



Tanna Kinnaman/DN

club is made up of about 15 Brazillians living in the



Marni Speck/DN

Goalkeeper Mike Ammann goes up to get a corner kick, knocking New England Revolution defender Alexi Lalas and members of his own team out of the way. The Wiz beat the Revolution Saturday night 4-2.

Big Time MLS scores with players, fans

By Matthew Waite
Editor

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — In the great pantheon of sports fans, many have made a creative mark.

The NFL's Green Bay Packers have the cheeseheads — throngs of fans that wear goofy foam slices of cheese on their head.

Major League Baseball pitcher David Cone has a following of fans who wear large rubber head extensions and call themselves "coneheads."

But no teams' loyal followings are as loud as the Kansas City Wiz's Samba Club. And there are only about 15 of them.

The group, made up exclusively of Brazilians, pound drums for 90 minutes of Major League Soccer. They are at Arrowhead Stadium, rain or shine, win or lose.

The group has their own section in the Wiz Zone seating section, and every one of the 11,555 people that came out for the Wiz's Saturday matchup with the New England Revolution knew exactly where they were.

The Samba Club has entrance music. They give out their own MVP awards. And they have fun.

These are the fans that have the organizers of MLS smiling.

MLS, a professional soccer league, has exceeded all the expectations for attendance that were laid before it last year.

In order for the U.S. to host the World Cup in 1994 — the most-watched sporting event in history — they had to plan and start a professional soccer league.

In their inaugural season, the 10 teams of the new professional soccer league have taken in more than 1.8 million fans.

In Los Angeles, with its large soccer-crazy Hispanic population, the Galaxy's average home attendance is an impressive 40,430, the largest in the league.

The world's sport has come to America, and most of the responsibility lies on the shoulders of the U.S.'s popular World Cup team, along with a host of international stars that have come to America.

Players like Alexi Lalas, the wild-haired media darling that endured much of the World Cup attention, and Jorge Campos, the flamboyant Mexican goalkeeper that brought with him a following when he started play for the Galaxy, have built the foundation.

Now, players say, they are ready for next season to be bigger and better.

Lalas, standing outside the visitors' locker room signing autographs, said he was encouraged by the large number of World Cup players from America that left their European and South American teams for MLS.

Lalas has said any chance he gets, that soccer's life and death in America relies on the players, especially those from the World Cup team. It is a responsibility he has said he enjoys.

"But we don't want to overdo it," he said. "We've had tremendous successes this year. We want to get bigger and better."

Lalas said he knows how to do just that.

"The way to do that is to keep doing what got us here, and that's to work our ass off," he said.

The usually flamboyant Lalas was more reserved Saturday evening, partly because of the U.S. Olympic team he played on not making it out of bracket play, partly because the man he marked on defense this night scored two goals and had an assist.

That man was Vitalis "Digital"

Please see **MLS** on 8

rdy night. Takamira chipped in two goals and an
day night's game. (Photo by Tanna Kinnaman)