



Greg Vanney

AN AMERICAN IN CORSICA

So smooth has Greg Vanney's adjustment to the French League been that he makes light of challenge.

"Be on time and don't let your cell phone ring during a team meeting," says Vanney from Corsica, where he arrived in January and won the left back spot for French First Division club Bastia.

In fact, it's more complicated. On the field, the six-year Galaxy veteran faces the latest generation of French stars churned out by the world champion's renowned soccer schools and much of Africa's top talent.

"If you make a mistake, you really pay for it," says Vanney, the first American-born player to play in the First Division. "It's super organized, fast and technical. I'm enjoying it very much."

Off the field, some differences are minor.

"For home games, we stay in a hotel the night before," he says. "Our coach joked that he was doing us a favor. He told one player, 'Now you don't have to pick up your kids and do chores for your wife.'"

Some acclimation is more challenging. Most Americans abroad play in England, or in nations where English is spoken widely. Corsica is an island the size of Puerto Rico. Its 250,000 residents, who have strong nationalist sentiments, speak

French and Corsican, an Italian-like dialect. Almost no one speaks English.

Vanney, there with his wife, Amy, is on the fast track to learning French.

"My teacher's from North Dakota," he says. "She's the only American we've met."

Vanney hopes he'll have plenty of time to learn French. He's on loan from MLS but a transfer is in the works.

Bastia's 10,000-seat Furiani Stadium is considered the most inhospitable venue in French soccer. During a 2-0 win over Nancy that put Bastia in the French Cup quarterfinals, Vanney got his unofficial welcome.

"The fans are real passionate," he says, "setting off flares like I used to see watching European games on TV. At my second home game, someone waved an American flag. That was real nice."

— Mike Woitalla

Bastia president Francois Nicolai hands Greg Vanney his new jersey upon the Galaxy defender's arrival in the French First Division.