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COMMENTARY

# Paul Krumpe on the key college soccer issues, American talent growth, and his Olympic & World Cup experiences

by **Scott French** (/publications/author/138/scott-french/) @ScottJFrench  
(<https://www.twitter.com/ScottJFrench>), Feb 17, 2021

Soccer was a secondary priority for **Paul Krumpe** when he arrived at UCLA, where he planned to work toward a career in aeronautical engineering. Then **Sigi Schmid** moved him from central midfield to right back, and everything changed.



Krumpe was part of the pioneering generation of players who paved the road to what American soccer has become, a key figure in prodding the U.S. toward an impressive performance at the 1988 Olympics and then as part of the group that led the U.S. into the 1990 World Cup, its first in 40 years.

He retired in 1991, went into coaching, and since 1998 has guided Los Angeles' Loyola Marymount University's men's program in the hugely competitive West Coast Conference. His teams have won 195 games, made seven NCAA tournament appearances -- the most recent in 2019, when the Lions went 6-1-0 to finish second in the WCC -- and captured

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conference championships in 2010 and 2013. Among the players he's prodded toward the pros are Cruz Azul's **Rafael Baca**, formerly of the San Jose Earthquakes, and MLS players **Bobby Burling**, **Arturo Torres** and **Kevin Novak**.

LMU kicked off its COVID-delayed season Feb. 12 with a 1-0 win over UCLA, was picked to win this spring's West Coast title by the conference coaches, and Krumpe says it could be one of his best sides, if not the best. And the entire group could be back next fall.

Krumpe spoke with Soccer America about 1990, the state of the college game and player development, and what it's like to coach a team in one of the country's most impacted COVID areas.

**SOCCER AMERICA: What's it like coaching a team and preparing a team in a pandemic?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** It's just a lot more attention to detail in everything that we're doing. I mean, the guys have to be socially distanced as they're coming out to training. They have to wear masks while they train. It was kind of fun the other day. We actually had a scrimmage [a 0-0 draw with Fullerton-based NAIA school Hope International], and they didn't have to wear a mask. The coaching staff is still masked-up.

We're doing our best to keep them as safe as possible. I think the majority of our guys realize how important this is to protect everybody on our campus and not just our team.

**SA: Los Angeles has been hit hard by the coronavirus. You need responsible players, because they need to be responsible away from the team, too.**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Absolutely. I mean, we run into those kind of issues all the time, and I have to remind everybody all the time, you know, "Anybody you interact with outside of campus, if you're not doing the right things when you're away from us, you're essentially bringing that back to the team." So, there's a lot of trust involved with 18- to 21-year-olds. And I feel like I've got a very mature team that has been through quite a bit in this past year, just like everybody else. It is what it is. We're dealing with it as best we can, and we've got to trust that they're doing the right things when they're away from us.



**Ronaldo Brown (white jersey) scored the Lions' gamewinner in its 2020-21 season opening victory over UCLA.**

**SA: Losing the fall season gave you more time to work with players individually and in social-distanced team activities, and it leads to only a nine-game season.**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** And essentially that means that every game is worth double, right? You're usually playing an 18-game season. So, you know, a win is like two wins, a loss is like two losses.

**SA: Have you had COVID setbacks?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** All the way back into the fall and before this spring season started we've had issues with guys testing positive. And so everybody has to go through -- just like everybody else is doing -- the quarantine or the isolation periods before they're allowed back out. And then even when they're allowed back out, there's a delay in how quickly they can return to full-capacity training. So it's just adding little pieces that we have to put

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together before every time we step on the field. We've got to make sure that we're abiding by all the guidelines and making sure we're taking care of the student-athletes as best as we can.

**SA: What's been the toughest part in dealing with the pandemic for the team and players? Are there silver linings?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** I think it's been really hard, especially for the incoming freshmen, because as much as a team plays together on the field, they also like to hang out together off the field, and with COVID they're really prevented from doing that. There was a little bit of a silver lining in not having a season in the fall, that we did have about two months that we got to train. And incoming freshmen never have that opportunity. Generally, you get on for a week and a half [in August], and then they've got to jump right into a college season. So there's been a much better timeline for them to get up to speed. So that's one big silver lining.

