USWNT head coach Hayes brings unique personality back to the country that 'made' her

By MEG LINEHAN
The Athletic

PETER DEJONG | The Associated Press

Coach Emma Hayes directs Chelsea during a Women's Champions League quarterfinal match against Ajax on March 19 in Amsterdam. Hayes is the new head coach of the U.S. Women's National Team.

Emma Hayes won her fifth consecutive Women's Super League title with Chelsea on Saturday. On Wednesday, she arrived in Newark off her flight from Heathrow, and by Thursday morning she was awaiting a whirlwind media tour introducing her to an American audience that she, in some form, already knew.

But before the car picked her up from her hotel to begin that tour, she took a walk in the morning through Central Park, early as it was.

New York City is a place where anonymity and fame can happen simultaneously, where the incoming head coach of the U.S. women's national team can take a long, meandering walk through an often-bustling park and have that moment to herself before the pressure fully sets in.

In a few months, after she takes charge of the U.S. women's national team at the Paris Olympics, Hayes might not have the leisure of taking a walk anywhere without being recognized.

At her first stop on Thursday at 30 Rock to appear on "Today," Hayes delivered the perfect line for those watching at home, unfamiliar with her journey as a coach — a winding two decades that ended with her in the highest profile coaching role in women's soccer.

"I'm lucky to be born in England, but made in America."

For Emma Hayes, who spent many years in her early career as a coach in New York, the paths of Central Park — and the city itself — already felt like home.

Hours after her first national TV hit, and after an early summer thunderstorm blew through Manhattan, Hayes settled in at the head of a table in a conference room at the NWSL offices near Bryant Park. Behind her, a massive window showed the streets below, the sidewalks filled, sunlight filtering in between the skyscrapers.

"Walking around New York, you can just imagine me getting off at Newark yesterday and thinking, 'I remember those days,'" Hayes told the small roundtable of reporters assembled for her first day on the job. Hayes lived in New York for seven years, and she remembered them well both for all of the challenges they presented a young coach, but also for the fulfillment they provided, and the lifetime friendships.

She had first come to New York from England having coached a bit in some youth programs in Liverpool and London, with her playing career ended years before thanks to a skiing accident as a teenager.

"(I was) fighting to stay in the country on different visas," she recalled. "Wondering where I'm going to get enough to pay the rent in the next upcoming block. What am I going to do next?"

She coached teams in Syosset and Port Washington (both in suburban Long Island) and said she spent "many a time underneath the Throgs Neck" – referring to the Throgs Neck bridge that links the boroughs of Queens and the Bronx, which overlooks a soccer field at Little Bay Park.

For a while, Hayes said, she had an apartment in Washington Heights, near the northern tip of Manhattan. She used to look out at the George Washington Bridge, take her walks then in Fort Tryon Park. It's easy to imagine a 20-something Hayes wandering through that bucolic park's numerous features: the heather garden, blooming with colors overlooking the Hudson River; the Cloisters, the Met's medieval art collection housed in a castle; maybe through the Billings Arcade down below, a stone arch essentially created as a Gilded Age driveway.

Hayes, in many ways, has contributed to the mythologizing of those early days.

"I've got so many fond memories of turning up in Long Island with a backpack and a thousand dollars and working for clubs across the whole of Long Island and Westchester and New York City," she said in her introductory Q&A with U.S. Soccer, published in November. "I've experienced everything from intramural soccer, recreational Sunday soccer, to the collegiate game, to USL, to the pro game, to state ODP, regionals."

On Thursday, she brought up many of those same organizations again, mentioning friends like Lisa Cole, a longtime coach with experience at the college and professional levels in the U.S.

"My journey has been bottom-up, so I have such an appreciation, not just of the landscape, but my journey," Hayes said last week. "I've worked hard to get to this point. You can dream for something — we all have dreams — but it's not often your dreams become reality."

It wasn't a long leap from her own story to that of the American dream, but Hayes tied both to her future with the USWNT.

