

The Golden Girl

By Rowan Watkins

Photos courtesy of Lindsey Horan

Just 11 years ago Golden High School (GHS) was home to a girl named Lindsey Horan. That girl is now a woman who is considered one of the best soccer players in the world.

At the time, no one knew how much she would change women's soccer. Horan grew up in Golden and played club soccer in the area for 12 years. Horan's family surrounded her with support even when she was just a young 5-year-old girl playing in the local grassroots league (a league focused on activities for different sports of all ages).

"When I was younger, I didn't do many things outside of soccer. I went to school sometimes and I played soccer and I had a few friends on my club team and stuff, playing my school friends, but it's not like I went to the parties or I went to any school events. Nothing like that. And I think that was fun and well back then because I was working to be where I am today."

Her mother, Linda, was her first coach and helped her master the fundamentals of soccer and create a healthy relationship with the game. Horan described her one-of-a-kind relationship with her mother when she stated, "When I was younger I was so shy, I was such an introvert. It was really hard for me to come out of my shell. . . I can't believe my mom did all of this for me and she was my coach forever."

Outside of soccer, she loves Chipotle, her dog Ferguson, watching movies, and hiking when she comes back home to Golden. She played for Colorado Rush in 2012 while attending GHS. Instead of playing for Golden's women's soccer team she and her coaches decided that she would just play for her club team rather than playing for both.

When she was playing youth soccer her team played in a league named ODP (Olympic Development Program)

but over the years the youth soccer systems have become harder and harder for players to navigate. She talks about the difference when she states "It's really difficult now because there's so many different forms of recruitment and evaluation and there's different tournaments. It is impossible for national team coaches or regional team coaches to go and see these players. They could be the best players in their respective age groups or clubs. But you know what? Where do you go and watch them?"



Although many people would have loved to see her represent Golden, playing for Rush gave her opportunities to play against some of the best players in the country. During what would have been her spring season with GHS, she played with the boys club team.

“I had the chance to now go play with a boys club and get better in a different way. . . What's going to get me to my goal quickest?” This allowed her to develop her skills and get used to a higher level of difficulty than she would have at GHS. Youth girls' soccer in the city of Golden and surrounding cities has gained more attention since she entered the professional women's leagues.

“All I cared about was playing and training, and it wasn't about sleep or nutrition or anything like that.” When she was younger, Horan spent any minute she could playing, watching, thinking, or talking about soccer. “I do try to go back to the rush and I try to see the girls and the coaches.”

She was offered a sports scholarship to the University of North Carolina during her junior year. The university was, and still is, considered one of the best women's soccer programs in the country and she had been considered the top prospect for women's college soccer. Horan and UNC women's soccer coach Anson Dorrance would have taken the NCAA by storm. However, her coaches and she decided to turn down the offer to develop her skills more deeply while also pursuing the opportunities that the collegiate level couldn't offer.

“I know in my heart that I could be one of those players. I could be a professional athlete, I could be on the U.S. national team. . . it's just about how much work you put into it.”

“If you work your ass off every single day you could be professional, you could play in college.”



Horan became one of the most talented soccer players this world has ever seen because she bet on herself and trained day in and day out to get to where she is today.

After turning down the scholarship she boldly decided to move to Paris to play for the Paris-Saint Germain first team. At 18, Horan signed a six-figure deal with Paris Saint-Germain making her one of the youngest women to sign an agreement of its caliber. The deal with PSG also made her the only American women's soccer player to skip college and go straight to a competitive women's league.

Deciding to skip college and not participate in collegiate soccer or academics wasn't something people expected from Horan, partly because she didn't know a word of French and partly because she was only 18. Although her path may have been unconventional it helped her become one of the most versatile players the soccer world has ever seen.

She played in 58 games over the four years she was with the club and recorded 46 goals for the French side.

