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Trying to Save W.P.S.: A Player's View

By *Yael Averbuch*

MONTCLAIR, N.J. — “When W.U.S.A. folded, one of the worst things I continued to hear was that it was too bad they [the general public] didn’t know more about it.” When I read that in an e-mail from a fellow W.P.S. player, I was moved to do my part.

If you don’t already know, W.P.S., Women’s Professional Soccer, may not exist in 2012.

This, as I understand it, is the situation: On Nov. 20, US Soccer met to decide whether W.P.S. would be continue to be sanctioned as a professional league. The federation has established basic standards for a league to be considered professional, and this past season W.P.S. did not meet several of these standards. There must be no fewer than eight teams, and they must span more than one time zone — two stipulations for which W.P.S. was granted an exception. US Soccer has given W.P.S. 15 days to secure another franchise, meaning the league would again consist of six teams, still technically below the standard. But this has put W.P.S. in a bind. A bind that could potentially threaten the league’s existence.

There are a group of players (myself included) who have been involved since the inception of the league in 2009. We are closely tied to its success and struggles, and have had discussion after discussion about how W.P.S. is faring and what we can do personally to insure its survival and success.

I like to think that I have a fairly realistic view of the state of women’s soccer in the U.S. I am fully aware that it is likely never going to be a huge money-maker, filling large stadiums and securing tons of corporate sponsors. I have, however, seen extra seating brought into Sahlen’s Stadium in Rochester to accommodate more than 14,000 fans for a Western New York Flash game, with others unable to get tickets.

I have seen families gathered around the U.S. women’s national team training field in Scottsdale, Ariz., eagerly hoping to get an autograph. I’ve seen girls screaming as if they were at a Backstreet Boys concert for the chance to meet Abby Wambach or Alex Morgan. I’ve seen Hope Solo, on “Dancing With the Stars,” transcend her role as an athlete and become a celebrity. I’ve seen fans jumping up and down, almost at the point of tears, because I gave them my used, sweaty shinguards after the W.P.S. final this past season. These things tell me that there is hope, and a lot of it.

I whole-heartedly believe that there is a market for women’s soccer in this country. No, it is not going to be a multi-million-dollar-making endeavor. And it will not happen quickly or easily. But the raw materials are there. If they weren’t, I wouldn’t feel so strongly about making it work.

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