



San Diego Sparks !

Get to know Ramiro.



Becoming a Spark...

Ramiro first heard of the Sparks at a fundraiser hosted at a local bar. He had never heard of an inclusive LGBTQIA soccer club in San Diego. After a 20 year hiatus from soccer, he finally got the courage to officially join in 2016.



"My favorite memory as a Spark is going to Paris, France for the Gay Games in 2018... we made tons of memories together off the field."

Ramiro C.

I'm Inspired By...

Ramiro grew up in San Diego and he has been playing soccer since the young age of 12. He is one of the few lefties on the team and plays on the wings in the mid-field. He shared that before the games he likes make the sign of the cross. When he's not on the soccer field with the Sparks, you can find him at the gym.



Ramiro

Continued...



The Professional Athlete That Inspires Me...

Ronaldhino was his favorite soccer player. His technical skills, creativity, use of tricks, feints, no-look passes, and overhead kicks, as well as his ability to score and create goals made him his favorite to try to imitate on the field.

Advice...

The best piece of advice he has received came from a current teammate, Ricky. "It doesn't matter how good you think your opponent is, if you get to the ball first, he can never beat you."



"He might not remember saying this to me, but I constantly hear it (the advice) in the back of my head when I play."

Ramiro C.



San Diego Sparks !

Get to know Alex O.



Becoming a Spark...

Alex O. became a Spark in 2016 via google. After 5 years of trying to fit soccer into his schedule, he finally made it out to practice and instantly fell in love with the team's comradery, professionalism, and spirit. He is now one of the Sparks' defenders.



"Sin City Classic 2022. Hands down core memory. Playing alongside my amazing teammates and partying alongside them made me appreciate just how special this club is and how important it is to create a safe space for players to enjoy the sport they love.

- Alex O.

About Me...

Alex O. grew up in Orange County and Sacramento, CA. He's been playing soccer since he was 8 years old. He played both club and high school soccer. Once he joined the Navy, he played in all of the Navy soccer leagues.

Alex grew up swimming, he loves the outdoors and photography. He also likes skating, surfing, going out dancing with friends, and enjoys music festivals. Oh yeah, he also stays working on his fitness.



Alex O.

Continued...



The Professional Athlete That Inspires Me...

Although he is not a soccer player, the most influential athlete for Alex is Michael Jordan. He has always admired his unwavering dedication to developing and sharpening his skills in his sport.

Additionally, it's the standards he holds himself and his teammates to, both on and off the court. He has a constant drive to develop those around him and Alex tries to emulate as well. .

Rituals Before a Game...

Well, at 32, his biggest ritual is to stretch a little bit longer than he thinks he needs to. After that, he sprints across the field until he feels like he can't breathe. That way once the game starts and the going gets tough, his body will already remember what the struggle feels like and he can push through anything the other team throws at him. He also likes to listen to Nicki Minaj's "Truffle Butter" to get pumped for a big game.



"Know when to hold the guy close, know when to give him space. [applies to my love life too]"

- Alex O.



San Diego Sparks !

Get to know Chris Grow.



Becoming a Spark...

Chris first heard of Sparks while he was bartending Downtown San Diego in 2011. He ran into Dolan (Sparks) on a random night at work and they hit it off. Chris joined a coed league with Dolan and eventually made his way to the Sparks. "Best decision ever!"



"Paris 2018. It was my first real tournament with the Sparks... It was definitely a huge growth spurt for me in my personal development and self-acceptance/love."

Chris G..

About Me...

Chris grew up in Toms River, New Jersey. He is a striker and started playing soccer at the age of 4. His dad was his coach most of his life. A song that gets him pumped before a big game is Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now" You can find him going camping, watching a tennis tournament, going to the beach, sneaking "chicken nuggies" into the movie theater, or connecting with friends and family.



Chris Grow

Continued...



The Professional Athlete That Inspires Me...

Ronaldo is his favorite professional soccer player. ("Brazilian Ronaldo that is") He is not overly flashy, but super dangerous on the ball and next to impossible to take down. "Not to mention, he never dove, unlike some other Ronaldos we know." He could run through people and create something out of nothing.

Pre-game Rituals...

"You will never see me wearing an odd number jersey by choice. Otherwise, just a thorough stretching routine, like every other athlete in their 30s (*eye roll)"

Chris G.



Best Advice Received...

"You run like a gazelle!"
-Ted Gillen



San Diego Sparks !

Get to know Mark.



Becoming a Spark...

Mark became a Spark because he wanted to start playing soccer again and meet new people, so he started googling "gay soccer team San Diego" and found the Sparks. He officially joined the Sparks in August 2021 and is one of the defenders.



"When I was younger, I was a good athlete but lacked confidence. During a game once, my coach put me in to take a penalty kick I wasn't expecting. After the game, he told me the reason he wanted me to take the shot was to help me believe in myself. I still struggle with confidence to this day, but I remember my coach who supported me in that moment and reminded me that I can play well if I just get out of my head!"

