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Supporters survey: Can the music

By Beau Dure, USATODAY.com

MLS' most passionate supporters agree on a few things: The quality of play has improved, drums are good, and the canned "jock rock" played at many games should be put back in the can.

Two supporters of each team — an official of the team's supporters organization and a moderator for the team's discussion board at BigSoccer.com — were given a questionnaire. I received 16 of the desired 24 responses, plus several more from Galaxy supporters. I averaged the additional responses from the Galaxy crowd to give their votes the same weight as those from other teams, which is why Kevin Hartman didn't run away with a couple of categories. Every team is represented except Columbus.

Here's what they said:

Favorite MLS team (besides your own): All teams received lukewarm support, with New England holding a slight edge over the MetroStars. One Metros supporter picked New England: "They've been hapless underdogs as long as we have." Other teams with multiple votes: Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas and Tampa Bay. One person picked the Rochester Rhinos, ignoring the slight technicality that the Rhinos aren't in MLS.

Least-favorite MLS team: Winning MLS Cup is a sure way to annoy opposing supporters. D.C. United edged Chicago ("Chicagoon," to one voter), with the Metros and Dallas also annoying at least two.

MLS Cup 2000 winner: The MetroStars earned almost half the vote. Chicago placed second, followed by Los Angeles, Tampa Bay and Kansas City. Several voters split their votes, and I expect those folks



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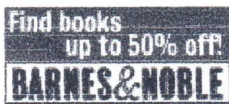
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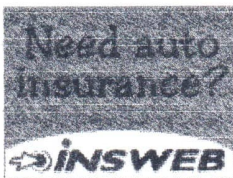
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to be silent when I miss my MLS Cup prediction this year.

Best MLS player: Tampa Bay's tandem of Carlos Valderrama and Mamadou Diallo took the top two spots, with Jaime Moreno, Hristo Stoitchkov and Simon Elliott getting multiple votes. Yes, I said Simon Elliott, and they weren't all Galaxy supporters.

Most overrated player: Lothar Matthäus was the runaway winner, though Dallas Burn supporter legend "ElJefe" took it a step further: "I was going to write 'Lothar Matthäus,' but by this point, the only people that think that he's worth a flip are your Teutonic counterparts in the press box." (Hey, I rarely sit in the press box, and who died and made you Garth Lagerwey?)

Cobi Jones, Luis Hernandez and Roy Lassiter also displeased multiple voters.

If promoted to MLS for a 28-game season, the Rochester Rhinos would finish: 9-14-5. Most voters gave the A-League team a smattering of wins. "Better than my Quakes," one supporter said.

Other supporters were dismissive. "Rhinos worship, based on a few games mostly at home or at neutral sites against MLS benches, is one of the funniest things in U.S. soccer fandom today," said one Revs supporter and longtime U.S. Open Cup follower. Quick memo to one Galaxy supporter: Actually, Rochester does indeed lose players to national team call-ups — Jamaica's Onandi Lowe and Canada's Martin Nash.

Rank noisemakers from best to worst (pick from four): Drums placed first on all but one ballot, that of a Galaxy supporter who made the curious observation that "jock rock" is best in other stadiums but worst at the Rose Bowl. Plastic horns edged whistles for second, though horns had a few detractors as well.

One supporter lists drums, whistles, then a host of things including "drunken belching" and "tourists from Nebraska asking where the nearest Red Lobster is" before "jock rock." Then "the screams of the damned," "maiming and torturing small kittens" and "the Partridge Family" before plastic horns.

"I am going to pretend I never even heard you say 'jock-rock,' " was one of several hostile reactions to the canned music.

The quality of play in MLS has (improved a lot, improved a little, stayed the same, declined a little, declined a lot) since it started: "Improved a lot" won all but a handful of votes. No voter said play had declined, though one said it has stagnated in the last couple of years.

One voter: "Good gosh, I had the opportunity to watch some games from '96 that I had taped. They were unwatchable." Another voter looking back at 1996: "Two words: Thor Lee."

(Fill in the blank) deserves more of a look on the national team.

Voters split wildly on this, mostly naming defenders from their own teams. Jason Kreis earned three votes, while Tony Meola, Steve Ralston, Dante Washington and Bayer Leverkusen youngster Landon Donovan each earned two. Galaxy supporters pushed for Kevin Hartman and Clint Mathis.

The WUSA (women's league) will (help, hurt, have no effect on)

MLS. Most voters hedged on this question, with the overall vote leaning toward helping. Others offered qualifiers — if the league is done right and true cooperation exists, it'll help.

Next week: What the supporters would do if given all-encompassing power over MLS. If you have additional comments, send them to the e-mail address at the bottom of this page.

On the calendar (Unless otherwise noted, home teams are listed first):

LAST WEEK

Aug. 9: Champions League, Europe. Third qualifying round, first leg. Will Helsingborg take Inter Milan's space in the Champions League? The Swedish side leads 1-0 after the first leg. Rivals AC Milan won handily at home; Rangers (Scotland) will have little trouble advancing.

