

STATE COLLEGES

Local goalkeeper among standouts on first ever Miami-Dade College women's soccer season

BY WALTER VILLA MIAMI HERALD WRITER AUGUST 20, 2024 6:00 AM



Courtesy of Miami-Dade College

On four separate occasions this summer, Ashley Fonseca showed up at Miami International Airport with a single red rose and a balloon.

No, this was not a dating show. It's about teamwork.

Fonseca, a freshman, has earned the starting goalie job at Miami Dade College, which on Thursday in Texas will play the first women's soccer game in school history.

“Ashley has been lights out in practices and scrimmages,” MDC coach Ramiro Vengoechea said, “and she’s a leader.”

Fonseca is such a leader, in fact, that she volunteered to drive to the airport to pick up some of the 12 international players on MDC’s roster, which goes 24 strong.

The roster includes players from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, France, Haiti, Hungary and Malaysia. Among the Americans, there are 11 players from Miami and one from Denver.

“It’s important that we connect as a team,” said Fonseca, a Miami La Salle High graduate who has also played for the Honduras Under-20 national team. “We have shown the international girls around Miami, and we’re combining all of our traditions together.”

Vengoechea said Fonseca and Brazilian midfielder Camila Martins Viera have been MDC’s standouts in the leadup to the opener against Angelina College.

“Camila is a baller,” Vengoechea said. “She is smart with the ball, and her field vision is fantastic.”

Vengoechea’s staff includes Mario Concha and Bianca Mandrini, both of whom played college soccer. Paolo Frassino will serve as the goalie coach for both the men’s and women’s teams.

But the MDC women are not the only ones making history.

On Thursday night at 7, MDC’s men’s team will host Monroe, the two-time reigning junior-college national champs. It will be MDC’s first men’s soccer game in 36 years.

Giuseppe DePalo, a native of Milan, Italy, is MDC’s men’s coach, and he has put together a 26-player roster, including 18 internationals.

DePalo has athletes from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, England, France, Haiti, Italy and Nigeria. The standouts so far are Colombia’s Alejandro Cumplido, Argentina’s Facundo Ochoa; Italy’s Edoardo Duchini; Arizona’s Eduardo Cornejo; and Miami’s Kyle Reid.

Cumplido exemplifies the grip soccer has on millions of people throughout the world.

“From the first day I played, I said, ‘Soccer is the love of my life,’” Cumplido gushed. “Soccer has given me everything, including the future I now have at MDC.”

Besides Frassino training his goalies, DePalo’s assistant coaches include Munga Eketebi; Juan Rivera and Phil Zayas.

As a player, Eketebi led FIU to an NCAA Division II national title in 1984. He went on to become a head coach at FIU and at Nova Southeastern University.

“It’s an awesome staff,” DePalo said. “It would be hard to find a better group.”

DePalo believes his team is up to the challenge of facing Monroe, which is based in New York City.

“We answered a lot of questions in training camp,” DePalo said. “We’re a little thin on depth for our central defense, but our strength is our attacking players. We have some firepower.”

THIS AND THAT

- FIU's women's team opened its season last week, beating Florida Gulf Coast, 2-1. It was FIU's first win over FGCU in 14 years.
- In NCAA Division II men's soccer, Barry has been picked to win the Sunshine State Conference. NSU has been predicted to finish fifth.
- Among the women, NSU is picked second, and Barry is predicted for 10th place.
- St. Thomas University's men's team, which reached the national NAIA semifinals last year, has been picked to win the Sun Conference.