

Los Gatos UNITED

By Scott Forster



Sitting over a hot coffee on an unusually cold Los Gatos day, I found myself captivated by the passionate energy around the table. “There’s something special about this town and the pride it has for soccer,” said Shaun Tsakiris, Los Gatos United’s new Technical Director. If anyone could be the judge of that, it would be Shaun. Prior to joining Los Gatos United, he was coaching some of the country’s brightest young soccer talents. It’s not often you get the chance to speak with a former US Men’s National Team coach who has led the national teams at the U16 and U17 levels.

Soccer is the world’s most watched sport. While being relatively new to mainstream sports, American soccer has slowly grown to pass the NBA and the NHL for attendance at live events. The US Women’s team is a three-time World Cup Winner and there are several young American players that are bursting onto the world soccer scene. Soccer’s popularity among players comes from the fact that, unlike basketball or football, soccer is an inclusive sport; anybody can be part of a soccer team. Lifelong friendships are formed on the soccer field as players grow and develop as a team and as individuals.

“We are fortunate to have a pro team like the Quakes so close to home. It is great to see professional soccer represented in the Bay Area and I want to support Los Gatos boys and girls in fulfilling their soccer dreams- whether that’s being successful in a local competition or finding a path to play professionally.” Like many things in the Bay Area, the local club soccer scene has become very competitive. Tsakiris aims to harness this competitive resolve and refocus it away from corporate ambition and toward community spirit. Having grown up in Saratoga, his excitement to be back in the area and to be building a community club worthy of the local passion that fueled him is palpable.

Joining Tsakiris on the Los Gatos United management team is Shawn Blakeman, a fellow professional player who has had 15 years of competitive club management experience at Sacramento United. Sacramento’s loss is most certainly Los Gatos’ gain and the hard work, determination, and experience that transformed a rudderless club into one of Northern California’s top places to

play will prove invaluable here. “We’ve known each other for 30 years and it’s a pleasure to be back on the same team again,” said Blakeman, also a former Saratoga resident. “I never thought us both playing soccer, right here as kids, would come full circle to us now leading the club together in a new and exciting direction.” Although Shawn’s career took him to Germany, across the US, and back, you can feel that reconnecting through shared passion and a common vision has ignited a spark in them both. The pair seem set to create a new soccer landscape where community and family are at the fore.

Soccer training and soccer playing deliver new avenues for discipline, personal learning, athletic skills development, team building, and a healthy life style. At its core, soccer is a simple game. But within the challenges of playing the game, there are a whole range of transferable skills that can go a long way to developing a balanced young adult. “The healthy competition that soccer provides has positive impacts on personal development,” explains Blakeman. Los Gatos United have clearly prioritized youth development and have made bold moves to build a safe and positive learning environment where students can be challenged. The team at Los Gatos United are also quick to point out that the club supports the whole soccer community, regardless of skill level. As a result, they have over 900 kids participating in spring play.

Los Gatos United is a 501c3 non-profit that has been promoting soccer in the South Bay for over 30 years. Under the direction of Taskiris and Blakeman, Los Gatos United is creating a community legacy and developing long term relationships that can facilitate youth soccer in Los Gatos for generations to come. With Shaun and Shawn at the helm, it’s clear that the club is well on its way to delivering on its mission to develop young athletes through the universal power of soccer and to be “good soccer citizens.” The club is taking the new direction as an opportunity to reach out to the community to welcome new players, donors, and sponsors.

To connect to the club, visit their website www.losgatosunited.com or reach out to Shaun directly at shaun@losgatosunited.com