

# *Fun While it Lasted*

**Tiffany Weimer** was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1983. Weimer gained national accolades as a school girl soccer player for North Haven High School in Connecticut and enrolled at Penn State University in 2002.

During her four years at Penn State, the Nittany Lions won four Big Ten championships and twice advanced to the NCAA women's Final Four. In her senior season, the Nittany Lions posted an undefeated 23-0-2 mark. Weimer left school as the Big Ten's all-time leading scorer and the 9<sup>th</sup> all-time scorer in NCAA history. She was a two-time finalist for the MAC Hermann Trophy, college soccer's highest individual honor.

When Weimer enrolled at Penn State, the United States had a first division women's professional league known as the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA). By the time she graduated in 2005, the WUSA had folded and there were no professional soccer options for women in the States, outside of securing a spot on the U.S. Women's National Team. Weimer then embarked on her world travels, playing in Scandinavia, South America and in U.S. amateur leagues throughout her early twenties. In 2009, she signed on with the new Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) league that returned top level women's pro soccer to the United States, playing two seasons with the Bay Area and Boston franchises.

Lately, she has returned to her nomadic ways, leaving WPS to play in Sweden and in Vancouver, Canada. A journalism major at Penn State, she serves as Editor in Chief of *Our Game Magazine*, an online magazine and blog dedicated to the women's game.

Tiffany Weimer spoke to Fun While It Lasted about WPS and her life as an itinerant pro soccer player on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

*Disclaimer: FWIL interviewer Andy Crossley signed Weimer to a free agent contract with the Boston Breakers in 2009.*

*Interview begins after the jump.*

**FWiL:**

When you enrolled at Penn State in 2002 there was a 1st division women's pro league in the United States, the WUSA. By the time you graduated in 2005 as the Big Ten's all-time leading scorer, the WUSA was gone, along with the opportunity for you to play professionally in America. How did the demise of the WUSA impact you as a top collegiate player during that era?

**Weimer:**

To be perfectly honest, I wasn't really bothered by the fact that WUSA wasn't around. At the time I didn't really plan much ahead of the next day. When you live like that, you don't worry too much. I was playing with the U.S. Under-21 Women's National Team and having a successful college career, so I wasn't thinking about it.

The other part of that was this weird faith I had in a league I knew nothing about. Since I was 5 years old I always told everyone I would play professional soccer. And there wasn't even a league back then. I'm not sure where I came up with this. But I believed there would be one eventually for me to play in. And that belief pushed me to keep training and to be ready for it whenever it appeared.

**FWiL:**

To extend your career after college, you had to become a nomad, playing everywhere from high school football stadiums in Connecticut to women's leagues in Finland and Brazil. Can you describe how you went about hustling for playing opportunities in those years? What was life like for you overseas?

**Weimer:**

When I was playing in Connecticut, my living conditions were pretty amazing. I was able to live at home and play on the SoccerPlus Connecticut Reds. Though they were an (amateur) WPSL team, the Reds was my favorite team that I ever played on. It was a professional environment and all the players played for each other.

But I couldn't continue playing for a team that was only in the summer and that didn't pay. So, I went off to a team in Finland - Aland United. Aland Island is a small island where everyone knows everyone. We had a great apartment and pay, and the topper, free groceries. The level wasn't quite as high, but the living conditions were great.

Brazil was quite the opposite. The living conditions weren't that great, but the quality of play was really impressive and very technical. I lived in a house across the street from the stadium with 25-30 girls, all on the team. I shared my room with 3 other girls, bunk beds and washed my clothes by hand (with a bar of soap and a scrubber). It was definitely an interesting experience.

**FWiL:**

When WPS launched in the spring of 2009, you were 25 years old. Now there was a true 1st division pro league once again for women and you were drafted by the FC Gold Pride club in San Jose. How did the reality of playing in WPS compare against this vision you had of playing in a professional league when you were a teenager?

**Weimer:**

Playing for FC Gold Pride as a professional was what I expected. Going to practice every morning and knowing that was my "job" was a dream. Getting paid enough to play and not have to do anything else - well, being able to survive - was what it was all about. And the WPS experience was that.

