

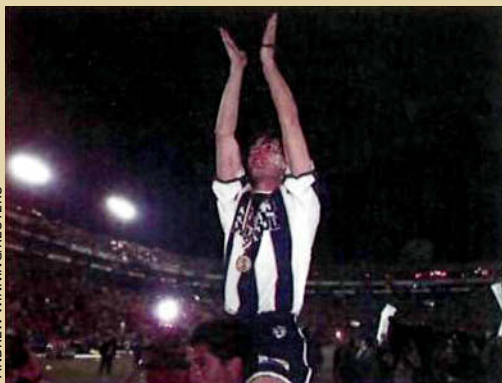
# Thumbs Up & Thumbs Down



The good news on the **Major League Soccer** front was that the holidays came and went without contraction. The bad news was that MLS had resorted to a form of self-censorship. Since the advent of the Internet era, MLS's daily e-mail of news good, bad or indifferent had been a vital service to all involved in the business. Unfortunately, MLS chose to ignore those articles with the "c" word: contraction.



The holiday season brought a much-needed **indoor soccer merger**. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Major Soccer League in the early 1990s, two leagues battled it out for indoor control — the winter NPSL vs. the summer CISL and its successor, the WISL. The decision by the NPSL (renamed the MISL) and WISL to merge brings needed direction to the struggling indoor game.



ANDREW WINNING/REUTERS

**Argentine Gabriel Caballero, who was recently granted Mexican citizenship and is being touted as a candidate for the Tri, is carried off the field by fans after leading Pachuca to Mexico's Torneo Invierno title.**



**Pachuca**, Mexico's oldest club, won its second title in three years when it captured the Torneo Invierno with a 3-1 win on aggregate over Tigres in the final. The architect of Pachuca's success is Javier Aguirre, who led it to the Torneo Invierno title in 1999, its centennial year. After leading Pachuca to second place in last season's Torneo Verano, Aguirre left the club to take over as Mexican national team coach. Under his direction, the Tri rallied to qualify for the World Cup finals for the 12th time.



Traditional powers such as Flamengo, Vasco da Gama, Corinthians and Palmeiras failed to make the Brazilian playoffs, paving the way for tiny clubs to rise to the top. **Atletico Paranaense** won the title when it beat Sao Caetano, 5-2, on aggregate in the final. Atletico's previous best finish was in 1983 when it finished third. Sao Caetano had never played in the top flight until last season, when it also finished second.