

SOCCER

From East High to MLS elite

Nat Borchers retires after 14 professional seasons

BY NICK JURNEY

THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Nat Borchers spent 33,013 minutes on the Major League Soccer pitch.

On Friday, the East High School graduate decided that was enough.

Borchers, a fierce defender who won league championships with Real Salt Lake in 2009 and the Portland Timbers in 2015, is retiring after 14 seasons.

Borchers, 35, played two seasons for the Timbers after being traded from Real Salt Lake in 2015 and had been rehabbing from a ruptured Achilles tendon that he suffered in July.

"Even before I got injured, I had been pushing my body through a lot of different things, and I knew at some point it was going to give out," Borchers said. "That injury sort of gave me some pause and perspective about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life."

Borchers graduated from East in 1999 and played for the University of Denver.

Despite going undrafted in 2003, he signed with the Colorado Rapids and ultimately carved out a successful MLS career.

Borchers is tied with



Nat Borchers

Landon Donovan and Jamie Moreno for 11th all time in career MLS games played with 340, including 339 starts (sixth most all-time).

He's one of just six field players to log at least 30,000 career regular season minutes and also made 11 trips to the MLS Cup playoffs with three different teams (Colorado, Real Salt Lake, Portland).

He attributed his grit and longevity to being a Pueblo product.

"Being from Pueblo, I always grew up with a big chip on my shoulder," Borchers said. "I was always playing with kids from Denver and other big cities, so I always wanted to prove myself.

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Borchers also played two years with the Norwegian first-division club Odd Grenland (now known as Odds BK), and played for the U.S. national team a handful of times, most recently in a 1-0 friendly win against South Africa in 2010.

Borchers quickly became a fan favorite in Portland and was easily recognized by his signature red beard, which became a rally symbol during the Timbers' 2015 championship campaign.

His blocked shot in stoppage time against FC Dallas during the second leg of the Conference Championship that year preserved the Timbers' one-goal lead and pro-

pelled them to the Cup final.

Borchers has remained involved with his hometown soccer program during his professional career, most notably through his visits during the holiday season to play in the East Alumni soccer game and fundraiser over the past four years.

For his next move, Borchers and his beard will hit the broadcast booth and join the community relations team for the Timbers while also growing his real estate investment business.

"I've got a few irons in the fire that I'm really excited about," Borchers said. "I think more than anything I will miss the relationships. You go to battle with your best friends and really get to know them inside and out. I'll be forever grateful for those relationships."

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