

USL AT A GLANCE

By Andrew Mosier



ATLANTA SILVERBACKS

THE GOOD With two goals in his first two USL League games, it looks like former Irish youth international Liam Geary may be worth the Lucky Charms they're paying him.

THE BAD A porous defense once again proved to be costly and will have to be addressed if they hope to make the playoffs.

THE UPCOMING With the finishing touches being put on their new stadium, the Backs will not play at home until Charleston comes to town June 3rd.



CHARLESTON BATTERY

THE GOOD Former MLS'er Gavin Ginton comes back from a two-year layoff from professional soccer and nets two in his first game. Not bad, even if it was against the Mariners.

THE BAD Despite the 3-0 score, the Battery were outplayed for portions of the game—particularly in the midfield—which should have mandated the inferior Mariners.

THE UPCOMING With the next four games at Blackbaud, the lengthy home-stand should help put some points up that they are going to need later on in the season.



MIAMI FC

THE GOOD An enthusiastic crowd of 3,243 witnessed an inspirational 0-0 draw against Montreal as professional soccer returned to south Florida.

THE BAD Romano, Romano, where for art thou Romano? Shorly's visa problems kept him out of the opener. Front office officials are promising to have him on the field before he turns 50.

THE UPCOMING With no sitters scheduled until they play Virginia Beach and Toronto on consecutive weekends the first of June, points may be hard to come by until the Club finds their stride.



MINNESOTA THUNDER

THE GOOD Handing the reigning champs Seattle their lunch with a 4-0 drubbing in the opener is a good sign that first-year coach Amos Magee is doing something right. Terry Alvimio grabbed a goal and set up another. These others contributed goals for what looks to be a very competitive Thunder side this year.

THE BAD What can anyone say about a 4-0 win over last year's champions?

THE UPCOMING After a three-game trip to the Pacific Northwest and then to Montreal, the Thunder spends the month of June playing at home. Summer in the Twin Cities, beats the heat of Miami.



MONTREAL IMPACT

THE GOOD Former Islander Mauricio Salles got the game winner against his former club in Montreal's southernmost trip in the Impact's 1-0 win over Puerto Rico. The win gave Canadian international Greg Sutton his 60th career shutout with Impact.

THE BAD Seeing as they did finish at the top of the table last season, they probably should have done more against Miami. But who were they to spoil the Club's debut?

THE UPCOMING With probably the most balanced schedule in the league, no extended road swings or home stands may help the Impact back to the top of the league standings.



PORTLAND TIMBERS

THE GOOD The Timbers camp seems to have an optimistic outlook for the season despite a 1-0 loss at Vancouver to open the season.

THE BAD The Timbers Army faithful are going to have to spring for a program with so many new faces on the field.

THE UPCOMING The schedule makers were not kind to the Timbers with eight back-to-back games before the end of July.



PUERTO RICO ISLANDERS

THE GOOD With a championship caliber team—on paper at least—the 3-1 trouncing of Atlanta at home pointed towards a promising future led by what else but a Canadian, Alan Marcina.

THE BAD A 1-1 draw with the Backs the next night was not so promising. The 1-0 loss to Montreal was nothing but salt in their wounds.

THE UPCOMING The Islanders are once again going to have to have the league's best road record to make it into the post-season.



ROCHESTER RAGING RHINOS

THE GOOD One of the best supported teams in the country will finally have their own place to call home in Paetec Park.

THE BAD Not beginning play until May 5th could put the Rhinos at a distinct disadvantage early on in the season as they look to find their form.

THE UPCOMING Seven consecutive games on the road to open the season could be a difficult hole to climb out of, even with sparking new aids.



SEATTLE SOUNDERS

THE GOOD Their uniforms looked nice in the opener, still free of tears and those stubborn grass stains.

THE BAD Everything else. A 4-0 loss to archrival Vancouver was not the way the defending champs wanted to kick things off. It looks like Preston Burpo will be sorely missed.

THE UPCOMING Spending most of June on the road, the Sounders will probably have some catch up to do even to make it to the play-offs.



