

The Reggae Boy via Florida

He's spent almost half his life in the United States, but Tyrone Marshall's World Cup hopes hinge on Jamaica's success.

BY JEFF RUSNAK
in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Three years ago, Jamaica was playing in its first World Cup and Tyrone Marshall was an MLS rookie trying to adjust his gangly frame from being a forward to becoming a midfielder or defender in order to save his pro career.

World Cup dreams couldn't have been farther from his mind.

How things have changed.

Since establishing himself as an athletic



and able left-sided flank player for the Miami Fusion, Marshall cracked Jamaica's lineup at right back. He started in every qualifier of the semifinal round.

"The idea of playing in a World Cup has snuck up on me," says Marshall, 26. "I never knew I would get this opportunity. It's still just hitting me that I'm with the national team and just a year away from maybe playing in the World Cup."

COLLEGE STAR. Marshall moved to Florida at 14 from Jamaica. He won an NAIA title with Kentucky's Lindsey Wilson before returning to Miami and reaching the Division I final four in 1996 with Florida International.

He's a unique example of a player whose feats in the United States have turned him into a key national team player for another nation.

The 11th pick in the '98 MLS college draft, Marshall had to change his approach—from maneuvering in tight space in the goal area to being a two-way player on the flanks.

He played just 17 minutes for Colorado in '98 before being traded to Miami. Under Coach Ivo Wortmann, the right-footed Marshall played eight games as a left-sided midfielder. The past two seasons, he's logged 51 games, shuffling from midfielder to defender — even center back — under Coach Ray Hudson.

"His real strengths are his tremendous pace and great stride," Hudson says, "but he also has the ability to use the ball on the ground and dribble through guys. He's also got a warrior's attitude."

HEMELCOMING. The trade to the Fusion meant a homecoming. Lockhart Stadium is five minutes from Marshall's high school. He debuted for Jamaica against Romania in 1999 at Lockhart with his mother watching. His father, Cornell, lives in Kingston, Jamaica, and saw Tyrone play for the Reggae Boyz for the first time last year against Cuba.

Cornell "Granny" Marshall played for Jamaica in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Tyrone was the fourth of five boys and grew up learning the game from his father before he came to South Florida.

"You need a foundation to build on, and I got that in Jamaica," Marshall says. "I was around skilled players all the time learning. When I came here, I could tell the skill difference I had with other players, but on the other side, I wasn't as physical as I needed to be."

Because he is married to an American, Marshall could have played for the United States or Jamaica. He opted for his native country because that's who asked first.

"There's a lot of pressure on the team," Marshall says. "They're looking for us to go back. We want to prove it wasn't a fluke and we can do it again."

(Jeff Rusnak writes a Sunday soccer column for the South Florida Sun-Sentinel.)



The Miami Fusion's Tyrone Marshall left Jamaica at 14 but returns regularly for national team duty.

BILL BARRETT