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## LMSC Alum Sassano Inspires Youth Soccer Players

Submitted by Mary Brown



Photo Mary Brown

Youth athletic programs can be the launching pad for a career in sports, even right here in our own backyard. For professional football, there is Ken Dorsey from Orinda. For Olympic swimming, there is Natalie Coughlin, who grew up in Lafayette. And for professional soccer, there is 23 year old Luke Sassano, an Orinda native and Cal graduate who now plays Major League Soccer (MLS) for the New York Red Bulls. The Red Bulls reached the MLS finals for the first time after drafting Sassano in 2008.

From the age of 11 until 18, Sassano played soccer for the Lamorinda Soccer Club (LMSC), a soccer program for Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda youth ages 7-18.

Every weekend in January, drivers along Highway 24 could see 150 kids on Bentley High School's new state of the art turf field. These young players, ages 7-11, were participating in LMSC'S Winter Development Clinics, working through 9 stations over the course of the morning, covering skills ranging from dribbling moves to footwork to "one on one" practice.

On January 17, LMSC welcomed Sassano home to visit with these young players who are as eager to practice the fundamentals and play soccer as he was many years ago.

Sassano spent time with the players on the field, alongside Technical Director, Mohamed Mohamed, and his Winter Clinic Instructional Team of professional

coaches, college players, and older LMSC players. In between, the kids gathered with balls, t-shirts and player cards to collect the autograph of this real life, professional soccer player in their midst.

After the ink in Sassano's Sharpie had finally run dry, Sassano reflected on these young soccer players: "It was great spending time with them and seeing how youth soccer has grown. Coming here is like visiting family. At LMSC, I learned not only the skills, but (also) the passion, persistence, and teamwork to reach my goals in soccer and in other life situations. I feel fortunate to have been coached here, and it continues to be a great ride."

As if to make the point, a 9-year-old player returning for a second season -- having finished a morning of good, hard work and fun -- stepped into one of the cars at the long pick-up line at the curb and announced to his parents, "Soccer rocks!"

For information about LMSC or upcoming 2009 team tryouts, visit [www.lamorindasoccer.com](http://www.lamorindasoccer.com).

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