

Series: Amani vs. Athlete

Role in the execution of piece: I act as the host, producer, and director of the web series “Amani v. Athlete.” A spinoff of a previous web series that had the same focus, I take the role of host and attempt to “try out” for teams as a way for people around the community to get a glimpse into the talent and personalities of teams, as well as how they prepare for games. As the host, I am the primary on-screen face with the players; however, I also provide creative direction during the shooting and editing process to add satirical aspects to the series.



▶ Amani vs. Athlete Episode 1: Men's Basketball



▶ Amani Vs. Athlete Episode 2: Men's Rugby

Article: Women's volleyball sets up for conference play in WCC home opener

Byline: Amani Rivers

Role in the execution of piece: I acted as the sole pitcher, reporter, interviewer, and writer during the execution of this article. I pitched the article as an in-depth recap of Loyola Marymount University's women's volleyball team's first conference match, I interviewed all the sources featured in the article, and I wrote the article myself. I also came up with the title, and chose the pictures featured in the article.

Women's volleyball sets up for conference play in WCC home opener

Amani Rivers, asst. sports editor
Sep 28, 2023



LMU women's volleyball lined up before their match against Saint Mary's College to introduce their starters, as well as stand for the singing of the National Anthem.

via LMU Athletics

Over 450 people filled the seats in Gersten Pavilion as LMU women's volleyball took on the Saint Mary's College Gaels in their West Coast Conference (WCC) home opener. The Lions, coming off a five-game win streak — including three wins at the Boise State Classic volleyball tournament in Boise, Idaho — took to the court ready to compete against the Gaels, who came into the game with a six-game losing streak.

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Past games aside, the Gaels came ready to play, opening the first set with a 6-2 lead over the Lions with some crafty kills. Despite some valiant efforts from the Lions to close the gap, the Gaels held the lead all the way up until the Lions tied it up at the 11th point, when graduate outside hitter Amethyst Harper received a set from senior outside hitter Kari Geissberger, tying the two teams up. From there, the Lions took their first lead of the set, resulting in a hard-fought battle between the two teams until the last few plays. The Lions walked off the court after the first set with a victory, the score on the board flashing 25-22.

“Games like this can go fast, so [we tell] our team to just slow it down and take it one point at a time, knowing that we have each other’s backs,” said Geissberger.

“Sometimes, we just go into the huddle to take a deep breath and reset for the next point,” said junior middle blocker Jacquelyn Moore.

The communication and effort amongst the team is what made LMU stronger and better coming into the second set — the beginning of the set brought energy and anticipation to both teams, as well as the audience. LMU and SMC went back and forth, scoring points, taking leads and tying the game several times in just the first few minutes of the second set. Geissberger and Moore were a force to be reckoned with, both blocking the spikes sent their way, showcasing their chemistry.

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Junior middle blocker Jackie Moore and senior outside hitter Kari Geissberger were an electric duo during the game.
via LMU Athletics

Despite the intensity of the game, though, the Lions stayed calm, even taking moments after some kills to regroup and share a laugh.

“A lot of us love to play loose, so there’s a lot of jokes, a lot of dance parties. I know, for me, I just have to keep it light [because] that keeps me loose and ready for the game. Obviously, we take it really serious and we’re super competitive ... and we use that superpower of being goofy to stay close and to stay loose,” said Geissberger.

The competition between the teams only grew as the set went on — amazing kills came from graduate setter and opposite hitter Michelle Shaffer, backed up with talent from Harper and senior setter Isabella Bareford. After the Lions went on an 8-0 run in the middle of the second set, making the score 16-9, it was another scrap to the finish line with the Gaels. The Lions won the second set 25-21, giving the Lions a two-set advantage.

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Compared to the other two sets, the third and final set went quickly. However, even with some impressive runs and kills from the Gaels, the Lions won the final set, sweeping Saint Mary's, clinching their first conference win and extending their win streak to six.



The Lions' bench was energetic and lively the entire game, getting interactive with the crowd and motivating their teammates with silly cheers.

via LMU Athletics

“Winning is always fun. Everyone loves to win and, obviously, that boosts up our confidence a lot. I think it’s just seeing how far we can make it [and] how much work we can put in the gym to get ready for the next game. We’re not looking forward to the championship or anything; it’s just all about the next game,” said Geissberger.

