

The four new guys on the block

Quartet of head coaches take over teams with lots of questions

Franks Yallop can be forgiven, and he can be believed, when he says, "My head is spinning with all this." With all of two weeks under his belt as the San Jose Earthquakes' head coach, Yallop set off Feb. 17 with his team for games and training in Mexico.

As one of four new head coaches in MLS for 2001, Yallop is in the toughest situation. He's the only one without previous head-coaching experience, he's taken over the worst team in the league, and the NHL's Sharks have pledged to run the team for just one season.



RIDGE MAHONEY

None of the new men is inheriting an ideal situation. As they tinker and experiment in preseason, their franchises stand at critical junctures.

Tim Hankinson has taken over in Colorado, and Alfonso Mondelo is his successor at Tampa Bay. Mike Jeffries left Chicago to replace Dave Dir in Dallas.

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UNDERACHIEVERS. Not since the inaugural season of 1996 have the Quakes reached the playoffs. Average attendance has dropped from 17,232 to 12,460 in a market rated as one of the league's best.

The retirement of defender John Doyle swept away the last survivor of that playoff team.

Yallop's head may have been swimming, but that didn't stop him from invoking changes. He waived defender Dan Calichman, dealt disgruntled striker Abdul Thompson Conteh to D.C. in exchange for Jeff Agoos, ac-

quired attacker Manny Lagos, and plucked the nation's top college scorer, Chris Carrieri, with the first overall pick at the SuperDraft.

The dealing was necessary. There are holes and questions pockmarking the few bright areas of attacker Ronald Cerritos, midfielder Richard Mulrooney and goalkeeper Joe Cannon.

Wade Barrett, a regular in 1998 and 1999, suffered a broken leg in preseason last year and played just 163 minutes. He played mostly at defensive midfielder but will get a look at left back, which would allow Yallop to push Agoos into the middle.

"That's where I'm hoping to play him: Right in the middle, where he can be my captain and bring these young guys along," said Yallop, who learned a bit about defending while playing 13 seasons in the English League and three more in MLS.

San Jose scored only 35 goals last season, by far the

worst in MLS. Lagos, Canieri and A-League product Dwayne DeRosario — taken with the No. 6 overall pick — will be offered the chance to play with Cerritos, whom injuries limited to just nine games last year.

The sleeper of the three is Lagos, who logged eight goals and seven assists for the Mutiny last year while starting only 17 of 27 games.

"I worked with Manny very closely in Tampa," said Yallop. "I always thought he's a good player that maybe didn't get to play much.

"He's not a dynamic winger, but the field at San Jose lends itself to being tight anyway, and he's got very good feet. I want to get goals out of Manny."

Yallop is in no hurry to use his team's three allocations. Given the tight budgets proclaimed by the league office for 2001, his aims are more modest than the blockbuster playmaking midfielder or stud striker he'd like to get.

A RAPID REVIVAL. Here's a nightmare that would jolt any coach out of his sleep: take over a team under a credo to play a more attacking, entertaining style, and don't use as an excuse the fact that the team lost its best playmaker as well as one of its top scorers.

Tim Hankinson sees some similarities between the 2001 Rapids and the 1998 Mutiny he inherited from John Kowalski.

"That was a team that was playing on its heels, a team basically that no one was worried about playing against," said Hankinson. "We didn't have a number of weapons, like Chicago for example.

"No one was making plans, worried about stopping us, when I first got there."

The Rapids scored 43 goals last year — second-worst behind San Jose — and have lost Jorge Dely Valdes (7 goals) and Anders Limpar (9 assists) from that juggernaut.

Hankinson does have top scorer Junior Agogo (10 goals) and veteran Paul Bravo to work the middle. He's looking to strengthen the flanks and replace Canadian international Jason Bent should his quest to find a team in England succeed.

"One of the concerns I have is this squad hasn't really had any type of flank play, no natural wingers," said Hankinson.

