

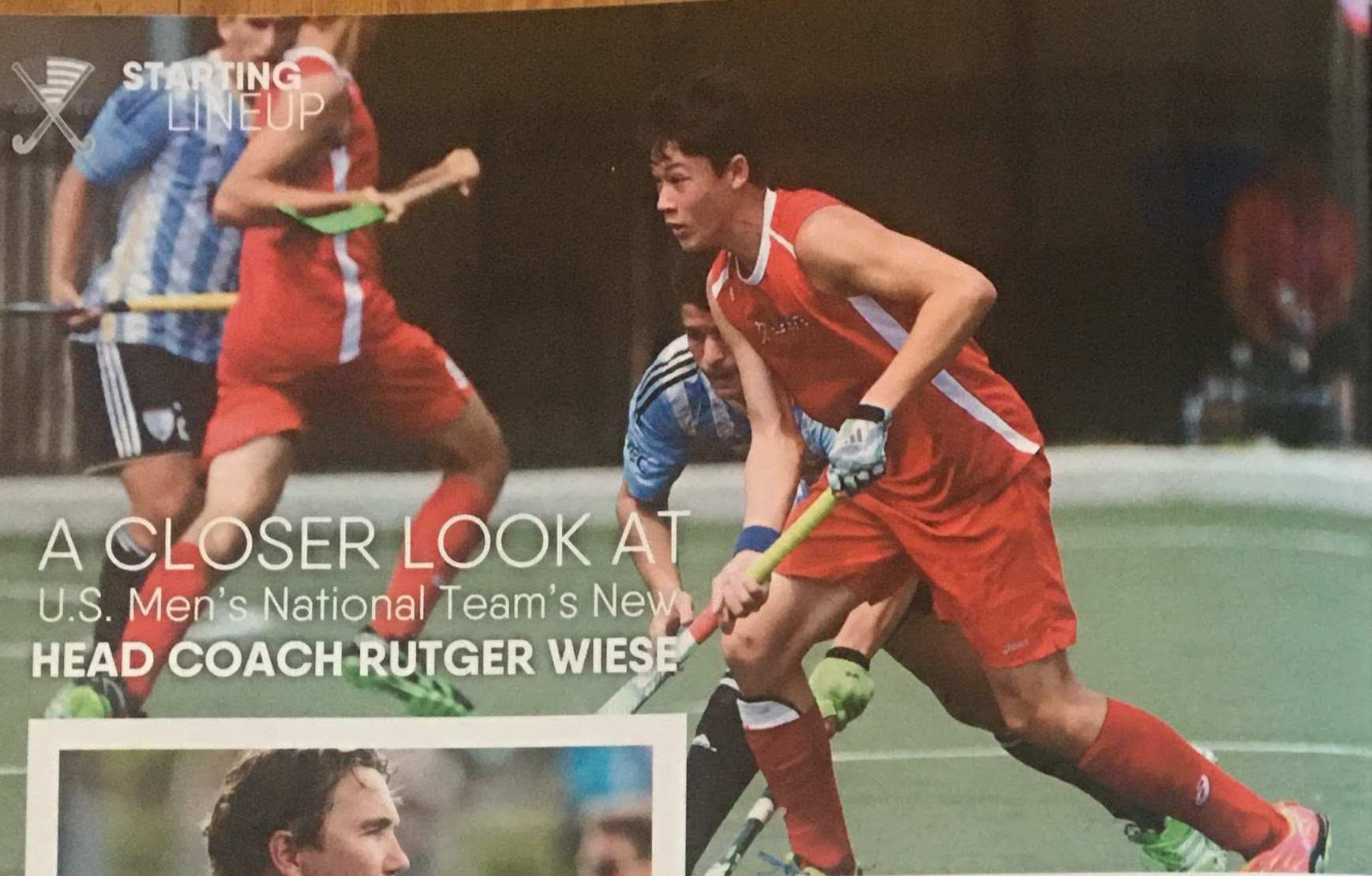
THE MAGAZINE OF USA FIELD HOCKEY

life

Spring 2017







## A CLOSER LOOK AT U.S. Men's National Team's New HEAD COACH RUTGER WIESE



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**E**arlier this year, Rutger Wiese was appointed the U.S. Men's National Team Head Coach after serving as an assistant coach since 2013. Wiese was instrumental in the squad's 2016 gold medal finish at the FIH Hockey World League Round 1 and has also been at the helm of the U.S. U-21 Men's National Team, most recently steering the squad to a fourth-place finish at the Junior Men's Pan American Championship.

