

SOCCER STARS GET A KICK OUT OF DOGS

→ Matt Besler and Graham Zusi are busy guys. Besides playing for the MLS team Sporting Kansas City, the pro soccer stars and former roommates will represent the U.S. at this summer's FIFA World Cup in Brazil. And have we mentioned that they're also full-time dog owners? Their 4-year-old pups are Baci and Gipper, Labrador Retriever-mix sisters the two adopted from a shelter in Kansas City, Mo.

Besler and Zusi recently talked to DOG FANCY about adopting Baci and Gipper.

Q: How did you go about getting Gipper and Baci?

MB: Dogs have always been a pretty big part of both of our lives. Once we got an apartment together, it was something that we started talking about.

I was telling Graham about this place called Wayside Waifs, and it's an adoption shelter in Kansas City. ... And we showed up (one day after practice), and an hour before, there had been a litter of seven puppies that just showed up from Arkansas.

And these dogs just fit almost everything that we were kind of looking for. So we just started playing with a few of them. ... We just said, 'Well, I know we didn't really talk about it, but let's get one.' So we were kind of just looking for a dog that we were both going to take care of, and it was going to turn into our hobby off the field to train a dog.

GZ: Our job being a soccer player ... you can get traded pretty much at any time. We started thinking, if one of us isn't around, who gets the dog? We realized pretty quickly that we were going to have to take two dogs home.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about Baci and Gipper's relationship?

GZ: The dogs did pretty much everything together. ... They loved to chase each other, play tag, and roughhouse—the whole puppy thing.

Now that Matt and I are not living together, we still like to get together and have little play dates for the pups. It's funny, as soon as they're together again, it's like they never missed a beat.

MB: You can just tell right away that they're sisters. They have this little special

connection that only brothers and sisters can have. They're really competitive with each other.

The other thing that I always notice is just how they take care of each other. They clean each other's ears out all the time.

Q: Do you play soccer with the dogs?

MB: Not necessarily soccer, but (Gipper) definitely has that Labrador Retriever in her, so she loves running after balls and chasing things and chasing Frisbees.

GZ: I've always tried to get (Baci) to play with a soccer ball. She's not a fan of a full-sized ball, but a lot of her toys are little, soft soccer balls, of course.

Q: What do the dogs do when you're on the road, and what will they be doing during the World Cup?

GZ: My girlfriend here in Kansas City, while I'm on the road, usually takes care of Baci. I have done a few road trips with her, usually in the offseason. If I'm driving back down to Florida, I'll bring Baci as well.

(During the World Cup), she'll stay in Kansas City, and a good friend of ours will be looking after her. One of our good friends has a puppy as well, and they're very good friends, so Baci will be having some sleepovers over there.

MB: I'm lucky enough that I had a fiancée, and now my wife, involved in Gipper's life, so when I went on the road, she would be the one that would watch over Gipper and take care of her.

I'm lucky enough, too, that I grew up in Kansas City ... so my parents' house



Graham Zusi and Baci



Matt Besler and Gipper

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is about 20 minutes away, and they have a huge yard. Sometimes even when I'm in town, I still bring her out there. ... She gets to run around the backyard a lot, and that's where she will be staying during the World Cup.

Q: What is the best part about having a dog?

MB: Just the fact that every day, no matter what happens to you, whether or not you have a horrible day, an average day, or a great day, when you walk through the door, your dog is going to be there to give you attention and to love you.

GZ: Unconditional love that a dog always has for its owner is pretty special. Just kind of having someone who's extremely dependent on you always—they're basically like a child. ... You get that father feeling over your dog.

— Katie Ingmire