It’s safe to say the chemistry, fun and hard work that radiates through the Lions on and off the court speaks to how well they have been doing this season, and it does not seem like they’re letting up any time soon.

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"I think we've grown a lot in the preseason to get to where we are now. [There's been] a lot of lineup changes and just working through some stuff, and I think it's showing right now how good we can be and how good we are, so I'm excited to just see how well we can do [in the] WCC. A lot of us, we want to win it," said Shaffer.

The Lions proceeded to take on Pepperdine University on Saturday, Sept. 23, which resulted in a hard loss that ended their win streak and dropped their conference record to 1-1. The Lions have a long way to go until the end of the season, and even with some bumps, it seems that they will continue getting better to get to their goal: winning the WCC.

Watch the Lions continue their journey this Thursday, Sept. 28 on ESPN+ for their third conference game against the University of Portland.

Amani Rivers

Sports Editor

Article: Women's track and field carries a legacy of love and loyalty

Byline: Amani Rivers

Role in the execution of piece: I acted as the sole reporter, interviewer, and writer during the execution of this article. The article was pitched to the Sports section as a part of a group detailing the six sports cut from Loyola Marymount University earlier this year. My task was to put together a comprehensive article leaning into the success of women's track and field and how they feel about their team being cut.

Women's track and field carries a legacy of love and loyalty

Amani Rivers, asst. sports editor
Feb 1, 2024



via Trinity Tingey

After the women's track and field team were told about the unprecedented news that their team would not be returning after the 2024 season, they did something that may be surprising to some: They all showed up for practice the next morning.

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“Shortly after [the decision] was announced, [the men’s and women’s track and field teams] met outside Gersten [Pavilion] and ... [Head Coach] Chloe [Curtis] was the first to say, ‘So, what do you guys want to do? Do you want to practice tomorrow?,’ and it was a lot of head nods, a lot of people yelling ‘Yes,” and, that’s just who this team is — anything you throw at them, they aren’t going to be derailed from the mission, and that’s to make this season the best it can be — independent of Tuesday,” said assistant coach John Pickhaver.

With a team made up of 16 underclassmen — compared to six upperclassmen and graduate students — the next legacy of women's track and field was just beginning. In their 2023 track and field season, the team had amassed over 15 fifth-place-or-higher finishes across 13 different meets, a promising season for such a young team. The team combined etched themselves into the school history books in just one season, with 13 new school-record entries over all recorded events.



Some women's track and field members gather for a Monday morning practice. Practices and long runs are amongst the team's favorite memories when looking back on their time at LMU.

Adam Goldstick | Loyolan

However, beyond the meets, numbers and statistics remains what LMU track and field is at its core: a family.

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“Running is such a gritty sport, and you’re always trying to find that extra gear to push harder — and I think being surrounded by people you love really helps you find that next gear, and knowing that they’re doing that same thing ... it’s just kind of extra motivating and extra special,” said sophomore runner Tawny Smith.

“People you love” is the fashion in which many members of the team describe one another, as opposed to teammates or friends. The community fostered within the track and field teams are one-of-a-kind, and according to Head Coach Chloe Curtis, it has always been that way.

“What’s always been so special about LMU is our community. We’ve always just rallied together, and that’s what’s helped us have these performances that are maybe unexpected sometimes. We really have consistently ... in the history of this program, punched above our weight and done more than what was expected of us,” said Curtis.

Curtis ran on the track and field team from 2013 to 2016, after transferring from the University of Washington to attend LMU. Following her graduation, she came back to the team as a volunteer assistant coach from 2018 to 2019 before being named head coach in 2021.

And for many of the women on the team, Curtis was the very reason they chose LMU.

“She is a lot of the reason why a lot of people came to this school,” said graduate runner Avery Doan. “We all love her so much ... she’s such a great leader and she inspires us so much, and we’re all so loyal to her.”

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Head Coach Chloe Curtis has been an integral part of the women's track and field program since she first joined the team in 2013.

Adam Goldstick | Loyolan

Curtis made the track and field program an unique experience that many members of the team enjoy thoroughly.

