

CHICAGO, IL ~ JANUARY 2011 ~ WEEK 2 ~ ISSUE 54

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Newcomer Brandon Corday

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#15 Brandon Corday



Height: 5'9"
 Weight: 145 lbs
 Hometown: Morton Grove, IL
 Birthdate: Apr 03, 1986

Brandon Corday, a 2008 Franklin & Marshall graduate and four-year starter on the men's soccer team, has signed his first professional indoor soccer contract with the Chicago Storm.

Corday is the first Franklin & Marshall player to be selected to play professional indoor soccer. While with the Diplomats, he was a four-time All-American and first player to be chosen Centennial Conference Player of the Year in back-to-back seasons. He was also the first CC player to repeat as first-team All-American. Corday was a four-time All-CC first-team and Mid-Atlantic All-Region selection. He finished his career with 31 goals and 25 assists, breaking F&M's all-time assist record.

REGULAR SEASON

YEAR TEAM	GP	3G	2G	A	PTS	SHOTS	PIM	F
2008/09 Chicago	11	0	1	0	2	4	4	0
TOTALS	11	0	1	0	2	4	4	0

	BLK	PPG	GWG	SOG/A	RSG	PSOG	PK
TOTALS	1	0	0	0/0	0	0	0

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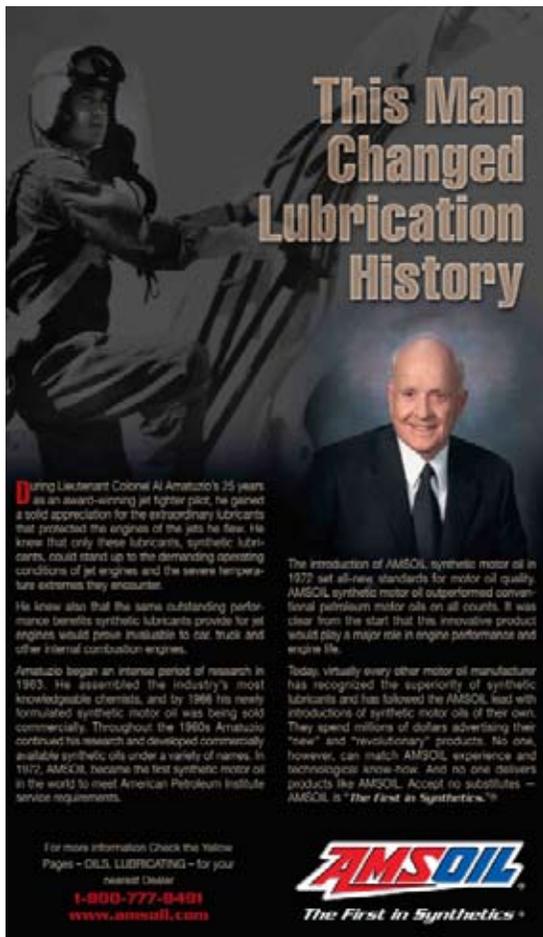
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Lazio anniversary celebrations turn violent

Celebrations for Lazio's 111th anniversary have turned violent, with fans clashing with police and at least one supporter arrested.

The ANSA news agency reports that about 100 fans with their faces covered lit trash bins on fire, broke windows of several banks and launched fireworks following

Saturday night's festivities in a downtown piazza.

ANSA said police used tear gas to restore order and some 20 police officers were injured.

Police said in a statement Sunday that a 31-year-old Lazio fan was arrested.

Ljungberg makes Celtic debut in cup win at Berwick

Freddie Ljungberg made a winning start to his Celtic career on Sunday with the Glasgow club advancing to the fifth round of the Scottish Cup with a 2-0 win at Berwick.

The 33-year-old former Sweden midfielder recovered from a virus to play 64 minutes on debut.

Celtic manager Neil Lennon says "it was difficult for him to have an impact on the

game because it was quite congested in there."

But Lennon added that "the longer he trains and plays, there will be more opportunities for him to show what he can do."

Daniel Majstorovic and Scott Brown scored for Celtic.

In Sunday's other fourth-round match, Motherwell routed Dundee 4-0.

German lawyer resigns from FIFA commission

A top German lawyer has resigned from FIFA's ethics commission in protest at the world football body's apparent failure to tackle alleged corruption in its ranks.

Guenter Hirsch wrote in a letter to ethics commission president Claudio Sulser that FIFA appeared unwilling to deal with growing problems.

The 67-year-old former president of Germany's highest appeals court said FIFA showed "no real interest" in trying to clean up the organization.

"The events of the past few weeks have raised and strengthened the impression that responsible persons in FIFA have no real interest in playing an active role in resolving, punishing and avoiding violations against ethic regulations of FIFA," Hirsch wrote in the letter, according to the German DPA news agency on Sunday.

FIFA officials were accused of bribe-taking and vote-trading before the World Cup host election last month. The 2018 World Cup was awarded to Russia and the 2022 tournament to Qatar.

FIFA's ethics panel investigated and barred two of the 24-member executive committee members, Amos Adamu and Reynald Temarii, from voting based on evidence provided from an undercover sting by a British newspaper, The Sunday Times.

