

An American Coaches Germans

BY MIKE WOITALLA

Former U.S. star Brent Goulet took his scoring prowess to Germany more than a decade ago and hasn't looked back — much.

Bonn, the birthplace of Beethoven, was chosen as West Germany's capital in 1949 because it was far from the East German border. Or maybe because Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's home was a short Rhine River ferry ride away.

It's not known for soccer, being too small support a top tier team. But Bonn is where American Brent Goulet arrived in 1991 to play Third Division ball. He's no longer there, but he's still in Germany.

"You would think so," Goulet says with a chuckle when asked if he's become a German. "But not quite."

EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE

In 1987, the U.S. Soccer Federation named Goulet its Player of the Year, calling him, "Perhaps the best goalscorer this country has ever produced."

That year, at age 23, the Tacoma product shot the United States into the 1988 Olympics, scoring six goals in six qualifiers. At the finals, he scored one of the Americans' three goals.

But he fell out of favor with Coach Bob Gansler during qualifying play for the 1990 World Cup. After a short spell in the Major Indoor Soccer League, Goulet, who in 1987 saw action with England's Bournemouth, joined Bonner SC midway through the 1990-91 season.

It dropped to Fourth Division for his second season, but thanks to Goulet's 31 goals — the most scored by a player at any level in Germany that year — the club returned to the Third Division. Goulet pondered Second Division offers but instead moved to rich and ambitious Third Division Tennis Borussia Berlin. Goulet contributed 21 goals and the club moved up.

"I loved Berlin," said Goulet, who arrived as the reunified German government began moving its capital back to the metropolis. "I couldn't believe I had a chance to move there."

But his stay came to abrupt halt when he



Brent Goulet, now in his second season as assistant coach of German Third Division SV Elversberg, helped make club history as a player.

went scoreless in the team's first few games in the Second Division. He went back to Bonn.

"At that time, I hated Germany," he remembers. "My girlfriend left me. I was miserable. Then I became a Christian and started looking at life from a different perspective. I started appreciating Germany again. It has a great standard of living. People are hospitable. I was back in Bonn, which was wonderful. I've made a lot friends in every city I've been."

He made two more Third Division stops — Oberhausen and Wuppertal — before pondering a query from the Tampa Bay Mutiny,

where Lothar Osiander, Goulet's Olympic team coach, was the assistant in 1998.

"But I got injured, then heard from a friend who was taking over at Elversberg," he says. The club in a city of 15,000 had just been promoted to the Third Division, where it never managed to stay for more than a season.

"The challenge intrigued me," Goulet says. "And we did it. We stayed up. I'm proud of that."

He played three seasons at Elversberg and after breaking his leg was asked to become assistant coach.

"Whoever heard of an American coaching Germans?" he says. "I jumped at the chance. In March, I'll get my A license, so then I'll be eligible to be a head coach. Of course, I think about coming home, but right now I can't give something like this up." ■