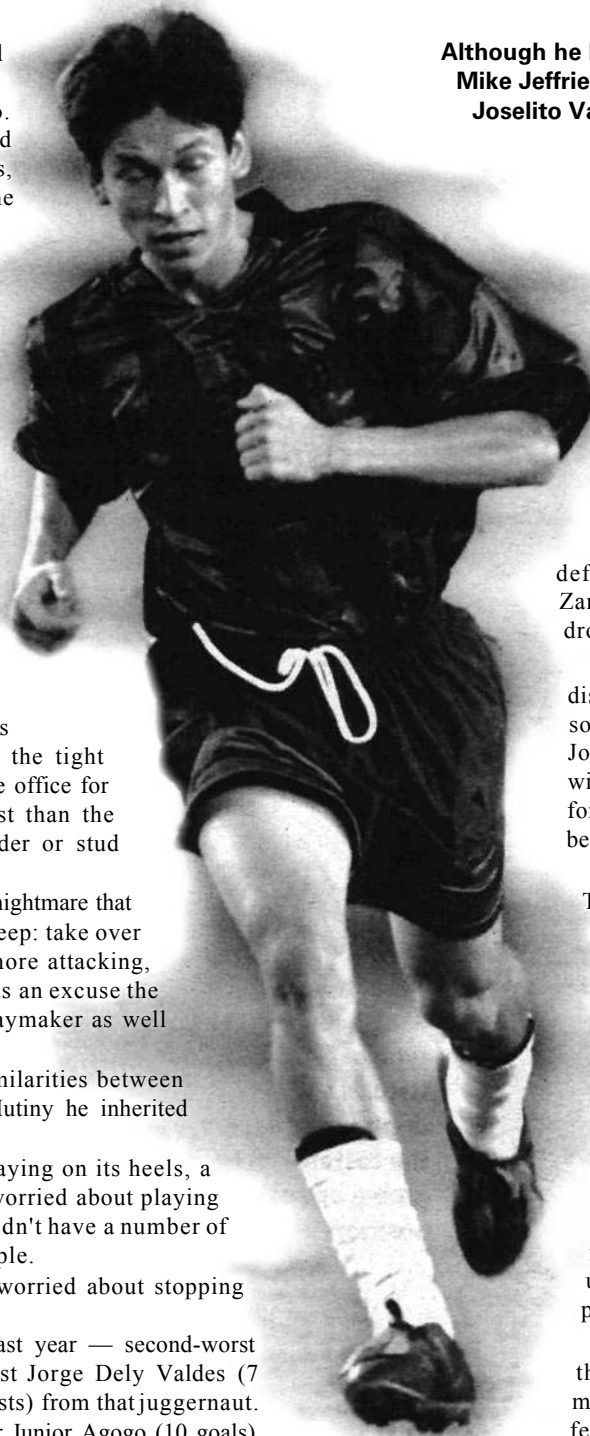
"When you had a player like Valderrama, he can go right down the middle and penetrate the defense with a pass. But that's not always there for you.

"We don't have players on the roster who have grown up playing that position. We drafted Ryan Trout and Eric Lukin, who both play wing midfield."

Hankinson also will audition some guest players dur-

Although he had other needs, Burn coach Mike Jeffries grabbed Bolivian teen-ager Joselito Vaca with the fifth selection of the MLS SuperDraft.

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ing the Rapids' stay in Portugal: Former Revs and Clash midfielder Jair; Polish midfielder Kubik Arkadiusc, who plays on the left; and Croatian international midfielder Aljosa Asanovic, who played for his country at France '98.

Matt Okoh will get a look at defensive mid. Forward Henry Zambrano is close to being dropped.

With one allocation and two discovery players, Hankinson has some options. Scottish attacker John Spencer is expected to sign with MLS soon. South African forward Neathen Gibson also is being courted.

MONDELO OF THE MUTINY. This will be Mondelo's second stint in MLS — he coached the Metros to a 14-17 mark before Bora Milutinovic took over — or his third, if you count his time with the Project-40 team.

Tampa Bay, spurred by Mamadou Diallo's league-high 26 goals, scored 62 times last year to rank second in MLS. Finding a complement for Diallo and ways to tighten up the defense are Mondelo's priorities.

"We need to get deeper on the left side of the park and maybe the right side of the defense as well," said Mondelo, who will limit his team's foreign forays to a pair of games in Colombia.

lombia.

"Ideally, we'll play 4-4-2 with someone to complement Diallo up top and a solid defense. Last year, this team scored a lot of goals but also gave up a lot of goals [50], so we want to solidify the defense to minimize the number of opportunities we're giving to the opponents."

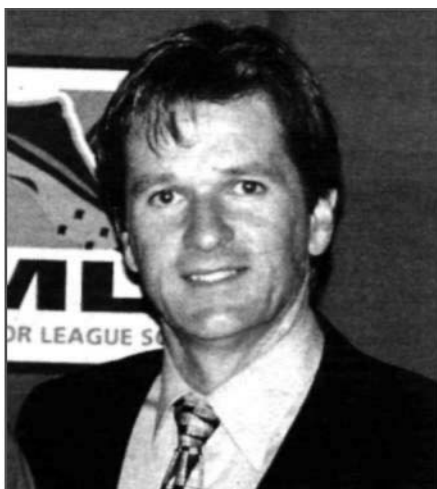
Draftee Ali Curtis and Amos Magee will be paired with Diallo to see what works best. In Hankinson's 4-5-1, flank midfielder Steve Ralston and Eric Quill provided most of Diallo's support. They combined for 28 assists, and Valderrama set a league record with 19.

"The goalkeeping is very solid with Scott Garlick, and



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Dallas Burn



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Alfonso Mondelo
Tampa Bay Mutiny

the offensive midfield with Carlos Arid Ralston is quite strong," said Mondelo. "The center of the back we have to find the right combination that will anchor the center of the defense."

Defender Craig Demmin, who joined MLS from A-League Rochester, drew some praise from Mondelo for his work in the second half of a recent exhibition against Chicago. He is a projected starter in the center.