Adamu from Nigeria became the first FIFA official suspended for bribery and is serving a three-year ban from soccer duty.

Temarii, a FIFA vice president from Tahiti, was given a one-year ban for breaching rules

on confidentiality and loyalty. Both men have said they will appeal their punishments.

Four former FIFA executive committee members - Tunisia's Slim Aloulou, Amadou Diakite of Mali, Botswanan Ismail Bhamjee and Ahongalu Fusimalohi from Tonga - were suspended for between two and four years after they advised undercover reporters how much to pay FIFA voters in bribes.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has promised to ensure his organization is free of corruption after scandals surrounding the World Cup hosting votes and intends to establish a new committee with outside members to monitor the governing body.

The Swiss FIFA president is aiming to present the project to FIFA's congress of 208 national governing bodies in June, where he will stand for re-election seeking a fourth four-year term.

British Prime Minister David Cameron attacked football politics on Sunday and complained that he was personally misled by a number of FIFA executives when he lobbied for support for England's failed 2018 World Cup bid.

"We had a great bid - technically, I think, by far the best bid - and I think the presentation we made was compelling," Cameron told the BBC.

"I definitely had a number of those FIFA executives who looked me in the eye and shook my hand and said, 'Don't worry, we're with you.' "I'm afraid that the world of football governance is rather murky in that way."

Asked about Blatter's anti-corruption efforts, Cameron said: "I think we will have to judge that by the results."

Ortega told his career is over at River

River Plate veteran Ariel Ortega has been told by coach Juan Jose Lopez that he will not play for the club when the Clausura season opens next month - seemingly ending his career with the famous Buenos Aires side.

Ortega has been River's leading player for much of the last two decades but missed the club's first day of practice on Wednesday for the upcoming Clausura season. When he arrived at practice Thursday he said Lopez told him he was not needed.

"He (Lopez) told me I'm not in their plans," he told reporters before leaving practice. The 36-year-old Ortega said he expected to talk with club President Daniel Passarella about his contract, which expires at the end of the Clausura season.

River Plate has struggled in recent seasons, but the club played better at the end of the recent Apertura season under Lopez. The coach took over in November after Angel Cappa was fired and has worked to instill more discipline in the club.

An attacking midfielder and great dribbler, Ortega joined River in 1991 and stayed until 1996. He spent the next four seasons with European clubs Valencia, Sampdoria and Parma before returning to River in 2000. He left again in 2002 for Turkey club Fenerbahce, but came back to Argentina in 2004 with Newell's Old Boys.

He moved back to River Plate in 2006 and stayed there, expect for a year on loan with Argentine club Rivadavia de Mendoza.

Ortega also played in three World Cups with Argentina - 1994, 1998 and 2002.

In the last several years, Ortega has often been late to practice and has talked openly about his battle with alcohol addiction. Reports said he missed Wednesday practice with "stomach problems."

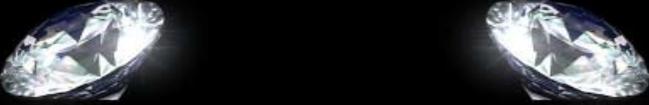
"I got the doctor's report and I'll make a decision," Lopez told reporters on Wednesday. "Beyond what happens with Ariel, we all have rights and responsibilities that have to be respected."

Argentina's biggest export? Footballers

Argentines are proud their players are everywhere, in big football countries like Spain and England, and small outposts from Albania to Vietnam. Young players can dream of playing in Wembley Stadium in London or Camp Nou in Barcelona, and the exodus guarantees top talent is continually tested against the best in the world. Even lesser talent finds work. But local clubs like Boca Juniors and River Plate are paying the price.

Argentine teams survive by finding and selling the rights to players - over 2,000 left in 2010 - at ever younger ages. Few have sophisticated marketing operations, many stadiums are decrepit and ticket sales and merchandising lag as money makers. The talent drain is hurting the nation's league and even, some say, Argentina's chances of winning a third World Cup. Meanwhile, going abroad is not always an easy road to riches. Thousands of players get by moving from club to club and country to country.

Cristian Colusso is the flip-side of Lionel Messi. Both grew up in the Argentine city of Rosario, promising young forwards hoping to strike it rich at a big European club. Barcelona spotted Messi before he reached his teens, and shipped him to Spain where he became the best player of his generation, seen as the successor to Diego Maradona. Colusso was sold at 19 to Spanish club Sevilla. What defenders could not do, bad luck and corruption managed to. "As a young man, maybe I was immature and unprepared for the bad things that would happen," Colusso, now 33 and living back in Argentina, said in an extensive interview with The Associated Press. "Before I left I was 100 percent on top of my game and felt no one could stop me." Sold in 1997 to Sevilla, Colusso got caught up in a fraud case involving his agent, who reportedly tried to pocket as much as \$1.2 million on the transfer. Eventually he was shipped to the Mexican club Leon and barely played for several years. This was followed by psychological counseling to regain his confidence, and transfers to clubs in Argentina, England, Italy, Ecuador, Venezuela - even tryouts with two MLS clubs in the United States - and eventually a three-month nightmare with Algerian club USM Blida. "I signed the contract in Paris. I can't remember the agent's name, but if I could I would not repeat it out of fear. When I arrived in Algeria I was greeted by the head of the police, who was the right-hand man of the club president. They took my passport, and the club put me in a spare room in a store that sold toilet fixtures." Colusso said his work permit prohibited him from playing on the club because he had not played for Argentina's national team - only its under-20 team.