“With the experience of being on the team, it’s probably been one of the most amazing experiences I’ve had. I’ve been running for a long time, and ... a major part of [my decision to come to LMU] was [Curtis] — she’s the one that wanted me the most, she talked to me the most, she cultivated this amazing environment that I was ready to go into,” said sophomore runner Hayden Washington.

Like Washington, several women on the team had been running for their whole lives, with their tenure at LMU being just another step forward in their respective journeys. So, with the decision to discontinue the team, many of the members find themselves facing an impossible decision: leaving behind their found family or leaving behind the sport they love.

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“Emailing us the transfer policy, after [essentially] telling us we need to pick between our family and the sport that we love and we dedicated our entire lives to — it’s not right. We go through so much together, and every morning, we’re out there and supporting each other, on the track, off the track, whatever we need,” said sophomore runner Katie Power.

On the track and off the track, the women’s track and field team has been dedicated to multiple aspects of life here at LMU.

For example, sophomore runner Ayden Brown is a part of the SDG Student Ambassador Program, which is a program built to “deepen ... knowledge of environmental and social responsibility,” according to the program’s website.

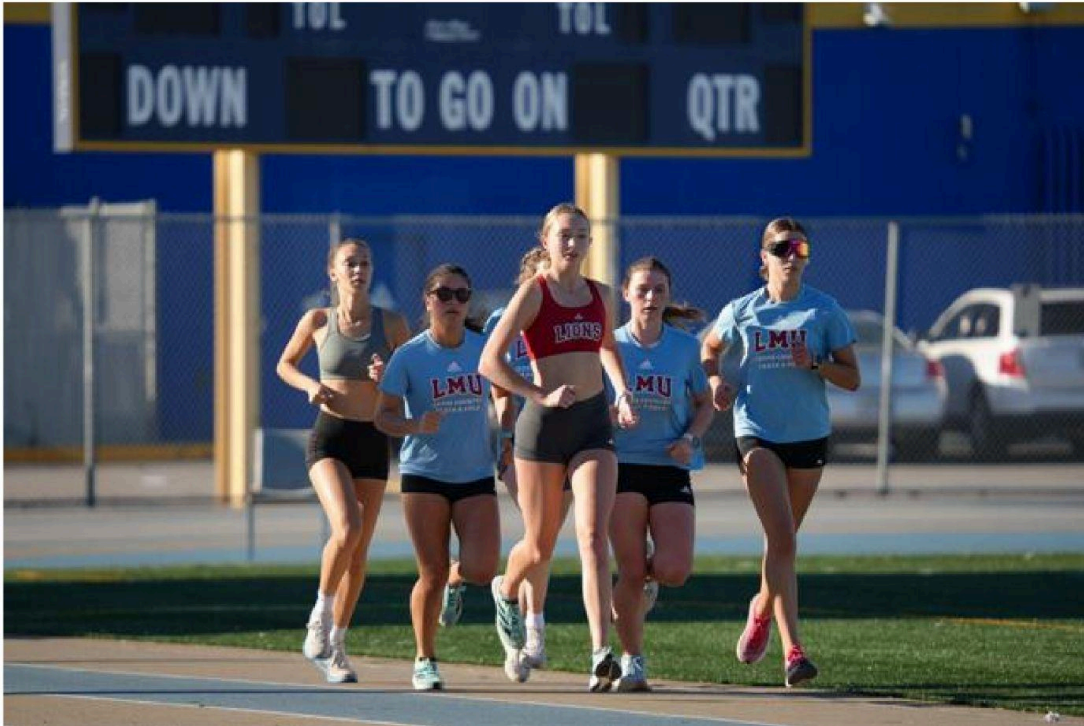
Additionally, the team had more than 10 Lions in the 2022-23 WCC Commissioner’s Honor Roll and has been one of many teams to keep their average student-athlete GPA above a 3.0 in the 2022-23 school year.

The women’s track and field season is so much bigger than it seems — in the fall, the team transitions into women’s cross country with the same team, just with a separate set of goals. And since women’s cross country is not a part of the teams that would be discontinued, the girls have been put in a unique situation, as they do have the opportunity to continue competing in an LMU jersey.

The team is equally as promising in their cross country season as they are in their track season — consistently setting new personal bests and recording multiple individual top-10 finishes throughout their meets. With the team receiving this news before their 2024 track and field season has even begun, the Lions are ready to translate their impressive cross country season into an astounding final track season.

