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Celebrating Seattle's Soccer Legend

Natalie Schorr, Social Media Manager

If you ask someone to name a women's soccer player, Megan Rapinoe will likely come to mind first. It's not hard to see why. Rapinoe is arguably one of the most prolific women's soccer players of her time. Known and beloved for her contributions on and off the field, it was no small surprise that 34,130 people—a National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) attendance record—came to celebrate her last regular season home game for the OL Reign.

Rapinoe has played in Seattle for her whole NWSL career. To her, being able to stay in one place and grow with the club has been an important part of her life and soccer journey.



Natalie Schorr

"It feels like home. It was always the safest place," Rapinoe said to the record-setting crowd. "This was always the place where I could be myself."

The deep gratitude Rapinoe showed toward the Emerald City was reflected back tenfold before, during and after the game. Fans showed up in Rapinoe jerseys and sporting pink wigs in honor of her iconic hairstyle. At kickoff, fans sitting on the east side of the stadium participated in a card stunt that spelled out "Thank You Megan" and a Rapinoe-themed Tifo was hoisted to the south end.

The energy was kept high throughout the night during a difficult match. While the final score against the visiting Washington Spirit was a scoreless draw, the celebration did not feel dampened—a sentiment that was echoed by Rapinoe's longtime teammate Jess Fishlock.

"The entirety of the city was here just to watch her," Fishlock said. "There is no moment that is too big for [Rapinoe]."

After the conclusion of the match, Rapinoe's teammates, friends and family gathered on the field for a post-game celebration. Reign Head Coach Laura Harvey was the first to speak. She touched on how Rapinoe, a member of the Reign since their inaugural 2013 season, aided the club in their first season by ending their losing streak and setting them on a path to success.

"She was the catalyst to turn it around," Harvey said. "She gave me the belief that what we were doing was right."

Rapinoe was the next to speak, and after multiple minutes of cheering from the crowd, she expressed how she was at a loss for words in the moment. She was quick to acknowledge the immense gratitude she had for the city of Seattle and the fans of the club, explaining just how much this moment truly meant to her.

"To see the way that the city showed up and to express that gratitude and love towards me is really special," Rapinoe said. "I know that I'm a well-liked figure and an important person in this game. I do know my impact, but it's one thing to know and one thing to be able to see it."

One of these impacts was made on Harvey herself. During the post-match press conference, she detailed how Rapinoe helped her become more comfortable in her own sexuality after moving to the U.S.. According to Harvey, the culture when she was coaching in England was one where you did not bring your personal life into your job. She said that Rapinoe was able to encourage her to live more freely in her day-to-day life.

"You see someone like [Rapinoe] live so authentically in who she is, that it made me feel okay doing that too," Harvey said. "There's no bigger impact on my personal life than that."

Harvey also explained that Rapinoe had taught her a lot about the various social justice issues the soccer player campaigns for, particularly when it came to kneeling for the anthem. Harvey mentioned that she hoped that she created a space where Rapinoe felt comfortable to continue her activism on and off the field.

Rapinoe has also made a big impact on her teammates, which according to fellow Reign player Lauren Barnes, has made the time leading up to this game difficult. She and Fishlock have been at the club with Rapinoe since the beginning, making them three out of the just five total NWSL players to spend their whole careers at a single club. To Barnes, this has made the goodbye even harder in certain aspects.

"There's a moment that happens and you think: 'that's never going to happen again,'" Barnes said. "I don't think we ever took it for granted, our 11 years here."

Because playing for this club has been such a large part of Rapinoe's career, many are wondering what the soccer star will set her sights on next. Rapinoe detailed how she wants to stay involved in women's sports and the NWSL, not wanting to miss out on what is next for the game.

"I am really looking forward to being one of the business architects in this next phase," Rapinoe said.

Rapinoe's retirement from soccer will be a loss that is felt throughout the soccer world. With her work in standing up for equal pay and other social justice movements, she has forever changed the landscape of women's soccer. There is no doubt she will be missed by the city of Seattle. But, if the support at her last home match was any indication, she will still have many fans supporting whatever she does after she hangs up her boots for the last time.