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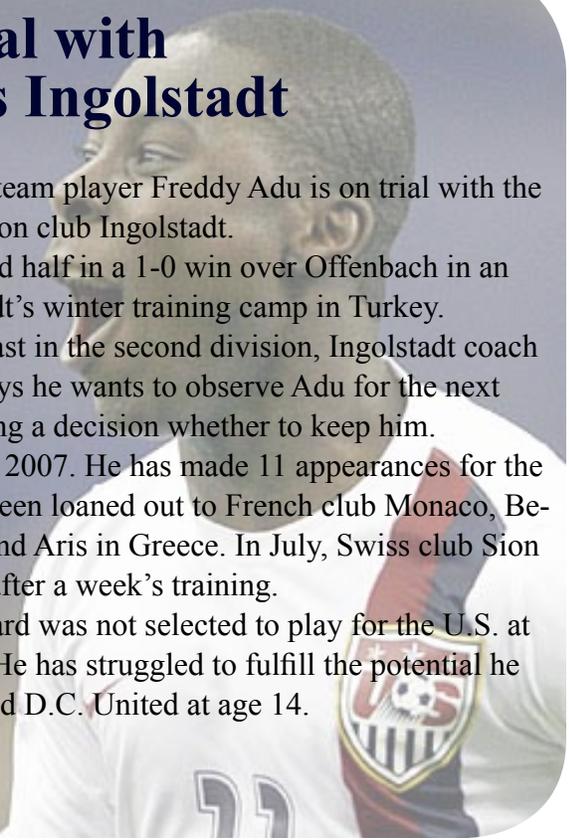
Adu on trial with Germany's Ingolstadt

Former U.S. national team player Freddy Adu is on trial with the German second-division club Ingolstadt.

Adu played the second half in a 1-0 win over Offenbach in an exhibition in Ingolstadt's winter training camp in Turkey. Ingolstadt is next-to-last in the second division, Ingolstadt coach Benno Moehlmann says he wants to observe Adu for the next few days before making a decision whether to keep him.

Adu joined Benfica in 2007. He has made 11 appearances for the Portuguese club and been loaned out to French club Monaco, Be-lenenses in Portugal and Aris in Greece. In July, Swiss club Sion declined to sign Adu after a week's training.

The 21-year-old forward was not selected to play for the U.S. at the 2010 World Cup. He has struggled to fulfill the potential he showed when he joined D.C. United at age 14.

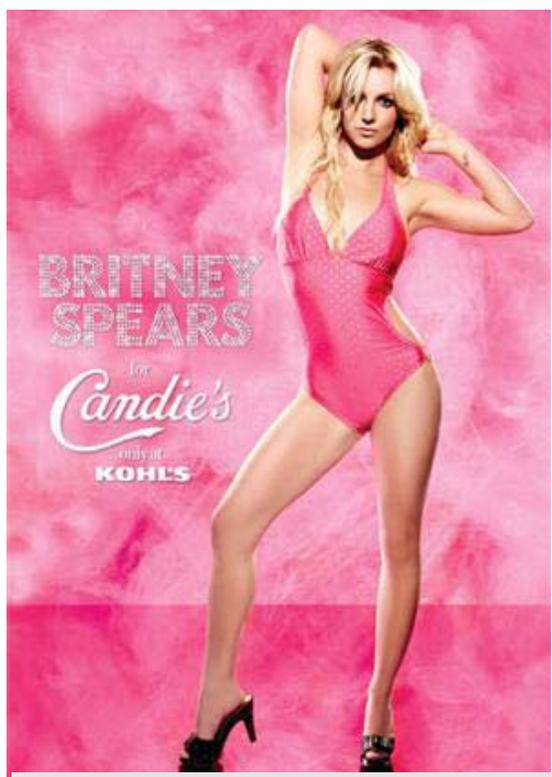


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Onyewu loan to Twente in the works

U.S. men's national team defender Oguchi Onyewu has failed to find regular playing time ever since joining AC Milan a year and a half ago. A torn patellar tendon cut short his first season with the Italian club, but a year later he has failed to make a single appearance.

However, it looks like Onyewu's quest for playing time could finally be ending. The Washington Post is reporting that Onyewu is close to finalizing a loan deal to defending Dutch champion FC Twente.

If he makes the move, Onyewu would be reunited with FC Twente manager Michel Preud'homme, who was Onyewu's manager at Belgian champion Standard Liege for two seasons (2006-2008).

