

[17-year-old Zac Herold forced to retire before first pro match](#)

By [Carter Daly](#)



Football is sometimes described as a game of immortals. Whether it be on the club or international stage, it's a sport in which men some might consider well past their prime can be the spark of a team or magical title run. This, however, will not be the case for 17-year-old [Toronto FC](#) rookie Zachary Herold. The club announced Monday that due to a serious heart condition, [their 2010 MLS SuperDraft second-round pick will be forced to retire before playing his first professional match.](#)

Says [TFC's official website](#):

Herold suffers from the condition Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) – which causes abnormal thickening of a part of the heart muscle. With this condition, under strenuous exercise, there is a risk of developing a potentially fatal irregular heart rhythm, or arrhythmia. Unfortunately the only way to reduce this risk is to put significant life-long restrictions on exercise.

On Saturday, May 22 the team will honor the 2010 MLS SuperDraft pick in a ceremonial coin toss before the 1 p.m. ET kick-off against the [New England Revolution](#) at BMO Field.

A sad story about a promising young talent who has had his dreams dashed due to a health condition he has no control over, but at least now he's aware of his life-threatening condition.

Herold, who [passed on interest from the Bundesliga's FC Cologne](#) to join MLS, is coping with the situation as well as one can hope:

“Announcing my retirement from soccer at this age is something I never, ever thought would happen to me,” said Zac Herold. “I am grateful to Dr. Smith, and all the specialists I’ve seen over the last few months – this news was very hard to take but I know it’s the best decision for me and my health. My parents have been with me every step of the way, and it means so much to me that I’m able to ‘retire’ as a Toronto FC player. The whole team has been wonderful to me and my family and although it’ll be a tough day, I’m looking forward to seeing everyone on the 22nd.”

Aside from the troubling reality of such an early retirement, questions will now surely be asked of Toronto FC director of soccer Mo Johnston, who spent a valuable second-round pick on the former Under-17 U.S. men's national team member:

“Early in pre-season we did medical’s on all our players, and obviously our doctor, Ira Smith, was concerned with some of Zac’s results,” said director of soccer Mo Johnston. “From there he then began a series of tests with a variety of doctors, in both Canada and the U.S. Zac’s health was first and foremost in this process. Our hearts go out to Zac and his family; it’s a very difficult situation. We felt it was the right thing to do by honoring him in front of our fans, and give them a chance to show their support.”

Toronto FC supporters will find it extremely troubling that Mo or anyone else at the club didn't know about such a serious condition before the pick was made, only to discover Zac’s problem through the team tests after he was drafted and his Generation Adidas contract was signed. Even still, it's better that they found out when they did instead of having something horrible happen on the pitch.