TEXAS STYLE. Like the Quakes, the Burn will spend time in Mexico. Unlike the Quakes, Dallas has more strengths than dilemmas.

"We have a fair number of guys with good experience, who are good on the ball and can move it around," said Jeffries. "We're probably not as athletic as some other teams in the league, which sometimes catches up with you."

Dir never missed the playoffs in Dallas, yet the Burn's failure to reach MLS Cup prompted GM Andy Swift to bring in Jeffries.

He wadded up his carefully crafted selections when Bolivian teen-ager Joselito Vaca was still there at the fifth overall pick. Such is the draft.

"Outside midfield is a concern with us, particularly on the right side," said Jeffries. "There was some thought given to find somebody to play there. We felt like we needed some depth at the back.

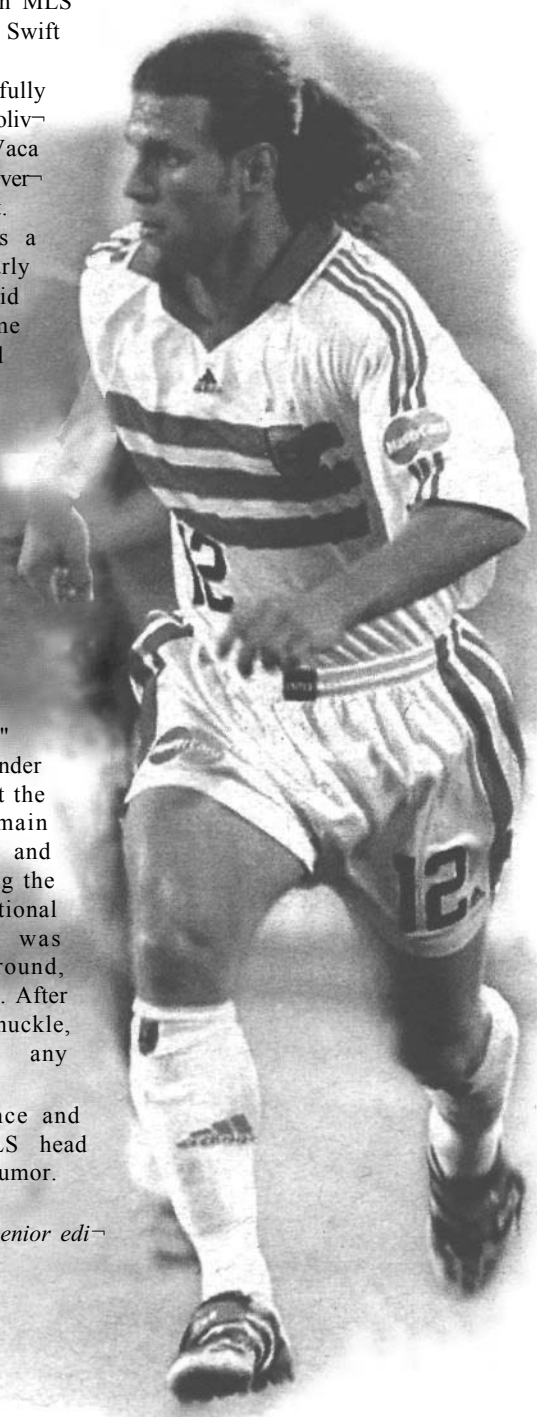
"When Vaca was available, I felt the kid is a good player and will fit in with our system and our style, and we needed to pick him. I had to change my thinking, and that happens in the draft."

Jeffries did pick defender Ryan Suarez as well, but the flank midfield slots remain open with Mark Santel and Sergi Daniv traded during the offseason. Junior international Josue Mayard, who was grabbed in the second round, will be tried on the wing. After that, Jeffries said with a chuckle, "We'll take anybody, any resumes you may have."

Along with experience and knowledge, a new MLS head coach needs a sense of humor.

(Ridge Mahoney is a senior editor at Soccer America.)

Frank Yallop is looking to veteran defender Jeff Agoos to provide the Earthquakes leadership.



ALL ABROAD

Some adjustments have been necessitated by MLS moving its Spring Training to March 13-24.

Formerly, teams gathered in Florida right after the SuperDraft. In 2001, teams are taking their foreign trips earlier to leave open the last two weeks of March.

"You want to get a good game," says Burn head coach Mike Jeffries. "The alternative is to stay in the country and play college teams."

A-League teams won't be in training until most MLS teams return from their foreign trips.

Teams are spending time in Portugal (MetroStars, Kansas City and Colorado), Mexico (Dallas, San Jose and New England), Germany (Columbus), Costa Rica (New England) and Colombia (Tampa Bay). The most exotic trip is the Galaxy's journey to Japan and China for three games.

"We wanted to take a long trip that would give the players an idea of what'll happen when we go to Spain this summer [for the Club World Championship]," said Galaxy coach Sigi Schmid.

—Ridge Mahoney



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