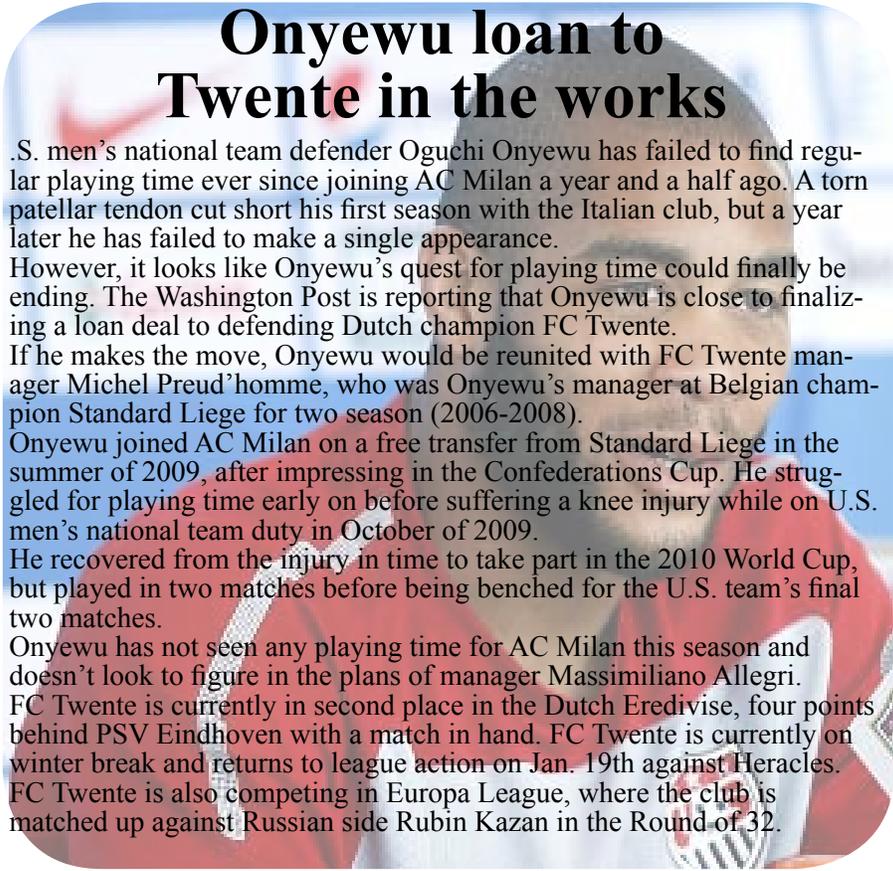
Onyewu joined AC Milan on a free transfer from Standard Liege in the summer of 2009, after impressing in the Confederations Cup. He struggled for playing time early on before suffering a knee injury while on U.S. men's national team duty in October of 2009.

He recovered from the injury in time to take part in the 2010 World Cup, but played in two matches before being benched for the U.S. team's final two matches.

Onyewu has not seen any playing time for AC Milan this season and doesn't look to figure in the plans of manager Massimiliano Allegri.

FC Twente is currently in second place in the Dutch Eredivise, four points behind PSV Eindhoven with a match in hand. FC Twente is currently on winter break and returns to league action on Jan. 19th against Heracles.

FC Twente is also competing in Europa League, where the club is matched up against Russian side Rubin Kazan in the Round of 32.



Ferguson questions Beckham loan

Sir Alex Ferguson has questioned whether David Beckham's short-term loan move will be of significant benefit to Tottenham. LA Galaxy midfielder Beckham, 35, is due to seal a two-month loan to White Hart Lane on Sunday as he seeks to convince Fabio Capello that he still has a future at international level. Harry Redknapp believes Beckham's experience and character will be a real boost to the squad as they look to play their part in the title race, but Ferguson is not convinced.

"The thing with David if he comes to England is that he will have to go back in March," Ferguson said. "It's a very short-term loan and we had the same situation with Henrik Larsson in 2007."

"We utilised those two months well and Henrik played a great part, but we knew we would miss him at the very time when we would have liked to have had him - at the tail-end of the season - but that was the arrangement, so we had to move on."

He added: "Obviously anyone at 35 is looking at the twilight years of his career. I have players at United like Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville who grew up with David and are at the same level."

"They know they are coming towards the end of their careers and the horrible part of being a manager is seeing that. These players are eventually going to retire. David knows that better than anyone."

Redknapp, though, feels the signing will give the fans a lift and expects Beckham to prove his worth during his brief stint. "They [the fans] will be pleased to have him here," Redknapp said. "Everyone respects him. He wants to play football."

"Most players would sit around thinking, 'That's okay, I've got eight weeks now to sit around the pool. Go and have a game of golf, or whatever' but he wants to play."

"It tells you everything about him. That's why he's probably had such a great career. He's always worked hard. He always puts a shift in. He's a good trainer. You never hear anybody who ever played with him criticising him."

Redknapp also reiterated that he has no plans to sign Ajax striker Luis Suarez. "He's a good player but we haven't made any offer for him," he said. "I would doubt very much that anything will happen there. I've watched him loads of times; he's not an out-and-out striker but he could play anywhere."

