

Can Express hold on 'til Trevor arrives?

By C.J. RISAK

Spring. The baseball season is just a couple of weeks away. College basketball is into its final game, while both pro basketball and hockey are nearly into the playoffs.

And the soccer season has started. If you didn't know it, you can be excused, because soccer isn't one of America's established sports. Professional soccer is entering just its second season in Detroit, and, as every team is apt to do at the opening of a new season, the Detroit Express start the year with unbridled enthusiasm.

But the team has good reason to be optimistic. After all, didn't they win their division in their inaugural year? And even though they lost their first playoff series, didn't they make a run at the title?

And didn't they make some transac-

tion over the winter that can do nothing but strengthen the team?

The answer to these questions is yes, but the most important reason to be optimistic is that Trevor Francis is returning.

The darling of Detroit, the toast of the town, this 24-year-old Englishman will return and try and lead the Express to a division title and a possible Soccer Bowl berth.

In case you're new to the area or never read the sports pages or are a hermit recently returned to civilization, here's what Francis did in his first season in the North American Soccer League (NASL). He played 19 games with the Express last year and scored 22 goals.

DETROIT WAS ONLY 5-6 when he arrived, but the Express immediately

ran off 15 wins in their next 19 contests. Included in those games was a 10-0 romp over San Jose, in which Francis scored five goals.

It was quite a coup for the management of the Express to resign Francis for the coming season. It took some lengthy negotiations and a transfer from Francis' English team, the Birmingham City Blues, to the Nottingham Forest team. The deal cost Nottingham \$2.3 million, and it included the rights to have Francis play in the NASL.

He won't join the team until sometime in June, depending how Nottingham does in the English playoffs. But even though he will play only half the NASL season, Francis will be getting quite a hefty sum.

The Express front office apparently figures he's worth it. His scoring ability and popularity have made him the franchise.

But that still leaves the Express with a problem: How do they replace Francis, or what do they do until he gets here?

"We struggled a bit last year, until we got Trevor and (Alan) Brazil," said Ken Furphy, the Express' head coach. "We'll just have to keep using the players we have now and do the best we can."

Logical enough. But it will require some changes in the lineup, and it be difficult to replace the firepower that's missing when Francis isn't in there.

"We'll probably put my son (Keith Furphy) in Trevor's spot. You know, Trevor is a very good finisher. We'll miss that."

That is a proper choice of wording. In the Express' last exhibition game against the NASL champion New York Cosmos, Francis finished them himself, scoring six goals in an 8-2 romp.

Francis, who was flown in just for the game with the Cosmos and then flown back to England, admitted afterwards that "I haven't scored this many since school." He was the one doing the teaching last Tuesday.

BUT WHY FLY Francis in just for one game?

"It was done to boost season ticket sales," Furphy said. "It was a lopsided victory, but it didn't affect our morale much. The only drawback was that Angus Moffat didn't get much playing time."

However, Furphy was more concerned with the beginning of the regular season, rather than with when Francis would return. The team has lost six players from last year, including four who played extensively: Mickey Leach, Alan Brazil, Ian Davis and goalie Steve Hardwick.

But the team's acquisitions may have been better than their losses. The Express' front office signed Johann

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Scharmann, a highly regarded Austrian midfielder, and Jim Brown, an up-and-coming goalkeeper from Scotland.

"Scharmann will replace Leach, and Brown will replace Hardwick. Both are better players than those they are replacing."

Furphy's other big problem is depth. "Ian Davies is gone, and he played

left back," Furphy said. "We've got Steve Sergeant there now, but that only leaves us with four backs. Injuries could cause us a problem."

Starting in front of goalkeeper Brown, in addition to Sergeant, will be Sam Oates, Eddie Colquhoun and Paul Hunter. Scharmann will be the left midfielder, while David Bradford, one

of the team's leading scorers last year, will start on the right. When Francis joins the club, he and Danny Vaughn will hold down the strikers positions, with Keith Furphy and Brian Tinnion as wings.

FURPHY PLANS TO use several combinations in the front line until Francis returns.

While it may take the Express a while to find themselves this year, Furphy figures it may not take their team's long to overtake them.

"I think Chicago will be a bit stronger, but you can never tell. You do your best and hope the ball bounces right for you."

"I'm always optimistic going into the season. But leave the forecasting to the general managers, not coaches."

Part of Furphy's optimism might be based on some promising young play-

ers on the Express' roster. "Bob Rohrbach and Neils Guldbjerg both look good, but they have to develop a bit yet."

Rohrbach is one of three native Americans on the squad. Vaughn is the only starter from the States, with reserve defenseman Hal Partenheimer the third.

The squad also includes two Canadians, an Austrian (Scharmann), a Dane (Guldbjerg), a Yugoslav and eight from the British Isles.

The team will be on the road for its first two regular season contests. The Express will open at the Pontiac Silverdome on April 14 against Memphis.

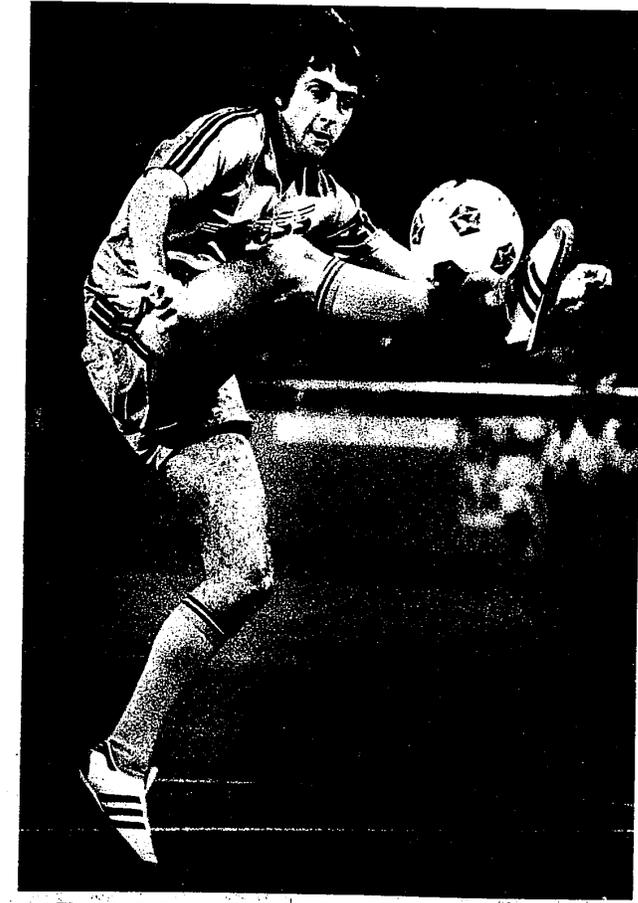
So, it may take a while before the Express gets rolling — about the middle of June, when a young Englishman nicknamed the "Wizard" scores his first goal for the Express.



Express Coach Ken Furphy.



Making the defensive play on one of the New York Cosmos is Eddie Colquhoun (with beard) and Sam Oates (No. 5). Both will be counted on to anchor the Express defense during the season. (Staff photos by Mindy Saunders)



The man who the Express are depending on in the second half of the season — Trevor Francis.

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