The other huge silver lining is the NCAA determined that this year, even if they play, the whole team, it doesn't count as a year. So you can repeat -- every one of these guys, if they started the year as a senior, they can play again next year as a senior.

That brings up a whole new crop of problems, because you generally have a senior class that graduates and moves on, and their scholarship money is then available to go back to an incoming freshman class. Well, they are trying to arrange for those seniors to stay on and slow down or finish their degree and start a graduate program and still give them scholarship money. You don't have that scholarship money available for that incoming freshman class. So there's been a whole new set of problems with that. And it's going to exacerbate next year, because nobody used a year of eligibility.

There is a possibility that this whole team could return. And then what do you do with having less scholarship money to try to bring in an additional freshman class? It's going to have impacts, you know, throughout the year. It's not just "one year and move on" in college athletics.



**SA: How does all of this impact guys who will go on in the game, guys who want to play professionally but haven't signed or didn't make themselves available for the MLS draft? Gerardo Lopez, an All-West Region defender in 2019, comes immediately to mind.**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Right, so we work out a deal with him, and probably the other guy would be [Jamaican forward] **Duhaney Williams**. And [Swiss midfielder] **Bastien Oberli**. We have several guys that probably would have been considered.

We had several guys leave. **Francis Avoce** signed a professional contract in Cyprus. **Gaetan Roux**, a transfer from Virginia Tech, left and is playing over in Europe. And **Alfredo Cortez**, who transferred in from Cal State Fullerton for a year, is signed with one of the local teams. So some guys decided to move on and go ahead and sign a pro contract.

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And then the other guys, we worked out situations for them to either continue to finish their undergraduate degree or to start a master's program.

That's what **Gerardo Lopez** ended up doing. That's what Duhaney Williams is doing. That's what Bastien Oberli's doing. That's what [defender] **C.J. Wood** is doing. They finished their undergraduate degrees and now are in a graduate program. And to be honest, I love it. Because it's like I get an extra year out of these guys, and if we can make it work, we can get another season out of them next year. But it's going to be a real tough go to figure it out financially.

**SA: When you look at the opportunities these kinds of players have today -- where MLS is, what the USL has become -- and you think back to when you were coming out of UCLA in 1985 and opportunities just weren't there, do you wish you'd come through in a different era or were 20 years old now?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Look at the explosion of the Americans playing over in Europe right now and all the young guys that are deciding not to go to college and sign with the MLS clubs as well. It's pretty exciting.

I knew that time was coming. I always thought there was a mushroom ready to take over. It took a while, but we finally got all these guys that are coming of college age now, and they've been coached by people who have played the game. When I was growing up, I had one coach, and it wasn't until I was maybe 14, who had ever played soccer before. To have all these club coaches who are out there who have played at a high level, played in college, maybe professionally -- to get that experience out to these young American kids is pretty exciting.

There were opportunities for me. I went No. 9 in the MISL draft. I mean, it's just ridiculous, though, when you think back on my national team career, that really for the first two or three years I was getting paid by an indoor soccer team, playing indoor all year long, and then get called into a national team camp and try to compete with international opponents [through] indoor soccer. It was crazy, you know? Totally different game. It's like the difference between running an ice hockey shift and then trying to go play 90 minutes straight against Argentina outdoor. Crazy.

But there were opportunities there. For a couple of years, I played for the Chicago Sting and made a living out of that. And then when that club folded, I just decided it was time to move on. And fortunately, that was when [U.S. Soccer] signed us to year-round contracts. I got to do that for a few years, where I didn't have a team to play on, necessarily, but I would come home and train on my own and then get called back into a camp. There were a lot of obstacles, and there weren't as many opportunities. But it is what it is. It was a different time.

It was a little disappointing that we weren't able to celebrate as a group this year, because this would have been 30 years since our 1990 World Cup. That team was pretty close, and we had plans to get together at a national team game, and then we just weren't able to do it because of COVID.

**SA: Your generation, the one that built up to and competed in the 1990 World Cup, represents the first real step towards what we have now. You've got to take pride in that.**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Oh, by all means. I mean, I think my greatest soccer moment, in all honesty, was as a college player winning an NCAA championship [in 1985] at UCLA. I mean, I was a captain with **Paul Caligiuri** and **Dale Ervine**. That was the ultimate.