Terry to face no police action

Chelsea defender John Terry will not face a Police inquiry over claims that he injured a steward near the end of Wednesday's game at Wolves.

West Midlands Police confirmed that officers had decided to take no further action after viewing television footage of the incident during the Premier League game.

A police spokeswoman confirmed that a complaint of assault had been made by Wolves steward Patrick Steadman following Chelsea's 1-0 defeat at Molineux on Wednesday.

Mr Steadman told The Sun he had suffered whiplash and was considering taking legal action after being pushed in the chest as the Chelsea captain retrieved a ball which had gone out of play.

A Chelsea Football Club spokesman said: "Video footage of the match clearly shows any claim to be ridiculous. The club will vigorously defend itself and its player against this frivolous claim."

A spokeswoman for West Midlands Police said:

"We can confirm that a man attended a police station in Wolverhampton on the afternoon of Thursday January 6 to make a complaint

of assault following an incident in injury time of the Wolves v Chelsea match the previous evening.

"The man is a steward at Wolverhampton Wanderers FC and claims he suffered an injury after being pushed by a player during the course of the game.

"After viewing the footage of the incident, police will be taking no further action with regards to this complaint."

Mr Steadman, who lives in Wolverhampton, told The Sun he did not think he had been hurt immediately after the incident, but had woken up with a sharp neck pain the following morning.

"I could hardly move my head," the 39-year-old told the newspaper.



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CHICAGO RIOT'S 4TH-QUARTER RALLY FALLS SHORT AGAINST OMAHA

Vipers hold on to beat Chicago, 13-11, on Sunday at the Odeum

The Chicago Riot posted a late rally but fell to the Omaha Vipers, 13-11, on Sunday in Major Indoor Soccer League action at the Odeum Sports and Expo Center.

In the fourth quarter, the Riot's Fred Degand posted a power play goal and Eric Duda netted a three-pointer to cut a seven-point deficit to 13-11. But in the closing minute, the Riot's deep shot attempts either were turned away by Vipers goalkeeper Jose Bontti, or the team missed the goal frame.

Bontti made a game-high 24 saves for Omaha. Riot goalkeepers Jeff Richey (six saves) and Ante Cop (10 saves) split time in the net after Richey left the game with a leg injury. Richey surpassed 800 career goals and sits at 801.

Next up for the Riot is a 7 p.m. match on Sunday, Jan. 16, against the Baltimore Blast at the Odeum. Tickets start at \$10 and are available at ChicagoRiotSoccer.com or by calling 630-708-6284.

The Riot got on the board first when Alex Megson's shot from the right side trickled past Bontti at the 8:05 mark of the first quarter for a 2-0 lead. Megson and Miodrag "Miki" Djerisilo worked a give-and-go to carve past the Vipers' defense.

With 2 seconds remaining in the first quarter at the 14:58 mark, Vipers forward Johnny Torres booted a three-point goal that hit Richey's gloves, but the ball found its way under the crossbar and into the back of the net as Omaha took a 3-2 lead.

The Riot's Sandre "Sunny" Naumoski took a shootout at the 2:35 mark of the second quarter following a Ricardinho penalty, and Bontti stopped the attempt. But Chicago capitalized during the penalty. Riot midfielder Semir Mesanovic tallied his 75th career goal on the power play at the 3:50 mark for a 4-3 lead. Bato Radoncic had the assist from the left side and Mesanovic's strike hit the upper left corner.

But the Vipers posted a 6-0 run in the span of five and a half minutes. Johnny Torres posted goals at the 5:24 and 10:52 marks of the second quarter, and Ryan Junge had an unassisted score at 7:47. Torres gave the Vipers a 9-4 lead with his second tally.

Following Torres' first goal at 5:24, Kraft substituted Cop into the net for Richey, who was noticeably limping from an injury earlier in the game.

Radoncic cut Omaha's lead to 9-6 at the 13:40 mark of the second with an unassisted restart goal from the left side, shooting the ball into the upper right corner of the net.

With both offenses going quiet for much of the third quarter, Omaha midfielder Mauricio Curiel's second-chance effort at the 14:32 mark gave the Vipers an 11-6 lead. Curiel took an initial strike, with Cop making a diving save to his left. But the ball popped back out in the box, and Curiel headed the ball in for the unassisted score.

The Vipers pushed their lead to 13-6 with a Victor Quiroz power play goal at the 3:28 mark. But Chicago responded as Degand tallied the Riot's second power play goal of the game at 6:13 off of a Mesanovic assist to cut the Vipers' lead to 13-8.

The Riot continued a comeback with Duda's three-point goal at the 9:36 mark to cut the Vipers' lead to 13-11. But the Vipers' defense held things in check the rest of the way.

Omaha Vipers (4-4) at Chicago Riot (1-6)

January 9, 2011 -- Odeum Sports and Expo Center, Villa Park, Ill.

Omaha Vipers 13, Chicago Riot 11

Omaha	3	6	2	2	-	13
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Chicago	2	4	0	5	-	11
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SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

1. Chicago Riot - Alex Megson (Miki Djerisilo), 8:05; 2. Omaha Vipers - Johnny Torres (unassisted), three-point goal, 14:58.

