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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 Schreck

The Lamorinda Soccer Club coaching director has an idea why the United States performs so well in international basketball competition, yet not so well in soccer. "The kids start playing basketball in the parks and the playgrounds from a very early age," said Mohammed Mohammed, who has worked with the club since 1994. "That street type of soccer is what's been missing."

Mohammed knows of what he speaks. He grew up in Sudan, where he played soccer as a youth on the streets and in the alleys. He credits that street background for the development of his creativity, technical skills and instincts. With the opening of the Lamorinda Futsal Arena in the Rheem Shopping Center, next to the post office, Mohammed said he feels the community finally has a resource for young players to develop their passion for the game, minus the possibility of a street fight over a bad call.

Colleen Wiggins, board president of the LSC, 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 facil-

ity, 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.

Walking S.F. City Streets with an App

Lafayette 'entrepreneur' reveals history beneath our feet

By Chris Lavin

In a day when many people over the age of 50 fumble around with technology and try to hit the right buttons with their fingers to text their kids or a workmate, sometimes despairing at the results, there are people like Gloria Lenhart of Lafayette. She would have none of the despair. Bring it on, she seems to say.

Lenhart is a lifelong lover of history. What came before — people's lives, the stories, the buildings, the shape of the land — defines who we are now, she says, and she's become obsessed with it.

"I love history, especially San Francisco because this whole area is so connected," she said. "We wouldn't live here right now if it weren't for San Francisco. And more people would love the history, too, if it were more accessible."

Lenhart wracked her brain: Should she condense all her knowledge into a physical book? Do more tours? "People don't have time to take tours. Lots of people want to go at their own pace, on their own time," she said. "So I was thinking that if people could just get this wealth of information by using a phone or a tablet, they might use it more."

Voila: The idea for a smartphone app — City Explorer San Francisco — was born. She successfully completed a Kickstarter campaign. Then she turned her iPhone around and started recording herself.

"I really hated how I sounded at first," Lenhart said. But then she got better at using the technology. "Plus people don't have to listen to me," she said. "They can just read." She laughs.

Lenhart writes all of the historical material for her apps, and using her Kickstarter money, she was able to hire a company in New Zealand to do the programming. Now she has officially launched, both physically and virtually. Her tours cover specific areas of interest: Chinatown, the Victorians of Lafayette Park, North Beach, and more. Hit the City Explorer app and get the history and significance of the Chinatown Gate. Get off at the Montgomery Street BART station and take a tour of public art. Readers take the whole tour, or just look at particular intersections while they're waiting for the Metro — a place that might have been under water during the Gold Rush.

"Yes, Front Street was the front! The rest of downtown is all fill, and full of sunken ships. People love the sunken ships tour," she said.

On a recent free two-hour tour of the Urban Gardens South of Market, Lenhart wended her way through the POPOS (that's privately owned public open spaces). The



Gloria Lenhart of Lafayette leads a walking tour in San Francisco of public art and space South of Market.

Photo Chris Lavin

tour focused on private art open to the public during business hours, but includes the niches of private open spaces to which one might bring a lunch or a laptop. Someone asked her how much it cost to download her tour of North Beach.

"It's free," she said flatly. The asker looked dumbfounded.

So Lenhart hasn't quite gotten that part yet. Anyone can download three of Lenhart's tours through the Apple store or Google Play, depending on the device, just by Googling City Explorer San Francisco. She is, however, charging \$1.99 for some of the tours, with half going to 826 Valencia, a nonprofit dedicated to closing students' academic achievement gaps.

"I should probably charge something for the physical tours, too," she said over lunch. "Like at least \$5." She still hasn't quite gotten that part, either.

Lenhart's free downloadable tours are available at www.cityexplorersf.com.

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