



Miami Dade College finds its two pioneering soccer coaches for its debuting programs

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Forget pizza.

Forget the ferocious sports cars Ferrari, Maserati and Lamborghini.

Forget even the famed fashion shows of Milan.

What really feeds Italy's soul is soccer.

Giuseppe DePalo – the coach who is bringing men's soccer back to Miami Dade College for the first time in 36 years – is from Milan, Italy, and he knows what it's like to live his favorite sport.

In fact, he doesn't even call it soccer. It's football, thank you very much.

"I don't see passion (in the U.S.) for any sport like I see for football in Italy," said DePalo, 52.

"Football runs deep in the Italian culture. On Mondays, after a Sunday game, there are about 20 TV shows discussing every intricacy of the match.

"By Tuesday, there are 20 more TV shows talking about the next game. It's non-stop."

Non-stop is a good description for what faces DePalo between now and August 22, when the MDC Sharks will play host to reigning national champion Monroe Community College (New York). In fact, Monroe won three national titles in the past five years, including 2022 and 2023.

Between now and August 22, DePalo will have to complete his coaching staff and recruit roughly 24 players.

The same mission awaits Ramiro Vengoechea, who has the distinction of being the first-ever women's soccer coach at MDC.

Both hires were announced last week.

DePalo, who moved at age 10 with his family to Connecticut, played three years of pro soccer in the U.S., and he's been coaching ever since. That includes coaching in the organization's academy when the Seattle Sounders won the Major League Soccer Cup in 2019.

He was also Nova Southeastern University's head coach from 1999 to 2015, taking NSU from an NAIA program to NCAA Division II.



Giuseppe DePalo men's soccer coach, January 22, 2024 Cristian Lazzari

"I'm proud of the work we did at NSU," DePalo said. "Hopefully we can do something similar at MDC."

DePalo, who has a Master's degree in Sports Management from NSU, seems well positioned to make MDC a soccer power given his status as the Under-19 coach at Inter Miami.

His familiarity with top young players -- in Florida as well as internationally -- should help him greatly in recruiting.

The same could be said of Vengoechea, who coached a standout high school team, Lourdes Academy, to a pair of state titles and six trips to the Final Four from 2013 to 2021.

He has also coached the semi-pro FC Surge, a Women's Premier Soccer League team based in Miami.

A graduate of Miami's Sunset High and FIU (Bachelor's degree in International Business), Vengoechea is getting his first shot at college coaching. And while he doesn't yet have a completed MDC schedule, he is steamrolling toward his first official practice, which is set for August 1.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to establish a new program," said Vengoechea, a 41-year-old Miami native. "Starting the first women's soccer program at MDC is an attractive proposition.

"I'm loving the challenge. I get up every morning thinking of ways to make this program successful."

Vengoechea said he was also intrigued by the chance to work for a president and an athletic director who are well-equipped to understand his coaching needs. MDC president Madeline Pumariega is an ex-college basketball player, and athletic director Mike Balado is a former high-level basketball coach, most notably as a Louisville assistant for Rick Pitino.



Ramiro Vengoechea was recently hired to be the first women's soccer coach at Miami Dade College. Cristian Lazzari

Miami Dade College “(Pumariega’s) energy and passion are infectious,” Vengoechea said. “She played at MDC. She knows first-hand the commitment it takes. She knows how sports can improve the lives of the athletes.

“(Balado) has that go-getter attitude that I can relate to. He understands the needs of coaches, and he facilitates things for us. We did a zoom call the other day with a recruit, and (Balado) was amazing. He’s a pro.”

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