Second quarter

3. Chicago Riot - Semir Mesanovic (Bato Radoncic), power play goal, 3:50; 4. Omaha Vipers - Johnny Torres (Chile Farias), 5:24; 5. Omaha Vipers - Ryan Junge (unassisted), 7:47; 6. Omaha Vipers - Johnny Torres (Chile Farias), power play goal, 10:52; 7. Chicago Riot - Bato Radoncic (unassisted), restart goal, 12:40.

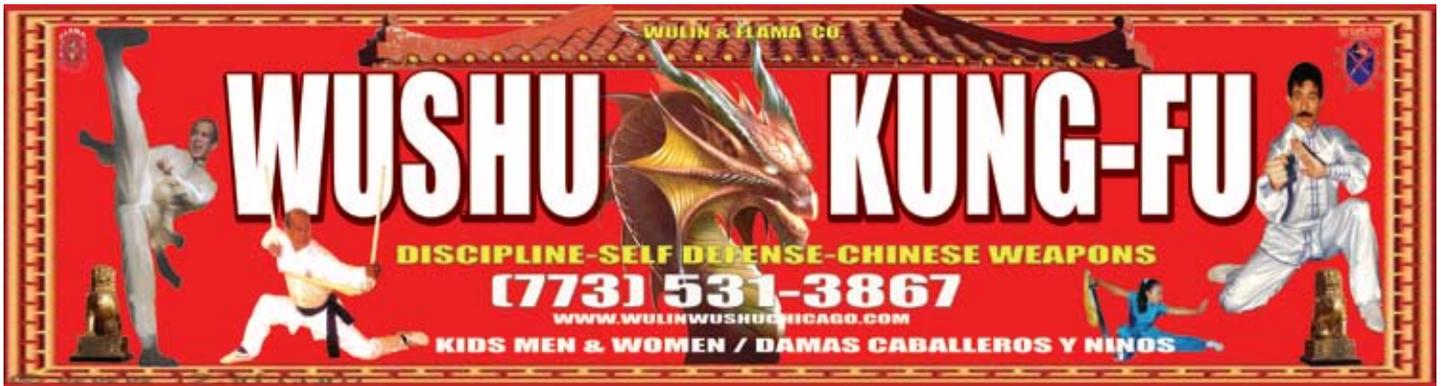
Third quarter

8. Omaha Vipers - Mauricio Curiel (unassisted), 14:32.

Fourth quarter

9. Omaha Vipers - Victor Quiroz (Fabinho), power play goal, 3:28; 10. Chicago Riot - Fred Degand (Semir Mesanovic), power play goal, 6:13; 11. Chicago Riot - Eric Duda (unassisted), three-point goal, 9:36.

Saves: Jeff Richey (Chicago Riot) 6; Ante Cop (Chicago Riot) 10; Jose Bontti (Omaha Vipers) 24



Player faked kidnapping to avoid fine

Police say Botafogo midfielder Somalia made up a story about being abducted on his way to practice because he was late and wanted to avoid a fine. Rio de Janeiro Police Chief Juliana Domingues said footage from a video camera in Somalia's building showed him entering around 4 a.m. Wednesday and leaving about five hours later. Somalia had told police he was kidnapped at 7:15 a.m. and held for two hours. The club said players can have up to 40 percent of their pay docked for tardiness. Investigators became suspicious when Somalia contradicted himself on details. Domingues says Somalia will be charged for falsely reporting of a crime. Botafogo issued a statement saying it is looking into possible punishment.



Jadue elected new president of Chilean football



Sergio Jadue was elected president of the Chilean Football Association on Friday in a second vote after the election in November of Spanish businessman Jorge Segovia was annulled.

Jadue said he would ask Marcelo Bielsa to stay on as national team coach. Bielsa resigned after Segovia was elected, citing differences with Segovia.

Jadue had the support of Segovia, which could make it more difficult for Bielsa to remain. The Argentine coach guided Chile to its first World Cup since 1998 and its best finish since 1962. The team lost to Brazil in the round of 16.

Jadue, 31, received 27 votes to beat Ernesto Corona, who had the support of outgoing president Harold Mayne-Nicholls and received 21.

Jadue and Segovia both had support from Chile's largest clubs.

Segovia, who owns the club Union Espanola, was elected on Nov. 4, defeating Mayne-Nicholls. But the Chilean association later ruled that Segovia was not qualified to hold the office because he had violated federation bylaws by signing commercial contracts.

Segovia said the little-enforced rule was used as tactic to nullify his election.

A five-member panel, which included the president of Chile's Supreme Court, supported the Chilean association's position.

Chile is scheduled to play a friendly match against the United States on Jan. 22 in Los Angeles. Bielsa has called up mostly substitutes and young players for the match, which may be his last.

