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Onz Chery  · Jun 2 · 5 min read

One more game: A look at Sporting's journey to their upcoming promotional match to CSL's top flight



Sporting SC players in a huddle. Sporting SC Image

From playing in 8V8 leagues around NYC to their massive promotional game against Polonia Guardia NY, here's Sporting SC's long but successful journey.

You can argue that Peruvian-American Edgardo 'Ed' Romero knew how to spell soccer before his name. But it was at the age of nine, on his first trip to Peru that Romero would meet the person responsible for the origin of Sporting.

His grandfather, Carlos Romero, used to have a manufacturing company in the 1930s that produced soccer balls, cleats and other sporting accessories called, Sporting Enterprises. C. Romero also coached a local soccer team mainly made up of members of his family.



Carlos Romero and his players posing for a picture.

Romero's grandfather showed him how they made the soccer balls in his factory and gave him one. His "first Sporting ball" the 43-year-old calls it.

All that truly impacted the young soccer enthusiast, especially the stories he heard from his family – from his uncles sneaking into the stadium to watch and meet the top players at the time to the triumphs of his family’s own soccer team.

Thirty-four years later in 2002, Romero revived his grandfather’s team as he created a soccer team with members of his family: his father, his uncles and cousins.

“He put that seed in me,” Romero said about his grandfather. “Of course, I was like ‘I want to do what my grandfather did,’ which was have a soccer team.”

That seed could develop into becoming the latest team to join one of the most prominent amateur leagues in the United States’ top division, the Cosmopolitan Soccer League. Sporting will play a promotional match against Polonia Gwardia NY on Wednesday night.

But rewinding back to the first year of Romero’s team in 2002, it was initially named NYC Libertadores before being renamed Sporting Astoria Soccer Club the following year. Romero and his relatives played in 8V8 tournaments in NYC and dominated them.

Later in 2005, they decided to join the most competitive league they can find in New York. That’s when Sporting’s journey in the CSL started.

SSC entered the CSL in the bottom division, Metro 2 (Div. 4). About seventy percent of the team was Romero’s relatives then. In their inaugural season in the CSL, they got promoted to Metro 1. Romero’s cousins, Sebastian and Patricio Acosta were the clubs MVPs. S. Acosta netted 16 goals.

The following year in Metro 1, Sporting was on track to get promoted again. But “things fell apart little by little,” Romero recalls. Life happened and a lot of relatives had to move on from the club. P. Acosta got married, S. Acosta moved to New Jersey and so on.

SSC lost their chance of promotion in the second to last game of the season and ended their campaign in third spot.

Because so many of Romero's relatives had to move on from the club, Sporting stopped being a blood-related family team.

"It was inevitable," he said. "My dad and my uncles were all part of the team and they told me since the beginning 'This is all nice, we're all here but there's going to come a time when new faces need to come because we're going to be busy. People are not going to be fit anymore.'"

"If you want it to be a family thing then it ends here but if you want it to be a club then you have to recruit."

Romero recruited. He even joined the league's board in 2008 to learn how the successful clubs got to where they're at. P. Acosta also returned to the team alongside other former players. In 2013 Sporting finally got promoted to the second division.

D2 and Metro 1 are two different ball games. SSC had to learn that first hand.

"We had to secure fields, had to secure it for four hours, had to come up with a reserve team [...] the pace is faster," Romero said.

The average age of the team was 30 years old.

"They [the players] were like 'This is a younger men's game, don't start a team around us, try to get younger people.'"

Sporting ended their first season in D2 in second to last place. But something positive came out of this campaign, Queens United became the club's reserve team and that's when Romero met his second-hand man until today, Johan Clarke.

SSC's first team finished at the bottom of the table for the next three seasons. Their only accolades were winning the CSL Winter Indoor Tournament in 2016, becoming D2 Reserve Champions in 2016-2017 season, and getting to the Saunders Cup Finals in 2017 and 2018.

But it all changed this year. Before the start of Week 5, the club brought in investors which helped them land more quality players.

“The investors came with a price. If we want them to stay, we’ll have to win something,” Romero explained. In fact, Sporting won their first state cup, the Flamhaft Cup, edging A.C. Tumi, 2-1, on Sunday.

Former Jamaica U-20 player Kendon Anderson netted the game-winning goal five minutes from time.

And in the league, they finished the regular season in second place with a 9W-2D-4L record. Ex-New York Red Bulls man Ibrahim Abdoulaye helped the club tremendously, tallying a league best of 23 goals.

After the end of the regular season, SSC won their first promotional match, defeating Stal Mielec, 3-2, in a nail-biting match on Wednesday night. Anderson was yet again the hero. The Jamaican racked a hat trick, including a winner in the 80th minute.

“That goal was a great feeling. It eased up the pressure of the defenders and that’s the goal that took us to the final promotional match,” the 25-year-old said.



Kendon Anderson during his time with Tampa Bay Rowdies.

Anderson previously played in the top division with CSL powerhouse Lansdowne Yonkers F.C. in 2014. The striker is eager to play in the top flight again, where there are more opportunities to get noticed he explained.

Anderson never played in a decisive promotional game before but like the matches against A.C. Tumi in the Flamhaft Cup and the one against Stal Mielec in which he scored the game winner, the striker isn't nervous.

"I'm not nervous," Anderson said.

"I wouldn't think my teammates are nervous either because in the semi-final no one looked like they were nervous. But it's going to be a final, it's a bit different from a semi-final so hopefully they're not nervous and want to play. Because when you're nervous that's when you make mistakes."

His teammate Abdoulaye is eager to win on Wednesday to join the elite division where he can face more players of his level.

"They have ex-professional players there so that means there's going to be more experience. I like a league like that," the Togo native said. "[But] I think there, it's going to be easy for me too. I can't wait to meet the ex-professional players. I hope we go to first division so I can meet them."



Sporting SC captain Ibrahim Abdoulaye. Sporting SC Images

Romero ranked Abdoulaye third in his list of most valuable players in the club's journey to Wednesday's game. P. Acosta is first in the list, the Argentinian led the team for many years and helped them get promoted twice, to Metro 1 and then to D2.

In second spot, the Peruvian-American placed, Joe Mancuso. Mancuso captained the club for many seasons. Although Mancuso lives in Wisconsin, he's now a member of the board.

Win or lose on Wednesday, Romero noted that the team is well prepared for both outcomes. In case of a loss, the 43-year-old shared that the club will keep their heads up and try again next year, he mentioned KidSuper Samba A.C. who came close last season, tried again this year and got promoted.

In case of a victory, they will recruit more and even bring players in from South America.

It's been an awfully long journey; from hearing stories about his grandfather's team to playing with his relatives, to the rough rides of the CSL's lower divisions, Romero can almost taste the Cosmos League's first division now.

He saw many players come and go, even had to relocate from Astoria to the Bronx; when asked what rode to the club to a shot at promotion, he answered: "All the people around me. My board. They help me make decisions. Because I can't do everything.

"I just led a ship—we all knew where it was going. I didn't do it all by myself. If you're in a ship, you need a crew, right?"

Sporting might not be made up of Romero's relatives anymore but it's still a family team.

"You can make anything happen. All you need is determination, the ability to always keep learning, never be afraid to fail, and make sure to keep yourself surrounded by good people. I made something out of nothing, you can do it too."
– Carlos Romero