Aug. 9: U.S. Open Cup, quarterfinals. D.C. United and Dallas, two past champions, are out. Miami knocked out United and now assumes the strange role of lovable underdog.

Aug. 9: U.S. team announced for Aug. 16 World Cup qualifier vs.

Barbados. With Joe-Max Moore, Brian McBride, Carlos Llamasa and John O'Brien back in the side, the U.S. is close to a full-strength team.

Aug. 10: U.S. women's Olympic team announced. With Michelle

MLS playoff race

Team	GP	Pts	L10
Kansas City *	25	45	12
MetroStars *	25	44	22
Tampa Bay *	26	44	20
Chicago	25	41	16
Los Angeles	26	41	14
Dallas	27	37	16
Colorado	27	36	14
Columbus	26	35	16
New England	26	33	8
Miami	25	32	13
DC United	27	24	11
San Jose	26	23	6

Key: GP: Games played (out of 32); Pts: Points; L10: Points in last 10 games; *: division leaders

This week's games

changes in the Sydney squad. The real changes will come next year, when players make names for themselves in the WUSA. The biggest names left off the team: Susan Bush and Aly Wagner, who will be important players in the next World Cup.

Aug. 10: UEFA Cup, qualifying round, first leg. One reason given for Kasey Keller's absence on the U.S. roster this week was the need to focus on Rayo Vallecano's crucial qualification games. In the first leg, Keller's squad won a 10-0 squeaker over Andorra's Constellacio. My cat could've played in goal for that one. B36 Torshavn (Faroe Islands) suffered an 8-0 loss, but Bohemians made a great statement for Irish teams by winning 2-1 at Aberdeen (Scotland).

Aug. 12: Premier Development League semifinals and final, Saginaw, Mich. Chicago Sockers 1, Mid Michigan Bucks 0. Two weeks after each team knocked an MLS team out of the U.S. Open Cup, the Sockers won the amateur league title.

Aug. 13: W-1 League final, Raleigh, N.C. Chicago, Chicago, that soccer town — the Cobras match the Sockers by winning the title in the nation's top women's soccer league, taking a penalty-kick shootout after tying the Raleigh Wings 1-1.

Aug. 11-13: Germany's Bundesliga starts. In case you're wondering, Energie Cottbus is a newly promoted team, not a Green Party vice presidential nominee.

Aug. 13: U.S. Women 7, Russia 1. Russia did better in a closed-door scrimmage two days later, holding the U.S. to a 1-1 draw.

Aug. 14: U.S. men's Olympic team announced. Jeff Agoos, Chris Armas and Frankie Hejduk were added as the "overage" players. The most surprising cut: Sasha Victorine, who has looked better with the Galaxy than a few of his teammates. Clive Charles did very little to shake up the team that won an Olympic bid in qualifiers, which explains why solid MLS players such as Bobby Convey, Rusty Pierce and Nick Garcia weren't added.

The MLS team that will be hurt most in the first round of the playoffs, which coincides with the Olympics, will be Chicago, which will lose Chris Armas, Evan Whitfield and Josh Wolff. Los Angeles, Colorado and the MetroStars each will lose two good but replaceable players.

Aug. 15: MLS trade deadline. Quiet, wasn't it? The only rumors involved San Jose forward Abdul Thompson Conteh, a good player whom coach Lothar Osiander has turned into a scapegoat (forgetting, of course, the crucial injuries, the team's mediocre draft picks and the Hamlet-style deliberating that cost the team a chance to get a good

player allocation when it mattered).

Aug. 15: World Cup qualifiers all over. Brazil unnerved its fans with a 3-0 loss to Chile, Mexico effectively slammed the door on Canada, and Costa Rica got two goals from Paulo Wanchope to beat Guatemala and move into first in the U.S. team's qualifying group.

UPCOMING

Aug. 16: More **World Cup qualifiers** all over the world, including the surprisingly important U.S.-Barbados game. Also, the European qualifiers start with an early game between Estonia and Andorra.

Aug. 19: Premier League (England) starts.

Aug. 19-20: Division 3 Pro League playoffs start. The New Jersey Stallions clinched the top seed and earned a spot in the league semifinals. The other 12 teams to clinch playoff spots play this weekend: Reading at New Hampshire, Western Mass at South Jersey, Charlotte at Wilmington, Carolina at Texas, Tucson at Utah, Stanislaus at Chico.

Aug. 20: U.S. women friendly vs. Canada, Kansas City, Mo. (3 p.m., ESPN2)

Aug. 20: Haiti plays Honduras at Meadowlands after MetroStars-Rapids game.

Aug. 22: InterToto Cup finals (second leg). Winners reach the UEFA Cup. Stuttgart (Germany) leads Auxerre (France) 2-0, Udinese (Italy) and Sigma Olomouc (Czech Republic) are tied 2-2, and Celta Vigo (Spain) leads Zenit St. Petersburg (Russia) 2-1.

Aug. 23: U.S. Open Cup semifinals.

USATODAY.com's Beau Dure can be contacted at bkdure@usatoday.com. You can find his past columns at <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/soccer/bdpast.htm>.



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