

Family, Food, Clubhouse: Ed Romero of Sporting Astoria

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"We are born alone. We will die alone. That doesn't mean you have to live alone. Strength is in unity."

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It's been another wild and crazy week in the world of American soccer. So let's look at something positive and stable, shall we? And one quick note, today is my three year wedding anniversary. So if you notice I fall fairly silent on Twitter, I won't be around this weekend, because I'll be out celebrating.

I got connected with Ed, interestingly enough, through my work with [American Soccer Clubs United](#). I was recruiting him, and in the process, we set up an interview, too. This might be one of my all time favorites. We talked about his clubhouse, efforts to start a youth program, food, and even there's even a recipe for Beer Chicken hidden in this interview. It's a lot to read, but it's going to be worth every minute of your time. Check it out.

Tell readers a little about yourself. Who you are, where you're from, and what your roll is with Sporting Astoria.

Its going to be long, so brace yourself.

I was born and raised in Astoria, Queens, NYC. Just so you get an idea, Astoria is the first town in Queens up from midtown Manhattan. I am founder and current president of Sporting Astoria Soccer Club. Our club was founded in 2003.

I am first generation Peruvian-American. As early as I can remember, all my family gathered to watch the Peruvian National Team. I was born the year they won their second Copa America, 1975. The Peruvian National Team was going through their 2nd golden age. It all started in 1969 when they eliminated Argentina with a 2-2 draw in Buenos Aires to qualify to the 1970 World Cup. What they had achieved I do not think I will ever experience. Just to name a few - quarter-final finish in 1970 WC, second Copa America Title, group winners in 1978 WC, Peru's best player, Teofilo Cubillas, scored 10 goals in two FIFA World Cups, and then 3 world cup qualifications, 70, 78, 82.

My family (Fathers side) had a close relationship with football in Lima, Peru. My grandfather had a soccer ball manufacturing company, Empresas Sporting (Sporting Enterprises). He would sell soccer balls (among other items) to all the local clubs in Lima. My grandfather was well known. By the 70's his business sales would decline with the increasing popularity of Adidas. By the late 80's his business was gone. I had the pleasure of being part of his business when I went to Peru in 1984, my last visit - I was 9. None of his kids continued the family business. He retired a happy man.

When we sat around to watch football my uncle, Dad, and granddad would study every game. They would compete to see who would analyze the game more accurately. They were scholars. When I was old enough to join a soccer club, my dad shopped around and couldn't find a 100 year old club that he could enroll me in. There were no football clubs. There were a few ethnic clubs which turned him off. There were no community soccer clubs. There were the Cosmos, that to him, oddly represented all of NY. How? He expected to find clubs in every town. There were no soccer teams or leagues in our schools. It was rough. He told me to get involved with other sports. I played Basketball and Baseball for much of my youth. He didn't like the ethnic Latin leagues that had soccer "schools" but that had coaches who were out to make a living rather than teaching the sport.

We would still gather as a family to watch soccer games. That never changed but for many years that was the extent of my involvement with soccer besides having the occasional family soccer games every spring, summer and fall.

It wasn't until 2002 when things changed. Over the years more family had come over from Peru and there was a resurgence of soccer fever in our family. At the time, William C Bryant High School had received a new turf field. A soccer league had taken full advantage by setting up there. I found out more information about the league and I signed up a team. I called family and friends to join and we put together our first team. It was a family affair. In our second season the excitement kept brewing and I was being pushed to name the club. I paused and relived my soccer journey. It came to me. I must represent my town like my Dad wished someone had. I have to name it Sporting to honor my granddad. And like that, Sporting Astoria Soccer Club was born. From that moment on I received so much support from family and friends and continue to receive support. It is easy to work hard for something when you have support.

By 2005 we were ready to enter the best league in the city, the Cosmopolitan Soccer League. We went from 4th to 3rd division after our first season. We spent 8 seasons in the 3rd division. This time was important for me. I took this time to become a member of the CSL board. In those 8 years I learned everything I needed to know to know how to succeed. I met Sunil Gulati, Sal Rapaglia, the ENYSSA president, everyone on the state board, and listened to plenty of stories of the early days of NYC soccer. I learned how to properly run an amateur club. For instance, how to recruit, how to fund raise, picking board members, having an identity. I read a lot about coaching, was mentored by my uncles and father. After all, my eldest uncle had played and achieved high school accolades playing along side childhood friend Teofilo Cubillas. He went on to play professionally as well. My dad had been on the reserves of Universitario Football Club. My uncle was a young prospect in Sporting Cristal Soccer Club in Peru. My last uncle was a great organizer and planner.