Many have urged him to stay on, at least through the Copa America, which opens in Argentina on July 1

Nagbe, Press win Hermann Trophy

Akron's Darlington Nagbe won the Hermann Trophy on Friday as the top men's college soccer player, and Stanford's Christen Press took the women's honor. Nagbe, a junior forward and midfielder, helped the Zips win the NCAA title, the school's first in NCAA competition in any sport. He had seven goals and 13 assists last season, and is among the top prospects in next week's Major League Soccer draft.

Press, a senior forward, scored 26 goals last season, the most in the nation and tying the Stanford record as the Cardinal reached the NCAA final, where it lost to Notre Dame.

For the first time in the history of the award, given by the Missouri Athletic Club, both winners were from the same schools as the previous year. Teal Bunbury, who went on to an excellent rookie season with the Kansas City Wizards, and Kelley O'Hara won last year.

The previous back-to-back winners of the men's award from the same school were Duke's Thomas Kain and John Kerr in 1985-86. The men's award began in 1967 and the women's award in 1988.

Indiana junior forward Will Bruin was second for the men's award, followed by Louisville junior forward Colin Rolfe. Bruin also is in next week's MLS draft.

In the women's award, Notre Dame junior forward Melissa Henderson was second, followed by California senior forward Alex Morgan, whose goal in the first leg of a playoff gave the U.S. a 1-0 victory at Italy that helped the Americans qualify for his year's Women's World Cup.

Voting is done by NCAA Division I soccer coaches.





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Ex-Nigerian soccer star Okafor kills self in Texas

Uche Okafor, a defender on two Nigerian World Cup teams and a stalwart player for the Kansas City Wizards in the U.S., committed suicide this week at his Dallas-area home, authorities said Friday. He was 43.

Okafor's body was discovered Thursday afternoon by his wife in their house in Little Elm, a town about 30 miles northwest of Dallas, Detective Oscar Hinojosa said. The Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office said Friday that he hanged himself in an upstairs hallway.

A friend who could not reach Okafor called Ifeyinwa Okafor, the former star's wife, police said.

"She was at work and she came home and found him," Hinojosa said.

Okafor played on the 1994 Super Eagles team that won the African Cup of Nations.

Nigeria reached the second round of the World Cup that year and again in 1998, with Okafor on the team both times. He didn't play in 1994 and played in one match in the first round in 1998, a 3-1 loss to Paraguay after they had beaten Spain and Bulgaria. He didn't play in the second-round loss to Denmark.

"We are totally shocked by the news. Uche Okafor was a great player who represented his country at the highest level," said Musa Amadu, acting secretary general of the Nigerian Football Federation.

Okafor was with the Wizards from 1996 to 2000, playing in 119 regular-season games and seven Major League Soccer playoff games. His professional finale came on Oct. 15, 2000, when Kansas City beat the Chicago Fire for its only

MLS Cup championship.

When Okafor retired before the 2001 season, he was one of only three Kansas City players to have competed every season since the Wizards' inception in 1996, the team said.

"I'm terribly sad to hear of his passing," said Ron Newman, Wizards manager from 1996 through 1999. "He was a big, strong guy, but he was very pleasant and I found him to be very professional. He was just an absolute gentleman."

"I wouldn't like to be on the wrong side of him if I was playing against him," he said. "He took no prisoners. But he was fair in everything he did; fair play and good guy. If he knocked you over, he'd pick you up and dust you down."

Kerry Zavagnin, an assistant coach with Sporting Kansas City - the Wizards changed their name last year - played with Okafor during Kansas City's championship season.

"I'm shocked and saddened," he said. "He was a great teammate and most importantly, he was certainly a great man. This is a sad loss for all of us."

Okafor had worked for ESPN the past two years, providing analysis of African soccer. His contract had been renewed last month.

"We are deeply saddened by news of Uche Okafor's death," the cable network said. "He was well-respected for his insightful analysis on ESPN SoccerNet Press Pass. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends and fans."

Associated Press writers Diana Heidgerd and Danny Robbins in Dallas, Bill Draper in Kansas City, Mo., and Yinka Ibukun and Jon Gambrell in Lagos, Nigeria, contributed to this report.

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AC Milan coach bids Ronaldinho farewell

AC Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri has bid Ronaldinho farewell with high praise for the Brazilian, even though he didn't use him much since taking charge this season.

Ronaldinho is currently in Brazil and appears intent on signing with Palmeiras, Flamengo, or his former club Gremio.

Allegri says, "Ronaldinho is a big loss and it will be difficult to see a player with his technical qualities in Italy again," adding that not even newly signed Antonio Cassano can completely replace him.

Ronaldinho played as a regular last season under Leonardo but the 2004 and '05 FIFA world player of the year was reduced mostly to a substitute's role this season.

Allegri adds, "Dinho always respected my choices, and I always tried to do what was best for Milan."



Flamengo looks set to sign up Ronaldinho

Flamengo and AC Milan have nearly reached an agreement on Ronaldinho's transfer from the Italian team back to Brazil, according to the leadership of both teams.

The announcement reported on Globo TV's G1 website that a deal was "99.99 percent" in place on Saturday put to rest much of the speculation about which of Flamengo, Palmeiras, or his former side, Gremio, would sign the former world player of the year. Details of the transfer and the contract still needed to be worked out - a process that will likely take two or three days, Flamengo president Patricia Amorim told G1. "This hasn't been an easy, calm discussion," said Amorim. "But it is important that Flamengo and Milan reach an agreement."