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"One thing that's so distinctive about the running community is our workouts are ... tough. You are going through a lot of pain, but you're in pain together, and that's what creates such special bonds between us," said sophomore Ayden Brown. Adam Goldstick | Loyolan

"We were on the rise even before [the decision] and ... now, we have even more motivation to fuel the fire and really build something great and end with an amazing season," said Brown.

Everyone on the team is preparing to have the best season this year, especially the coaches.

"Having [Curtis] and [Pickhaver] lead this ... they know we just got this terrible news — but they also know that, if this is it, then people are going to want to go out with a bang. So, they're ready to have a crazy season, but I know they can get us all where we need and where we want to be," said Power.

As the Lions prepare for what is their last season under LMU's track and field program, they have plenty of support in their corner. From alumni to parents to classmates — many are ready to support the Lions as they begin their season this February 17.

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“Our alumni [is] so deep with loyalty to what it means to run at this school. That’s why I committed to go here ... just the reputation of the program was that people love running as an LMU Lion. And our alumni that don’t even know us personally are so upset and so ready to fight for us, and I think that speaks a lot,” said Doan.

The Lions open their last season as a program on Feb. 17 at the Pomona-Pitzer Invitational.

Amani Rivers

Sports Editor

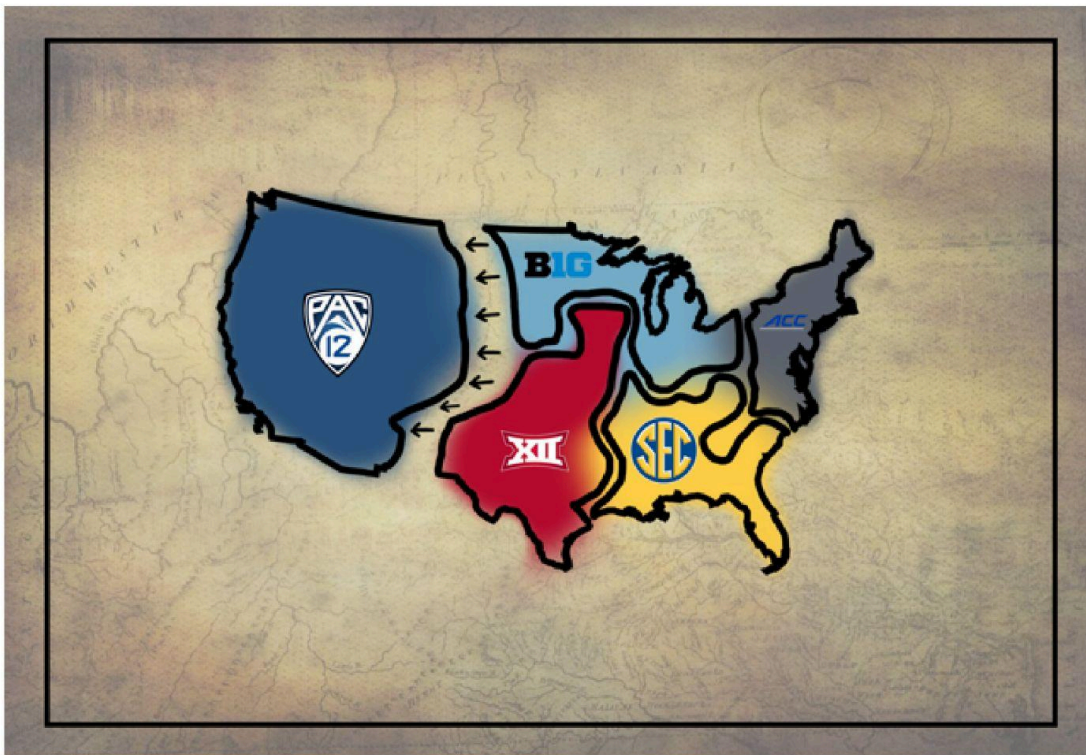
Article: The demystification of conference realignment, and what it means for LMU

Byline: Amani Rivers

Role in the execution of piece: I acted as the sole writer of this article during its execution. The article was pitched to the Sports section as a part of a group of articles discussing huge topics in the sports world at the moment, like NIL (name, image, likeness) and conference realignment. My task was to put together an informational article detailing what conference realignment was and how it can be understood through the context of sports at Loyola Marymount University.

