

ESI NEWSLETTER

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A BOLD & UNIQUE VISION FOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

THIS MONTH'S ISSUE



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GAGE CAMERON



REMEMBERING FRANCE 2015

MOHAMMAD “MO” ABUALNADI FINDS PURPOSE & PASSION AT ESI

To be a left center or left back defender in collegiate and professional soccer you have to be a beast. Mohammad “Mo” Abualnadi brings his collective fire, technical soundness, strong work ethic and a sheer love of the game to the position.

At the core of his passion for the game is the European Soccer Institute (ESI) and long-time coach Stéphane Auvray. The now NCAA college freshman defender at Notre Dame credits his two years training and two years playing with ESI for changing the way he approaches soccer. During his four years working with Stéphane Auvray, Mo gained confidence as a leader and communicator, and his overall commitment to the game changed dramatically.

“I was going through the motions with soccer before I met Stéphane,” Mo says. “I was playing without a purpose.” During his time at ESI, Mo was able to find what made him tick as a player and found clarity in making soccer a career.

Mo emphasizes his time at ESI for also helping him expand as a player. His foundational soccer technique was enhanced greatly by the international experiences he was given - particularly going to Guadeloupe France to train.

“It was one of the best soccer experiences I’ve had. It was a very good trip because you get exposed to other players from outside the country,” he explained.

ESI included great families, flexible facilities and was player focused. Mo has many fond memories.

“I loved how training would never get canceled because we had outdoor and indoor facilities. I think the facility was extremely nice. The lounge always felt like home,” Mo said. “Personally I think ESI is one of the best institutes.”

Since leaving ESI, Mo has accomplished numerous goals. He joined Sporting Academy in Kansas City, and after six months, was training with the Swope Park Rangers (now Sporting KC 2). He was also called up to play on Jordan’s U-19 National Team. As a high school junior he was scouted by Notre Dame and made the decision to play for the Fighting Irish team after graduating high school.

As a freshman at Notre Dame he balances a NCAA soccer schedule and higher learning academics. He played in all of the team’s 19 games and was a starter in 15 of them. He is enrolled in pre-professional/pre-med courses. This balancing act has been challenging and stressful at times.

“We play two games a week. Between homework, exams, and labs - I’ve have to make some sacrifices,” Mo said. “The university does a good job of helping student athletes. Study hall is mandatory at first and we have easy access to tutors.”

Come game day how does he handle the life balance juggle and onfield performance? Mental focus and stress can play a part in the game and you have to try to stay focused and relaxed in order to perform well, Mo notes.

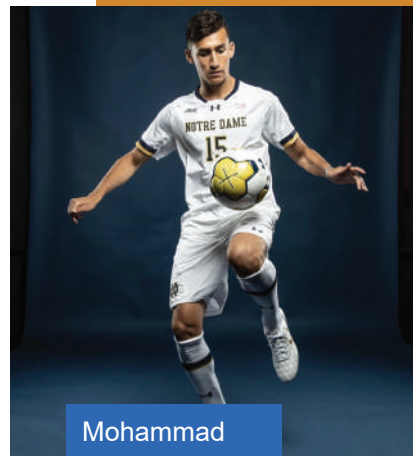
“I usually take two and a half hours before a game to mentally prepare,” Mo said. “I watch highlight videos to help me get focused.”

This current collegiate soccer player has visions of MLS and playing soccer in Europe in his sights. No matter what’s ahead, Mo will always carry the lessons he learned at ESI.

“ESI prepared me on many, many different levels, for many different things. Without Stéphane, I couldn’t have achieved what I did with Sporting, with playing with USLT, pre-season with the first team with Sporting KC – just getting in the system with Sporting. I think Stéphane prepares players on another level,” Mo said.

Mo also credits his parents, brother and sister as being fundamental to helping him advance in his soccer career. In addition, the sheer tie to ESI is still strong and Mo’s relationship with Stéphane continues to be important and relevant as he finds himself working toward a professional soccer career.

