

My Own Words

Eliseo Quintanilla On Growing Up Fast



Eliseo Quintanilla joined D.C. United, the football team of the nation's capital, in 2002 at age 19, becoming one of El Salvador's youngest players to ever join a foreign team. He had strong seasons in 2002 and 2003 and then faced a sidelining injury in 2004. More about Eliseo's record is available at http://dcunited.mlssnet.com/MLS/players/bio.jsp?team=dcu&player=quintanilla_e&playerId=qui458455

Eliseo Quintanilla, midfielder, scored the first goal for D.C. United in a 6-0 rout over CD Municipal in a September 2004 game. (photo: Tony Quinn/Wireimage)

I began playing soccer [football] when I was 11 and then went on to represent the national team of El Salvador. I became a professional athlete at age 16.

On the team that I played for when I was young, we would train in the afternoon, and in the morning I would go to school. My family helped me a lot; they always supported me in my education and also my playing soccer. I owe a lot to my family. Even today, although my parents are not with me, their support is most important in my life.

Fortunately for me, I did not encounter any barriers in my goal to be a professional soccer player. If I didn't succeed as a player, I planned to continue in my studies. While with the Club Aguila of El Salvador, I played in a match in Los Angeles. The management at D.C. United watched the game tapes and signed me with the club in 2002.

Adjusting to a new country and professional life is a very difficult experience, especially for a young person. Going to the supermarket, living in a different climate and culture, and getting adjusted to new surroundings were all challenges. The biggest barrier was language—communicating with my teammates and coaches, both on and off the field. My teammates helped make the transition easier.

I've always had to deal with much older people in the soccer profession, and this has forced me to mature. Sports have taught me a lot about discipline and also about how to be humble and how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Most of all, I value the bonds of friendship I have developed with teammates and coaches.

In 2004, I was injured at a preseason training camp and was unable to play the season. When setbacks like that happen, you can get down on yourself or even go into a state of depression. There was a time when I asked myself if I would ever play soccer again. Fortunately for me, I had a circle of friends who supported me during rehabilitation, and I kept busy with different activities to stay motivated. I have a lot of contact with young people, especially fans, both in the United States and in El Salvador. I try to relate to them my own experiences, because these young people also have aspirations and dreams. I try to tell them that, first and foremost, you have to have an objective in life and choose what you want to do. Second, you have to dedicate yourself to the goal you choose. And you have to stay motivated every day to be the best that you can be. ■