- Mark W.

About Me...

Mark grew up in Central Florida in a town called Lakeland. He also lived in New York before making his way to San Diego, 7 years ago. He played soccer as a child until the age of about 15 and took a 20-year hiatus. Mark enjoys surfing, snowboarding, hiking, hanging at the beach, spending time with friends, practicing yoga, and traveling. Additionally, he is very passionate about self-healing and spirituality through various practices.



Mark

Continued...



The Professional Athlete That Inspires Me...

Mark admires all LGBTQIA athletes who are open about their sexuality/gender identity and push the boundaries of heteronormative ideologies. One of the reasons Mark stopped playing soccer when he was younger was because he was terrified that people would find out that he was gay. Now, he is proud to be a part of a team that is inclusive and provides a safe space for queer athletes.

Favorite Sparks Memory...

Mark's favorite memory was the Sin City Classic tournament in Las Vegas. He was injured prior to going to Vegas and wasn't sure if he was going to be able to make it. His teammates encouraged and supported him and was able to make it and played his best. He had a hard time due to his injury, but was able to help his team secure 3rd place.

"I tripped over myself in a few occasions... afterwards, teammates joked about the imaginary sniper taking me out during the game; I will never forget that!!(LOL)"



"I'm so grateful younger generations don't have to experience that [fear of coming out] as much as and am happy to be part of a sports team honoring all sexualities and gender expressions."

- Mark W.



San Diego Sparks !

Get to know Dan Dolan



Becoming a Spark...

Dan stumbled upon the Sparks in the early 2000's. He was struggling with coming out and was trying to find connections between the gay world and his "real world." He was scared to go to a Sparks practice so he ghosted Leslie [Sparks founder]. After he came out, a friend who was already on the team helped him build up enough courage to show up to practice.



"I grew up playing stopper/defensive mid, but in High School and ODP, I was shifted to center back in a four-back system, sweeper or right back in a flat 3 system. I am comfortable playing anywhere really, but I enjoy outside back and probably thrive at defensive mid."

- Dan D..

About Me...

Dan grew up in Spokane, Washington. He's been playing soccer for 36 years now and started when he was at the young age of 4. Dan works a lot, but when he's not working or on the field with the Sparks, he loves to go on hikes with his pup (Icarus), grab a beer at a brewery, watch movies, read books, and travel.



Dan Dolan

Continued...



Best Advice Received...

The first is, "practice doesn't make perfect, perfect doesn't exist. Practice makes permanent." Such a powerful phrase, emphasizing the fundamentals and repetition creating muscle memory. It's a key piece of wisdom Dan uses when playing, coaching, or even teaching at work.

Second, a coach told Dan, if he makes a mistake, that he should remove it from his head. He would have players run their hand through their hair to "grab the mistake" and literally toss it aside.

Favorite Memory...

Dan Dolan's favorite memory with the Sparks was the first ever pre-season party where he met the team for the first time. Leslie (Sparks founder) read an email to the team that he had received many years ago. The letter was from a young college guy that was struggling to come to terms with his sexuality and desperately seeking comradery and friendship in a community he had no knowledge of. After Leslie read the email, he addressed the team by saying "THIS IS EXACTLY WHY THIS TEAM WAS FOUNDED, to give people a safe place to play the world's beautiful game and make friends and choose a family that will accept them no matter what, and forever" Leslie then looked at Dan and asked if he knew who the email was from. Dan answered "yep, that was me."



"Now what gets me pumped is shooting the shit with my team and just absorbing all that positive energy. Nothing makes me want to dominate a game more than that feeling I get playing with my closest friends."

- Dan D.



San Diego Sparks !

Get to know Gaspar (Gas).



Becoming a Spark...

Gas became a Spark after meeting David and Ricky after playing an indoor soccer game together, they told him about the Sparks and invited him to practice. He joined in November 2019 and is now a midfielder (left or right winger).



"Even if you think that the opponent is better, faster, or stronger than you, if you are able to take the ball away from them, that's all that matters."

- Gaspar A.

About Me...

Gaspar was born in Mexico, but raised in Ramona, CA. He's been playing soccer since he was 9 years old.

Before a game, he has to eat a banana. He feels it will keep him from cramping afterwards. He also likes to listen to some pop, metal, bachata, reggaeton, or rap to get him pumped before a big game. When he's not on the soccer field, he likes to paint, bake, go to the gym, or just hangout at home.



Gaspar (Gas)

Continued...



The Professional Athlete That Inspires Me...

Xavi Hernandez. His style of play is so beautiful and makes soccer look so easy. The most important thing he's learned from him [Xavi] is scanning the field before and after you receive the ball from your teammate to ensure you don't have an opponent near you and know your next play.

Favorite Sparks Memory...

"...so far it has been going to the Sin City Classic 2020. I feel like that weekend everyon bonded with each other in a way that made us closer as a family. Also... it's pretty memorable as well because the pandemic started less than 2 months after that."

- Gaspar A.

