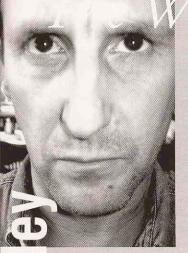
OUTSIDE THE BOX



By Justin Kavanagh

I'll tell you this for nothing—Freddy Adu isn't the future of American soccer. He's said so himself, and Peter Nowak and all at D.C. United know better than to hype him as such. That disservice has been executed by the media.

But D.C. United and Freddy Adu have made watching soccer fun again this year. Elsewhere, the venal stench of corruption is wafting from the world's major leagues: Van Nistelrooy goes around trying to break legs; Wayne Rooney throws himself to ground "for the good of his team"; the grown men of Arsenal respond by flinging food about; and Real Madrid seem leaderless despite, or maybe because of, their millions.

On October 30th, D.C. United took a 2-0 lead back to their

home ground for a tense second-leg play-off game. Everyone would have gone home happy with a 0-0 tie against the MetroStars, and advancement to the Eastern Final. Freddy Adu had other ideas.

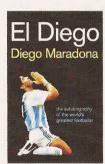
A 78th minute sub, the 15-year-old grabbed the game by the neck and went for it. For 12 magical minutes, he ran at the heart of the MetroStars' defense and brought them to their knees with pace, with power. He crossed to Moreno for the first, and won the free-kick that produced the second. RFK Stadium erupted, and you knew you were witnessing something special, something thrilling.

Adu was playing his game, taking people on, one-on-one, playing his street soccer from Ghana. But he was doing it here, for high stakes, on the big stage. Credit too, to Peter Nowak, who has ignored the hype and focused on the development of F. Adu (9), squad member. Nowak always sends teams out to attack.

So what instructions had he given to the super-sub entering this tense affair? "I told him, 'Freddy, have fun!'" [Told him, Told him,

THE INFALLIBILITY OF EL DIEGO

In his new autobiography, El Diego, Maradona gives a big shout-out to the "two beards" who have helped



him through all the traumas of his life, Fidel Castro and God! God's good pal, the Pope, gets a rather harsher judgement however, as the Argentine legend recalls the pontiff's 'total lack of respect' during his family's audience. (I'm not making this up!) The cause of the Papal offense? Apparently, John Paul II's failure to provide Maradona with special rosary beads, leaving the soccer god to count his Hail Mary's on the same beads as other mortals. The indignity of it!



The Classic in the Capital

The MLS Eastern Conference final between D.C. United and the New England Revolution was a game that all present will talk about for years. Both sides went all out for the win, and the home team led three times. Pick of the bunch was their final goal, a wonderful header from Christian Gómez. D.C. had one foot in the final, until Pat Noonan rescued the Revolution's season with six minutes remaining.

Extra-time provided end-to-end thrills and spills as both sides battled cramp and the dread of a very sudden death by Golden Goal.

And so... to penalties. A lottery? Not if you're as cucumber-cool as young Freddy Adu, who dispatched his kick with the practiced ease of a mailman delivering his last letter of the day.

Nick Rimando then read Clint Dempsey's intentions and made himself a hero. D.C.'s long play-off purgatory was over, and all heaven broke loose. As RFK rocked to its old rafters, you had to feel for Steve Nicol's men.

Mike Petke, among others, called it the best game he has ever played in.

And, as you caught your breath, you realized that the chances of catching
a more enthralling game anywhere in world soccer that night would be
slim and none. And slim had gone to L.A. for the final.



GÓMEZ' GOAL TO SAVOR

After Alecko Eskandarian and Jaime Moreno had posted fresh contenders for goal of the season, D.C. United playmaker Christian Gómez finished off the home side's scoring with a goal that lit up a memorable night.

A typically intricate D.C. passing move led to Earnie Stewart being freed down the right. As the veteran looked up, he had only Gómez ahead of him, and his long cross seemed to be beyond the onrushing playmaker, who, at 5' 8", is not exactly Argentina's answer to Jan Koller.