Those 8 years were the best soccer years of my life. I learned so much. In 2013 it would be our last season in D3. We won promotion to D2 with a runner up finish. In 2016 we won our CSL indoor tournament going undefeated, beating first division teams. In 2017 we won our D2 reserve division group and the reserve division championship. This year we are 2-2 and getting ready for a near future move to D1. We have a small clubhouse, over 30 players, and a huge network of soccer supporters. Since 2015 we have been running youth summer soccer programs to get the word out in our neighborhood about our club. The future seems bright.

When I entered the league there were no teams representing towns besides Hoboken FC. Every team had ethnic names. Now you there are a lot more teams representing towns like Flushing FC, FC Spring Valley, Williamsburg International FC, Brooklyn Bound, Bronx Supreme, Richmond County FC, Brooklyn Gunners. I want to think my club had a minor role in that.

As for the league, I am currently 2nd Vice President of the CSL, second division chairman, and head all our social media/internet/brand name efforts. I'm responsible for promoting our brand name - CosmoLeague. I am responsible for bringing in an exclusive writer solely dedicated to our first division. I opened up social media accounts and from zero followers we now have over 1K in each account.

I hope you have figured out our identity. If you can figure out the type of person I am then that is the type of club we are. We take care of what we have, we work hard to gain more, and we always help those behind us, respect those in front of us, and we never quit. We do not go back we go forward. That is what all my teams share and what each player must have as a characteristic. That is Sporting Astoria Soccer Club. Soon enough I will open our club to our town in order to involve absolutely everyone. It will be a fragile project that will take some time before it comes to fruition.

Everything has come full circle now. On Thursday Peru plays Argentina for a spot in the WC. A win will most likely see Peru in. After 33 years, I will be flying to Peru to watch the national team play their last home game before heading off to the WC (I know they will win (They didn't)). I am simple a messenger. Sporting Astoria SC must exist.

I love answers like this! What can you tell me about the league Sporting Astoria is in, the Cosmopolitan Soccer League? What's the level of competition like, do you have any major rivals, those types of things.

I like giving complete answers.

When I did my homework on the best league in the city, it took some time but I finally came across the CSL. It was a hidden secret. To this day not many players know of the CSL. I'm trying to change that.

The league has been around since 1923. It started as the German American Soccer League. Over the years it incorporated many different ethnic clubs and became Cosmopolitan Soccer League. The history is deep. Many players played for the US national team in its early days. Every year we get countless ex professional domestic and international players. A slew of top college players as well. For example, a Turkish club signed ex-Galatasary all time goal scorer to their team this year. And they are in the second division.

The CSL teams win all the state cup competitions organized by our state association and the best CSL team, Lansdowne Bhoys, won the USASA Fritz Marth Cup (aka Amateur Cup) and the Werner Fricker Cup. Those competitions are the top tournaments for the USASA. As you can see the competition is strong. The league also has 4 divisions with promotion/relegation between the top 2 divisions and the bottom 2 divisions.

The level of organization is probably the best aspect of the league. The board members are dedicated to the league and they have been welcoming in allowing the newer generation to take the league forward. They are all good people and mentors. True soccer enthusiasts. The league possess very strict rules to ensure everyone follows a culture rich in sportsmanship and order.

You mentioned that the club has it's own clubhouse. How did the clubhouse come about?

Well its funny. There is a local German restaurant in Astoria, [Max Bratwurst Und Bier](#), very close to where I live. I go there all the time. It has great food. A mutual friend introduced us to one of the owners and we became friends. After hearing about the club he wanted to be a part of it. The restaurant donates their party room to our club. He is also a member of our club playing in our reserve division. We house all our trophies there as well as some team pictures, banners, and a glass enclosed jersey.

Many of the teams think of the present, not of the future. If you want your club to survive there needs to be a building process. I did both at the same time. I coached my team as well as planned on how it can be maintained for the next 10 years.

What kind of advice would you give to another team interested in doing the same things as Sporting? Anything they should or shouldn't do to really make it work?

Start by incorporating your organization. Create bylaws for the future club members to follow. You need to find ways to establish steady donations. You need to create a healthy and fun environment for the players - hydration, weekly training, and clubhouse are all good things. You need to be well organized. There needs to be a coaching staff and board. Promote your club on all social media platforms. Broadcast your games. Do not just submit senseless information. It has to be concise and smart. Get a website! And lastly, start building a youth program.

I can talk about this for days. I am living proof that you can turn your team into a club. It requires planning, commitment, and support. It can be done.

