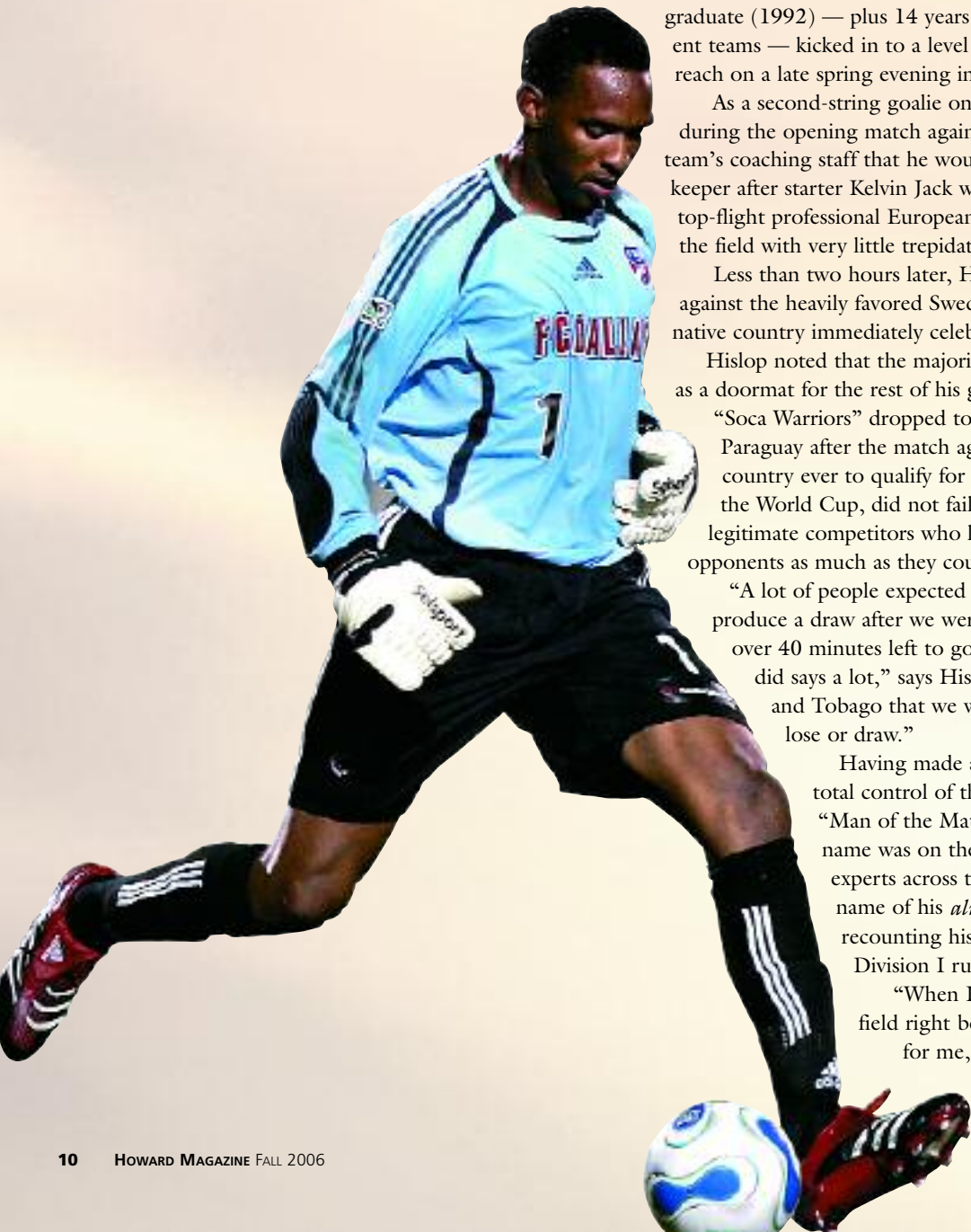


# Alumnus Kicks it on World Stage



If there is one position in the sport of soccer which takes supreme discipline, it's goalkeeping.

During Shaka Hislop's time at Howard University, the discipline learned as a member of the Bison's men's soccer program and as a mechanical engineering graduate (1992) — plus 14 years as a professional player with four different teams — kicked in to a level that most top-level athletes may never reach on a late spring evening in Dortmund, Germany.

