

Mutiny underachieves but

While the front-office door revolved, the Tampa Bay faithful have had plenty to enjoy: Classy playmaking by Carlos Valderrama. Goals galore from Roy Lassiter and Mamadou Diallo. And the steady offensive output from Steve Ralston.

BY BILL WARD
in Tampa

During their club's five-year existence, Tampa Bay Mutiny fans have experienced a myriad emotions:

The joy of supporting a playoff team for four seasons. The wonder of watching Carlos Valderrama work midfield magic. The disappointment of underachieving in nearly all of the club's postseason appearances. And the omnipresent fear of losing the team to relocation.

Through it all, the team's past has been shaped by the four coaches and three general managers.

1996: R&Q'S SHORT HONEY-MOON It seemed like the perfect combination: former Tampa Bay Rowdies hero Farrukh Quraishi is named the Mutiny's

first general manager. Quraishi then pegs an old friend as the team's first coach — Thomas Rongen, the NASL veteran and Fort Lauderdale Strikers player and coach.

Utilizing a squad top-heavy in veterans like Valderrama but featuring the talent of rising star Roy Lassiter at forward, the Mutiny led the Eastern Conference from start to finish and posted the league's best regular-season record at 20-12.

But on the eve of its first playoff game, things unraveled for the Mutiny. Quraishi revealed

the club's former finance director, Mark Fortunat, had been charged with grand theft after an audit revealed \$100,000 missing from the team's account. A few weeks later, the Mutiny was knocked out of the Eastern Conference finals by eventual champion D.C. United.

Weeks later, Quraishi was fired by then MLS Commissioner Doug Logan. The team's poor home attendance — an average of 11,679, second worst in MLS — is offered as a possible explanation for Quraishi's sacking. But insiders say it was because of the league's embarrassment over Fortunat's actions under Quraishi's watch.

A week after Quraishi's sacking, Logan named Nick Sakiewicz the Mutiny's new GM. Two weeks later, Rongen, who was vocal about his displeasure with Quraishi's firing, fled to coach the Revolution. Ten days after his hiring, Sakiewicz named John Kowalski the Mutiny's coach.

1997-98: S&K'S BALL OF CONFUSION. Kowalski, had college, pro and national team coaching experience in the United States. But, from the outset, he had trouble commanding the respect of several Mutiny players.

