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US Women Soccer Superstars – Victims of Their Own Success

By Chris Lauber

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by: **Chris Lauber**

With the imminent retirement of long-time veterans Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, and Joy Fawcett from the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team, I often find myself thinking how fortunate my family has been to witness their heroics on the field and their positive influence off of it.

But the last game we saw in person stands out as a very different experience from the first game we saw nearly nine years ago.

Last summer, I attended a soccer match between Brazil and the United States Women's National Team in New Orleans with my teenage daughter, Leah. It was a great game with plenty of action on a beautiful, sunny afternoon, and the U.S. Team won on a Tiffeny Milbrett goal in the 90th minute.

For Leah and I, it was a bittersweet experience.

It was a wonderful "dad and daughter" 42-hour trip from our home in St. Petersburg, Florida to New Orleans and back again. We talked, we laughed, and we listened to each other's music for each of the 20 hours and 1393 miles in the car. During our short stay, we visited Bourbon Street at night and the Cafe du Monde for breakfast.

But our journey's focus was to see our soccer heroes in action again. That's right, I said OUR heroes. Ever since that rainy night in February of 1996 when we first saw our National Team play in Tampa, these outstanding women became my heroes every bit as much as my daughters' heroes.

I remember being awestruck as I watched them for the first time - their skills, their strength, and their obvious passion for the game. But it was after the game, that I was won over as a dedicated fan.

Earlier that day, Nicole, my younger daughter, asked me if she should bring her Official U.S. Women's National Team Calendar for autographs. My response – "This is our National Team with the best

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players in the world. I really doubt you will get any autographs," I said. "With the rainy weather, you don't want to ruin your calendar, but bring your autograph book, just in case."

When the game ended, I couldn't believe my eyes. Every single player came over to the bleachers where about 1,900 spectators anxiously waited. Not only were they willing to sign autographs, but **EACH OF THE PLAYERS HAD THEIR OWN PENS!** They talked with the fans, posed for pictures, and most importantly, they really seemed to enjoy doing it. We were immediately hooked.

Since then, we've been extremely fortunate to witness some of their most important games: the 1996 Olympic Gold Medal match in Atlanta, the historic 1999 Women's World Cup Championship game in Los Angeles, and even Mia Hamm's record-breaking moment for career goals in Orlando in 1999.

We've had several encounters with the players, including clinics, autograph sessions, and we even attended a few training sessions in Orlando. Five years ago, while Leah worked as a junior reporter for

the St. Petersburg Times, she wrote five features for the weekly X-Press Page for kids.

Along the way, Leah interviewed nearly every team member and even Head Coach Tony DiCicco. Afterwards, at the age of twelve, she wrote a book, Soccer Dreams, to share her adventure, promote the positive values she learned from the team, and to encourage readers to DREAM BIG! It was published last year and has earned very positive customer reviews at

So our commitment to the Women's National Team runs deep. As a family, soccer has been a unifying force ever since Leah and Nicole played on the same U-8 team, which I coached. This great sport has provided us with countless memories, as participants and as spectators.

So why, you might wonder, was it bittersweet in New Orleans, to see our team again after more than four years of nothing but televised games? Most of the players were the same, and they all had the same intensity on the field we've come to expect.

But this time, the team had already broken through. Ever since the 1999 Women's World Cup, huge crowds cheer them on wherever they play. In New Orleans that day, they played in front of 15,000 spectators, with a live national television audience and a horde of media members reporting their every move.

They were enjoying all the fruits of their many years of labor. Their dreams of just a few years ago, playing in front of huge crowds, of being recognized, had been realized – repeatedly.

In the beginning, we wanted nothing more than for these players to be given their due, for them to enjoy their success. Now they are living like the superstars they have always been, with fans hanging out in their hotel lobby and screaming for autographs wherever they go. Easy access is probably gone forever. Recognizing and understanding that was an eye-opener.

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Imagine being a Bruce Springsteen fan in the early Stone Pony days, before he rocketed to worldwide fame and glory. Perhaps you had a chance to talk to him, maybe even hang out with him. While you knew he was something special and you wanted him to reach the rarefied air of superstardom, once he did, your little secret was out. No more casual chats. No more hanging out. Now you're lucky to get an overpriced ticket in the nosebleed seats from a scalper.

But of course, like Bruce, try as they might, our National Team can no longer satisfy everyone. They still carry their own pens for autographs after the games, but now there are increased post-game media demands.