"I always grew up with that notion of this whole American dream concept that you can come to the country, work in a certain way – and as a woman coming from England, trust me, I never felt more supported than I did when I worked in the U.S.," she said. "To work my way up through the system, to now be the head coach for the USWNT, as far as I'm concerned, I will give it absolutely everything I've got to make sure I uphold the traditions of this team."

Hayes's nostalgia-heavy trip to New York City only lasted about 48 hours before she was off to Denver for her first camp with the USWNT, but it provided a reminder of what's changed in the time since.

"As a parent, I know where the toy shops are now," Hayes said, noting with a smile she had passed a few already on Thursday. The presence of her son, Harry, had played a role in her departure from Chelsea, as the long hours and grind of the club season proved incompatible with solo parenthood.

"Everybody's under pressure, everybody's got to get headlines. Everybody's got to grab content," she said at the time earlier this year, after deactivating her social media accounts following a loss to Liverpool that had put Chelsea's title run into question. "For football managers, we're in an impossible position. Because every day we're in a place where, no matter what we say, it will be turned into something that gets you guys (the media) paid and at the same time puts us in a position where we're just pieces of meat."

By Thursday, her accounts had been restored and she was posting a few behind-the-scenes looks of her arrival in the States, a photo with Chris Pratt while at the "Today Show" and a video the NWSL cooked up about watching games on their streaming platform.

In an hour-long meeting with reporters that could have felt transactional, Hayes never shied away from being personal. She embraced it, just as she said she embraced the pressure of the role, despite going on record a few times about how she'd actually much prefer "a quiet life" out of the spotlight. She mentioned that she didn't mind the long list of media appearances and interviews on Thursday, just as long as they didn't happen every three days.

The spotlight will shine much brighter with the USWNT, but Hayes seems ready for it. She danced around the question of what color medal the USWNT will bring back from Paris on the "Today Show," instead providing an answer that focused on the process. She did the same later in the day when asked about how she wanted to approach external messaging on the goals of the team.

"I want to focus on the process and the performance," she said. "For me, it's absolutely essential."

For a team that's been at the sharp end of many bad-faith attacks following its early World Cup exit, "essential" feels too light a word. A focus on the process could mean that results won't be tied to self-worth and that everyone can still claim their humanness at the end of the day.

In one of the last questions she received, Hayes was asked what she'd bring to the USWNT as head coach that no one ever has before. She answered, fast as a New York minute, with a smile.

"Oh, you're never gonna get anybody with a personality like me!"

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SLT0027879

Pique under investigation over Spanish FA corruption allegations

By LOREM IPSUM
The Salt Lake Tribune

Former Barcelona and Spain defender Gerard Pique has been placed under investigation by the court examining allegations of corruption at the Spanish FA during Luis Rubiales' time as president.

The court has decided to take this action over "possible illegalities with criminal implications" regarding commissions received by Pique's company Kosmos in the deal to move the Supercopa de Espana to Saudi Arabia.

That deal was agreed in September 2019, when Pique, now 37, was still a Barca player.

It said his company Kosmos would be paid €4million a year as commission. The Spanish FA (RFEF) earns €40m a year from the deal, which is due to run until 2025.

On March 20, Spanish police carried out a series of raids as part of an anti-corruption investigation codenamed 'Operacion Brodie' – after Englishman John Alexander Brodie, an Everton fan who pioneered the use of football nets in the late 19th century and worked for a while in Bilbao in the north of Spain.

Guardia Civil officers – one of Spain's two national police forces – raided RFEF headquarters at Las Rozas near Madrid, as well as other locations across the country. Seven arrests were made – five in Madrid and two in the southern city of Granada, where a property owned by Rubiales was also searched.

Operacion Brodie was set in motion following a legal complaint in May 2022 by Miguel Angel Galan (who in October spoke in depth with The Athletic) over the RFEF deal with Pique's company Kosmos.

Pique and Kosmos have insisted the deal was all above board.

Rubiales was placed under investigation by the court, in Majadahonda in the community of Madrid, in April. He has strongly denied the corruption allegations, as has his replacement as Spanish FA president, Pedro Rocha.

Rocha, who took over after Rubiales decided to resign in September (having already been suspended by FIFA over his behaviour at the Women's World Cup final the month before) was also placed under investigation in April.

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