

# Japan not ready to give up this title: reigning Women's World Cup champions

[ca.sports.yahoo.com/blogs/eh-game/japan-not-ready-to-give-up-this-title--reigning-women-s-world-cup-champions-021803696.htm](http://ca.sports.yahoo.com/blogs/eh-game/japan-not-ready-to-give-up-this-title--reigning-women-s-world-cup-champions-021803696.htm)

By Israel Fehr

7/4/2015



VANCOUVER – Facing the same team they beat back in 2011 to win the Women's World Cup, Japan heads into Sunday's final against the United States four years later intent on retaining their status as reigning champions.

"I think we are in our best form," said Japan's head coach Norio Sasaki. "We are in a very good condition to play against the U.S. If we can play our own game and stick to our plan I think we will have an opportunity to win."

For all the legacy talk on the side of the Americans and the rock star status and notoriety of their big-name players, there's just as much at stake for the Japanese, if not more.

Winning back to back World Cup titles would put this group of Japanese players in a special class. They could become the second women's team to repeat as champions. [Germany](#) won the tournament in 2003 and again in 2007. In the long history of the men's tournament only [Italy](#) (1934, 1938) and [Brazil](#) (1958, 1962) have accomplished that feat.

While U.S. legend Abby Wambach [desperately hopes to add World Cup champion](#) as the final piece to her glowing soccer resume before she steps away from the game, her Japanese contemporary Homare Sawa is also eyeing a storybook ending.

Like Wambach, Sawa is playing at her last World Cup and has had her role reduced in recent years, but she remains an integral part of her team's identity. Now 36, Sawa is no longer required to carry the load like she did in

her prime but can still conjure her share of magical moments reminiscent of the goal she scored in the 117th minute of extra time to send the 2011 World Cup final to penalty kicks. Adding a second World Cup trophy to the cabinet with Sawa as a bit contributor would be a lasting testament to what what she's built with that program.

Just as U.S. captain Carli Lloyd has raised her game over the last month in Canada, Japan's captain Aya Miyama has been brilliant all tournament long. A diminutive maestro in the midfield with a daring ability to run at defenders and a deft passing touch, a win would go a long way in getting Miyama her due and being recognized as the holder of the unofficial title of best player on the planet.

Many American players have said they are drawing motivation from the World Cup loss back in 2011. Japan has a loss they'd like to avenge as well. The two nations faced off in the gold medal game at the 2012 London Olympics and this time it was the U.S. that emerged victorious by a 2-1 scoreline. That day, Japan left Wembley Stadium thinking they deserved better.

"In 2011 we capitalized on our opportunities," said Sasaki. "But in 2012 I thought we played better than 2011. In any case, this is the third time we are playing each other in the final. Our motivation is high because we are playing the United States."

"I wanted the gold medal in the Olympics, but we were not able to do that," added Miyama. "The bitter feeling I had that day has stayed with me for the last three years."

These two teams are obviously familiar with each other. Sasaki realizes his side isn't as dynamic as the Americans they will line up against in this final. That doesn't mean he's lacking in confidence though, even if Japan's 2-1 win over [England](#) in the semifinals wasn't all that convincing.

"The strength of the U.S. team is their power, their structure, and also their strong desire to win," said Sasaki. "We don't really have as much power, but we have the skill, technique, and also the network amongst the players. I think in these three areas we are better. In terms of the desire to win, I think both teams are at the same level."

There's no question where the power emitted from the crowd at B.C. Place on Sunday will be fed. The U.S. have essentially played a home World Cup, with American fans filling the stands at all their games across Canada. The final will be no different. An overwhelming number of the expected sellout of over 55,000 people will be screaming for the stars and stripes to take home the title.

Taking into account the history of the matchup and the quality of the teams on the field, it's setting up to be a thrilling final.

"We have this badge that shows our World Cup title on [the front of our] uniforms," said Miyama. "I hope the girls that are playing after us will be able to wear this uniform with the badge of [this next] title."

That's the true legacy that one of the teams will leave with Sunday: which one will earn the right to display that they are the world's best for everyone to see. The U.S. will once again pose a tremendous challenge, but Japan is hoping that after 90 – or 120 – hard-fought minutes, they'll be able to do so with great pride for four more years.

-----

[Israel Fehr](#) is a writer for [Yahoo Canada Sports](#). Email him at [israelfehr@yahoo.ca](mailto:israelfehr@yahoo.ca) or follow him on Twitter. [Follow @israelfehr](#)