“He was my coach for so many years. He is like a second dad to me; and a great mentor too,” Mo said. Adding to those that want to follow in his footsteps, “If you train and play with Stéphane, you are going in as one of the best players. His players are better on so many levels, whether it’s mentally, physically or on the ball side. He prepares a player extremely well to achieve their dreams.”



Mohammad
“Mo” Abualnadi

“

...Stéphane prepares players on another level...

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PARENT HIGHLIGHT: RANDAH ALTHAHABI

Randah Althahabi is the mother of Mohammad (Mo) Abualnadi, an ESI alum, who played with ESI for two seasons before joining Sporting KC's Academy team in 2017. Mo played with Sporting KC until attending Notre Dame where he currently is a freshman and plays soccer for the Fighting Irish.

Since Mo had such a strong passion for soccer at a young age and always had the ball at his feet, Randah knew she wanted to help cultivate his desire to grow and improve. She and Mo evaluated several potential professional coaches until they connected with Stéphane Auvray in 2013.

"We could tell immediately that he cares a lot about the player," Randah noted. "The amount of time and effort he poured into my son and how he interacted with him was impressive."

Mo trained with Stéphane individually until ESI developed a team for Mo's age group in 2015. Mo had such dedication to playing soccer that before ESI he would attend his regular team practice while adding Stéphane's training session 3 times a week.

As a parent, Randah appreciated Stéphane's unique gift for concentrating on the player, his customized coaching, and ongoing analysis and evaluation of each player he worked with. Mo's commitment to hard work and development - coupled with Stéphane's technical soccer knowledge, experience as a professional player, and honest approach with each player - are what Randah believes were the keys to Mo's success over the years.

"Stéphane is kind and has a sense of humor. But he is also not going to sugar coat exchanges with a player," Randah said. "He was always really honest when evaluating the player. His approach with Mo is something that was always welcomed and appreciated."

In addition, Randah noted that the environment that ESI created with families and players was just as special as Stéphane's individual training sessions.

"The relationship between the kids on the team was awesome," Randah said. "It was the true definition of a team—the boys played cohesively on and off the field with equal respect and determination. It was a very supportive, diverse family environment."

Beyond Mo's development on the field, Randah saw growth in her son as a person. The sessions with Stéphane and time at ESI not only taught skill with the ball, but Stéphane became a mentor for life lessons too.

"The players learned about resilience," Randah said. "It is not just about playing soccer but there are a lot of other aspects to the game. Confidence is key—confidence in themselves and their values. These two traits especially are what have carried over into Mo's day-to-day life and helped him grow as a young adult and leader."

Randah is proud of all her son has accomplished over the years and his achievement as a NCAA collegiate soccer player. She attributes Stéphane and ESI for getting him to where he is today.

"Mo has transformed into an awesome player and a confident, mature man. If Stéphane wasn't his coach and without ESI, Mo wouldn't be where he is today," Randah said. "Simply put, Stéphane is a highly talented coach and even more importantly a wonderful life mentor. His level of personal and professional commitment are what drives the success of each of his players."



Randah Althahabi & Mohammad "Mo" Abualnadi



If Stéphane wasn't his coach and without ESI, Mo wouldn't be where he is today.



INSIDE THE INSTITUTE

US FUTSAL NATIONALS HIGHLIGHTS

Following Futsal Nationals, ESI Technical Director, Stéphane Auvray shared the highlights and MVPs from each age group. His selection and the statistics are highlighted below:

ESI U17 TEAM RESULTS

ETHAN HOUSEWORTH

Stéphane said, "Ethan was instrumental in our victory at Futsal Nationals. His ability to transform into a Futsal goalkeeper and demonstrate skill and comfortable use of his feet was critical in our victory. He demonstrated leadership and communication skills that are imperative to the team's success and was decisive when we needed him to be. He also had 2 assists!"

