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## Lamorinda Indoor Sports Arena Opens

By Nick Marnell



Sophie Leksan keeps a coach's eye on the kids at the new Lamorinda Futsal Arena.  
Photo Andy Scheck

said the club decided to invest in the arena to generate revenue and to provide players a year-round facility. "Of special importance, though, we wanted to find a way to bring the community to our club in any way we could," she said. The club has invested \$60,000 in the facility, one of four indoor soccer arenas within 15 miles of Lamorinda, but the only one with an artificial turf playing surface.

The arena recently opened to training sessions for the under-4 and under-8 age groups. The children are exposed to futsal, a five-to-a-side version of soccer, which stresses the development of individual skills by letting the kids jump right into the action to learn the game through experience.

"No coach is telling the kids what to do," said Mohammed. "Kids can be themselves, without a structured practice. When you are playing in a small-sided game, it maximizes the number of touches. It makes you play faster, think quicker, make sharp decisions. Their natural instincts and creativity develop. Their problem solving ability increases. When they fail, they will have figured it out themselves.

"The game is the teacher."

"I wish I had a facility like this where I could have played year-round," said volunteer coach Evan Sassano. "When I was young I would have been here every day. Maybe I would have gone even further." And that's saying something, as Sassano starred at UC Berkeley and played professionally in the North American Soccer League for the Minnesota United. He began his soccer career with the LSC at age 11.

"I love teaching the kids," he said. "I want to give back, and help them with their dream: a little guy growing up from the streets and turning pro."

The club boasts 27 alumni who play college soccer, including Megan Reid of the University of Virginia, a 2014 NCAA College Cup finalist. Claire Winter of Acalanes stars at UCLA and Campolindo's Sophie Leksan, goalie with Loyola Marymount, volunteers with the current LSC crop of U-8s.

The new arena will open to the U-15 age group later this summer, with adult leagues scheduled for the fall. The club expects the arena to stay solidly booked throughout the year. "When it's 30 degrees at Wilder, 7-year-olds are freezing," said Sassano. "They don't want to move.

Now we can bring them here."

"We're going to make this a place where the kids want to be," said Mohammed. "This place will bring the street mode into the equation, but in a safe environment."

And maybe produce a star player for Team USA at a men's or women's FIFA World Cup.

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[back](#)

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