

Taking on the world

Playing for second title, shot at professional league motivates USA Women's World Cup Soccer Team

BY RUTH STEPHENS
The Battalion

This weekend, Texas A&M assistant soccer coach Robin Confer is flying to Pasadena, Calif., to join the other A&M soccer coaches and thousands of other Americans in cheering on the U.S. Women's Soccer Team as they battle the People's Republic of China for the championship.

"I'm hoping they (the U.S. team) can win the whole thing," Confer said. "With the caliber of players they have, they could win it all."

To reach the final game, the U.S. women beat Denmark (3-0), Nigeria (7-1) and the People's Republic of Korea (3-0) in the first

round, Germany (3-2) in the quarterfinals and Brazil (2-0) in the semifinals in a whirlwind two weeks of soccer.

This year the United States is hosting the World Cup, which is played every four years and considered the most prestigious tournament in soccer.

Venues are scattered across the country with games in New York/New Jersey, Chicago, Boston, Washington, D.C., Palo Alto, Calif., and Los Angeles.

"The only complaint I've heard about is the excessive travel for some teams to change venues," Confer said. "Otherwise, the tournament and the fans have been great. The crowd

support is unbelievable."

Throughout the tournament, each match has averaged 62,000 fans per game, while the United States has averaged over 70,000 fans at their games, including the 73,123 at the semi-final game against Brazil last Sunday.

Confer, who played four years with the perennial powerhouse University of North Carolina has also played with the U.S. National Team since 1996. She said she is still friends with many of her U.S. National teammates and keeps in close contact with them.

"Goalkeeper Tracy Ducar is a good friend of mine," she said. "We've been e-mailing throughout the tournament."

More than just a victory, Confer said winning the World Cup would be a huge boost for women's soccer and could help start a women's professional soccer league.

"Winning would make it easier to launch a pro league," Confer said. "It's been in the works for a couple of years, but officials are hoping a victory by the United States will push it to reality."

Confer said that with this dream comes pressure on the national team to win.

"They know a win is important for the league to start," she said. "I think they're dealing with the pressure well though."

There have been tense moments along the way, though, especially in the quarter-final match against Germany when they had to come from behind twice to win the game 3-2 and then defeat an



U.S. Women's World Cup soccer player Mia Hamm, left, drills with Julie Foudy during a practice at the Pingry School in Martinsville, N.J.

upstart Brazil team 2-0 in the semifinal match last Sunday to advance to Saturday's championship game.

Confer said the United States-Germany game was the toughest quarter-final game of the tournament.

"The players are taking it game by game, though," she said. "This is what they trained so hard for in the spring."

Confer said, U.S. coach Tony DiCicco's main concern is the

SEE WORLD CUP ON PAGE 4.

All-Stars: Popularity or production?

As baseball's best and brightest get ready to gather for the All-Star game next week in Boston's Fenway Park, one thing has become painfully clear about the Midsummer Classic: instead of being a showcase of the game's best players, it has become nothing more than a popularity contest.



DOUG SHILLING

Sure, most of baseball's best will still be at the game, but the honor of starting the game, an honor that should go to the players who have been the best over the first part of the year, has become just like a high school student council vote — whoever has the most friends wins.

While the problem is not as bad in the National League, the problem of undeserving people in the All-Star is rampant in the American League.

Cleveland Indians fans tried their best to make it a game with their team against the National League.

The Indians fans placed four of their players on the starting lineup, and almost added another three.

In fact, Texas outfielder Juan Gonzalez, the winner of two of the last three AL MVP Awards, was so upset by his snub in favor of the Indians players, that he has requested he not be picked for the All-Star team at all.

If baseball wants to keep the integrity of the All-Star game intact,

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CHARLES BENNETT/AP PHOTO

Tisha Venturini, left, and other members of the U.S. Women's World Cup team meet with children of the SOS Children's Village in Lockport, Ill.

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