**FWiL:**

At FC Gold Pride in 2009, you had a team loaded with veterans, including the Brazilian star Formiga (31 years old), and the long-time U.S. National Team icons Brandi Chastain (40) and Tiffeny Milbrett (36). But you had a relatively inexperienced coach in Albertin Montoya. Montoya had no previous NCAA or professional head coaching experience, but he had coached the teenage daughters of the club's owners in youth competitions. Did Montoya's resume and relationship with ownership pose a credibility issue within that team?

**Weimer:**

Personally, I never really thought about this until we started losing. During preseason and the beginning of the year, that was some of the most fun I've ever had with soccer. We had quality training sessions and we played awesome soccer. It wasn't until things started going bad during the season that we wondered how we'd turn it around, and if we would turn it around. Many times we'd be reminded that we weren't professionals before that season. We didn't know how to handle ourselves necessarily. Which is somewhat true. Not at that level. But at the same time, we knew that Albertin hadn't experienced this before either. Most of his <college> teams were winning teams. So, between both parties not making a stand, we stayed the same way throughout the season.

**FWiL:**

You led FC Gold Pride in assists during 2009, but as the season went on, you spent more and more time on the bench. Gold Pride fans in online forums seemed mystified about your lack of playing time, particularly with the team struggling to score in general. What was the story there, from your side of things?

**Weimer:**

It was definitely a combination of me and the coaches. I was injured during preseason and came back in time for the first game. I didn't keep my fitness and strength up after the injury was healed. Which probably put me pretty far behind at that point. I was a new professional and really didn't know better. I've learned a lot from that. With that said though, I had one bad game against St. Louis and lost my starting spot. I played ten minutes the next game, and it went down hill after that. I never recovered from it. But I didn't feel I had the support to either.

**FWiL:**

FC Gold Pride finished in last place in 2009, as the lowest-scoring team in the new league. What's your assessment of what went wrong with that team, with a couple of years hindsight now?

**Weimer:**

I think once we realized we were going down, no one really stepped up and said, okay, we need to change things. We never made any trades (I'm sure I would have been one) or additions. In some sports the coaching staff may have changed. We just kept doing the same things and getting the same results. I think we needed something different.

**FWiL:**

When I signed you in Boston in late 2009, you came with the reputation of being a "South American" type player. The scouting report was that you had a flair and creativity in your game that was unusual to find among American players that tend to come up in highly structured, drill-intensive programs as youth players. You could break down opponents one-on-one and score highlight reel goals from odd angles. But at both FC Gold Pride and the Boston Breakers, you struggled to gain playing time in WPS, despite being productive when you did get in.

Did you ever feel that the "creative" tag became a handcuff or a back-handed compliment? That you became typecast as a one-on-one specialist, but not an everyday player?

**Weimer:**

I think the creative tag has held me back in many ways. I think it holds me back personally because I don't think of myself as a fit/physical kind of player. Even if I am fit and strong. But I know coaches see me in a certain way. And I can't really help that. I've never had playing time issues in other countries. And yes, one can argue that the level isn't as high, but they also play and appreciate a different kind of soccer. That's not to say I couldn't be more well-rounded, but that would make a big difference too.

**FWiL:**

After playing in WPS, you are now one of the league's key observers as Editor-in-Chief of *Our Game Magazine*. From your perspective, what are the hurdles the league (and the sport) needs to get over if women's soccer is going to continue as a professional sports in the States?

**Weimer:**

Obviously the money issues need to be taken care of. That's something behind the scenes that I don't know much about. But women's soccer is getting good exposure now and hopefully that can carry over to WPS. We need to be given a chance. Because once people see the product, they're usually impressed. But lots of people don't even give it that first try.

**FWiL:**

Can you share one or two favorite memories that stand out from your time in the Bay Area and in Boston?

**Weimer:**

One of my favorite memories was in 2009 playing with the Pride. During that season Carrie Dew and referred to the first game against Boston as our "Glory Day" because it was the best we played and we thought we were going undefeated after that. And it was pretty cool to beat Boston - because I had thought <Breakers Head Coach> Tony DiCicco would probably draft me. That was an amazing experience. Especially because it was on TV and my family was able to see me play pro for the first time. They didn't see me in Finland and Brazil.

Boston was an interesting experience. Lots of ups and downs. That <2010> team was very close though. And I have to say that Leslie Osborne was a great captain. She had everyone's back. I've never had a leader that would go to bat for everyone like she did. Taught me a lot about standing up for what you believe in. Same was true with Kristine Lilly. The two of them taught me a lot.

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