

Americans assemble, veiled in secrecy

The national team is again trying the clandestine approach to preparation in hopes of keeping Mexico guessing about which players it plans to use on Feb. 28.

Coach Bruce Arena's lockdown on information and access is similar to the procedures he followed in the days preceding his team's match against Costa Rica in Columbus in the second-to-last game of the semifinal round of qualifying.

The main difference this time was that Arena released a roster of 24 players well in advance. The notable omission from that list was goalkeeper Kasey Keller. Arena has opted for Brad Friedel, who has been excellent recently with Blackburn of the English First Division. Friedel also was in goal for the most recent qualifier against Mexico — a 0-0 tie in Azteca Stadium in 1997.

The roster includes nine players based overseas and two others (Gregg Berhalter and Cobi Jones) who just had trials in England. Teenagers Landon Donovan and DaMarcus Beasley were included in the group, but Arena will select 18 players to travel to Columbus Feb. 24.

Once in Columbus, all the team's training sessions will be closed to the media, which will have access to selected players away from the field once a day.

Arena recently admitted that he is not sure if his closed-door tactics will gain his team an advantage, but he said that they cannot cause a disadvantage.

The team scheduled three scrimmages, closed to media, during its eight days in Fort Lauderdale—against the Miami Fusion and two against the Chicago Fire. Team spokesman Rich Schneider said U.S. Soccer would not release reports on them as usual. He also said that if any injuries occur in training, they will not be publicized.

"[Arena] is playing it very close to the vest," Schneider said. "I think he doesn't want people to make too much of the scrimmage results and he wants Mexico to have as little information as possible."

— Will Kuhns

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Goalkeepers—Brad Friedel (Blackburn Rovers, 66 caps), Tony Meola (Kansas City Wizards, 96), Zach Thornton (Chicago Fire, 6). **Defenders** — Jeff Agoos (San Jose Earthquakes, 106), Gregg Berhalter (free agent, 18), Carlos Llamasa (Miami Fusion, 16), Eddie Pope (D.C. United, 37), David Regis (Metz, 15), Greg Vanney (Los Angeles Galaxy, 12). **Midfielders** — Chris Armas (Chicago Fire, 24), DaMarcus Beasley (Chicago Fire, 2), Cobi Jones (free agent, 136), Chris Klein (Kansas City Wizards, 4), Clint Mathis (MetroStars, 7), Ben Olsen (Nott. Forest, 19), Claudio Reyna (Rangers, 78), Tony Sanneh (Hertha Berlin, 15), Earnie Stewart (NAC, 64), Richie Williams (MetroStars, 14). **Forwards** — Landon Donovan (Bayer Leverkusen, 3), Brian McBride (Preston North End, 46), Joe-Max Moore (Everton, 83), Ante Razov (Racing Ferrol, 13), Josh Wolff (Chicago Fire, 4).