I can tell already a lot of people are going to benefit from reading how you answered just the first couple questions! I've got some questions based on your answer about the clubhouse. What kind of bylaws do you have for future members to follow, and how did you go about the process of actually coming up with and instating them?

I hope people enjoy the answers.

I forgot to mention our rivalries. We have a unique situation that I need to explain.

So we are from Astoria, Queens. While we played in Astoria our biggest rivalry was with Shamrock SC. We were in the same divisions from 2005-2009. But since then they have left us behind and moved up to D1. We were both Queens teams. Another team we have a close rivalry with that is from Queens is NYPD FC. We have been playing against each other for over 10 years. Some very good battles.

As field conditions dwindled in Queens, we moved our home field to the Bronx. The Bronx is the northern most borough in NYC. We play close to the South Bronx that is 15 minutes away from Astoria. Our friendly rivalry now in the Bronx is Bronx Supreme. We play tough against each other but off the field both clubs are good friends. We share fields all the time.

It is important to set up bylaws to fit your club identity and further build your culture. I saw first hand how the CSL bylaws created a culture of organization that is impressive and contagious. There is no compromising with the Germans. The rules must be followed. So I took that same idea and came up with bylaws to properly create and improve our club culture.

What kind of things do you do at Sporting to create a fun and healthy environment for your players?

What is our culture? well, nothing is given in Sporting. Its the other way around. The member has to give to Sporting. So an annual fee is requested from all members. Cost is \$40.

What do members give? We help with the laundry, we help each other car pool, we help set up the field. Previous members have written recaps on our games, donated balls, or donated jerseys.

The other just as important bylaws are keeping holy our Sabbath Day. (Saturday night and Sunday) We ask players to follow our diet and season workout schedule, commit to improving character by committing to a cause, supporting their teammates, respecting their coaches and opponents etc, and being on time. Success is only accomplished by preparing. We push this on every member, every season.

I am big on fitness and nutrition. Proper eating and hydration is huge. We have a relationship with U-ADE Sports Drink. We not only talk about how important hydration is, we also act on it by providing our players with UADE. Caring about the player is more valuable to a player than money. We also BARBEQUE. The barbeque is a staple in the club. We like to have big feasts and eating together. We also try to film our games so we can watch it later. We haven't done so this season but we will. The plan is to watch it at the club house.

Our strength is in our unity. Unity in whatever situation you are in. Without unity the CSL would not have lasted this long. And of course leadership. Well, Sporting has that with me!

You mentioned that it's important for teams to have a youth program. Is that something you have in place already, or something you are looking to do in the near future?

Right now we are getting our feet wet with the youth program. We are promoting the club among the local charter schools. There are 3 charter schools in Astoria and we have kids that play in our summer programs that are geared to promote the club as well as a test drive for our organization. We already have looked into joining the Cosmopolitan Junior Soccer League. We need to have certain things in place in order to move forward, the most important things being a field and coaches. So I predict that in the next year or so we will. We already have kids that we are looking at as future prospects. We still have local Catholic and public schools to tap into. It is a project that is moving well.

I like the sound of this club feast. What does a normal club meal look like? What do you cook, how many people are there, what are some of the favorite foods at the table among members?

Well we have an "asado" and "pollada". We cook strips of meat (skirt steak), beer chicken, sausages and beef ribs. We have malbec or beer when the guys are around. when the women are around we also make sangria. When its warm we make ceviche.

I forgot to mention an important saying that I learned from my family. It goes like this: "We are born alone. We will die alone. That doesn't mean you have to live alone. Strength is in unity."

When you approach these schools about promoting the club and looking at players, what approach do you normally take? Are there any particular things you do, or some type of 'sales pitch' that you make?

I am assuming you are asking about our process in obtaining fields or young players. Let me state that schools are always pushing back. They see us as competitors fighting for the same thing, parent contributions. Charters schools are always looking to raise money and their main source of donations come from parents as well as local businesses. But I explain that we aren't an academy charging an exorbitant amount of money. We are a club. We obtain fields so our members can play. Our players and

coaches help the kids get familiar with playing the game. We just let them play in the same way other kids around the world get familiar with soccer. They just play, play, play. When they do things incorrectly we correct them. We tell them we are all about bringing our community together with soccer. We are a neighborhood club, Sporting Astoria. We do not represent any ethnic group. I may be of Peruvian descent but my loyalty and motivation lies in my town of Astoria. We always put Astoria first. Once they get to know our program they are welcoming. especially when we give these schools free registration for a few families so they can use it in their school fund raising auctions. We also have learned how to screen print t shirts, and we give them out to our kids. We want all the kids in Astoria to have a Sporting Astoria t shirt.