But for our group to be able to come and qualify for the 1990 World Cup, when we haven't qualified for 40 years, that's a long time. To go from 1950 to 1990 and not qualify. I take a lot of pride of being a part of that group that got us back onto the international stage. And then you think about how many years we qualified up until this last World Cup. It really did start a trend in the right direction for American soccer.

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## ITALIA WC 90

# WORLD CUP 1990

### Krumpe's no rocket scientist — but he could've been

**Just when it looked like he would miss final-round World Cup qualifying play through injury, Paul Krumpe recovered and contributed both on and off the field. He's only 26, but Krumpe is an elder statesman on a young U.S. national team now preparing for Italia '90.**

**By Doug Cress**

I didn't take a rocket scientist to assess the chances in Paul Krumpe's life. Or did it?

He could have been a rocket scientist, you know. Or at least an aviation engineer. He could have kept his job at McDonnell Douglas streamlining MD-80 airliners, worrying about things like runway length and take-off weights. A secretary would've screened his calls and all he'd have to worry about was when the pension plan would kick in.

Instead, he was a soccer player with a screw in his right foot, a scar on his right hip, a baby on the way and an very uncertain future.

That was Krumpe last summer, several months after suffering a stress fracture in his foot. Idle since March, nothing seemed to go right and not even his old place on the U.S. national team seemed secure.

"Looking back, I find it kind of amazing that I could go eight months without playing," Krumpe said recently. "I've never been through that before. Rehabilitation was especially tough because for the longest time I couldn't do anything. Then when I could, I had to do it by myself and push myself individually. I've never had to do anything without teammates before."

Yet the U.S. national team defender doggedly stuck to a

Paul Krumpe beats Trinidad and Tobago's Lemmon Lewis to the ball in the Nov. 19 1-0 win that saw the United States through to the World Cup final. Krumpe's playing in his first qualifier of the final series after a series of injuries, gave an solid account of himself in the 62 minutes he spent on the field. (Photo by Jon Van Worden)



staring at each other, amazed. Paul of the injury became apparent. wasn't any better. All this was left

**SA: You were on the field against Trinidad & Tobago when Caligiuri scored on that "shot heard 'round the world" to qualify for 1990. A huge goal, but it's sometimes forgotten that it was an early goal and there was still much game to play. What memories stand out for you?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** It was in the first half. My story with that is I was a starter with the national team for the two years previous, but I got a stress fracture in my foot and missed the previous seven qualifiers. So I was recovering for about six months and Bob Gansler tested me -- I had to do a fitness test when I came back from my injury -- and I did really well, and Bob Gansler started me in that final qualifier. It was an amazing experience.

I mean, it was awesome to be able to play it. I think I was fit, but I wasn't game-fit, so I lasted about 60, 65 minutes, and then he subbed me out. But, yeah, I was on the field when Cal scored that goal. It was in the first half [in the 30th minute]. And we did have to play that whole second half, I think, back and not giving up a goal. Because we needed to win that game. We couldn't tie or we wouldn't advance. We had to win. So that was a memorable moment and something I take a lot of pride in being a part of that team on that field on that day and getting us back into the international soccer scene.

**SA: A year earlier you played a big role in that 5-1 win over Jamaica that got you into the final round of Concacaf qualifying.**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** It was a big deal for me, because even back before that, in the Olympic qualifiers, I think my greatest game as a national team player ... we had gone up to Canada in a home-and-home series in order to qualify for the [1988 Seoul] Olympics. And we lost to them, 2-0, and we came back to St. Louis, and I scored the first two goals as a right back, and **Jim Gabarra** got the third goal. And we beat them in the total goals.

I think I had a goal and an assist in that Jamaica game, and that's just the way it was. Everybody had a chance to contribute. It was very much a team effort. It wasn't like we had a **Ronaldo** to count on or **Lionel Messi** or, you know, somebody that was going to carry us. Each one of the guys felt the weight on their shoulders to produce for the team because that was the only way we were going to win.

