
MATADOR REVIEW

A QUARTERLY MISSIVE OF ALTERNATIVE CONCERN

Emerald City Support

August 29, 2018 / Jennifer Matthewson



**Emerald
City
Support**
by
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son**

It is 2009 when I see Tendency again. The year the Seattle Sounders are officially welcomed into the Major League Soccer fray, the year my marriage falls apart.

I make the drive north from Portland one weekend, and at a bar on Capitol Hill we sit with beers in our hands, laughing, and catching up about the last five years. I have been a bad friend, I confess to her, focused on everything but friendship—married, now separated since she last saw me, but still, our decade-old bond has not changed. As we part at the end of the evening, she urges me to come back to visit again soon, to find respite in Seattle as I move through my separation, to join her for a soccer game.

I return weeks later for my first Sounders match and try to keep up with a game with which I am unfamiliar. I am full of beers that are too expensive and my legs are tired from standing the full ninety minutes and then some. My throat is scratchy from soccer chants I didn't know beforehand. A knee screams from below after being whacked on the seat in front of me during bouncing and cheering. My head spins, but I bask in the



collective happiness of a win. As we flow out of our seats in a sea of green and blue, I aim myself straight for the Emerald City Supporters membership table and drop my \$25 down without hesitation. My first scarf arrives in short succession.

I venture up a few times over the next couple of years, running away from the perils of separation and divorce hoping to escape the heartache if only briefly. I attend matches as often as I can, learning the chants and songs, pogoing until my knees are bruised once again. Each game—whether we win, lose, or draw—helps to rebuild the places in me that feel weak amidst all the change in my life. I start to reconnect with others in the city with whom I was once close. I start to see myself in the light I once saw before. With every visit, with every match, I am me again.

Seven years past, the divorce now behind me, a homeowner, a single parent with tales to tell, I fall in love with a fellow soccer fan. Someone who lives it, breathes it, plays it in his off hours.

Someone who is a fan of the local soccer team, fierce rivals of my beloved Sounders. He presents me with a season ticket, inviting me to join him in the stadium, to cheer for his team. On match days, we wind through the streets of Stumptown on our way to Providence Park, and I revel in the joy as he reaches back for my hand, maneuvering through the crowd. I take in his excitement, his passion for the team. I try to sing along in support. I am tackled at penalty kicks, hugged with goals, kissed with a win.

After a few matches, the shine starts to wear. My stomach turns to ropes as I stand in their supporter areas. His drinks get stronger, his friends more dismissive with every game. His mood changes depending on the play.



Seattle Sounders at
CenturyLink Field
Stadium (2016) | (U.S.)



I hate standing here, I text Tendency
from nearly every match.

Army | Adeline
Witherspoon)

What are you doing? she asks. They are
our rivals. You're a Sounder.

But love, I argue.

When a Seattle match finally fits into our schedule, I convince
him to join me for the journey north. It is my old hometown,
and I lead the way through Pike Place Market, along First
Avenue, and down to the stadium. He makes me laugh as we
wander the city, jokingly frowning in photos, grumbling about
the soccer rivalry. When we finally arrive at CenturyLink to
stand with the ECS, he stands tall next to me, his arm still
around me despite his feet in enemy territory. He makes faces in
our usual match-day selfies. He runs for beers when we ask
politely.

“Thank you for really loving me,” I say to him in soccer glow.

One Sunday, he is late. After weeks of mismatched schedules,
days that coincide with talks of family and marriage and curious
silence.

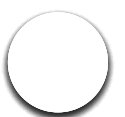
I forgot there was a match today, he texts.

Oh, I respond. I just baked cookies. I'm in for the day.

I guess I'll just see you after. I'm just getting to the stadium, he
answers.

I'm too hurt to respond.

When he finally arrives at my house, there is a paper bag in his
hand and I see the outline of my overnight things showing
through.



“We should rip the Band-Aid off,” he says, unable to look me in the eye or give me any further explanation. In my shock and surprise, I argue about our plans for the future, about his words and promises, about the upcoming soccer match in Seattle between our two rivals.

“Will you still go?” he asks.

“Only if I don’t have a boyfriend,” I mumble while he walks out the door.

As the match begins between our rival teams, I am standing in the middle of the ECS, with friends, without him. In the distant corner of CenturyLink, the Portland supporters wave their flags and I’m filled with knots wondering if he’s among them. I pray to the soccer gods for a win, pray for a defeat of their stupid rival team. I pray that he feels the empty space next to him wherever he’s watching.

The first ball reaches into the net and the stadium is on its feet, a loud roar with which I am so familiar, flags waving around me, the fiery flames spouting from cannons on the field. My friends, my ECS family, leap in celebration, but I fall into my seat, tears escaping from the heightened emotion. I feel an arm around me as Tendency reaches down for me, wrapping me up while I sob beneath my scarf. When she finally lets go, others around me reach in, each squeezing me tightly, the screams from the crowd still ringing.

The match is called, a Sounders win, and I know he is somewhere feeling the loss.

Seattle meets Toronto on a cold December day months later and I am still surrounded by my ECS family. It is my first viewing with the Anchor-N-Rose 48s, an ECS subgroup deep in enemy territory who gather in Southeast Portland to watch matches, a



safe haven from the rivalry outside the bar walls. I don't know anyone when I arrive, but the blue and green banners hanging from the walls, the scarves around the necks of the fans surrounding me, assure me that I am at the right place.

It's a fight to the soccer death, that shiny MLS Cup, that star, that title hanging in the balance. It's a long perilous match without a score, and I am grateful to be in a crowd of supporters of my team. My people. With each play, we sigh, yell, cheer the same. We sing our songs and yell our chants, a beam of Emerald City love.

The match goes into overtime, extra play, and my chest tightens knowing he's somewhere in the same city watching the same match with the same intensity. The room breathes collectively with each penalty kick, inhaling deep, exhaling without resolve. Each penalty kick misses, first us, then Toronto, then Seattle, then Toronto. Finally, a Sounder sinks a winning goal in the net, and we are immediately all on our feet. A collective hug, high fives in every direction, selfies, beers knocked to the floor without thought. The tears escape me.

Soccer saves.



categories / Sports, Sex & Love

*tags / Sports, Sex & Love, Seattle Sounders, Portland, Seattle, Jennifer
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Newer / Older

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