

Sports

In this MISL series, it's visitors who are laid-back

By Brian Brown
Staff Writer

He would be the psychologist of the year, if the Major Indoor Soccer League had such an award.

The Kansas City Comets were 2-9 and fading in December when they hired sports psychologist Dr. Andrew Jacobs. Just a few months later, they appear capable of stopping the Sockers from taking a fourth straight indoor title.

"You get nervous before a game," said Comets goalie Manny Schwartz. "He helps you relax."

"He helps you keep a positive attitude," said

defender Tim Twellman. "He tells you things about yourself that you already know, except they haven't come to the surface yet."

Jacobs, who accompanied the team to San Diego for the playoffs, has been happy with the results of his work this season.

"They are really a courageous group of players," he said. "When I got there, they were pressing. They were 2-9 when everybody expected them to be 9-2. They got roughed up by San Diego in the first few games, but for the last 145 minutes, they've played them even."

On March 3, the Comets lost to the Sockers 4-3 in overtime. Wednesday night, in the opening match of their quarterfinal-round playoff

series, the Comets again lost to the Sockers 4-3 in overtime. With only a little luck, the results might have been different.

The Comets will be looking for a few lucky bounces when they meet the Sockers tonight (7:35) at the Sports Arena in the second match of the best-of-five series.

As the team went through an informal practice yesterday on the beach in La Jolla, Jacobs asked the players to exercise their minds as well.

"I told them to visualize a door on the beach," said Jacobs. "I told them to walk through the door and imagine that they were

in a tranquil place, a place that gives them confidence. I told them to think about that place when they are playing."

Jacobs, 30, lived in Pacific Beach from 1976 to 1981 while he earned his doctorate from San Diego's California School of Professional Psychology. Before being hired by the Comets, he worked with cyclists on the United States Olympic team, a group that produced the most cycling medals in American Olympic history. Jacobs is based in Kansas City, where he is the president of a venture called "The Winning Edge."

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Sockers: Go for 2-0 bulge over Comets

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Comets defender Steve Pecher is one player who appears to have found the winning edge. Jacobs worked with Pecher to reduce his appearances in the penalty box, a habit that usually gives opponents the winning edge. Pecher is the MISL career leader in penalty minutes with 198.

The 6-0, 190-pound defender spent only 15 minutes in the box this season. Except for 1983-84, when Pecher missed most of the season with a shin fracture, it was the fewest minutes he has accumulated in any of his six years of pro soccer.

"Steve has a lot of energy," said Jacobs. "He had to learn how to focus his attention on playing the game. When he got angry, I wanted him to relax. He had to use that outburst of anger in a constructive way."

Several of the Comets use cassettes upon which Jacobs has taped relaxation programs.

Part 1 of the program is breathing exercises, which are meant to aid relaxation and encourage concentration. Part 2 is a step-by-step program of muscle relaxation, which starts at the head and moves to the feet. Part 3 is a discussion of mental relaxation, and Part 4, which is tailored to individual players, asks the listener to visualize his ideal performance during a match.

One of Jacobs' immediate tasks will be to convince Schwartz that he can repeat his unlikely performance of Wednesday night. The Comets goalie was the defensive star of the match, slapping away 37 of 41 shots by the Sockers. He denied five shots by Steve Zungul, nine shots by Branko Segota and allowed Jean Willrich only one goal on 16 attempts.

Schwartz said yesterday he was uncertain he could repeat such a performance.

"He was awesome," Jacobs said of the goalie. "But he has been doing the same thing all season long. Nobody has noticed, because it wasn't in a playoff game."

Jacobs will be trying to convince Schwartz that he surely will be awesome again tonight.

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So impressed was he by Schwartz's performance that Sockers coach Ron Newman, like a referee at a prizefight, held the goalie's hand in the air at the conclusion of Wednesday's match. Comets coach Rick Benben later complained, "What, does he think we have only one player on the team?" Said Newman yesterday: "I couldn't very well hold up everybody's hands, could I? The smell would be awful." ... The sports book at the Las Vegas Stardust Hotel and Casino has the Sockers as 2½-goal favorites over the Comets tonight.



Tonight's Game

THE MATCH: Kansas City Comets (0-1) at San Diego Sockers (1-0), Major Indoor Soccer League playoffs, best-of-five quarterfinal round, Sports Arena, 7:35 p.m.

RADIO/TV: KLZZ-AM (600). No TV.

SOCKERS

Leading scorers in playoffs: Brian Quinn (2 goals, 0 assists, 2 points); Jean Willrich (1-0-1); Hugo Perez (1-0-1); Kaz Deyna (0-1-1); Branko Segota (0-1-1).
Injuries: midfielder Steve Daley (strained right calf).
Goalies: Jim Gorsek (1-0, 2.50 goals-against average); Zoltan Toth (0-0, 0.00 GAA).

COMETS

Leading scorers in playoffs: Greg Makowski (1-0-1); Angelo DiBernardo (1-0-1); Damir Haramina (1-0-1); Laurie Abrahams (0-1-1); Charlie Fajkus (0-1-1); Tasso Koutsoukos (0-1-1).
Injuries: None reported.
Goalies: Mannv Schwartz (0-1, 3.33 GAA).