Those were terrific years for me. I love those guys on that team and representing the country. That was a big deal, being from Torrance, Calif., where, like I said, I didn't have a coach who had necessarily played soccer until I was 13, 14 years old. It was pretty exciting to be a part of that. And with **David Vanole**, who was from [nearby] Manhattan Beach, and Cal [Caligiuri], who was also a teammate at UCLA. It was pretty special.





**SA: One of your teammates in that era was Chico Borja, who sadly passed away on Jan. 25. What a player he was!**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** I played against Chico when I was in Chicago and he was in Wichita. He was a magician as an indoor player. Absolute magic on the turf. Then I got opportunities to play with him while qualifying for the Olympics in 1988. He actually assisted on my biggest goal for the national team, when we beat Canada, 3-0. He flicked a perfect ball back to me as he was spinning away from goal, and I was able to loop a shot over the Canadian goalkeeper for our first-half goal.

Chico had a smile from ear to ear that absolutely lifted the spirits of anyone and everyone he interacted with.

**SA: What memories stick with you from the 1988 Olympics?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** The fact that I got to start every game was awesome. The opening match, when we step out and we're a goal up on Argentina with 10 or 11 minutes left, and the only way they tie us is with a penalty. That was an unbelievable result, right?

And then we turn around against South Korea, and Dave Vanole had the game of his life, because in all honesty, we probably could have lost that game, 10-0, and we tied 0-0. And then we lost to [the Soviet Union, the eventual gold medalists], 4-2, and they were better than us, and they had **[Oleksiy] Mykhaylychenko**, who was just dominant in midfield. I think they were up, 3-0, at halftime, and we lost, 4-2.

We played a very difficult group and did pretty well, considering how young we were. I was only 24 and I was one of the older guys on that team. We did have **Rick Davis** and **Kevin Crow**, so we had a couple older guys, but other than that, you know, 23-, 24-year-olds. We were very young. And I know that's the way it is in the Olympics now, with an under-23 tournament, but that's not what it was then.

**SA: The 1990 World Cup was a very different experience for you, in that you didn't take the field.**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** I was injured. I pulled what's now called a hip-flexor. I played a little bit in the [tuneups against] Switzerland and Liechtenstein, and I just wasn't 100 percent. And the team needed me to be 100 percent for Gans [Coach **Bob Gansler**] to put me in. So it was disappointing to go through the experience and not have the opportunity to play. I wasn't the only one, but, you know, Gans did a really good job of trying to reward the guys that did a good job of helping to get us there, too.

You know, **Eric Wynalda**, if he doesn't get thrown out in the first game [against Czechoslovakia], I don't think that's a 5-1 game. I think we as a group probably impressed ourselves and realized at the time that we could compete at this level when we played our second game against Italy and lost, 1-0, in front of 80,000 Italians in their national stadium.

And really almost equalized in the closing minutes of that game, with **[Peter] Vermes'** shot that went through the keeper's legs. I think we really understood at that point, "Hey, we can do this, we can play at this level." The big moment where, you know, the sky's the limit. This team can perform. We can.

Fast-forward to today with all of these young Americans over in Europe, it is just going to get better and better for the U.S.

**SA: You retired soon after and began your coaching career. How did playing for Sigi Schmid at UCLA influence you as a coach as you were starting. What kind of role did he play in you becoming a coach?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Oh, it was huge. He was my mentor. I always knew I wanted to be a college coach. That was my goal. And when I was done playing, I went to Sigi and asked what should I do? Well, club soccer was a thing, but it wasn't as big of a thing as it is now. And he said, "Well, you've got to be coaching somewhere." So when I was done playing with the national team, I got a teaching and coaching job at West Torrance High School, my alma mater, and did that for four years. I coached cross country and soccer and track and taught math, and it was the busiest four years of my life. But I kind of found my way in the coaching ranks.

I obviously would use a lot of what I learned from my national team coaches -- Bob Gansler and **Lothar Osiander** and **John Kowalski**, even **Bora [Milutinovic]** a little bit, although Bora really didn't work for me. But Sigi was my mentor, and my assistant coach was **Steve Sampson** at UCLA. I have some mentors that I was able to start my career with. It took awhile, and then four years into it, there was an opening at UCLA, and Sigi hired me and David Vanole, and the two of us were his assistants for three years before I landed the Loyola Marymount job.