While goalkeeper Briana Scurry did the post-game ESPN interview that day in New Orleans, forwards Cindy Parlow and Mia Hamm were the first to be interviewed by the local media, followed by forward Tiffeny Milbrett, defender Brandi Chastain, and Head Coach April Heinrichs. The rest of the players signed autographs, but with 15,000 fans, it was simply impossible to accommodate every fan.

Leah didn't try to acquire autographs that day. She already has plenty, and on that day, we also had field photo credentials. Not only is autograph-collecting taboo for "objective" journalists, but our memories of the game will be in the photos we captured.

After the game, as the players boarded the bus, I saw one woman approach a team official. She was ranting and raving that she had driven five hours to bring her daughter to the game and that her

daughter didn't get any autographs from the players. The team official explained that the players signed autographs for a half hour INSIDE the stadium, which was true.

Apparently, this woman and her daughter had been positioned in the wrong place and were headed home empty-handed. As she stormed off, she yelled, "BOOO Women's National Team!! I'll never come to another game! BOOO!"

I am certain other fans left empty-handed as well or disappointed with just one or two autographs. I am also certain this woman's experience will be repeated during the current 10-game Fan's Celebration Tour and at future games as well.

Our National Team players are victims of their own success. After working so hard, for so long, to develop their fan support, it is simply impossible for them to continue to be so accessible and provide autographs to every fan who wants one.

So if you are lucky enough to see our National Team play this year or in any other games in the future, go to enjoy the skill, the intensity and the passion these gifted athletes put into their effort. If you are really lucky, and do get an autograph or two, even better.

But you shouldn't be disappointed if you don't get any autographs. And you should forewarn your kids that it might not be possible this time around, which will lessen their disappointment.

Finally, as you're driving home, take advantage of the opportunity to focus with your kids on the

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positive values (hard work, commitment, perseverance) these incredible athletes exemplify. Those are lessons we should want all our children to learn.

Chris Lauber is the photographer, editor, and publisher of Soccer Dreams, written by his daughter, Leah, to describe her true adventure following the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team, as a fan and 12-year-old Junior Reporter during the historic 1999 Women's World Cup. It is receiving excellent customer reviews at

. Purchase Soccer Dreams at Amazon on November 8th and receive

numerous bonuses. To receive an update, send us an e-mail to

Soccer Team Logo And Gear

By Dana Bradley

Soccer is one of the famous sports played in the United States, hence it is very demanded among every one who is the fan of Soccer. One of the exciting news is that people no longer have to spend a lot of money for the team logo and gear. Soccer team logo and Gear has many team logo and gear such as, Brandy Chastain, Galaxy, Pele, Freddy Adu, and Mia Hamm etc.

Soccer team logo and Gear are very famous around the Globe. It is said that the demand for soccer wear is much higher in the U.K when compared to other countries. Soccer team logo and gear are often used as gifted items to the loved ones, who are the lovers of Soccer.

The Young generation is crazy after the team logo and gear of Soccer. Some of the best sold Team logo and gear are:

2005 upper deck Major League Soccer Trading cards priced at \$65.00 (This is a game for those interested)

Brandi Chastain on knees 8x10 photograph priced at \$76.00 (Brandi Chastain is known to be one of the best athletes of today)

Brazil vs Italy 1994 World cup Soccer at the Rose Bowl Framed unsigned Panoramic photograph priced at \$125.00 (the measurements for the Panoramic are 16 ½ x 42 ½) MLS Soccer Ball bag priced at \$24.00

(it is a best soccer bag to carry soccer ball to the field) Soccer 12 oz Wheaties box (Display case) priced at \$49.00 (Manufactured in U.S.A) Soccer 18 oz Wheaties box (Display case) priced at \$50.00(Manufactured in U.S.A) Soccer 22 oz Wheaties box (Display case) priced at \$56.00(Manufactured in U.S.A) Soccer cleats Display case up to size 13 priced at \$84.00

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(Case accommodates size 13 shoe, Manufactured in U.S.A) Soccer cleats Display case up to size 17 priced at \$85.00 (Case accommodates size 17 shoe, Manufactured in U.S.A) Soccer cleats Display case up to size 23 priced at \$110.00 (Case accommodates size 23 shoe, Manufactured in U.S.A)

Above mentioned are some of the famous sold team logo gear products. Approximate sizes and brief description is explained to help to buy these products easily. Best of all, these products are available on the Internet. It's great being a fan of soccer or even knowing how to play the game with family and friends. But it is even greater when one can celebrate this exciting sport by wearing the latest clothing and gear available.

Dana Bradley writes about

and

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