TOP SCORER: OWEN NELSON

7 goals

TOP ASSISTS: LUKE HOELTING, MATHEW DRINKHOUSE, AIDAN KNAUTH

3 assists

ESI U15 TEAM RESULTS

MVP: ESHAAN SINGH

Stéphane said, "Eshann was consistent from beginning to end. He scored (1) and assisted (2) using dribbling abilities and decisive offensive skill. Additionally, he defended going forward with conviction and won many 50/50 challenges. He also performed at the Pivo position, demonstrating his ability to keep the ball under pressure. Very promising performance."

TOP SCORERS: GAGE CAMERON, LANDON TOLBERT

2 goals

TOP ASSIST: DREW ROSENTHAL

3 assists

WORDS FROM THE DIRECTOR



About the mental aspect of the game...

At ESI it is indispensable to prepare players mentally. A player who faces only success did not complete his development...failure is necessary to learn how to face adversity and overcome it. Most times this is when

you can tell who truly wants to make it far. A player won't be ready to play high level soccer until he experiences that stage.

- STÉPHANE AUVRAY

PLAYER CORNER: DETERMINATION & DEDICATION TO IMPROVING

Gage Cameron prides himself on staying focused and dedicated to elevating his soccer game. Playing and training at ESI with the 05/06 team has been a good fit both for his intensity and his future goals.

"Everyday I'm learning something new about the game," Gage said. "And Stéphane is a great coach. He is helping me improve in and out of practice - whether on or off the field."

Gage is in his fifth year at the European Soccer Institute. He trained in small groups one year before joining the 05/06 team. Gage appreciates Stéphane's approach to communication and coaching.

"For me, it is the way that he will address you," Gage says about what makes Stéphane special as a coach. "For example, during a game, he will call a player to the side and give advice that is going to help them while on the field at that moment. He's not afraid to tell you what you did wrong and will always correct you. This style has always helped me."

Gage attributes ESI for helping him determine and follow his dreams. His ultimate goal is to play professional soccer in Europe, so embracing the ESI commitment to hard work and continued effort is completely worth it.

"Stéphane played at a professional level. He knows what it takes to get there," Gage said. "We train four days a week. At ESI, you have to be dedicated to be playing here."

Dedication has created unique experiences for Gage. While he was too young to train in Guadeloupe his first year at ESI, he did get to travel with the team. He also counts his City Futsal trip, three years ago, as an eye opening experience into the importance of futsal training and in improving a player's overall game.

"It is really cool how outdoor soccer and indoor futsal training - differences and similarities - make you a better player," Gage noted. "In futsal you have to be quick with your feet and on the move. Futsal definitely helps you play better under pressure."

Continued personal growth is the day-to-day objective for Gage. He is finding that easy at ESI and believes it shows through the unique way that ESI differentiates their style of play from others. Gage is proud that his team is learning the game of possession and patience.

"What makes ESI different is the way that we play the game," Gage said. "We're very patient with the ball. We are always trying to find the space to play. A lot of teams nowadays have 'kick and run' strategies. That is not the way we play and keep the ball. That is why we stand out."

The play on the field and "winning" is important to Gage, but he also finds ESI has improved him as a person.

"Stéphane taught me to always be respectful, to make a good first impression, and to always show your true character," Gage said. "If you come to ESI, you are going to grow as a player and a person. That is coming back to Stéphane. He's always trying to make sure we are respectful young men."



ESI INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES



REMEMBERING FRANCE 2015

ESI players are no strangers to traveling abroad. Team members have had opportunities to travel to Guadeloupe each year to train. There have also been trips to France to visit French soccer academies, stay as residents in the academies, and even play in international tournaments and friendlies. How have all of these experiences prepared ESI players?

“It has broadened my horizons in my game, I have learned how to play under certain circumstances, and it has improved my game drastically,” Beau Ricard said. “Also playing in Guadeloupe and in France is definitely a different level than Heartland.”

The trip that started it all was the 2015 ESI trip to France. The 03/04 team was the core of the players with some of the current U17s fondly remembering their experiences traveling internationally as a team. “It felt like your community just picked up and went with you to France,” Aidan Knauth said of the trip.