This is my dream job. I love what I do. I love the level that I can coach at. These guys are smart, they're athletic and they're willing to learn. And it's fun, and I love it. And, you know, Sigi had a big heart. I mean, he was my whole experience in college prior to getting the LMU job, coaching with him or playing for him at UCLA. I couldn't have had a better mentor to help guide me.

And then what's great now is, obviously, I've got **Kyle Schmid**, his youngest son, coaching with me. He's my associate head coach. And in all honesty, when I end up leaving here at LMU, I fully expect him to take over the reins. And, you know, he's fantastic as well. And it's pretty easy at times, because when I hear Kyle speak, he sounds very much like his dad. And so there's still a little bit of a Sigi voice, you know, behind everything that Kyle says. So as much as he's gone, I still feel like I hear him just about every day.

**SA: Sigi grew up in Torrance, too, and had an outsized presence in the South Bay soccer community, of course. Did you have experiences with him before going to UCLA?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Yeah, well, I was a pretty good student. I think I had almost a 3.9 GPA coming out of high school. I was a central midfielder coming out of West High, and I remember my first contact with Sigi. He showed up at the senior all-star game and spoke to me afterwards. And he said, "What are your plans for next year?" And I said, "Well, I'm planning on going to UCLA," knowing that he was the coach, and he was like, "Great. If you need any help, let me know."

I didn't get into UCLA on my own. I got rejected at first and had to appeal and got in. And to be honest, the plan was to go to UCLA and become an engineer. I was an aerospace engineering major, and soccer was kind of a secondary thing. I redshirted my first year, came back out in the spring, and kind of just started, and then was able to get into a situation where I started in and played every game for the next four years. So that was my experience with Sigi.

The amazing thing about Sigi is, you know, like I said, I was a central midfielder, and he immediately said, "You're not going to be a central midfielder in college or the next level, but you're so fit. Let's see if you can do it at right back." And he turned me into essentially the best right back in the country once I was done at UCLA.

**SA: How would you describe your evolution as a coach at LMU and how you see the game?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** I mentioned Kyle before. I've got some great assistant coaches with Kyle Schmid and **Michael Oseguera** and **Christian Madrigal** right now. But I had **Mathes Mennell** and **Brian Irvin** and **Mike Erush** -- these guys are all really good coaches, and I leaned on them a lot. You know, the game has changed quite a bit since I started coaching in college soccer 23 years ago. So if we were still doing things my way, the old way, I don't think we'd be as good as we are right now.

I lean on these guys to help me get messages through to the team as best as we can. And they're fantastic with it. And I'm learning every day as I adjust with the changes of the game. I think you have to. If you don't, it just becomes stagnant.

**SA: How has recruiting changed since the rise of the academies and younger players signing pro contracts while in or just out of high school?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** How it's changed here, I would say the first 20 years, I never recruited an international player. As a former U.S. international, I always wanted to give my scholarship money to American players. And just in the last couple of years, we've reached out and brought in some Jamaicans -- Duhaney Williams and **Ronaldo Brown**. We brought in Swiss international **Bastien Oberli**. Gaetan Roux, who's a French kid. Probably our best player right now is a sophomore [midfielder] named **Noel Caliskan** from Germany.

I really want American kids to continue to develop. But it is the case now that if we want to compete, we have to look for those best international kids as well. And so that is one big thing that's changed with me just recently in the past two or three years.

**SA: LMU was one of the first schools really proactive in bringing in Latino players. What is that landscape like today? Are Latino kids, not just at LMU but in general, getting the opportunities in college soccer that they deserve?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** I know I always try to look for the best players that I can find when I'm offering, whatever ethnicity those guys might be. I think when I first started recruiting, half my team was Hispanic and about half my team were Caucasian kids. And I thought, you know, we blended them well together, and they worked well. We're much more diverse now with a mix of African-American kids, we've got Jamaicans, we've got some Hispanic kids, but we've also got a lot of Europeans and a lot of Caucasian-Americans. So, I mean, it's different.