Her performances were largely overshadowed by the abusive practices the head coach used and the hate she received from the French fans, specifically regarding her weight. The work environment of PSG has been described by many as toxic and it caused lots of internal problems in the club. During her time in Paris, multiple other players and or coaches were also affected by the inappropriate and fatphobic comments. The majority of bullying came from the head coach Farid Benstiti who would often make fun of players' weight, according to an article written by Emma Hurby in *Just Women's Sports*. It was even more cruel considering her age and newness to the professional scene. Even though her performance was exceptional she wasn't given the time of day or attention that she deserved. To be so young and to be treated so poorly taught her to prioritize her mental health and take care of herself so she can play the game she loves. "I think a lot of people think it's all just amazing things when you're playing pro." After four years abroad she returned to the States to play for the Portland Thorns in the National Women's Soccer League(NWSL). The coach at PSG moved during this time to Thorn's rival OL Reign.

Throughout the years of dedicating herself to her craft and her team, she has been pushed to find a balance between her personal life and professional life. Horan's overwhelming love for the game makes it hard for her game to not be personal.

"I have to find a bit of a balance of things I do outside of the game to also make me happy so that when I have a bad training or a down period, you know?" she said. "I have my fiance and now I have my time with my dog, as stupid as that sounds."

At Portland, she helped her team win the NWSL championship in 2017 while also collecting 25 goals, 88 regular season appearances, 9 assists, and winning MVP in 2018. After having a successful couple of seasons in the US, she was loaned to French side club Olympique Lyonnais Féminin in 2022 on an 18-month plan. After experiencing the club's dynamic, both clubs decided to restructure the deal to create a permanent transfer and contract with her playing there until 2026. The club has dominated the French Women's League(French Division 1 Feminine) for the past couple of seasons, as well as the Champions League. The club itself won four consecutive Champions League titles

(2016-2020) with Horan being a part of the latest championship. Just last season the team further proved their dominance by winning the Coupe de France Feminine for the tenth time(A cup tournament with the top French women's club). It is safe to say Horan is in one of the best clubs in Europe and is finally in a club where she is challenged and able to develop further as a player and person.



She has already brought lots of attention to the French women's league and will surely continue to put on a show with her new teammates.

Horan was first called up to the US national team during the team's March camp in 2013. She has played in more than 130 games for her country, and just this past summer she captained the team in the 2023 Australian New Zealand Women's World Cup. Since beginning her time with the national team she has been working towards being named captain. This past year at the World Cup she was named the USWNT 18th captain in the history of the federation, to be named captain is to be given the biggest honor possible in soccer.

"I think of myself as someone that can help other girls on the team. I think I have a decent head on my shoulders and I am very intuitive in that way where I think I know what people need at certain times. And I think that's characteristic of a captain," she said.

Being named captain gives you more authority but also names you as the leader and someone to look up to. In Horan's case, she proved to be a trustworthy and reliable teammate and is known for making the people around her more comfortable and giving them the space to be creative on and off the field.

"And it's taking on a lot and it's making me a better person, a better player, better teammate. . . it is one of the most honorable things I've ever been a part of."

When playing for the USWNT she plays more defensively and becomes more of a playmaker instead of always being in the play. She connects the ball and is the center of all communication on the field. Although the team didn't get past the round of 16 she still made lots of progress in creating a connection between the new young players and the veterans on the team. Lindsey Horan is and has been a key factor for a long time and hopefully will continue to be a fundamental aspect of the team's success.

Horan is one of if not the most versatile defensive midfielders the game has ever seen. Her style of play has always been fast-changing, which is one of her most desirable characteristics and has always been prominent in her style of play. Seeing someone like her who went to GHS and grew up in the same city that I am in, succeed in every way possible gives me hope and the motivation to believe that having dedication and discipline will pay off.

In 2017, Lindsey Horan donated her 2017 USWNT jersey to the Golden History Museum. Horan will become even more important to the team because Megan Rapinoe and Julie Ertz have both retired during this past September camp.

Many young kids and teenagers dream of becoming professional athletes but not many believe they can once they grow up. When she was younger she received a lot of backlash for her decision to go pro so early, but since she trusted herself and her decision she was able to start her journey into becoming one of the most influential women's soccer players.

"I feel like everything I do, got me to where I am. So I wouldn't want to do anything different." She is an example of how betting on yourself and focusing on your path can get you to the highest level of success in any aspect of your life; whether that's soccer, sports, family, or your career.