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© Joe Santos/CSA
English striker Kelly Smith was lost for most of the year after a knee injury

Injuries ravage season for Charge

End-of-season successes see rosy optimism for team, wherever they may be playing next year
by Brian J. Hegarty

Philadelphia, PA. August 21, 2003 (CSA) -- Oh, what could have been.

The coaching staff and administration of the Philadelphia Charge could be forgiven if they make this statement about the results of the 2003 season, which began with such high

expectations, only to see injuries ravage a lineup that many picked to contend for this season's Founder's Cup and have it end up with a 5-11-5 record, 20 points and a last-placed finish.

The injuries took away from the Charge midfielder and team captain Kelly Smith (torn right meniscus) for the majority of the season, as well as Heather Mitts (broken tibia) for six games, rookie striker Deliah Arrington (torn ACL) for the majority of the season, and rookie midfielder Pavlina Scasna (plantar fasciitis) for all but a handful of games.

These are some pretty serious injuries to some pretty important personnel.

Results

Home team first

Final - Founders Cup III

Sunday, August 24
Atlanta 1 - Washington 2

Playoff semi-finals

Sunday, August 17
Atlanta 2 San Diego 1 - OT

Saturday, August 16
Boston 0 Washington 0 - OT
Washington wins in PKs

Final WUSA Standings - August 10

Team	GP	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	21	10	4	7	37	33	29
Atlanta	21	9	4	8	35	34	19
San Diego	21	8	6	7	31	27	26
Washington	21	9	8	4	31	40	31
xNew York	21	7	9	5	26	33	43
xSan Jose	21	7	10	4	25	23	30
x Carolina	21	7	10	4	25	31	33
x Philadelphia	21	5	11	5	20	30	40

x -Eliminated from playoff contention

Links

WUSA.com

PhiladelphiaCharge.com

On the bright side, the Charge still had all-world striker Marinette Pichon, who tied for the league lead in goals with 14 and lead the Charge with 31 points. First-year striker Melanie Hoffmann showed herself to be an excellent foil for the Frenchwoman, and was herself a scorer of 5 goals, as well as 5 assists for 15 points.

Lorrie Fair continued to show her class on a daily basis, even though it's not reflected in the stats, and Stacey Tullock announced herself as one of the best young midfielders the U.S. women have, even though she continues to be overlooked by April Heinrichs for some unknown reason.

The midfield also benefited from the presence of Anne Makinen, who joined the Charge from the Washington Freedom, and she showed her authority in a holding role.

But the injuries truly decimated this team.

The season got off on what could be described as the wrong foot with the abrupt retirement of centerback and finalist last year for WUSA Defender of the Year Erica Iverson. This left a pretty substantial hole in the middle of the team's defense, which was the strength for the team last year.

Also, this happened after Pia Sundhage, the WUSA's new Coach of the Year - following in the footsteps of the Charge's Mark Krikorian last year - and assistant coach John Natale left the team for the Boston Breakers.

Into the breach went rookie Mary McVeigh, who matured as the season went along but showed there's a substantial learning curve for players going from college to the WUSA. She partnered Jen Tietjen-Prozzo, who showed herself again to be tireless in the center of defense, as well as left back Jenny Benson - recently named WUSA Humanitarian of the Year - and Mitts. When Mitts went down with her broken leg, rookie Rachel Kruze put in some yeoman-like displays on the right.

All in all, though, this back four was a shadow of what it had achieved last year.

The goalkeeping situation going into the season was less-than-clear, with the Charge using their first of three first-round picks to select Hope Solo, who had been on the periphery of the Women's National Team through her college career.

Solo and Melissa Moore battled it out throughout the season, with Moore starting the majority of the matches in the beginning of the year, and even earning WUSA Player of the Week honors for the week ending June 15. However, Solo took over the starting position in the latter portions of the season and, it appears, will have the inside track going into next year for the starting goalkeeper's position.

In addition to Solo, McVeigh and Kruze, Erin Misaki, a rookie out of the University of Portland, also was able to show her abilities on the right side of midfield throughout the year due to the injuries

"The Charge has begun their season-ticket operation for next season, which might possibly tip their hands slightly..".

suffered by the team. Trina Maso de Moya and Alexa Borisjuk played a more peripheral role on the team.

The Charge's best free-agent signing by far, was the acquisition of Emily Burt off waivers from the Atlanta Beat. She filled in a great deal and acclimated herself well toward the end of a season which was becoming a grind for everyone.

However, in the final three games of the season the Charge were able to beat the Founder's Cup-bound Atlanta Beat and Washington Freedom before ending the year with a 1-1 draw against Carolina.

In addition, Mitts and Fair were both named to Heinrichs' preliminary Women's World Cup training camp, which convenes in San Diego Aug. 21.

Certainly something to build on, right?

Yes, if the WUSA is in existence next year. Even if it is, the Charge may not be plying their trade in Philadelphia anymore. According to several reports, a "major investor" is looking to buy into the WUSA and move one team - possibly the San Jose CyberRays - to Los Angeles and another - probably the Charge - to Denver.

However, another rumor, reported recently in Soccer America, has Philadelphia businessman David Shaw, a season-ticket holder for the Charge, taking over operation of the club from current owners/operators Comcast, who have made no secret of their desire to divest themselves of the WUSA.

The Charge has begun their season-ticket operation for next season, which might possibly tip their hands slightly. Whatever happens, it's sure to be played out in the relatively near future.

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