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14-Year-Old Welcomed to Major League Soccer, Obscurity

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Fourteen-year-old soccer prodigy Freddy Adu signed a six-year deal with MLS franchise D.C. United on Tuesday. The young Ghana native will have to adjust to more than just American culture. Some worry that the pressure of professional play will be too much for the pubescent phenom, but Adu's father maintains that it really won't be a big deal since, as he put it, "nobody watches soccer here, anyway."

Adu marks the second teenager in as many years to join the league. All of this has led some to ask: why so many young players? As it turns out, age plays a significant role. Just as gymnastics careers peak just before the development of breasts, soccer players manifest their greatest potential during early adolescence. "It's important to develop talent in their early teens," said soccer recruiter Sal Manilla. "Once they're old enough to drive, their attention is easily diverted to things like cars, girls, and sports people actually watch."

According to psychologists, Children are more likely to believe in the future of professional soccer in America if they still believe in the Easter Bunny. "At some point in high school someone takes them aside and explains that nobody gives a shit about soccer," explained Dr. Ophelia Payne. "By then, you've lost them."

The decreasing age of professional soccer players does have its drawbacks, however. Offering to pay underage boys for "amazing physical feats" has landed several MLS scouts in jail. At one point during Tuesday's press event Garber said "We've had our eyes on Freddy Adu since he was twelve," at which point D.C. police carted him away in handcuffs.

Another potential sticking point is that players cannot be shown on television without their parent's permission, making lucrative broadcast deals more difficult. The league thinks they have an equitable solution and have contracted with the producers of *COPS* to televise the games, adding their trademark heavy Gaussian blur over all the players' faces.

The signing of Adu is considered to be a major coup in the soccer world. "With so much hype surrounding this guy, he's the Michael Jordan of soccer," said MLS commissioner Don Garber. *EDITOR'S NOTE: According to attendance data from the NBA and MLS, Garber's comparison is a lot like saying that someone is the Marlon Brando of the Fairfax County Community Theater.*

Given the buzz surrounding the child star, D.C. United executives expect average attendance to rise to as much as 400 fans per game. Adu's parents have promised to attend at least four of next season's games as long as the weather holds out and there's no basketball on TV.

"Adu coming to America is something really special," said Manilla. "His presence is very philosophical, like a beautiful and rare tree falling in an empty forrest to the sound of no hands clapping."

The league hopes to land a fat television contract for the next season that would guarantee broadcast of at least two games on ESPN-2 during the network's "prime-time" of 3am EST. If it comes through, that could mean Adu will get nearly as much screen time on the sports network as Sai Gunturi, winner of the 2003 Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee.

Some charge that agents and executives are exploiting the boy to boost their own fortunes, but commissioner Garber insists that the MLS is looking out for Adu's interests. "Rest assured, when the league declares bankruptcy next year and Freddy's out on his ass, uneducated and unemployed, I'm going to feel really, really bad about it."

Even if Adu's contract is not picked up in 2009, at least he won't drown his sorrows since he still won't be of legal drinking age for another year after that.

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