When recruiting players we tell them pretty much the same thing. We aren't about money, our club generates enough funds to cover costs. We only ask players/members to pay \$40 for the season. We tell them that they represent our neighborhood. We are working on coming back to Astoria soon. We can't wait for that. Players like teams with no ethnic affiliations. We have players from everywhere.

This is the first time I've heard of the CSL Junior League. Is that made up of just CSL team youth programs, or a mix of those clubs and other youth programs?

Correct, the CJSJL has both youth programs of our CSL clubs as well as other youth programs/youth academies. The CJSJL was created when the CSL passed a rule that mandated all clubs have a youth program. After a while they dropped that rule and the CJSJL became its own independent organization. Although the two leagues aren't tied together any longer, a strong relationship still exists.

Interesting. That separation would explain why I haven't heard of the CJSJL before. In CSL play, are there any teams that you would consider to be major rivals or can't miss games?

Its been fun to watch Landowne Bhoys, who are the best team in the league. National Amateur Cup winners. Their recent rival has been Cedar Stars Academy. Quite a recent rivalry. Those games are good.

Earlier this summer, I found out about a club in Germany's Regionalliga Sudwest named FC Astoria Waldorf. What would you think about the prospect of establishing a relationship with them, especially with the shared moniker of Astoria?

Regarding the relationship, it would be great since we play in a league that was originally German. The language would be a barrier but I would make it work. We will definitely look into it.

This is going to be the first time a question like this has ever been asked on AP, but here goes. You have to cook one dish for your team meal. What is it, and how can readers try cooking it at home?

Easy. BEER CHICKEN.

You have to prep the chicken first. Let it soak in water and lemon for 24 hours, or up to 2 days before cooking it. The night before rub it with some paprika, lemon zest, rosemary, oregano, salt and pepper. Stick it in the fridge. On cooking day, cut a tall can of Bud. Drink half of it, and stick the other half inside the chicken. Put it on your grill and let it cook for 45 min at 350F. While it cooks get the drinks ready, put a salad together, and buy some french bread. Best meal after a game.

I've never been to New York City, let alone Astoria, so how would you describe your community to an outsider like me?

Where are you from? This question is tough, but here it goes.

Living in NYC is tough and not meant for everyone. You literally have people from everywhere in the world living here. You have poor neighborhoods and rich neighborhoods a block away from each other.

You have a \$200K car parked next to a beater. You can have a homeless man asking for money while a millionaire walks right by him. You have a pregnant woman in the subway standing up while no one offers her a seat. There are people who will never see an Opera or Broadway play because the price of the ticket is what they make in a week. You can't sleep in this city, everyone is always chasing the dollar. Everyone wants the better car or the bigger home. They have to get the latest iPhone or Jordans. They will step over you if they have to. This is what you see and go through everyday.

What people don't see though are the few individuals that still care about this city. Nowhere is that more evident than our league and all the good people involved in it. We have prominent individuals on our board. We have very humble league members. We have a club that is probably the most prestigious US amateur sports club in the country. We have a slew of ethnic clubs. Our league symbolizes NYC and how we all can get along. This is the true New Yorker and what NY is really about. We care about our city and the people in our city, we never stop making things better. Come down to a New Years Eve at Time Square. Nothing but joy and love among hundreds of thousands of people. The city offers so much that the common person will never be able to experience. To live in NYC, for all its faults, it's still a great city and I have visited quite a few of them. I can't be more than two weeks away at a time or I get homesick.

Now Astoria is something special. Astoria is a great community. It is still a neighborhood. You see kids hanging out in the street playing stick ball or stoop ball or just goofing around. Many neighborhoods in NYC have been gentrified, but not Astoria. You still see the random social club and Irish bar that has been around for over 100 years. The characteristics that made this neighborhood are still alive and kicking.

You mentioned earlier that the team is looking to move back to Astoria. Why did the team have to start playing somewhere else, and how are things going on the returning the team Astoria front?

The high school we used as our home field was not up to par for league standards. So we used other fields nearby but could not obtain a permit. So the only place we could play was in the Bronx which is 15 minutes away from Astoria (via toll bridge). It has been tough for our Queens players to travel to the Bronx, but we try to car pool when we can.

But things have been good since we have moved to the Bronx. The quality of players is pretty high, so we have actually made our team better. However, with a home field we have a home field advantage. This is very important.

We are trying to return to the same high school in Astoria we used to play in but it has been a work in progress. The school has upgraded their facilities so we are trying to reestablish our relationship. It's happening but it's slow.

As you continue this season of CSL play, what can people expect to see from the team moving forward, on and off the field?

