



PSG - Team Photo



Sonia Bompastor

The WPS French Connection

Abily and Bompastor Launch the New Phase of Paris Saint-Germain's Women's Team

By Jason Hraynyk, Photos: Christian Gavelle

Sonia Bompastor and Camille Abily made very big impressions during the inaugural season of the WPS league in 2009. Bompastor playing with the Washington Freedom and Abily along side Marta with the LA Sol. The two talented French stars played such impressive seasons they both earned spots on the WPS All Star Starting XI. Abily however missed out on a WPS championship when the Sol were upset in the final by Sky Blue, despite the loss she was second in the season scoring behind fellow team mate Marta. On the east coast Bompastor impressed during the 2009 season with Washington and was nominated one of the Top 10 best female players in the world by FIFA.

Since the end of the WPS 2009 season, both players returned to their native France where they signed off-season contracts with professional team Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) in the LFP Women's League. Paris prior to this current season had put plans in place to really develop the women's element of the team operation and make it one of the big teams in the league with the likes of Olympique Lyonnais and Montpellier.

Camille Abily states that "the objective of PSG and their plan is to become one of the three best teams in France within

three years. They also wish to develop more young female players through their program, academy and pro team. After the start of the season we are having we are hopefully on the way to being placed in the top three this year".

Abily says a number of reasons helped her decision to joining the team, including the vision of President Simon Tahar and General Manager Brigitte Olive- Henriques, "They are the team from the Capital and the men's team is one of France's biggest, it is an honour to wear the colors. The president and general manager have decided to really develop the team and help grow women's soccer here in France. They proposed their development project and ambitions to me and I was happy to be a part of it".

By bringing in international players like Abily and Bompastor it proves that this development project is not to be taken lightly. They add depth and character from their pro experiences and also bring leadership to a team looking to unite and succeed with their goals and objectives. It seems to be working so far as the team find themselves on top of the standings one point ahead of powerhouse Lyon, and have yet to allow a single goal in their first nine matches played this season.



Abily is also second in scoring with Bompastor in the score sheets and currently second in league passing.

Along with success on the field other points to the project were to help attract more attention and media coverage for both PSG and women's pro soccer in general. Far behind the hundreds of thousands who play in North America, women's soccer is not as established in France where Abily states "the mentality is different and girls play soccer in North America from a very young age. Sadly it is fairly rare in France, but hopefully with the work of the FFF (French Federation de Foot) it will continue to develop and the mentality towards women's soccer will change. To a degree at PSG it already has".

So far the initiative has started off successfully, daily news on the PSG website has seen increased traffic along with blog postings. Supporters of the main Ligue 1 men's team are showing their support and the campaign leading up to playing the teams first ever match at Parc des Princes was an overwhelming success. Breaking a league attendance record, 5,892 spectators took in the Sunday afternoon match against Juvisy where Abily scored the record setting first ever female league goal at Parc des Princes and also saw PSG victorious.

Games of this status and media coverage has opened more possibilities for future matches at Parc des Princes and was a great tool for growing the fan base. "It was the first time that such a crowd has attended a match for the French Championship. The match was very special for me and I hope that the fans appreciated the level of play and quality and that they will come back. This is the way to build a strong fan base for PSG and help women's soccer here in France." said Abily.

Having spent a season in the WPS with the LA Sol, she was no stranger to large turn outs with great supporters and

agrees that the WPS is the best league in the world. Being able to play with the worlds best players, some of whom she has seen on the international level made the WPS exciting for everyone. Both players admit that it allows foreign players to set a goal of reaching the WPS one day and that there are some younger women in the French system who they hope to see one day playing with them in WPS. With a cap of foreign players limited to five players per team both Bompastor and Abily admit that the addition of Philadelphia and Atlanta in the 2010 season will allow the league to grow and also will give ten more international players a chance to play in such a highly respected league.

For Abily the adjustment of a new life in North America was at times difficult. "Life is so much faster here in terms of day to day life, people don't take as much time to enjoy the day as we do in France. It is also so much bigger so the aspect of all day travel going to the east coast matches was something to adjust too". On the pitch as well there were adjustments to make "the game is faster and more physical here which is not a surprise when you have such a wealth of talent to chose from".

For both players the passion, determination and desire to play keeps them both going 365 days a year as one season and league play into another. The two admit that they are able to play year round due to the training and medical staff at PSG and their WPS clubs. The facilities and proper treatment keep them in top form and allows them to continue at such a high level although fatigue does occasionally set in. With both players set to return to their WPS teams in late January their efforts with PSG will see them leaving with twelve matches or half the season remaining. They believe the team will continue the momentum they have currently going and be able to continue the rest of the season ultimately leading to the goal of top three and even a championship.

One thing is certain, Paris Saint-Germain and the French league are thankful to have these ambassadors playing in France and helping to develop women's soccer. Here in North America the WPS and its fans are thankful that they are able to see two of the worlds best playing in such an exciting league. In the end everyone is a winner. ♦



Abily battles while Bompastor looks on