

NWSL kicks off second season this month

By Jody Lim
The Asian Reporter

The second season of women's pro soccer in Portland kicks off this month. As 2013 National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) champions, the Portland Thorns intend to defend their title.

After a busy offseason that included a coaching change, the college draft, an expansion draft, numerous player trades, and a new name for the team's home field, the squad is ready for their first two matches on the road.

On Saturday, April 12, the Thorns will take on the league's first expansion team, the Houston Dash, and the following Saturday, April 19, they travel to Piscataway Township, New Jersey to play Sky Blue FC.

The squad's home opener against FC Kansas City takes place at the end of the month, on Saturday, April 26.

The remaining clubs in the now nine-team NWSL are the Boston Breakers, Chicago Red Stars, Western New York Flash, Washington Spirit, and Seattle Reign FC.

Hawai'i native Meleana "Mana" Shim, who scored five goals, had two assists, and was named Portland's Newcomer of the Year last year, is back for 2014. Last season as a rookie midfielder, she appeared in 19 games, became the first Thorns FC player to score a goal in four consecutive matches, and ranked third on the team in scoring with 12 points. She was also called up to the U.S. U-23 Women's National Team this past December and again in March for the Six Nations Tournament in Spain.

A new addition to the Thorns FC roster



is defender Rebecca Moros, who played the last two seasons for INAC Kobe Leonessa of the Japanese Nadeshiko League. Moros helped the squad win back-to-back championships in 2012 and 2013. Before competing overseas, she played for the Washington Freedom and Western New York Flash in the previous league, Women's Professional Soccer (WPS), between 2009 and 2011.

Moros feels her personal game improved and she grew as a player in Japan. She was impressed by the sophistication and technical style of the Japanese game and hopes to bring some of what she learned to Portland.

The Portland squad also includes returnees such as Christine Sinclair and Angie Kerr-Woznuk, who played soccer on the bluff for the University of Portland,

and U.S. National Team players Alex Morgan, Tobin Heath, and Rachel (Buehler) Van Hollebeke.

Several international players, including three from Japan, have joined the NWSL this season.

Nahomi "Naho" Kawasumi joined Seattle Reign FC in February. On loan from Japanese side INAC Kobe Leonessa, Kawasumi was the league's second-leading scorer and was named league MVP in 2013. She was also a member of the Japan Women's National Team that won gold in the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup and silver at the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

The two west coast teams face each other three times this year. The match at Reign FC's Memorial Stadium takes place July 27. Home games at Portland's Providence

SECOND SEASON. Japan Women's National Team members Aya Sameshima (left) and Nahomi Kawasumi (right) pressure Tobin Heath (center) of the United States during the women's soccer gold medal match at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. The two Japanese players are playing in the National Women's Soccer League during the 2014 season. Sameshima signed with the Houston Dash in January and Kawasumi joined Seattle Reign FC in February. Heath is a member of Portland Thorns FC. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson, File)

Park are scheduled for May 10 and August 17, which is the last regular-season match.

Defender Aya Sameshima signed with the Houston Dash on January 24, 2014. In 2013, she played for Vegalta Sendai in Japan. Sameshima won a gold medal at the 2011 Women's World Cup and took home silver at the 2012 London Olympic Games alongside teammate Kawasumi on the Japan Women's National Team. She has 53 caps with the Japanese national team.

The Thorns play the Dash twice in Houston — on April 12 and May 14 — before meeting them at home on August 3.

Forward Nanase Kiryu signed with Sky Blue FC in February. A native of Kanagawa, Kiryu had 127 appearances and 40 career goals for her previous club, NTV Beleza, which competes in the Nadeshiko League. The Japanese international was recently called to national team duty for the 2014 Algarve Cup.

Sky Blue FC visits Portland May 24 and June 25. While the team is in town, look for coach Takayoshi "Taka" Ishihara on the sidelines. A native of Aichi, Japan, Ishihara joins Sky Blue this season after having success at various levels in Japanese soccer. Most recently, he was head coach for perennial power INAC Kobe

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