The parents and players flew into Paris and then traveled in a bus across France. Going through cities including Caen, Vannes, Brest, Rennes, Lorient and Nantes to name a few. The bus carrying ESI players and families would stop along the route and visit academies, tour facilities and play friendlies. The pinnacle of the trip was playing in the Dirinon International Soccer Tournament.

The Dirinon tournament included 990 players from 15 countries and 4 continents. There were youth teams including high-profile and local teams such as: AS Monaco, Barcelona, AS Roma, FC Lorient, Stade Rennais FC, AS Dirinon and more. The tournament showcased the sport, but its goal was to specifically promote diversity. The variety of nationalities could be seen among the 7500 spectators that attended.

“The Dirinon tournament that we played in was my most memorable moment of that trip,” Luke Hoelting said. “It was a higher level of play than anything I had played before. The players were so much quicker with the ball and passes. They made me raise my level of play. It was good to play teams that were extremely sound technically and just really knew how to play soccer.”

Beau recalls the height advantage some of the competitors had. “I was very surprised at how big AS Monaco’s players were. I remember that one player who was at least 6 feet tall and at the time I’m not sure I was even above 5’1” - so that was an interesting challenge,” he quipped.

Aidan also recalls the physicality of the teams at Dirinon. “Honestly the other teams weren’t technically better than us, they just had more chemistry, moved the ball and were more physical than us,” he said.



The trip also included plenty of sightseeing. Beau loved visiting the France National team stadium to watch Paris Saint-Germain F.C. take on A.J. Auxerre in the cup final. He can recall how just entering the stadium was an experience that gave him chills.

“I will never forget that game. I had always wanted to go watch a big game like that and I still have the ticket from the game in my room,” Beau said.



Luke enjoyed the Eiffel Tower, Mont Saint-Michael, seeing the many cathedrals like Notre Dame, and the castles in Caen. Trips like these have taught him more than just about soccer. They’ve inspired him to learn more about the culture and the language.

“Traveling has helped me want to learn French – that is number one. To be able to communicate with the people,” Luke said. “The experiences also make you understand that you need to be respectful when you go

somewhere else because you are a visitor in their country.”

Beau agrees that the experiences have been humbling in both soccer and life. “Playing overseas taught me to be grateful for the things I get in life because I am very fortunate and blessed to be able to play soccer all over the world,” Beau said.

ESI U17 & U15 EVENTS

ESI'S U17S WIN 2020 US FUTSAL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

On February 17, ESI's 03 team did what no other ESI team has ever done. They won the bragging rights as the 2020 United States Futsal National Champs!

"We've been working for years to get to this point," Coach Stéphane Auvray said. "We are officially the best Futsal team in the nation at the U17 age group!"

The 2020 US Youth Futsal National Championships took place over four days and included 178 teams from 17 states with players aging from 9 to 19. The tournament is officiated by some of the top referees in the US, along with FIFA Futsal referees. ESI 06 also competed in the in U15 age group, before losing in the consolation round.

There were 3 teams in ESI's U17 bracket pool. ESI came out of their bracket the winners and played City Futsal from Dallas TX in the final.

"We've played against City Futsal in Orlando and lost to them time after time," said Mathew. "We had to think we could win first, then believe we could do it and make it happen."

The final concluded with ESI winning the US Youth Futsal U17 National Championship by the score of 8-6. "We came out with energy and really believed we deserved to win," Mathew said. "Being Futsal National Champions means a lot to our team."

Coach concluded that the MVP of the tournament was the entire team.

"I am very proud for our players," said Stéphane Auvray. "We showed what the ESI spirit is and we made it up for the counter-performance during Regionals."



TEAM SCHEDULES: MARCH – MAY 2020

March 7 - 8:

League Games (U15-U17 Teams)

March 10 – 21:

Guadeloupe International Trip
(U15-U17 Players)

March 28 – May 3:

League Games (U15 – U17 Teams)

April 17 – April 19:

KC Champions Cup (06/07 Players)

May 8 – 10:

Mother's Day Tournament (04/05 Players)

May 24 – June 2:

France Tournament (U17 Team)

