

# Loose cannon gets open mike

Former star Eric Wynalda promises he won't 'pull punches' during MLS broadcasts.

**ERIC WYNALDA, WHO NOW GRACES** MLS fields in a suit with microphone in hand, says an MLS coach has already cussed at him after an interview — and that it didn't bother him at all.

"When I was being interviewed for this job, I made it clear that I wasn't going to pull any punches," says Wynalda, whose professional playing career spanned three World Cups, a four-season stint in Germany and six years in MLS. "I told [executive producer] Michael Cohen that I wanted him to know ahead of time I'm not going to play that game where it's always, 'Oh, I totally agree.'"

**Working as an analyst for ABC at MLS Cup 2002 with Terry Gannon (right) served as a successful audition for Eric Wynalda.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF MLS

Wynalda made his MLS 2003 debut as a sideline reporter on ABC's broadcast of the opener between Los Angeles and Columbus. He says he'll be wearing an open mike on ESPN2's weekly game broadcasts while Rob Stone (play-by-play) and Ty Keough (color) work in the booth.

"If I agree, I agree," Wynalda says, "but everybody knows, whether it's JP [Dellacamera, play-by-play on ABC broadcasts], Rob or Ty, that I won't be the kind of guy who's afraid to say, 'You're completely wrong.'"

As a player, Wynalda's frank answers made him a magnet for the soccer press. When others would retract a controversial comment to reporters, Wynalda would punctuate his with, "And you can print that!"

For sure, his shots from the hip irritated coaches and teammates, but fans never tired of the man who still leads the national team in scoring with his 34 goals in 106 games.

When his playing career came to an end after another serious injury following the 2001 MLS season, TV work beckoned. He served as an analyst during the 2002 World

Cup and made appearances on MLS broadcasts, including MLS Cup 2002.

Wynalda is quick to point out that accomplished players don't necessarily make good broadcasters, but he's confident that his experience will go a long way.

"Whatever happens on the field, there's a good chance I've seen it before and know why," he says.

The 33-year-old feels strongly that TV commentators shouldn't talk down to American fans, who are knowledgeable enough to go without Soccer 101 lessons. He also believes they want honest analysis.

"I'm not going to be a vacuum cleaner salesman at a washing machine convention trying to sell a toaster," he says.

Not that Wynalda won't be willing to take directions. After the first telecast he was told to get a tan.

"They said, 'You're Californian, you need a tan, and it looks better on camera.'"

His reaction?

"I'm outside in the sun as we speak."

— Mike Woitalla