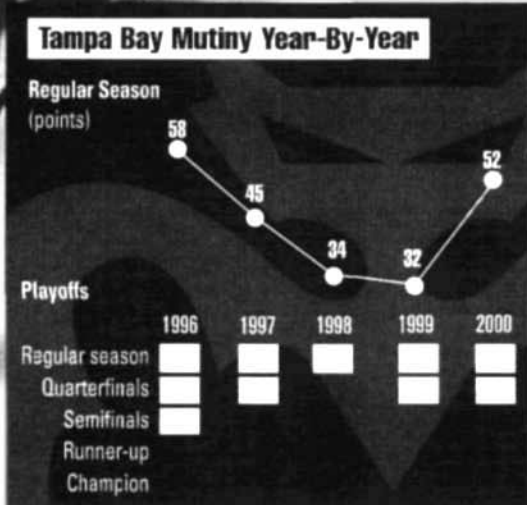
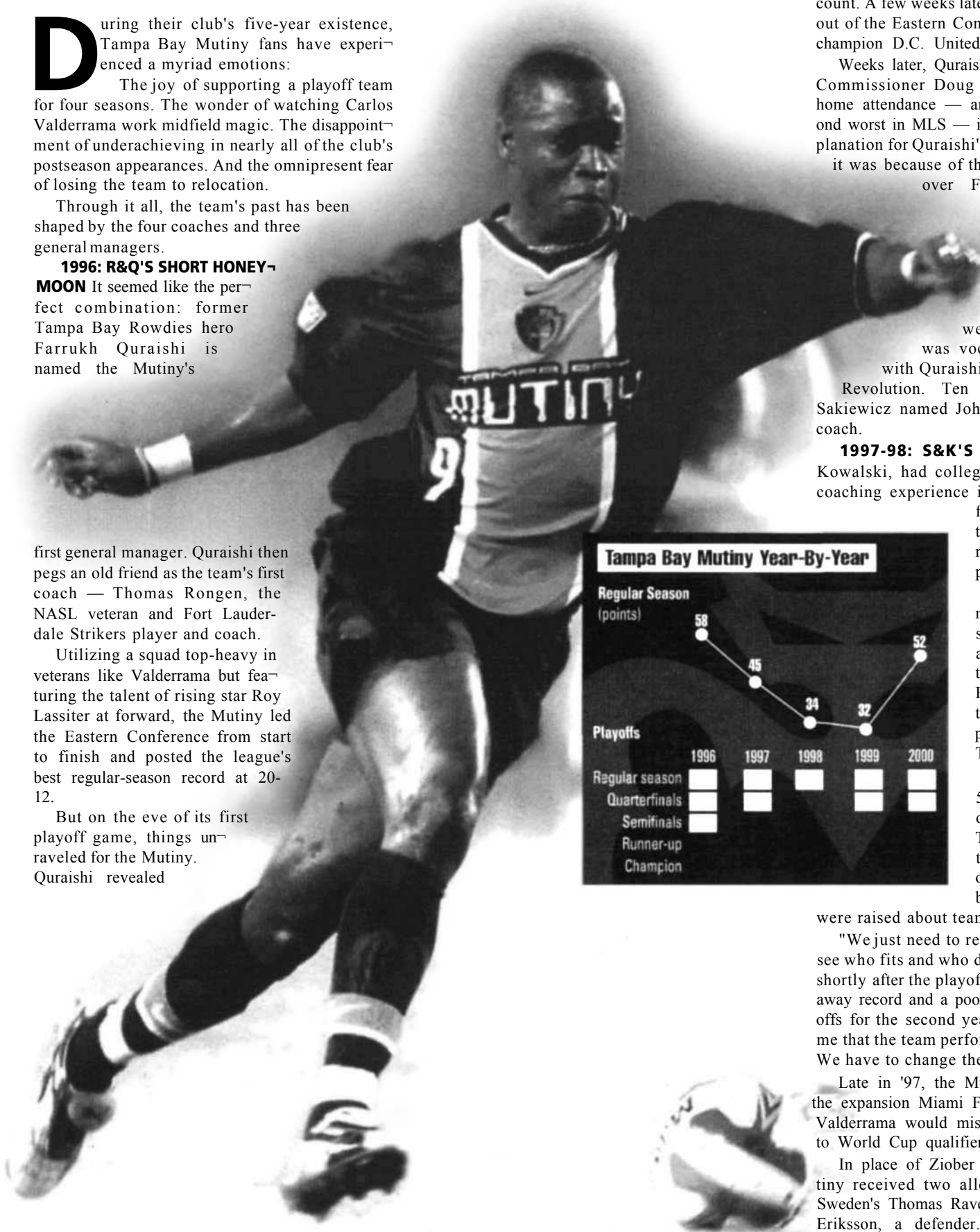
Moreover, Kowalski, a native of Poland, made a disastrous first move when he acquired former Polish international Jacek Ziober. He arrived in Tampa with a torn ACL and wound up playing three matches in Tampa.

Moreover, the Mutiny's 5-11 road record that year offset a 12-4 home mark. Tampa Bay was gone after the first round of the playoffs, victim of the Columbus Crew, as questions were raised about team chemistry.

"We just need to rebuild player by player and see who fits and who doesn't fit," Sakiewicz said shortly after the playoffs. "Because we had a bad away record and a poor performance in the playoffs for the second year in a row, it indicates to me that the team performs poorly under pressure. We have to change the chemistry."

Late in '97, the Mutiny dealt Valderrama to the expansion Miami Fusion. Its primary reason: Valderrama would miss much of the '98 season to World Cup qualifiers with Colombia.

In place of Ziober and Valderrama, the Mutiny received two allocations from the league, Sweden's Thomas Ravelli, a goalkeeper, and Jan Eriksson, a defender. The Mutiny allowed a



Mamadou Diallo hammered home 26 goals in 28 regular-season games in 2000 — but the Mutiny went scoreless in the playoffs.

