

ALEX THE GREAT

AFTER CONQUERING
THE WORLD CUP,
ALEX MORGAN SETS
HER SIGHTS ON HAVING
A GLOBAL INFLUENCE
ON YOUNG WOMEN.

BY JOHN MIHALY

LARS BARON/FIFA

MORGAN'S DARING
PLAY HELPED LEAD
THE U.S. TO WORLD
CUP VICTORY
IN 2015.





For years, female soccer players looked up to the 1999 US Women's World Cup Champions as their heroes. Alex Morgan was one of those young players. Now, as a World Cup champion herself, Morgan hopes to inspire a new generation.

MADDIE MEYER/FIFA

In the 2015 World Cup final, your US team went up 4-0 against Japan in the 16th minute of the game. At what point did you allow yourself to think, “We did it! We got this!”

Everyone had a good idea around the 20th minute, but I didn’t want to let that thought of us winning creep into my mind too early in the game. When the 70th minute hit, I looked up at the scoreboard and realized that since we scored four goals in under 20 minutes, there’s no way they could score that many in less than 20 minutes. So that’s when I thought, OK, we’re winning this thing.

How do you maintain a certain level of play with such a large lead? Is it difficult to focus?

In soccer, the two-goal lead is always dangerous. If you score another one, you’re closing out the game. But if you let another one in, it becomes a close game. For us, once it was 4-1, it felt a little more secure because we had a three-goal buffer, but when you do have a lead, it’s definitely a different game of tactics that early. You don’t practice that.

So much celebrating ensued after your victory, what was the best time you had after the team won?

My top day by far was the New York City tickertape parade when hundreds of thousands of people came out. Schools were closed so kids could come out and support us! That was a shock. We didn’t even know it would happen until about three days before. I was super excited because there hasn’t been a women’s team in a parade, and there hasn’t been a female athlete honored since the 1960s. That gives you some perspective. And to cap it off that night, we went to the Taylor Swift concert where we were able to raise the trophy with her onstage. So it was the longest, best day to celebrate the World Cup.

In 1999, you were 10 years old when the US Women’s team won the World Cup. How much did that impact you?

That’s when that shift happened for me. You either have it at that age or you don’t. That’s why I have my children’s book series, *The Kicks*, which centers around the ages of 8-12, because that’s when you have that shift. Obviously talent is what starts it off, but you have to have that passion to keep going and be able to sacrifice and be committed. For me, being that age and seeing the World Cup and seeing those role models, those female athletes that I’d never seen on TV before, it was pretty special. They sparked the dream for me to be a professional athlete, make it to the national team and make my life all about soccer. Now going back to it and being a “15er” and getting that third star on the crest is really special. When we look down and see that third star

on our jersey, that’s forever going to remind everyone of the “15ers,” not just the “99ers,” who everyone has been talking about for the last 16 years.

You’ve been really successful at finding endorsement opportunities off of the field—more than any women’s soccer player—with companies such as Panasonic and Coca-Cola. Do you feel like you’re blazing a trail that other players are going to follow?

It has to be authentic. I feel like I have a lot of teammates with big personalities, and they want to show who they are off the field. They get to do that through social media. I think a lot of us also have opportunities given to us through things like soccer clinics, such as the clinics I’ve been doing with Tampax. It starts here with an eight-year-old girl’s dream, not only in the US. I also want to get reach that 10-year-old girl who doesn’t even have the opportunity to play soccer, because it’s not in their culture. That’s more long term, but I hope I’m able to leverage a more global presence to create opportunities for girls to play.

Now that you’ve conquered the world, what’s next?

I do have a World Cup and Olympic gold medal, but what’s next is for me to be the best soccer player that I can be. If that’s the best in the world, then that’s the best in the world. If not, then I know at least I’m bringing out the best athlete I can be. I don’t feel like I’ve reached that yet.

You’re on the cover of the FIFA ‘16 video game. That’s one of the biggest honors for a modern athlete in their respective sport. How did you react to that news?

I actually didn’t realize that the FIFA game was as huge as it is. It has a reach bigger than, I feel, men’s or women’s soccer has in the US alone. It’s a global thing. And to be on the cover—I know that it’s only the cover in North America—but I’ve received so much support from around the world. It’s really crazy to see myself in Target! And not only to see myself on the cover with Lionel Messi, but to see male footballers see a female soccer player share that cover, we’re reaching a platform that we’ve never reached before.

How did you end up with the number 13? Do you believe in luck?

I took number 13 because it was the only number available when I signed up for club soccer, and it became lucky for me. That’s pretty much been the only number I’ve had since I was 13. Ever since I started to love the number 13, I’ve become a little superstitious. And if an athlete tells you that they’re not superstitious, they’re lying! I’d say Friday the 13ths are pretty lucky. ■