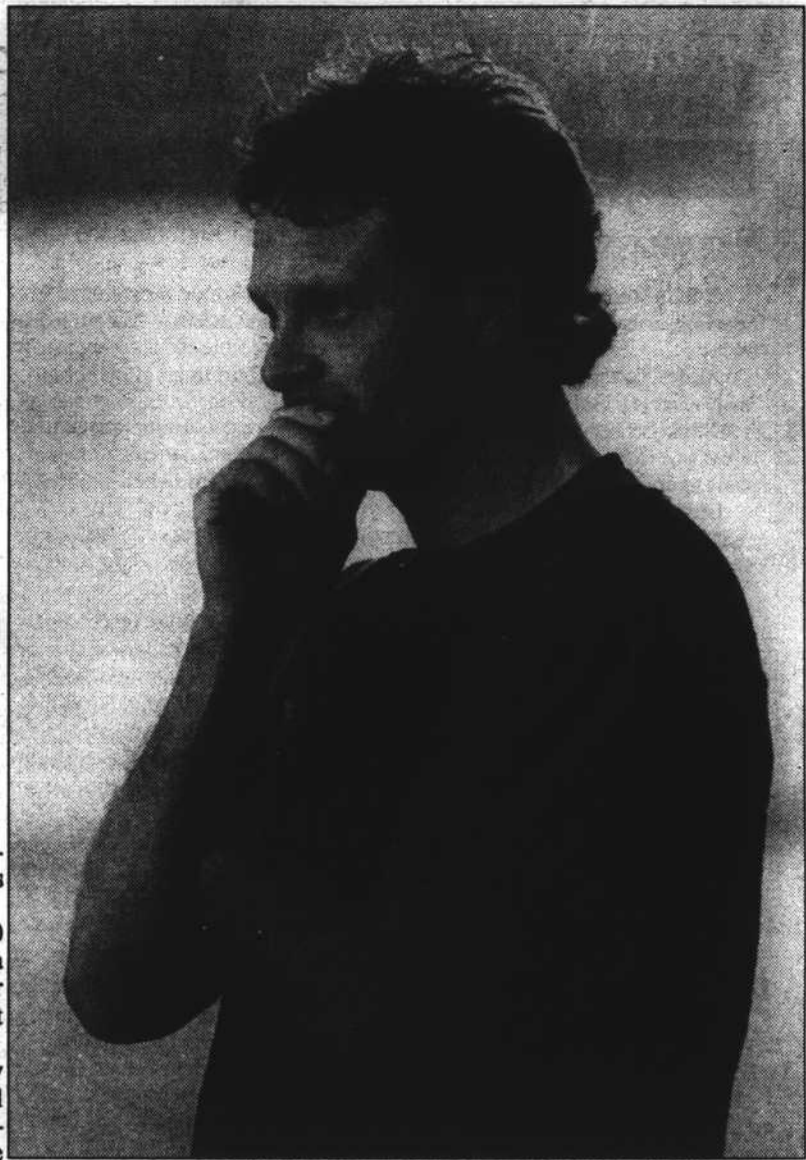


# Setting Fire to the Brigade

MATT MILLER/DN  
**LINCOLN BRIGADE COACH**  
 Brett Mosen studies his players during practice last week. The Brigade plays an indoor game against the Omaha Flames March 2 in Omaha.



BY DARREN IVY  
 Staff Reporter

**W**ebster defines a brigade as a group of people organized to function as a unit in some sort of work.

When owners of the Lincoln Brigade soccer club were thinking of a team name, the owners considered Webster's definition.

"We researched different names and wanted to have a name that represented our team," said Andrew Ferguson, who co-owns the club with his brother Glen Ferguson.

In choosing a name, the two brothers drew on the ideals of a traditional fire-bucket brigade where members had to rely on one another to succeed in putting out a fire.

"We want this to be the community's team," Brigade Coach Brett Mosen said. "We want to be involved in the community and develop local talent."

## Owning the field

Soccer has been a part of Andrew Ferguson's life since he started playing as a 3-year-old. He has played soccer, coached soccer, organized a soccer league and in 1990, was president of the UNL Club Soccer Team.

"I have dedicated my life to soccer," Ferguson said.

Ferguson's dedication to soccer, along with that of his brother Glen and of Robert Dugas, has been the force behind bringing the amateur team to Lincoln.

When the Fergusons began their league in Lincoln four years ago, they said they believed their playing space could support a professional soccer team.

Ferguson said he knew what it would take for a team to succeed because he had been studying the Premiere Soccer League for some time, mostly following the Des Moines Menace.

"We saw the potential for a team here in 1992, but things didn't work out," he said.



He didn't let this failure discourage him, though. He contacted the United System of Independent Soccer Leagues last year to find out new team requirements.

The criteria are:

- Locating the team in a city not already occupied by another team.
- Not locating the team in a town within a 30-mile radius of another town with a team.
- Having a large town to support the market.

Once Ferguson discovered that Lincoln met all the requirements, it was only a matter of time before things came together to start a new team, he said. That time came in 1996.

"Everything just came together this year with the successes of the Omaha Flames and NU women's team, along with the completion of our new indoor soccer facility," he said.

The Fergusons didn't let a second opportunity to begin a team slip through their fingers.

"We decided that if anyone was going to start the team, it was going to be us, since we have had a history of being involved with indoor and outdoor soccer in Lincoln," he said.

Once the owners found they could start a team, they designated the newly opened, 30,000-square-foot Pitch Indoor Soccer Complex as the team's home base. The \$500,000 soccer complex is on Sixth and Hill streets.

## A new ball game

The addition of the Brigade to Lincoln marks the second amateur sports team in the past two years to call Lincoln home. Last year, the Lincoln Stars hockey team made a successful debut. The success of the Stars has given the Brigade hope that other sports teams will catch on in a football town.

