

My View

Two more years is just enough



BY RIDGE MAHONEY

Let's set aside the marketing and iconic appeal of Landon Donovan. As important as they are, his development into a great player is crucial and it can't be done if he stays in MLS indefinitely.

As a league entering its eighth season, MLS ain't bad and is getting better. As a testing ground for brilliance, the league isn't there yet.

Two more years in MLS is about right.

By then, he should have four pro campaigns, a second Olympic Games, and a couple dozen more caps to his credit.

By then, he'll have charmed enough chat-show hosts and seduced enough sponsors and turned down enough book deals to captivate some serious attention and raise significantly the stature of MLS.

By then, he'll also have mined all he can out of league foes he sees several times a season. Next up are the challenge and chilling prospects of holding down a regular place in a country like Spain, where his skill, audacity, pace and command of Spanish would flourish.

By then, there will be a soccer stadium in Southern California and one or two more in the works.

By then international matches and the Olympics will have inundated the American public with his exploits and those of an emerging class of confident, talented, determined players led by a shrewd, demanding coach who has won everywhere he's been.

By then, the league and the sport will be healthier than ever.

By then, he'll be 23 and able to slug it out with the toughest each and every week. Tab Ramos and John Harkes and Eric Wynalda came back from Europe sharper and stronger than ever. He will too.

By then he'll be worth a lot more than the \$1 million-plus MLS paid in salary and loan fees to keep him.

By then, Donovan should be "this close" to being the greatest American player ever. But he won't get there in America.