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Inside Seattle University's Secret Soccer Dynasty

Daniel Truog, Sports & Opinion Editor

Every year, Seattle University spends thousands of dollars recruiting players from across the globe for its Division I soccer teams. However, lurking in the shadows of the Eisminger Fitness Center, there is another soccer team. They have no money. They recruit players from their mechanical engineering classes and the dining hall. Some of them had never played soccer before coming to the university. Yet, they have won five straight championships.

Gabriel Albert is a third-year political science major and a decidedly regular guy. He stays relatively reserved in classes and does not give off the energy of someone who has won five intramural championships in a row. Quietness is in his nature.

"I started playing soccer when I was seven years old, but I was too shy for the first two years, so I didn't really play that much. But technically, I started when I was 7," Albert said.

11 years after being too nervous to take the field, Albert came to Seattle U. His first intramural soccer team was captained by third-year mechanical engineering major Ben Adams. Adams ended a personal hiatus to play in fall quarter of 2022.

"In high school, I stopped to pursue the board. Skateboard, that is. And now I'm back on it, playing for my favorite intramural team," Adams said.

The team did not last long, failing to prevail in the playoffs and disbanding at the end of the quarter. Albert and his right-hand man, third-year computer science major Owen Abbott, were wooed by another third-year. Preman Rami, a third-year marketing major, had been paying attention to their team's 3-1 performance and smelled potential.

"Preman was on my floor freshman year, Campion floor three, and there were a lot of soccer players there. We all got to know each other and played soccer together," Abbott said.

Rami created a new team, known as the Fellas. Albert found that Rami's recruiting acumen made winning trivial for Fellas. Most games were decided by mercy rule. The captain's eye for talent led the team to two easy championships, in the winter and spring quarters of 2023. The team's 14-player roster, the maximum allowed in intramural play, meant Abbott and Albert did not take the field as often as they wanted. Victory came with a cost; soccer was not as fun with less playing time and without friends.



Austin Harper

The Seattle University Intramural Soccer teams face off on the campus field on Sunday, Oct. 27, 2024.



Albert and Abbott became dissatisfied with Fellas' victory after their back-to-back wins. The team's stuffed roster meant that Max Burger, a third-year mechanical engineering major and their close friend, could not join the team. Over the grease-stained tables of the Hawk's Nest Bistro, Albert and Abbott decided to break away.

"We wanted to win, but also we would have more fun if it was just our friends," Albert said.

10 minutes before registration was due for fall quarter of 2023, they created a new team, named China, with friends, including Zachary Hochstein from the Fellas. A cathartic season ensued.

"I think China's season was the most magical for me. It was us and me and Gabe's roommates and none of us took it that seriously but we were having so much fun," Burger said.

The magic Burger felt translated to their time on the field. That season's final saw China face off against players from the university's club soccer team. Against more experienced players who pay \$50 in travel dues to compete against other universities, China prevailed.

"I do want to say that I'm really touched by what you guys did for me," Burger told his teammates.

China's victory was accompanied by a relatively disappointing prize. The team was given a single photo opportunity with a University Recreation (UREC) wrestling belt, kept in a glass case on the second floor of the school's fitness center. The weak prize could not put a damper on a hard-fought victory.

One would expect a five-straight-championship team to have a strict training regiment. Pro athletes wake before the sun and spend long hours perfecting their craft. Adams has a different approach.

"We do a lot of individual mental practice every week," Adams said.

The driving force behind the continued success of this group is not their disciplined schedule or hours in the gym. Albert did note that one member, Aaron Beltran, joined in fall quarter of 2023 to do more cardio. But for most of the team, their core values provide the necessary energy for victory.

"Passion... that's our core value. It's all about passion," Albert said. "When me and Owen are looking for a new player, our first thing is, do you got passion? If you got passion, then you're welcome on the team."

Albert and Abbott scout a few new players each season. Caleb Headen, a third-year kinesiology major, joined the team in winter quarter 2024.

"This is a good environment to play soccer in. Competitive, not too easy, and you fight for every game," Headen said.

Tristan Huerta, a third-year business economics major, joined the team the same season as Headen and fit right in with the team's passionate spirit.

"I just started playing a year ago. Gabe invited me into the group and I've been having a great time. Winning," Huerta laughed. "I'm not the best, but I show a lot of passion. They're very welcoming."

Passion is key. The team puts on a humble face when talking about their streak but giddiness sneaks through whenever the team's accolades are mentioned.

"It's like we're climbing up Mount Everest every time we play," Albert said. "We don't come expecting to win. We come expecting to do our best."

Albert, who sends the team lengthy motivational texts occasionally plagiarized from World War I-era Winston Churchill speeches, will go to any lengths for the group he calls his 'chickens.'

"When we're in the game, it's a war. My shoulder popped out one game. I popped it back in and it's still cracking," Albert said.

No one on his team could confirm whether this actually happened despite efforts by Albert to show them the cracking noise.

This quarter, Albert and company are taking the field under the name “ibn-farouk fasou,” Arabic for “son of Farouk Fasou.” They have played one game already; a 3-5 loss to another returning intramural soccer team. Albert begrudgingly shared his observation that this team had beefed up their roster since last season.

Ibn-farouk fasou had a bye week after their first game, but decided to scrimmage against members of the Fellas Oct. 27. The two teams’ casual faceoff would not be interrupted by uncharacteristically strong rain that drenched their bags, dropped on the sidelines of recently re-turfed Seattle U Park.

Albert may have realized they have their work cut out for them this season. The individual mental practice strategy might not suffice anymore.



Austin Harper

One cause that is important to the team is the support from the general university community for intramurals. The number of teams signed up has waxed and waned over the quarters. Sometimes, even teams that do sign up fail to show.

“In the playoffs sometimes, some teams won’t show up,” Burger said. “The more teams that care, the better.”

Despite the competitive facade put on by Albert and his cohort, most students who participate in intramurals are not there to put their honor (and shoulder bones) on the line. Trace Seaton, the assistant director of competitive sports at UREC, has been working to make intramural sports an experience for all.

“One of the things we did two years ago was introduce the idea of a Champions League and a Novice League in some of our sports, soccer being one of them,” Seaton said. “That’s a way for people that maybe didn’t want to compete at that high level to still come out and have fun.”

Seaton’s efforts at UREC include overseeing the prizes bestowed upon intramural champions. The program used to give out shirts to winners, but in the past few years, these teams are only given a photo opportunity with the UREC wrestling belt.

“The unfortunate downfall of t-shirts is they are incredibly expensive to purchase year after year,” Seaton said. “We know that that’s a draw for students, and so we’re trying to figure out how we can offset the budgetary shortfalls.”



Austin Harper

The prize has lost much of its luster after years of championships for Albert and his chickens. Huerta had something specific in mind for an alternate prize.

“Maybe a soccer ball with all of our faces,” Huerta said.

Gripes with player compensation in a voluntary soccer league aside, everyone understands the purpose of intramural sports.

“Have fun and don’t worry so much about the winning and losing, just making memories with your friends or making new friends. It’s really what it’s about,” Seaton said.

The different leagues work for students who want a competitive environment and those who do not. Intramurals are open to all Seattle U students and soccer is far from the only offering. This quarter, they have pickleball, dodgeball, basketball, volleyball, flag football and soccer.

More information on registration can be found on UREC’s website. Anyone with passion can and should sign up... someone needs to step in and end this win streak.