

The scoring mission



MIKE WOITALLA

It's all about goals. Always has been. Always will be.

How often have you heard a coach praise his losing team by pointing out that its main problem was a lack of finishing? It's usually in the form of, "We dominated but didn't put away our chances."

That's like returning from the grocery store and telling your wife you had a great trip — but you didn't get the food.

American soccer faces many issues. But it all comes down to scoring.

For at least a decade, the United States has been able to keep important games close. The problem is up front.

Throw out the routs over feeble Barbados — 7-0 and 4-0 — and U.S. scoring in qualifying for 2002 is three goals in four games.

Four years earlier, Steve Sampson was so desperate for goals he gave starts to aged Roy Wegerle and David Wagner — foreign-raised players more woeful than U.S. products.

In its greatest win, 2-1 over Colombia in 1994, the United States relied on an own goal.

We live in the age of the Mission Statement. You want to make a pot of coffee? Submit your Mission Statement, then proceed. So how about a scoring mission?

U.S. Youth Soccer, among its virtuous aims, should include, "Produce goalscorers!"

What's the downside? Not producing enough defenders? I doubt it. Argentina churns out scorers for leagues around the world and has no problem at the other positions.

Indeed, an abundance of skilled forwards will raise the level of the other players.

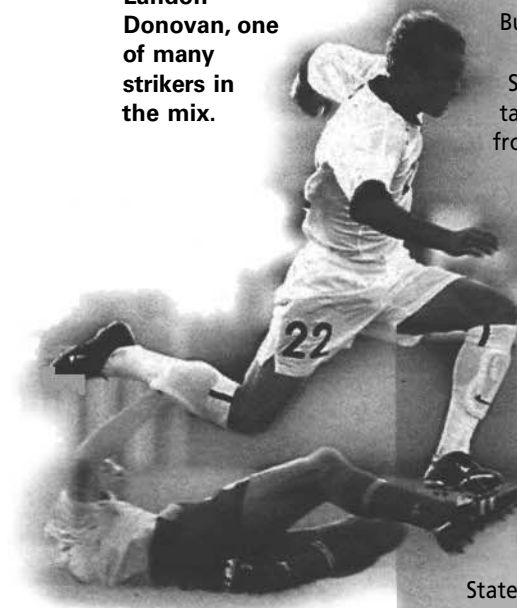
It's too late for Bruce Arena to benefit from my national drive for better forwards, but his team's fate still hinges on his frontline.

Going into the Hexagonal, he's got five to choose from: McBride, Donovan, Razov, Moore and Wolff. Arena must find the right combination of two.

If it's a high-scoring U.S. frontline, it might even start a trend.

— Mike Woitalla

Landon Donovan, one of many strikers in the mix.



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