

A leader, on and off the field

Former JMU All-American benefits from CAA connections BY DAVID DRIVER

As a senior for the Dukes soccer team in 2006, **Kurt Morsink** was an all-CAA player who led the team in goals (nine), assists (six) and points (24). One observer who was impressed was Kris Kelderman, then an assistant coach with Colonial Athletics Association rival George Mason.

"Kurt is a total player, not only a very well-rounded player but also a guy you know right away understands the game pretty well," Kelderman says. "[As a student player,] he came across as much more experienced than all of the other players."

By the start of the spring 2007 Major League Soccer SuperDraft, Kelderman was the assistant coach under Curt Onalfo for the Kansas City Wizards. Kelderman made sure to inform Onalfo, a long-time friend and colleague, about Morsink.

"I saw him play a good number of times to have a good feeling about him," Kelderman recalls. "I felt he was the type of player who could step in as a rookie and cope with the challenges of the MLS. I was very pro-Kurt Morsink."

Onalfo trusted his assistant coach, and Kansas City drafted the former JMU All-American midfielder in the fourth round.

Morsink played with Kansas City from 2007 to 2009. Onalfo and Kelderman were let go by the Wizards during the 2009 season, but that was not the end of their connections to Morsink. Onalfo was named head coach of D.C. United prior to the 2010 season, and in March the most successful team in MLS history signed Morsink. Shortly after, Kelderman was back in familiar territory as D.C. United's assistant coach.

"I was very happy," Morsink says. "Any chance I get to play for the biggest club in the league is a good thing. It was good for three years in Kansas City, but I am happy here. For me, it is better to be in D.C. since I have friends here." On Aug. 4, Onalfo was fired as the United coach, but Kelderman remains an assistant under new coach Ben Olsen.

JMU men's soccer coach Tom Martin, who coached Morsink as a student-athlete, was able to see Morsink play for D.C. United at RFK Stadium during the 2010 season. Morsink, a kinesiology

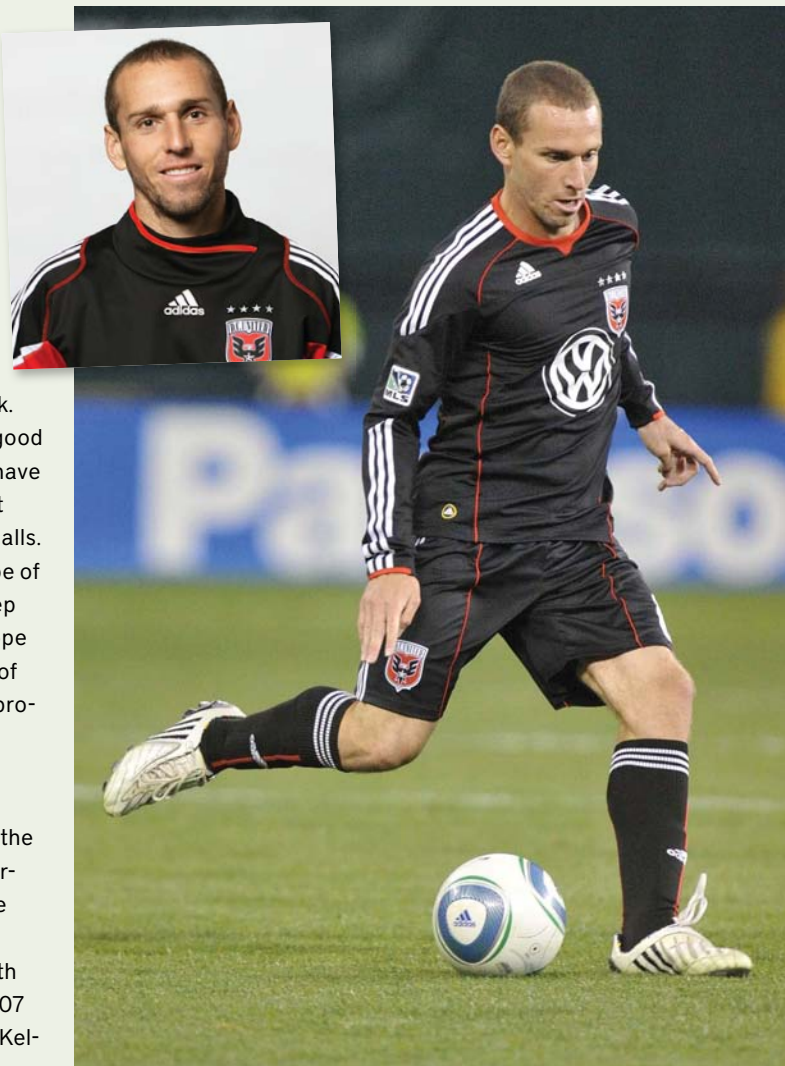
major, finished his JMU career ranked fourth on the school's all-time assist list (29), fifth on the points list (93) and seventh in goals (32). He was named to the CAA Silver Anniversary team (1985–2010).

"Coach Martin was not only a great coach but a great mentor," says Morsink. "He helped prepare me for this league. It was a big transition, and Tom Martin was extremely important in that."

During the 2010 season Morsink played in 10 of the first 17 games with nine starts for D.C. United. During a July game in San Jose, Calif., Onalfo was upset with the team's first-half performance: "I let them know it," he says.

Morsink also spoke up about the effort to his teammates. And, as a native of Costa Rica, Morsink speaks his mind in both English and Spanish. "On-field communication goes from English to Spanish real quick," he says.

"Kurt's best quality is that he is a guy that brings people together," Onalfo says. "He is a guy we value in the locker room. He is very charismatic. I like what he brings off the field as much as what he brings on the field. You need guys who are an extension of yourself as a coach. I view him as one of those guys." ■



Kurt Morsink ('06), a midfielder for MLS D.C. United, receives high praise from coaches and teammates for his leadership on and off the soccer field.