

# Mo finds peace and glory in K.C.

The Kansas City Wizards were MLS's October surprise, lifting the MLS Cup a year after finishing 8-24. No one was happier than Scottish captain Mo Johnston, who entered the season knowing it would be his last.

BY BOB LUDER  
in Overland Park, Kan.

**D**raped in loose-fitting black sweat pants and white shirt, Mo Johnston appeared at peace as he leaned back in an overstuffed chair at his spacious home in Overland Park, a southern suburb of Kansas City, and recalled the moment he decided to retire from soccer.

It occurred long before Oct. 15, when his announcement came after Kansas City's 1-0 win over Chicago for the 2000 MLS title.

The instant Johnston was thinking of occurred nearly 10 months earlier, on a hot, sultry day thousands of miles away in South America. At halftime of a preseason match against a Bolivian club, Johnston decided he'd had enough.

His wife, Karen, was back in Overland Park, restricted to bed rest after complications with the pregnancy of twin boys. Johnston, battling a bum knee, had difficulty summoning up the game which, in the 1980s and early '90s, made him one of the best Scottish players.

"Halfway through the preseason, I didn't feel I was contributing at all," the 37-year-old said. "What was happening with Karen and the babies. It was a difficult period.

"One day, I got up, and I didn't want to be there. I came out at the half of one game in Bolivia and didn't want to go back in. I went to coach [Bob Gansler], and said this might be it."

**SPIRITUAL LEADER.** Gansler first seemed surprised. Then he set about convincing his captain, indeed, the Wizards' spiritual leader, to hang in for one more season.

"I mentioned to him that we needed his tactical acumen, his emotional leadership, his brains on the field," Gansler said. "He was that connector we needed to keep possession. I'm glad I talked him out of it."

Which brought Johnston to this point. On this day, lounging at home, he proudly showed off the MLS championship medal, one that he's hung over the picture frame in his basement that holds his four other championship medals.

No Wizard grinned wider, cheered louder, savored the champagne more, or held the MLS Cup higher than Johnston. Back at his beloved position of forward after a season spent in defensive midfield, Johnston played a key role in the club's remark-

able resurgence. In addition to leadership, he scored four goals and assisted on seven others.

Most important was his assist, a header in which he was kicked in the face, on the game-winning goal that defeated the Los Angeles Galaxy and put the Wizards into the final.

"I'll cherish it till I die," Johnston said of the MLS title. "It ranks right up there with the first [championship, with Celtic in 1986]. That first was special, because we had to win like eight or nine straight games to play for the championship, then had to win by four clear goals in the final game. We won, 5-0."

Karen said her husband's calm demeanor since retirement is nothing new.

"He's been relaxed since coming to America," she said.

A large reason for Johnston's move to America was to escape the furor that had erupted when, in the late 1980s, the former scoring star for Celtic, Glasgow's Catholic club, joined Rangers, the city's Protestant team. That made Johnston the first Catholic to play for Rangers since World War 1.

Johnston could walk the streets of Kansas City anonymously, instead of receiving death threats from Celtic loyalists and having to travel with bodyguards. He could shop with his wife, take the kids to a park, go anywhere, do anything without worry.

Johnston said he'll stick with the peace and quiet of America's heartland, at least for now.

His three youngest children, 3-year-old daughter Alana, and twin infant boys T.J. and Tyler, were born here. They're Americans. Uprooting them would be difficult.

**MR. MOM.** What his professional future holds, Johnston doesn't really know. He's done some work for a couple of years now with GSI, a company that helps send American youth teams abroad. He may start a youth soccer academy. He's looking into purchasing two fields where he could start the academy or help with the Wizards School of Excellence.

Meantime, if he finds himself searching for things with which to fill his time, well, Karen said she can always help him out.

"I just call him Mr. Mom now," she said, laughing.

(Bob Luder covers sports for The Kansas City Star.)



## MLS Retirees

### Mo Johnston

Kansas City  
GP: 138

### Mark Dodd

Dallas  
GP: 92

### Sam George

Chicago  
GP: 87

### Thomas Dooley

MetroStars  
GP: 83

### Clint Peay

D.C. United  
GP: 43

### Miklos Molnar

Kansas City  
GP: 17

● Players who announced their retirement from pro soccer after the MLS season.



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