TORONTO LYNX

THE GOOD MLS is coming! Or is that bad?

THE BAD A 2-0 loss to, gulp, Virginia Beach, followed by a loss to Vancouver by the same score proves that some things just never change in Toronto.

THE UPCOMING With a light May and June on the schedule, a suddenly improved Lynx side in August and early September could sneak into the play-offs.



VANCOUVER WHITECAPS

THE GOOD Opening the season at home with a 1-0 win over Portland and 2-0 versus Toronto, the Whitecaps look to be in line with where they were at the end of last season. Second-year forward Joey Giertsen netted two winning goals in the first two games.

THE BAD Good teams find ways to win. Bad teams don't. So far it looks like Vancouver is not a bad team.

THE UPCOMING With eight games in June—only three of which are at home—the Whitecaps play-off hopes could depend on how well they play away from Swangard Stadium, a problem in the past.



VIRGINIA BEACH MARINERS

THE GOOD Greg Simmonds looked to be back to his old self with two goals in the Mariners home opener versus, fittingly, Toronto. They even got a good crowd out for the game.

THE BAD Old habits die hard. Despite outplaying Charleston for much of the game, they still managed to lose 3-0.

THE UPCOMING The playoffs... someday. To the new ownership group's credit, they have begun to turn the club around. Now all they need are some quality players, not the rest of the league's cast offs.

USL PLAYER PROFILE

Ian Fuller

Charleston Battery

By Andrew Mosier

IAN FULLER KNEW HIS MOVE TO THE Charleston Battery from Vancouver during the off-season would carry with it a considerable amount of pressure. USL Division One champions in 2003, the Battery have spent the last two years rebuilding. With pressure mounting to once again put a winning side on the field, and now stocked with young players with great potential and a year or two of professional soccer under their belts, Battery management brought in a handful of veteran players expected to make the difference between a good, middle of the table team, and a contender. "We've done well in the preseason, but that means nothing," Fuller says. "We have a good team here. We just have to go out and prove it on the field."

Fuller is one of those players toiling away in the USL that people ask why he isn't playing somewhere else. He could be. He was, drafted as a forward out of Clemson in 2002 by New England. That was before the advent of the Reserve League. At the time, going from a full-time player to little more than a ball boy was a pill too bitter for many rookie players to swallow. Fuller included. He's more philosophical about it now, four years removed from the experience. "It's strange," he says. "You go straight from college to the top flight without ever really having to work your way up without really getting the chance to prove yourself." Maybe had he been selected by a different team, one with a little less offensive firepower—Fuller was used sparingly as a late game substitute for Taylor Twellman and Pat Noonan when games were already won or lost and making an impact was not really an option—things might have turned out a little different. "But that's just the way it is," he says.

For Fuller the thought of another year languishing on the Revolution bench, watching games with his boots untied, hoping to be on the field long enough to actually touch the ball, was contrary to his very nature. He needed to be on the field playing—batting—on a regular basis. That was the hard-nosed player Dave Charles had helped groom during Fuller's schoolboy days in Portland, Oregon. That was the player who was a four-year starter at one of the top college programs in the country. He didn't know how to sit. Waiting his turn was not something he could do. So he decided to do something about it. In 2003 he signed with the USL Division One Rochester Raging Rhinos. The money he made playing for Rochester beat what New England was paying. And he was playing. He played in 38 games in a little over two seasons with Rochester, scoring eight goals. Shortly after the 2005 season began Rochester, in a move to lighten the payroll, traded Fuller to Vancouver. "I think they got a draft pick for me, or something," he says. "I really don't know." Happy to be back in the Pacific Northwest, Fuller's imposing presence in the middle of the field and ball-holding talents suited the Whitecaps' straightforward style of play. It was fairly early in the off-season when the Battery came calling, looking for a leader, a fighter, someone who can put the team on his back if need be. They knew Fuller was their man. It didn't take much to lure him back to South Carolina, not far from where he went to college.

"Charleston is as good as it gets," he says of his new club, one he hopes to be with for some time to come. **90**

Beside Dieter, what is the only city from the former East Germany to be a host city? (Answer on page 45)