Yet Gomez rose to the challenge: he showed incredible timing to judge the flight of the ball; technique to twist his body and meet the cross with power; and guile to redirect it back across the goal, into the far corner. Where Gomez comes from, it's called *viveza*. Goalkeeper Matt Reis' positioning was faultless, but somehow the Buenos Aires man looped it over him into the sweet spot. And somewhere in Argentina, there is probably a commentator still celebrating this unforgettable

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netimes Beautifu<u>l—World G</u>ame.

FREDDY ON THE SPOT!

Like everyone else at RFK, Outside the Box was astonished to watch Freddy Adu step up to take the third spot-kick for his team. He stared straight at keeper Matt Reis, undaunted by the 6' 1" hulk in front of him sporting an intimidating black eye. Stonily poker-faced, Adu was almost unrecognizable from the smilling, wise-cracking kid he is off the field. His eyes didn't wander or flicker. And his body moved with the same graceful ease that he displays in training. His execution was text-book stuff, forcing the keeper to commit, and giving him no chance. The boy is a pure footballer. Indeed, after this daunting display of raw courage, nerve, and professionalism, it's probably time we all dropped the "boy" tag.

"A 15-year-old that steps up and takes a penalty kick?" U.S. veteran Earnie Stewart was saying afterwards, "It's not easy, I'll tell you that. That he stepped up..." And he shook his head and his voice trailed off. Like the rest of us, lost for words.



Keeping It Professional—and Fun!

90:00 Minutes grabbed a quick word with the hero of the hour, Nick Rimando, after the Eastern Conference thriller. The game resembled a snapshot of the D.C. goalkeeper's rollercoaster season: the awful luck of Steve Ralston's PK rebounding off his back; the trauma of misjudging the same player's corner kick to allow Pat Noonan to steal the late equalizer; and then the redeeming drama of his two fine stops in the penalty shoot-out.

We asked Rimando about the challenge of putting the negatives behind him and focusing on the job. "That's what a professional is," he said, "somebody who can forget about his mistakes and move on. The most important play is always the next one."

The personal triumph also brought out Nick Rimando's inner striker. "The goal-scorers always get to have the celebrations," he joked, "so to get to run and jump in front of the home fans, that was fun!"

KLINSMANN KEEPING THEM GUESSING

German national coach Juergen Klinsmann has stuck to his guns over the (on and on and) ongoing battle between Bayern Munich's Oliver Kahn and Arsenal's Jens Lehmann for the No. 1 shirt.

Sepp Maier became an early victim of the War of the Gloves when he was relieved of his goalkeeping coaching duties for favoring Kahn. Then another national legend dove in. Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge claimed that Kahn and Lehmann were suffering under the scrutiny, and urged Klinsmann to establish one or other as the regular keeper soon, rather than wait until closer to the 2006 World Cup finals.

"The competition will proceed in a reasonable fashion," Klinsmann said. "Some people may need to adjust to the unusual constellation. But we're not going to change our plan. We will pick a number one six months before the World Cup, not sooner."

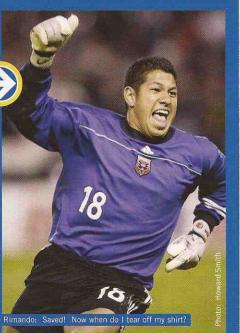
Germany team manager Oliver Bierhoff added that Bayern Munich doesn't run the national side.



Oliver Kahn: This indecision is killing me!

IT'S OFFICIAL—ROY KEANE IS HISTORY

Good to see Roy Keane inducted into England's National Football Museum in Preston. Knowing he mightn't take too kindly to becoming a museum piece, the curators got Sir Alex Ferguson to present the award! Also honored were Alan Shearer, Tony Adams, Billy Bremner and Don Revie. Keane, a very private man, didn't sound exactly overjoyed, and was quick to redirect the limelight: "I'm not a great fan of individual awards, because I play as part of a team," he said, "but I'm here to collect this for the team."



\$55,000

The price paid at a Christie's Auction recently for the shirt used to mop up Paul Gascoigne's famous tears in the World Cup semi-final of 1990 against Germany.