Amorim and Milan vice president Adriano Galliani met early Saturday in Rio de Janeiro, where Galliani was on vacation.

Galliani agreed with Amorim: "Ronaldinho is 99.99 percent Flamengo's," he told the website. They are now waiting for Ronaldinho's lawyers to read the contract.

Flamengo was already planning a celebration, either on Copacabana Beach or in Maracanazinho Stadium. A day after it prepared a huge party in Porto Alegre to introduce Ronaldinho to its fans, Gremio officially gave up on its efforts to sign the playmaker, saying that in the final moments of the negotiation the club was asked to pay an extra amount to AC Milan.

"We had sealed the deal. The player was going to come to Porto Alegre to sign the contract," Gremio president Paulo Odone said. "When I was contacted to negotiate the new value we realized we were going over our limit so I ended the negotiation." Palmeiras said it remained in contention, however, and that its offer was the best among all clubs.

The 30-year-old Ronaldinho struggled to establish himself at Milan, and hopes that a strong return to Brazilian football will help him play in the 2014 World Cup, to be held in Brazil.

Ronaldinho has been playing in Europe since he joined France's Paris-Saint Germain in 2001. He stayed for two years before making the move to Barcelona. In 2008, he left Spain to join AC Milan.

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Barcelona trio contest FIFA world player award

Spanish champion Barcelona is the sure winner when the world's best footballer of 2010 is crowned on Monday.

All three candidates for the FIFA Ballon d'Or award - Andres Iniesta, Xavi Hernandez and Lionel Messi - play for the club, and all learned their craft at its La Masia youth academy.

The gala ceremony in FIFA's home city shapes as another victory lap for World Cup winner Spain. National team boss Vicente del Bosque is favored to get the inaugural men's coaching award for guiding La Furia Roja to the title in South Africa.

Xavi or Iniesta, whose goal against the Netherlands decided the final, is likely to be similarly rewarded over Messi, whose Argentina side was outclassed by Germany in the quarterfinals.

In its 20th year, the FIFA event has merged with the Ballon d'Or award presented to the best player in Europe by France Football magazine since 1956.

The slate of honors now includes best female coach and player. A worldwide fans' vote decides the Puskas Award for most beautiful goal of 2010 and FIFA president Sepp Blatter will make a personal award. FIFA also awards a fair play prize and teams up with FIFPro, the global group of players' unions, to name a World XI. Barcelona is assured of an eighth victory since FIFA created its world player prize 20 years ago. Messi's win in 2009 followed Brazilians Romario (1994), Ronaldo (1996 and '97), Rivaldo (1999) and Ronaldinho (2004 and '05).

Surprisingly, no Spaniard has won or even finished runner-up. Xavi's third place last year matched Fernando Torres (2008) and Raul (2001).

Xavi's supreme year in midfield for club and country already earned him World Soccer magazine's 2010 accolade, edging Messi into second. Dutchman Wesley Sneijder was third and Iniesta fifth.

Victory on Monday would continue an emotional new year for 30-year-old Xavi, who set a Barcelona record of 550 appearances last week.

However, the FIFA voting college of coaches and captains from national teams plus invited journalists could be swayed by Iniesta's goal on the biggest stage.

Iniesta's assist rate was better than one per game last year. When the 26-year-old midfielder was sidelined by a right calf muscle injury, Barcelona was upset by Sneijder's Internazionale in a Champions League semifinal.

Messi's place on the shortlist is beyond question despite exiting the World Cup in an embarrassing 4-0 loss for coach Diego Maradona's team. For Barcelona, the 23-year-old forward was mesmerizing and prolific.

The diminutive trio of nominees - none taller than 5-feet-7 (1.70 meter) - combined six weeks ago in the defining club performance of 2010.

Barcelona's 5-0 humiliation of a Real Madrid team previously unbeaten in the league showed it, and not Club World Cup winner Inter, was now best.

The two coaches that night, Barca's Pep Guardiola and Real's Jose Mourinho, will challenge Del Bosque for the FIFA prize.

Mourinho was the world's best in the first half of 2010, leading Inter to a treble of European and Italian trophies.

The women's coaching shortlist features Maren Meinert, whose Germany Under-20 team was world champion in July, German senior team coach Silvia Neid and Pia Sundhage, the Swede who coaches the United States national team.

Germany international Lira Bajramaj is a new challenger for the women's player award. The Kosovo-born midfielder competes with four-time winner Marta of Brazil, and German forward Birgit Prinz who won the three previous prizes.

The 10 goals nominated for the Puskas Award include strikes from both ends of the broadcast spectrum.

Hundreds of millions watched live on television when Siphwe Tshabalala score the World Cup's opening goal for South Africa against Mexico.

Spectacular volleyed shots by Matthew Burrows for Northern Ireland club Glentoran and Linus Hallenius for Sweden's Hammarby owe their popularity to YouTube.