The demystification of conference realignment, and what it means for LMU

Amani Rivers, asst. sports editor
Feb 8, 2024



Conference realignment is a complex topic, but with the reshaping of collegiate athletics, it is more important than ever to understand.

Adam Goldstick | Loyolan

As college athletics change rapidly from year to year — with new developments such as name, image and likeness (NIL) laws and regulations — another aspect emerged in the reshaping of college athletics that has been widely discussed but not understood — conference realignment.

What is conference realignment?

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For LMU, a university that does not offer football, sports like women's and men's basketball play within the West Coast Conference (WCC). The WCC stands along with over 30 other conferences, such as well-known conferences, like the Big East Conference, the Big Ten conference, the Southeastern Conference or the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC).

Colleges and universities are sorted into these different conferences based off many different factors, like location, popularity, sports offered and more.

Conference realignment, at its most basic level, is colleges and universities switching throughout different athletic conferences in order to bring in more money and resources for their athletic programs. For example, in December 2023, the WCC added Oregon State University and Washington State University to be members of the WCC for two years, starting in fall 2024.

However, Oregon State and Washington State are coming from the Pacific-12, a conference that lost 10 of their 12 universities to the ACC and the Big Ten.

"This affiliation agreement provides short-term clarity for 10 of our programs and guarantees that our student athletes and coaches can continue to compete for conference and national championships ... This agreement represents an important step in our strategy to preserve options for the future viability of the Pac-12 conference," said Oregon State Vice President and Director of Athletics Scott Barnes in a WCC press release.

The conference consisted of athletic powerhouses like the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Southern California, along with the University of Colorado; Stanford University; the University of Utah; the University of Arizona; the University of Washington; the University of California, Berkeley; the University of Oregon and Arizona State University.

What is the main force behind conference realignment?

Well, it is all about money, resources and expansion.

Because of new developments like NIL, there is more pressure than ever to get student-athletes exposure and popularity, and the best way to do that is by highlighting them through the media.

The Pac-12, for example, offered the different schools within their conference an estimated \$23 million per year for five seasons with an athletics package through the streaming service Apple TV.

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However, even though the deal would bring in millions of dollars for each university, it does not hold up compared to the other conferences across the nation. For example, the Big Ten negotiated a contract for a \$7 billion agreement over seven years with media stations Fox, CBS and NBC.

The contract that the Pac-12 offered would not give Pac-12 athletes the popularity and media coverage that other conferences would, considering that Apple TV is a streaming service that citizens across the nation must pay for in order to watch, in addition to more accessible platforms like CBS, Fox and NBC.

“This was about national visibility for our players, being on linear TV so they can be seen, so they could have the national exposure. It was about stability. It was about having a future that we could count on and build towards,” said University of Washington President Ana Mari Cauce to ABC News.

What does this mean for LMU?

In an effort “to provide the best student-athlete experience possible, adapt to the quickly evolving NCAA landscape, and ensure continued equal opportunities and access,” LMU has had to make decisions — one of those being the discontinuation of six sports teams.

“This change in sports sponsorship allows us to accentuate our strengths while being mindful of the future ... Specifically, it ... improves competitive excellence across our remaining sports [and] better aligns with the sports offered in our athletic conference,” according to a press release issued by LMU Athletics on Jan. 23.

With schools like Washington State, whose men's basketball team is currently tied for second in the Pac-12 right now, and Oregon State joining the WCC, there is more opportunity for our athletic programs to properly compete and, hopefully, shine.

As far as media visibility, LMU is a part of the WCC, who has media rights with both ESPN+ and CBS Sports. And, although terms on how much money is being made and how long the deal will last have not been disclosed, it does not appear as though the deal will be dissolving anytime soon.

College athletics is changing, and with conferences like the ACC having 18 teams in their conference in the 2024-25 season, it will only continue to change even more.

Amani Rivers

Article: LMU alum makes World Cup history

Byline: Amani Rivers

Role in the execution of piece: I acted as the sole pitcher, reporter, interviewer, and writer during the execution of this article. I pitched this article after watching the Women's World Cup and realizing that one of the players was an alum of Loyola Marymount University. With help from advisors, I reached out to her former coach and put together an article looking at their time at LMU and how it prepared them for the Women's World Cup.

