

Brookwood Grad Walker Zimmerman Shining in the FC Dallas Defense

By Jon Gallo



FC Dallas defender Walker Zimmerman (25), a Brookwood grad, controls the ball past New England forward Diego Fagundez (14) during their May 21 in Foxborough, Mass. (Photo: Winslow TownsonUSA Today Sports)

Walker Zimmerman wants to set the record straight regarding the internet rumors about him: He hasn't been contacted by any professional Mexican soccer teams and his only concern is anchoring the defense of Major League Soccer's FC Dallas, which he's done superbly this season.

But Zimmerman, a 23 yearold Brookwood alum, also wants to make this clear: He's not upset his name has been linked as a target of Atlas, which recently finished 15th in Liga MX Clausura, Mexico's top league.

"Do I mind the speculation? No," he said. "I don't know how the rumor started, but it may have started when Atlas' upper management saw me in a game. But as a player, I like the exposure and it's always good when you get noticed for your play."

Zimmerman's performance on the field has made it easy to see why the Lawrenceville native would attract attention from Atlas, whose interest was first tweeted by ESPN.

"Walker has had a terrific season so far," FC Dallas coach Oscar Pareja told MLSSoccer.com of Zimmerman, who is signed through the 2018 season. "I think he's maturing in many areas of his game, and for me what I like to see the most is the approach he has with his character. He's been great. He's a player I can count on any day."

And Pareja certainly has. Entering July, Zimmerman has started 15 games this season for Dallas (945), which is in second place in the Western Conference, a point behind Colorado. Zimmerman, who played in 20 games for FC Dallas last year, has three goals in 52 career regular season games.

But he's also come up big when it matters most: in the playoffs. He scored the series tying goal and the gamewinning penalty kick in the shootout to give FC Dallas a win over the Seattle Sounders in the Western Conference semifinals last fall.

"He has adapted himself to the load, and I have seen character involved in that," Pareja told MLSSoccer.com. "It's the willingness in him to get better. So I don't see him anymore like a young guy — I see him as a guy that I can come with anytime."

Zimmerman hopes Pareja isn't the only coach who views him this way, as he aspires to play for the U.S. Senior Men's National Team, coached by Jurgen Klinsmann. Zimmerman has progressed through the national team program, having played on the country's U18, U20 and U23 teams. In his most recent stint, the U.S. fell to Colombia, costing the red, white and blue a spot in the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

"It was disappointing to lose and I'll watch the Olympic soccer tournament," he said. "The loss to Colombia will hurt more when the Olympics are going on because right now the Olympics are out of sight and out of mind. When I'm watching the Olympics and see the other teams from our region that are there in Rio and we aren't, I'll think 'it should have been us.'"

Since Olympic rules stipulate that only three of a team's players can be older than 23, Zimmerman's chances at representing his country at the Games might be gone forever. But his hopes to play in the World Cup, scheduled for 2018 in Russia and four years later in Qatar, are very much alive.

"That's the dream — to play in the World Cup," said Zimmerman, who played at Furman University before Dallas took him seventh overall in the 2013 MLS SuperDraft, "It's a realistic goal, too, since I'm trying to grow as a player every chance I get. I want the honor of representing my country. My confidence is growing. As a player, you always want to know if you are good enough to play against the best players in the world and that's what happens at the World Cup. If I don't make it to Russia in 2018, I'll be 29 in 2022 and I'll be in my prime or maybe a year past my prime. I will still have shot."

However, any shot Zimmerman has will have to wait. Right now, he's focused on leading FC Dallas to its first MLS title after the squad fell to eventual champion Portland in the conference final last year.

“We have something special going on in Dallas,” he said. “All of the other things, like playing in another league and playing in the World Cup are all in the future and will work themselves out. What we have in Dallas is right here in front of me.”

http://www.gwinnettdailypost.com/sports/professional/brookwoodgradwalkerzimmermanshininginthefcdallasdefense/article_0c4049f18c4652e2ac18d084d7e40cc0.html