Wiese's experience – as both a coach and player – is extensive. He picked up the game as a young boy in The Netherlands on the prompting of his parents who were looking for after-school activities for him and his brother, Wieger. Once the family moved from their small town to Amsterdam, Wiese pursued his passion for the game and earned a spot among the elite ranks as defender at H.C. Bloemendaal, a major-league team where he won three Netherlands National Championships (1999, 2000, 2002), a European Championship (2001) and a European silver medal (2000).

Later, while working at a camp in the U.S. in 2003, Wiese was presented with the opportunity to bring his talents to the collegiate level. He accepted a position as the head coach of Indiana University where he stayed for six seasons, through 2009 and later served as assistant coach at Harvard University for four seasons (2012-2015). Throughout his time in America, Wiese has provided training and camps for field hockey programs up and down the east coast through RutgerSports. Of his vast field hockey experiences, Wiese says serving as the U.S. Men's National Team Head Coach is his greatest accomplishment.

"It's a real big honor," said Wiese. "Anytime you can coach a national team and represent a country, I don't think there's a bigger honor than that. It's the highest you achieve in the sport."

In terms of what the USMNT will achieve under Wiese's direction, he's quite clear about focusing on the short- and long-term goals for the program which, he says, will equate to success on the field.

"Right now, we're not really going to focus on the opponents; we're going to focus on ourselves," commented Wiese. "It might sound cliché, but we are going to focus on getting better every day. We're not occupied with qualifying for the World Cup right now, we're occupied with getting the right structure on the field and mastering the little details that we're changing."

The changes that Wiese and his staff have implemented are small, but significant.

"The foundation of the national team is really good and the training regimen that was installed before was excellent," noted

Wiese. "Players are getting better. In terms of changes -- I would say playing a little bit higher tempo, really focusing on our defensive structure and having a very direct attacking style. Are these big changes, I don't think so? It's more of a detail or accent that we change here or there. We also need to put in place a recognizing playing style over the next years. If we accomplish these goals, I feel we'll be well on our way to being successful."

Wiese also says the success of the program depends on developing players from the U.S. Men's Junior National Teams, players like Amar Khokhar, who he recently elevated to the senior ranks and who Wiese says is definitely 'a very promising player to watch.'

"We've restored the junior national programs with monthly training because we need to develop several talented players and get them ready for the senior team," said Wiese. "All of the U-16 and U-19 players from the entire country will get

together every month and we will vary the locations so there will be some camps at San Diego, some north of Los Angeles and some camps on the east coast. We expect all the guys to travel to those camps all the time. We're also taking the guys to The Netherlands in June and we have an exchange set up in Canada where we play them in August in Canada and in November, they're coming to us. So, that's a first step toward success on the junior level which ultimately results in better level players when they are entering their senior ranks. We've had some training camps in the past but they were sporadic and only leading up to a tournament. We want to lay a foundation four years ahead of a tournament, not three months ahead."

Wiese noted, another key factor in the current squad's success is their unwavering work ethic. "I think one of the basics of every sports team is you need a control," added Wiese. "Hard work you can control. You either do it or you don't."

Having that said, I've told the men's team, and they've told me, that we will always work harder than the opponent, on the field and off the field. Our coaching staff will always do everything in our power to prepare so that we can help the guys win games. That's a definite."

The team is led by captain Mohan Gandhi "who is an extremely powerful fullback, a good passer, is exceptional at tackling and physically strong." Other team leaders include vice-captain, center midfielder, Ajai Dhadwal who Wiese characterizes as "a very skillful player who sees the game well and is a smart passer and fellow vice-captain and midfielder, Michael Barminski. Wiese noted Barminski "provides tremendous amount of energy and work ethic on the midfield." Seasoned veteran Pat Harris will also "create opportunities for us on the front line."

"We're fortunate enough that right now that many of our guys play in the top competition in Europe which means that on the downside, our preparation as a team will be shorter," said Wiese. "On the upside, they play every week against top competition so that's really positive. In addition, we are leaving early to go to tournaments which means we have time to train locally as a squad and we'll play practice matches. The preparation for the Pan American Cup in August will be a little more extensive and centralized as it will be summer and there are no competitions ongoing, so we'll have all the guys in for a solid month and prepare most likely in San Diego and part in Pennsylvania [at the Spooky Nook Sports]."

Another hallmark of Wiese's program is building a strong network of past national team players. "I'm looking forward to connecting with and getting all of the former national team players involved again; we need all the help we can find," commented Wiese. "I like to see that people are proud of the program and that means that former players, no matter how long ago, all have something to add to the program whether it's coaching, managing a team, mentoring, helping with the facility or organizing. We need to really get together as a national team, a national program, current and past. Together, we'll achieve great things."