LMU alum makes World Cup history

Amani Rivers, asst. sports editor

Jul 28, 2023



Bolden majored in business management at LMU and graduated in 2018. They signed with the Philippines national team during their final year on the Bluff.

Photo via LMU Athletics

Millions of soccer fans watched as the Philippines women's national team scored their first-ever FIFA Women's World Cup goal on July 25, securing a historic first World Cup win for the team. The goal scorer was none other than LMU women's soccer alum, 27-year-old forward Sarina Bolden ('18).

In the play that would solidify the win for the World Cup newcomers, midfielder Sara Eggesvik sent the ball towards the goal with a curved cross that Bolden headed past the New Zealand national team's goalkeeper. Philippine fans erupted inside and outside the stadium, Bolden sprinting over to the rest of her team to celebrate history being made. Back in California, previous LMU women's soccer coach Michelle Myers watched her former player leave a mark on the soccer world forever.

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“[Sarina] always looked like she was enjoying the game ... When you watch her goal celebration, she was just always that type of kid with a lot of passion for the game, a lot of energy,” Myers said in an exclusive interview with the Los Angeles Loyolan.



Former LMU women's soccer coach Michelle Myers said Bolden has always had “a lot of passion for the game”.

Photo via LMU Athletics

Bolden played under Myers for her four years at LMU, where they led the team in scoring, points and shots in their sophomore and senior seasons. Born in Santa Clara, California, Bolden has always proven to be a force on the field, even in her club days.

“From an early age, [Sarina] has always wanted to play soccer at the next level ... like when we were recruiting her, she was playing up age groups,” Myers said.

Her dreams would come to fruition soon: while still enrolled at LMU, Bolden joined the Philippines national team in 2018. In 2019, Bolden signed onto Sandvikens IF, a football club located in Sweden. Their journey did not stop there, as she would go on to sign with Taiwanese club Xinbei Hangyuan, the San Francisco Nighthawks of the Women's Premier Soccer League and Japanese club Elfen Saitama, before recently settling with the Western Sydney Wanderers of the Australian A-League.

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From the bubble of California, it can appear as though these moves were extremely hard, but according to Myers, Bolden used the experiences as life lessons that would make her better.

“[When] she got offered a spot [on Elfen Saitama], it was another example of her really being out of her comfort zone. She was like, ‘It’s hard with the language barrier.’ It’s a whole different game than what she was used to because her athleticism is her strength, and over in Japan, it’s very technical, and that wasn’t a strength of hers, so she was like, ‘Yeah, it’s good for me because I have to get better at this or otherwise, they don’t pass me the ball,’” Myers recalled when she and Bolden spoke while on break from the soccer season.

Bolden’s passion and toughness for the game has shone during her tenure as a forward for the Philippines’ national team, and as the commentator yelled as Bolden celebrated the historic goal, “She’s done it in the past and she does it again.” Even though Bolden’s goal may have been a shock to many, it is not the first time that they have made an ambitious play to move their team closer to a win. Bolden also scored the final kick in a penalty shootout against Taiwan – a play that would earn the Philippines a spot in the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup.

Bolden’s former coach says that while they possess incredible skill, Bolden also has something that differentiates her from many of her peers: she “isn’t afraid to fail.”

“She’s got that confidence, that energy ... Taking a shot from that angle, everybody else would say ‘Hey, why would you do that,’ but she says, ‘I’m going to give it a try,’” Myers said.

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Sarina Bolden ('18) led the Lions in scoring, points and shots in their sophomore season. Now, they use their skills on the World Cup stage.

Photo via LMU Marketing and Communications

Bolden's goal, with help of goalkeeper Olivia McDaniel and Eggesvik, has not only made history for the Philippines but has also put the team's name in ears that it may not have rung in before.

Yet, amid such a significant moment, Bolden still managed to stand humble. In a quote from Futbol Brew, Bolden said, "This is for you guys. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for all the Filipinas that started this team before I even came on. You guys are the reason this win could even happen ... I hope we made you guys proud tonight."

A true testament to who an LMU alum should be, Bolden will continue their World Cup journey with the Philippines national team on Sunday, July 30, in a match against Norway. You can find the matchup on Fox Sports.

Amani Rivers

Sports Editor