"No one was very familiar with hockey before the Stars came, now it seems like everyone is catching on," said Chris Redhage, a senior at Lincoln East High School and an amateur soccer player.

Ferguson said he liked the way the Stars had opened up their home rink, the Ice Box, to the community for public skating. He said one of his goals was to make the Pitch Indoor Soccer Complex a community gathering place like the ice rink.

"We hope to have an atmosphere like the Lincoln Stars have, where the fans and kids can hang out at the Pitch and interact with our players," Ferguson said.

## Star City Soccer

Ferguson's many years of soccer

experience have given him firsthand insight into how soccer has changed in the past 10 years.

"When I was playing soccer 10 years ago, our group of players was a quiet, closed group because soccer wasn't viewed as an acceptable sport and we were made fun of," he said.

However, since Ferguson's early difficulties, soccer has gained national acceptance. Along with this acceptance has come an explosion in the number of people who play the sport.

Here in Lincoln, Ferguson credited the YMCA with first introducing kids to soccer, along with the Capital Soccer Association and Spirit Soccer Club.

Ten years ago, the Capital Soccer Association had only five teams and the Spirit Soccer Club didn't exist. Ferguson estimated that in 1987, 1,500 to 2,000 Lincoln youths, adults and college students played soccer.

After just 10 years, Ferguson estimates the number of Lincoln soccer players has quadrupled to 8,000 people, and the Spirit Soccer Club alone now has over 70 teams.

Mosen, a native of England, said that from what he has seen, Lincoln seems to be very receptive to the game.

"Soccer is big here," he said.

Soccer got even bigger three years ago when UNL added women's soccer as an intercollegiate sport, which gave soccer a boost and provided role models in Lincoln.

Ferguson said he hopes the Brigade will be able to provide similar results and be a role model for men's soccer.

Redhage, a Lincoln East soccer standout, said he has faith in the program. Soccer is already popular with kids, but it's the adults who aren't familiar with it, he said.

"When adults catch on to soccer like they did with hockey, the sport will really take off," Redhage said.

Once the Brigade begins its outdoor season, Ferguson said the last piece of the soccer puzzle will be complete for Lincoln.

"We will take soccer all the way to the top, showing the younger players how soccer should be played," Ferguson said. "It will complete the cycle from youth leagues up to an amateur team."

## Higher goals

Some local players have already gotten in on the excitement by playing on the Brigade's indoor team. Although the indoor Brigade team is winless in three games, the experiences have not been all negative for Redhage.

"I thought of playing on the Brigade as a stepping stone for my soccer career," Redhage said.

For Redhage and many other soccer players across the country, the Brigade's level serves as the first goal for soccer careers.

"I have been to England and the level of these leagues is pretty similar to some of their lower professional leagues," Mosen said.

The Brigade will compete in the

"We will take soccer all the way to the top, showing the younger players how soccer should be played."

ANDREW FERGUSON  
 co-owner, Lincoln Brigade

Premiere Amateur Soccer League of the United Systems of Independent Soccer Leagues. The 11-year-old USISL has six levels of competition ranging from youth to professional teams.

The Premiere Development League is the highest nationally organized level of amateur soccer in the United States and the third level of soccer in the USISL. Only the A League and Major League, which are professional leagues, are above it.

The Brigade will compete in the South Central Conference Premiere League which consists of four other teams: Sioux City Breeze, Des Moines Menace, Colorado Stampede and Omaha Flames. The Brigade's will play 15 regular-season games.

After the regular season ends, the division winners of the six conferences will compete for Premiere Amateur League championship. The winner of this tournament will move up into the A League professional tournament.

## Coaching to win

Mosen said he hopes the Brigade will be one of the teams playing in the post-season playoffs.

That goal may seem unreasonable to some people, but Mosen and the co-owners are optimistic about playing at a high level in their inaugural season.

Mosen, 40, came to the Brigade after coaching two years with the Nashville Metros, another USISL team. In just two seasons under Mosen's tutelage, the Metros made the playoffs. Mosen liked Nashville, but he said he was ready for another challenge.

"I wanted to coach this team because of the opportunity to jump into a program that was starting from scratch," Mosen said.

While Mosen was coaching in Nashville, he also was the director of the Olympic Development Soccer Program. Before coming to the United States from England in 1987, Mosen coached the Middlesex County Football Association in England.

He started playing semiprofessional soccer in London at 14. After playing in London for seven years, he moved to Bermuda, where he played professionally another four years.

Mosen will have to use the experience he has gained as a coach and an athlete to pick players for his 26-player roster.

Mosen said he wants to see the local players at the March 1-2 tryouts before he decides how many outsiders he needs to bring in to make his team competitive.

In addition to the Brigade, Andrew Ferguson said there would be a separate training team which will practice with the Brigade. This 16-player team will be coached by an assistant coach and will play in some of the Brigade's games.

After the indoor season ends March 2, the new infusion of talent for the outdoor team could end the Brigades' winless record from exhibition games against Omaha and Tulsa, Okla.

But the start of a new season also means losing good players, such as Redhage, who will return to play for Lincoln East when the high school season begins.

## Moving out and up

After the indoor season ends, the rest of the Brigade will have a month to get ready for its outdoor season, which begins with a April 19 game against the Omaha Flames.

Mosen sees the series between the Flames and Brigade turning into a rivalry, which he said he thought would "be good for soccer in Nebraska."

With the facilities, owners and coach in place and the roster ready to be filled, the time approaches for the club to look into the future.

Mosen said one of the goals of the club is to eventually move up to one of the professional leagues, but he cautioned that this will only happen when the players are ready.

"We don't want to try to run before we have learned to walk."