Short term, this season I think everyone will finally see a competitive team that can fight for the top spots in the division. Our ultimate goal is to get to the First Division. We will be also promoting the club as much as possible in our neighborhood. Eventually we will open up our membership and board to the community.

Before we start wrapping this up, I have some questions based on the your last answer. Are there two or three specific things you are looking to do to promote your team around Astoria over the next year?

Our first step is to get all the fields available to run a youth program. Obtaining fields is very important. That is what we are working on.

Then we will continue to bring awareness among the youth of Astoria. In Astoria we have public schools, charter schools, and private schools. We want to reach all of them. Right now we have a relationship with the 3 charter schools in Astoria. We want to make sure all our communities families are aware of our soccer programs. So that's the second step.

The third step would be to bring awareness to the club. We have a club house so we want to leverage that. We want to bring youth kids there. We also want to print a lot of shirts and sell them at the local fairs we have during the year. Astoria holds 6 fairs every year. Set up a table, talk about the club and sell t shirts.

How do you plan on going about opening up membership and the board to the community?

Once we are well established - well structured youth program (league travel team/weekly training), presence in Astoria (meaning home field for our mens team for league play and training), and a big fan base (families/sponsors) - we will then ask the community to be members as well as volunteer to be board members. We want to become a town club. That is the goal. We will look for certain community leaders to be part of our board and ask our families to be members.

Let's wrap this up with some short questions. Favorite soccer players, one past, one present.

Maradona - to me he is a God who came down from the heavens to be with the people and he liked it. He isn't perfect like all of us but on the field, GODLY... what he has done no other player has or will ever do. Good and bad.

I have a few players from every conference, actually/

Conmebol: Guerrero from Peru - there are great South American forwards playing in Europe in the past few years... Cavani, Suarez, Falcao, Aguero, Higuain, Brazilians and Ecuadorians have a few too. Even Pizarro in Germany who is a legend. But this guy is underrated. He should be playing in Europe and not in Brazil but his better days have gone by. He scored against Chelsea to win the Club world Cup with Corinthians. He scored 5 goals in two consecutive Copa Americas. And he carried the Peruvian young team to (hopefully) the World Cup. Check out his goals; they are insane.

UEFA: A lot of guys have retired but I would have to go with Kane from Tottenham. This year he is out to win the Balon D'Orr and he has been on fire in club and country play. He is a premier striker, pun intended.

Concacaf: Pulisic (19) and another new rising star Tim Weah (17) - These guys are the real deal. They will finally represent the US like it should be represented. Quality and Heart. I get goosebumps thinking about the future national team.

Asia: Many good players but Tim Cahill is still a beast. He got Australia into the WC. Amazing.

Africa: Tons of good players here. The ones that come to mind is Salah & Mane. Love that these guys are in liverpool.

Oceania: No one - sorry

Do you have any books or podcasts, soccer related or otherwise, that you would recommend to people reading this?

Some of the books I have read that are good are: Inverting the Pyramid: The History of Football Tactics; Soccernomics; How Soccer Explains the World

I am currently finishing up: The Modern Soccer Coach 2014: A Four Dimensional Approach

I am starting to read: Revolucion: Philosophy of Soccer: In the Shadows of Marcelo Bielsa

Love hearing Taylor Twellman.

If you could meet one person from soccer history, who would it be?

I would love to meet teams, not just players from soccer history.

Peru vs Austria 1936. Peru won 4-2 and then Nazi Germany did everything possible to replay this game. Peru neglected and left the tournament. It was big for Peruvian and World History. (Lolo Fernandez)

Another would be the USA team that beat England in 1950. Would have been memorable to be there.

What would you say to someone asking you why they should get out there and support their local non-league team, like Sporting Astoria?

People should go out there to support Sporting Astoria because like everyone else we are hard workers always striving to be better and win. Life is a struggle. In NYC even tougher. And that's our team. We fight for 90 min. We lose and we win but we don't stop fighting. There is no point in quitting. Just this season our reserves were losing 3-0 at halftime. We ended up winning 4-3. We are a talented blue collar team. If you are out there struggling and sometimes you can't catch a break then come see us. You will see the struggle but you will experience the glory.

Ed, thanks again for taking the time to do this interview, I really appreciate it. Remember, if you are enjoying the content I'm putting out, I'd encourage you to click [here](#) to [Follow](#) me on Twitter, or [here](#) to [Like](#) the page on Facebook. Make sure to spread the word by sharing these interviews, telling friends about the blog, those kind of things. I can't accomplish my goal of maximum exposure for all levels of the American Soccer Pyramid without **YOU**. Until next time, Stay Loyal, Support Local.