As a second-string goalie on Trinidad and Tobago's World Cup team during the opening match against Sweden, Hislop was notified by his team's coaching staff that he would take the field as the starting goalkeeper after starter Kelvin Jack was injured. As a 37-year-old veteran of top-flight professional European matches, Hislop took his position on the field with very little trepidation.

Less than two hours later, Hislop led his country to a stunning draw against the heavily favored Swedes. He was mobbed by teammates, as his native country immediately celebrated.

Hislop noted that the majority of the soccer world picked his country as a doormat for the rest of his group in the tourney. And while the "Soca Warriors" dropped tough 2-0 decisions to England and Paraguay after the match against Sweden, Trinidad, the smallest country ever to qualify for the main draw in the 76-year history of the World Cup, did not fail to serve notice that they were indeed legitimate competitors who lived up to their own goals of giving its opponents as much as they could handle.

"A lot of people expected us to be beaten quite badly, but to produce a draw after we were reduced to playing a man down with over 40 minutes left to go in the match and to defend the way we did says a lot," says Hislop. "It showed the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we were there to fight on their behalf, win lose or draw."

Having made a half-dozen stellar saves while taking total control of the Sweden match, Hislop was named the "Man of the Match," on ABC television's telecast. His name was on the lips of a plethora of broadcast soccer experts across the globe, as the broadcast flashed the name of his *alma mater* on numerous occasions, recounting his contributions to the Bison's NCAA Division I runner-up finish in 1988.

"When I found out that I would be taking the field right before the match actually made it easier for me," says Hislop. "I didn't have to deal with pre-game nerves. I am a veteran, but I

still get nervous. But with the amount of time I had to get ready [to start] I didn't really have much time to think."

"As a player, the World Cup is soccer's biggest stage. I've been playing [professionally] for 14 years. And as much as people talk about the English Premier League, there is nothing like the World Cup. It was definitely the highlight of my career," he says.

## The Pursuit of Passion

Hislop was quick to credit his experience at Howard as a part of his preparation for the hectic world of professional sports.

"When I left Trinidad, there was no professional league to get into, so Howard gave me that opportunity to play against some great competition," Hislop says. "Some of the players I played against then are still playing professionally. Howard taught me discipline, not just with soccer, but in my classes as well. Being in college, sometimes you have to make some hard decisions if you want to be successful, and I learned that early [at Howard]."

"The entire [college] experience was fantastic. I still stay in touch with a lot of my friends I met while in school. Now that I am here in the states, it's time for me to try to renew old friendships. Since I have been playing in England, I haven't had a chance to come back, not even when I was inducted into the Hall of Fame. And I've missed every homecoming [since graduation]. Now I have the chance to come back, even if it is just for the weekend."

It's a promise he will more easily keep with his trade to the FC Dallas team of the U.S.-based Major League Soccer in early 2006. It's a win-win situation for him. He will be closer to friends and the league continues to be interested in the skills he brings to the game. Although at an advanced age for athletes on the field, Hislop plans to continue to play professionally as long as his body will allow.

"I am competing for the top jersey, I'm not here just to sit," says Hislop. "That's what makes the game exciting for me, competing. I hope that with the experience I bring, that not only can I help them on the field, but I can help get the best performance out of our goalkeepers. I will continue to play as long as I can. "Six or seven years ago, I said that I would play until I was 35. I felt good at 35, and now I am taking it on a year-to-year basis. One day I know I will wake up and will know that I don't feel like playing anymore. Right now, I am just enjoying my [playing] career."

While at Howard, Hislop interned at NASA, a prime proving ground for students looking to make a name for themselves in the engineering and technical fields. However, after more than a decade of immersing himself in the world of professional soccer, an engineering career isn't exactly the first option on his list.

"I was told while in school that 50 percent of what you learn is obsolete five years later," says Hislop with a laugh. "I have been committed to soccer, and it is my passion. I would love to pursue a career in coaching after I am done playing. It would even be great to come back to Howard, but I know [Howard soccer head coach] Keith [Tucker] isn't going anywhere. I want him to stay right here at Howard. He was the one who brought me here to Howard, and I'll always be grateful for that." **H**

John I. Harris III is a Maryland-based freelance sports journalist.



"I am competing for the top jersey, I'm not here just to sit," says Hislop. "That's what makes the game exciting for me, competing. I hope that with the experience I bring, that not only can I help them on the field, but I can help get the best performance out of our goalkeepers. I will continue to play as long as can."