



Des Moines Menace Prepare to take on Defending Open Cup Champions Sporting Kansas City

By Zach Smith

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The Chinese Zodiac calendar might say it's the year of the snake, but in the world of soccer it's the year of the upset.

Relegated Wigan of the English Premier League upset powerhouse Manchester City in the FA Cup, Atletico Madrid beat cross town rivals Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey, and Lazio denied Roma their 10th Coppa Italia title.

In the 100th edition of the U.S. Open Cup, four amateur teams pulled upsets of their own to make it to the third round against teams from Major League Soccer, tying the tournament record.

The Des Moines Menace of the PDL beat the Madison 56ers in the first round before going to Minnesota to knock off Minnesota United of the NASL.

Now, a club with a full-time staff of three people will go up against defending Open Cup Champion and 2000 MLS Cup Champion Sporting Kansas City at Sporting Park in Kansas City.

Menace head coach Mike Jefferies made three appearances for the U.S. Men's National Team. He coached the Dallas Burn of the MLS for two years, and was a scout for former MNT head coach Bob Bradley during the 2010 World Cup.

Jefferies took the Menace job in January 2013, and has enjoyed having his hands in to every facet of both the team and the organization. He's transitioned into more of a teacher where the oldest person on the team is 24 years old.

"We do realize that it's a difficult challenge," said Jefferies. "As defending champions, they're going to continue to push the pace. Our motivation is not going to be an issue. We have to make sure we walk in confident and prepared and not be overwhelmed."

Besides the team, the Menace will have a little piece of their city with them in Kansas City. More than 200 fans will make the three-hour bus ride from Des Moines to Kansas City.

The team has fans outside of Iowa, one of which is Adrian Healey, a soccer commentator for ESPN, who tweeted the Menace were his team in the Open Cup after they beat Minnesota United.

"A few weeks ago I looked at the list of teams and I was like 'You know what, I'm going to just pick a team,'" he said. "I didn't do it with any footballing knowledge of a lot of the teams. I've never been (to Des Moines) to be honest, but I looked at their roster and saw they were coached by Mike Jefferies, a man

that had a lot of respect when he was a coach in MLS with Dallas back a decade ago. They're a PDL team, which is the right level for them to cause an upset."

Healey said Des Moines is a "mythical" place for him. When he came to the United States more than 20 years ago, it was always one of the American names he always mispronounced, much to the delight of his friends.

Growing up rooting for Swindon Town of the third division in England, it would make his year when his little minnow of a team upset a big fish.

"There is always a chance," Healey said. "In 90 minutes, any team can beat any other team. You're not expected to win, and that's what is great about it. Those players will be playing their hearts out. They'll be playing to prove they belong on a bigger stage."

Menace goalkeeper Scott Angevine is actually one player who has been on the bigger stage.

A season ago, he was signed by Sporting Kansas City a few weeks before the Open Cup final, and was on the team when they won the tournament.

"I got a medal out of it and everything," said Angevine. "It's going to be a mix of feelings going back to that stadium and playing against guys that I was training with for nine or 10 months last year. It'll be nice to see everybody and all the coaches and fans I had relationships with."

Angevine finished third in the voting for Open Cup player of the second round, while Menace defender and captain Brandon Fricke won the award after his 86th minute game-winning goal against Minnesota United.

Angevine agrees with Jefferies that lack of motivation won't be a problem, but said this is more than just a game; it's a job interview.

"The guys have a great attitude going into this game," he said. "We're excited and ready to showcase the PDL. It's an important stage because everybody on this team wants to play at that level. For me, it's a chance to prove myself and that I'm good enough to be back at that level. That's a chip off my shoulder."

In the end, Jefferies said his team will be ready when they step on the field, they just can't count themselves out of it before the game even kicks off.

"It's a big game for the Des Moines Menace," Jefferies said. "It's the first time they've had the opportunity to play in an MLS stadium. It's not going to be an easy game. I want them to walk off the field at the end of the day knowing they did everything they could do to help the group win. Like anybody that goes into a fight, you always believe you have a chance."