

Questions of attack

Conspicuous by his absence during the 1-0 U.S. loss to Italy Feb. 13 was Brian McBride.

The United States attacked in much the same manner as it had while winning the Gold Cup, but the balls McBride would have flicked with his head or controlled with his feet or driven at goal weren't nearly as productive.

"We needed a big, strong forward tonight who could hold defenders off," said Coach Bruce Arena. "Tonight would have been a good night for Brian McBride."

The United States played aggressively and fluidly in the first 45 minutes but couldn't take advantage, and Italy, bolstered by four halftime substitutions, took command in the second half.

With strong European teams Poland and Portugal awaiting the United States at the 2002 World Cup, much of Arena's preparation will focus on the right mix of attackers.

Midfielder Earnie Stewart has scored nine goals in 19 games dating back to 2000. Arena would like more options than McBride, who scored four times at the Gold Cup and has 18 goals in 55 career internationals.

Clint Mathis and Josh Wolff are coming back from injuries, and Ante Razov suffered a groin strain at the Gold Cup. Jovan Kirovski has averaged one goal a year since his debut in 1994. Joe-Max Moore has 24 goals in 94 games.

The situation is further clouded as to uncertainty over where Landon Donovan and Mathis should play. Donovan played midfield at the Gold Cup. Against Italy, he played forward, where he plays for San Jose.

Arena feels Mathis' best position may be at forward.

"You take a guy like Clint, he's pretty hit-or-miss," said Arena. "He's a risk-taker. Because of that, he creates goalscoring opportunities. He needs to make

those mistakes closer to goal, not in the middle of the field."

Wolff scored on a

DYLAN MARTINEZ/REUTERS

Joe-Max Moore made little headway against Italian defenders Fabio Cannavaro (left) and Cristiano Zanetti.

breakaway in the Gold Cup final but made little impact as a sub against Italy.

"He's got to be more consistent and more confident," said Arena. "Individually, he has to do more to get himself over the hump. He's got to work a little harder."

Moore's fiery determination is admired but against Italy he often lost the ball after needing too many touches to control it.

"He's playing [for Everton] and he's a hard worker, obviously, good running off the ball," said Arena. "I think he's a guy who will help us in one form or another."

The U.S. midfield against Italy — Chris Armas, John O'Brien, Claudio Reyna and Stewart — is likely to be that used in the World Cup.

If McBride is to be one of the forwards, that leaves only one spot open.

— Ridge Mahoney