TONY QUINN/SOCCERPIXUSA

entertains

league-high 60 goals in '97, but many wondered why Sakiewicz and Kowalski would use one of their prized allocations on a goalkeeper, particularly one who was in his late 30s.

Early in a disastrous '98 season, Sakiewicz and Kowalski made what many still call the worst trade in MLS history: They sent Lassiter, the league's top scorer in '96 but without a goal in his first six games of '98, to D.C. United for 34-year-old forward Roy Wegerle. Lassiter scored in each of his first six games for D.C. and finished the year with 18 goals and eight assists. Wegerle had no impact in Tampa.

A month after the trade and the Mutiny floundering at 3-12, Kowalski was fired by Sakiewicz.

1998-99: S&H'S TAMPA REVIVAL. The Mutiny went 9-8 after Coach Tim Hankinson took over, winning five of its last six games. But the '98 Mutiny failed to make the playoffs for the first time.

But more important matters needed attention. Sakiewicz had to keep the team from leaving town. Logan was reportedly prepared to hand the Mutiny to Rochester, N.Y., unless Sakiewicz could work out a better lease at Raymond James Stadium and promise to boost corporate sales and season ticket purchases.

With the help of Tampa Mayor Dick Greco, Sakiewicz pulled off the 11th-hour save and the moving trucks never showed up. In the final analysis of his Tampa tenure, that's the legacy Sakiewicz should be remembered for.

Yes, in '99 he managed to land Raul Diaz Arce by trading one of Hankinson's allocation washouts, Alejandro Sequeira, to San Jose. And yes, the Mutiny retrieved Valderrama and returned to the playoffs in '99. But keeping the Mutiny in Tampa was Sakiewicz's greatest triumph — by far.

2000: MANNING IN, HANKINSON OUT. When Sakiewicz accepted a big pay rise to take over as GM of the MetroStars, he recommended Minnesota Thunder GM Bill Manning as a replacement.

Manning accepted and almost immediately, friction emerged with Hankinson. When Manning traded Diaz Arce to D.C. United without Hankinson's approval, the acrimony became public. Despite being promoted to player personnel director under Sakiewicz, Hankinson was no longer in control of the squad.

Hankinson remained for the remainder of the season and guided the team back to the playoffs on Mamadou Diallo's incredible scoring pace. But the Mutiny failed to score once it got there and was swept out of the playoffs by Los Angeles in two games.

A few weeks later, Manning announced he would not renew Hankinson's contract.

With Alfonso Mondelo now on board as coach and Manning acting much like Quraishi once did with Rongen — as co-coach of the club — the Mutiny has nearly come full circle from 1996. Can it repeat the success of that squad?

(Bill Ward covers the Mutiny for the Tampa Tribune.)

All Time Mutiny XI

GOALKEEPER.

Scott Garlick. Holds single-season club records for GAA (1.31), shutouts (6) and saves (184).

DEFENDERS.

Cle Kooiman. Hard-nosed, rugged defender who infected teammates with enthusiasm.

Frank Yallop. Canadian was most consistent center back in the club's history.

Joe Addo. Ghanaian brings unparalleled athleticism to central defense and joins the attack.

Steve Pittman. His powerful left foot and defensive grit contributed to the apex year of '96.

MIDFIELDERS

Frankie Hejduk. Used Tampa as springboard to '98 World Cup and Germany's Bundesliga.

Steve Ralston. Logged more minutes than any player in club history, is No. 2 all-time scoring leader (137 points).

Carlos Valderrama. All-time points leader (145 points) runs the team.

Martin Vasquez. Solid on defense and an offensive threat with a powerful and accurate long-range shot.

FORWARDS

Roy Lassiter. His 27 goals in 1996 are still a league record.

Mamadou Diallo. Burly Senegalese striker had 26 in 2000.

Omission:

The All-Time Columbus Crew XI in the Feb. 26 issue omitted forward Brian McBride because of a production error. McBride is tied for 12th in MLS history with 119 points.