islanders struggled early on to get points on the road, something that put them in contention last year. The mid-season coaching change may have had something to do with it.
UPCOMING The final three games of the season—all at home—should give the Islanders the shot in the arm they need going into the homestretch.



ROCHESTER RAGING RHINOS
THE GOOD Behind Matthew Delgado's six goals, and the rock solid goalkeeping of Scott Vallou, the Rhinos are fighting for a first round playoff bye.
THE BAD With six draws on the season at the halfway mark, the lack of a killer instinct may prove costly when it counts.
UPCOMING Facing four teams fighting for the last two playoff spots at the end of the season could find the Rhinos in a difficult position.



SEATTLE SOUNDERS
THE GOOD Despite a less than spectacular start, last year's champions are only a couple of wins out of the play-off race thanks to League-leading scorer William Weaver.
THE BAD The plundering of their roster after the Sounders' championship run has proven to be more costly than initially expected, particularly in goal.
UPCOMING At home the entire month of August, the Sounders may be able to sneak back into the playoffs and, like they did last year, find themselves playing for a championship.



TORONTO LYNX
THE GOOD With only three wins, midfielder Jamie Dodds has been the Lynx only bright spot in a truly dismal season.
THE BAD Romario has more goals than the entire Lynx roster.
UPCOMING It may be the last time USL fans will get to see one of the worst franchises in the history of the League. RIP.



VANCOUVER WHITECAPS
THE GOOD Consistent play has put the Whitecaps in a position to challenge Montreal for the League crown. Their blue-collar mentality has put them atop the stat sheet for goals scored, but does not have a single player in the top 10.
THE BAD Eight draws—The Whitecaps have struggled finishing teams off when it counts.
UPCOMING Five out of the last eight games at home should put the Whitecaps in a fine spot come playoff time.



VIRGINIA BEACH MARINERS
THE GOOD Behind Greg Simmonds, who seems to have found his long-lost goal scoring touch, and the strong goalkeeping of Matt Neilson, the Mariners are, for the first time, a respectable team.
THE BAD With the playoffs within reach, the Mariners are in unfamiliar territory. Should Simmonds go dry, they may be in trouble.
UPCOMING On the road for much of the second half of the season, a trip to the playoffs may be another year away.



Scot Thompson PORTLAND TIMBERS

It's hard to say where Scot Thompson would be playing right now had he not blown his ACL during the preseason of his rookie year with the Los Angeles Galaxy. Selected 16th in the 2003 MLS Draft out of UCLA, the speedy defender already had a wealth of international experience with the U.S. Junior National Team. And with an English passport, he could very easily be playing in the Premiership by now. But at the moment, he's toiling away with Portland in the USL First Division and loving every minute of it.

Thompson grew up with the game. His father, who emigrated from Jamaica to England before coming to the U.S. shortly before Scot was born, played the game all of his life, and was Scot's first coach. Having a father who actually knew how to play was a huge advantage, Scot said. He was always my coach, even after he had stopped coaching my teams.

Shortly after his family moved from the Bronx to Southern California, where he was discovered by then UCLA coach Sig Schmid, essentially the only college coach to seriously look at Thompson. After four years and a NCAA Championship his senior year, it was only natural Thompson follow Schmid to the Galaxy, where it was hoped he would be able to step in and make an immediate impact. The injury set me way back, Thompson said. Physically, it took me seven or eight months to recover. Psychologically, it took me a lot longer. In 2004, Thompson, tentative and suffering from a lack of confidence, saw limited time with the Galaxy. About halfway through the season, Sig approached me about the possibility of going to play on loan for someone, says Thompson. I was stuck in the role of a practice player and I saw it as a chance to play, so I took it.

Thompson joined Portland halfway through the 2004 campaign and made an immediate impact on top-of-the-table team starting in 13 games. It was hard at first, Thompson admits. Things are a little different in the USL. Playing back-to-back games was just not something I was accustomed to. You have to approach the game a little differently. It was something I hadn't had to do before.

At the conclusion of the USL season Thompson returned to Los Angeles and his role as a substitute, making his decision to sign with the Timbers at the end of the MLS season an easy one. He happily inked a two-year deal with an eye on moving on to Europe—England in particular. That almost came to be midway through the 2005 season. Thompson caught the eye of Sunderland Manager Mick McCarthy during the newly promoted Premiership side's summer tour of the Pacific Northwest. Impressed with Thompson's speed and vision, McCarthy brought Thompson in for a trial in the middle of the Timber's season. I played well, Thompson said. But they were looking for someone to step right in and play. I'm not ready to be that player yet! Soon, but not yet.

That time may come sooner than later. Thompson showed well in the Timbers 1-1 draw against Coventry City and will anchor the backline for the USL All-Star squad that faced championship-side Sheffield Wednesday in July. If the chance to go comes, I'll take it, but I'm not worried about it, Thompson stated. I'm in a good place with Portland. **90:00**