

Draft's defensive depth fills needs

THERE WAS AN ABUNDANCE OF DEFENSIVE TALENT starting with top pick Danielle Slaton, available in the WUSA Draft — a good thing. The league already has cornered most of the world's best attackers; somebody's got to shut them down.

Nearly everybody got a chance to upgrade its back line — even Atlanta, even San Jose — nabbing nine defenders, plus a midfielder with back-line experience, among the first 16 selections. In all, 13 of 32 players drafted could find opportunity in the back during spring training.

Slaton — a four-time All-American at Santa Clara, a Sydney Olympian and a starting central defender for the U.S. national team — was the best of a good lot. She's an intelligent, speedy, versatile defender who fills Carolina's most pressing need, upgrading a back line that played a large role in surrendering 40 goals in 2001, nearly double Atlanta's total.

Jena Kluegel, a left-sided midfielder at North Carolina who expertly runs the wing, will get a chance with Boston at right back, where she's playing for the U.S. women. The Breakers also picked up versatile Monica Gonzalez, a Texan who plays for Mexico.

The other big-name defenders went quickly, too: Anna Kraus (Atlanta) and Danielle Borgman (San Jose) in the first round, Casey Zimny (Washington), Amy Sauer (San Diego) and Bonnie Young (New York) in the second.

New York and San Jose were ready to pounce on Florida's Keisha Bell, who's recovering from a torn ACL, but she decided to retire, return home to Texas — degree in hand — and marry.

Two of her former Gator teammates will get a shot. Karyn Hall, a midfielder on Becky Burleigh's semifinalists, could be part of group trying to replace the irreplaceable Doris Fitschen in Philadelphia. Erin Gilhart, from Florida's '98 titlists, heads to New York, which lost Gro Espeseth.

— **Scott French**



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Santa Clara's Anna Kraus will contend for time on Atlanta's back line.