I mean, as much as I'd like to think that we do our best to bring in the best players, sometimes you get overlooked, and it doesn't always work out. And then the other part of that question is that financially it becomes a bit of a stretch at times, especially at a school like this. If there's a family that does not have any money, it's very difficult to piece everything together for that student-athlete. If a poor kid is \$5,000 short of a \$70,000 school, they might not be able to come. Whereas a wealthy kid who's \$5,000 short in what he's being offered of a \$70,000 school, that's a snap, right? So the socioeconomic conditions make a big impact as well, especially at private schools.



**LMU senior Gerardo Lopez, a San Diego product, played for several Development Academy clubs (<https://lmulions.com/sports/mens-soccer/roster/gerardo-lopez/10161>).**

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**SA: What is college soccer's role in the game today? How as that changed as we've seen the rise of the academies?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** There's a little bit of deterioration from the college game now vs. maybe 20 years ago. Because you've got a lot of these young kids that are making decisions to bypass college and jump straight to a professional career.

Where it's headed? Before COVID, the plan was, at least on the men's side, to get into this year-round model. I think that would have been a huge step for us, kind of what we're doing now and just playing one game a week. That's what our game needs. It has been ridiculous for the 20 years that I've been doing this where we're playing a Friday night game on a road trip and then turning around and playing on a Sunday at noon. These guys are laying everything out on the field, giving everything they can. And then you're asking them to turn around less than, what, 36 hours later and do it again? It's just been insane.

This year-round model to play both in fall and in the spring I think is where college soccer needs to go. I really do.

**SA: We still see players coming out of college who are ready for the pros. There's still a developmental component to the college game?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** College soccer can develop those kids who are not quite at the top of their game as a senior in high school or a junior in high school and help them become really good players.

If you were going to take my team today and play it against my team from 20 years ago, I think it'd be a very competitive match. And overall. I mean, there's no easy games in college soccer. The parity is insane. Any team can compete with any other team and come up with a result. Whereas maybe 20 years ago, there was more discrepancy in the level of the top teams versus the lower-tier teams. There's a lot more parity now.

**SA: What's the state of the youth landscape following the collapse of U.S. Soccer's Development Academy? What are the pros and cons? The reasons for optimism?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Hopefully, [the replacements for the USSF] Development Academy are just as good, because I think there is a little bit of a void there at that level. There were a lot of good coaches who were doing a good job working with those kids and developing them in the Development Academy. I'm sure there'll be something that'll jump in in the meantime. And in the meantime, we're kind of in a lull because of the fact that nobody used the year of eligibility this year, and next year those seniors can all return if we want to return them, so that I feel badly for the kids who are seniors and juniors in high school right now, because it's going to be a more difficult path for them to find a spot on a college roster the next year or so.

**SA: Are the athletes that are coming to college better prepared because of the club landscape?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Yeah, exactly. I mean, man for man, I think the each one of the student-athletes that come in nowadays are better than the student-athletes 20 years ago, Man for man. ... The Development Academies have done a great job of developing and getting every one of these kids ready to have that opportunity to step in immediately. I think it was more select back in the day, and then it was up to us as college coaches to get everybody up to speed as quickly as possible. Whereas nowadays, I think those kids are ready to go from the get-go. A lot more of them. Almost all of them.

**SA: When you look at the rise of American players, in MLS and abroad, where does the credit belong? How is that balanced?**

**PAUL KRUMPE:** Well, like I said back in the beginning, I think we're seeing that mushroom that I was talking about before, that now every kid, if they're good at all and they've been playing on a club team, they're playing for a man or a woman who has played in college or played as a professional. Whereas maybe 20 years ago, you know, maybe there weren't as many of those coaches out there. I think they're getting a jump start in terms of the coaching that these guys have been getting through their younger years. And I think we're seeing that kind of blossom right now before our eyes.

*Photos courtesy of LMU Athletics.*

**Santiago 1314** (/people/Santiago/), February 19, 2021 at 2:04 a.m.

Great to see a Writer who gets the Importance of the '88 Olympic Team, Hope The USSF is Going to try and Rebuild the MNT thru this years Olympic Team. Paul is a Class Act, glad to see him Succeed. Food poisoning by Host Pizza place in Pusan decimated the Starting Lineup, And Dino had to Save the Day.

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