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Monday, June 30, 2003

Resurgent Charge head south to take on the Beat Philadelphia aware of feisty Atlanta, look to continue hot streak

by Brian J. Hegarty

Philadelphia, 18 June 2003 (CSA) -- The Philadelphia Charge (3-5-2, 11 points) appear to be going in the right direction, with a 3-1-2 record in their last six games. They head down to Atlanta this weekend to face the consistent Atlanta Beat (4-2-4, 16 points) Sunday afternoon, June 22.

"Whenever you play Atlanta it's about being both physically and psychologically prepared to go into battle..."

Mark Krikorian

"Things have gone a little bit better for us," said Charge coach Mark Krikorian. "It's a long season, and if you allow yourself to fall into the trap when things aren't going well of getting down too much., it can probably do a lot of damage to you. The good news is our group is pretty resilient and kept fighting, giving us a chance to get some good results. Now we have to build on it."

Although there have been numerous keys to the turnaround for the Charge, one of the main reasons has been a shuffling of the back four, with usual right wing-back Heather

Mitts moving into the middle to partner team captain Jen Tietjen-Prozzo and U.S. National Team stalwart Lorrie Fair sliding back to the right back position.

"We knew in pre-season we could do this," said Krikorian. "It certainly helped us out a little bit. The addition of Emily Burt has also really helped us. (Melanie) Hoffmann getting more comfortable and (Anne) Makinen feeling more comfortable, all of those factors have come together at the same time. It's all been really beneficial to us."

"Our communication has improved quite a bit," said Charge goalkeeper and current WUSA Player of the Week Melissa Moore. "Mitts is talkative. The communication has got a lot better. Tietjen is the anchor of the team in the midfield."

Upcoming WUSA Matches

All times ET

Wednesday, July 2

San Diego at San Jose, 10:00 p.m.

Thursday, July 3

Washington at Boston, 7:00 p.m.

Friday, July 4

Atlanta at Carolina, 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, July 5

San Jose at New York, 4:00 p.m. - PAX TV
San Diego at Philadelphia, 7:00 p.m.

Results

Home team first

Sunday, June 29

San Diego 2 San Jose 1

Saturday, June 28

Philadelphia 3 Boston 2
Atlanta 1 Washington 0
New York 3 Carolina 3

Wednesday, June 25

Boston 2 New York 1
San Jose 2 Carolina 0

WUSA Standings - June 29

Team	GP	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Atlanta	12	6	4	2	22	24	9
Boston	13	6	4	3	21	21	22
San Diego	11	5	3	4	19	18	15
Washington	11	5	4	2	17	21	18
New York	14	5	7	2	17	24	33
San Jose	13	5	7	1	16	14	16
Carolina	13	4	6	3	15	21	23
Philadelphia	12	3	6	3	12	18	25

Moore was named Player of the Week after posting consecutive shutouts against San Diego, 2-0, and the New York Power, 0-0. Mitts' play in the middle has caught the attention of at least one recent opponent as well.

"Mitts can recover for other people's mistakes," said San Diego Spirit coach Omid Namazi. "She solidifies their defense. They aren't as dangerous in the attack, but are stronger in the back. She's excellent and tough. She has an edge to her. We haven't been able to figure out how to get by her."

Mitts herself is practical about the move.

"I can't run up the field as much," she said. "It's a different mentality to the game. You have more people coming at you."

Certainly, another key for the team's improvement has been the influence shown by former German international Melanie Hoffmann, who has shown herself to have the ability to successfully link midfield and attack.

"She's much more comfortable and she's doing a better and better job," Krikorian said of Hoffmann. "She's more comfortable with (Marinette) Pichon, she's more comfortable with what we're asking her to do."

"Her role is very well, clearly defined, and she understands it. She's getting more and more comfortable, and her level has certainly risen in the last three, four, five games."

A physically tough Atlanta Beat team will test the recent surge the team has had.

"Whenever you play Atlanta it's about being both physically and psychologically prepared to go into battle," Krikorian conceded. "I don't have any reason to think it'll be anything other than that because our group has, over the course of the past two years, always been prepared to fight against them and put in a good, hard effort. Atlanta always seems to bring out the best in us, and we look forward to getting down there and playing."

With the Charge turning things around, they have created an opportunity for themselves to move up the table and off the bottom of the standings -- something which seemed implausible earlier in the season. In fact, the difference between the Boston Breakers -- the team currently in first place in the WUSA -- and the Charge is only six points.

"We saw early on Atlanta and Washington shot out to an early lead, and us and Carolina sat at the bottom with no points for quite a while," Krikorian said. "The whole thing has tightened up a lot. Boston has now put themselves up at the top, but there's plenty of time left. If we can maintain what we've established in the past couple weeks and build on it, I think we'll be fine."

Notes:

Charge striker Marinette Pichon got some mixed news this week. On one hand, she was unable to attend the WUSA All-Star Game, held at SAS Field in North Carolina Thursday, due to a left thigh contusion suffered during a collision with San Diego goalkeeper

Links

WUSA.com

PhiladelphiaCharge.com

Jenni Branam.

"I am very disappointed that I cannot be playing in the All-Star game," Pichon said. "I have worked very hard and thank all the fans and coaches for voting for me to start on the team."

However, Pichon was nominated for an ESPY Award for 2002 Best Female Soccer Player. Other nominees are goalkeeper Kristin Luckenbill and forward Birgit Prinz of the Carolina Courage, and forward Katia of the San Jose CyberRays.

The award will be given out at the ESPY Awards at 9 p.m. on Wednesday, July 16.

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