



Center for the Study of the Southwest Texas State University San Marcos

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John Mc-Gonzale: This is John Mckiernan Gonzalez. I am interviewing Mike Slenczka.

Mike Slenczka: Correct.

John Mc-Gonzale: At the fields at Onion Creek Soccer Complex, which there's no complex on April 15th, 2018. And, um, gonna ask him some questions about soccer.

Mike, when did you first start playing soccer?

Mike Slenczka: Started playing-

John Mc-Gonzale: No, no, no, when did you first hear about soccer?

Mike Slenczka: Uh, when I started playing, which was about when I was six years old.

John Mc-Gonzale: Started playing six years old, uh, in Chicago, right?

Mike Slenczka: Uh, yeah, Southborough Village to be exact, which is western suburb of Chicago.

John Mc-Gonzale: There's a big motorcycle scene there, right?

Mike Slenczka: Not that I know of. There could be (laughs).

John Mc-Gonzale: Okay. I'll tell you about that later. Um, so you played in Elk Grove, um, from six to when you were?

Mike Slenczka: I played all my life. I think I've taken a couple years off here or there for some injuries, um, but I've pretty much played my entire life.

John Mc-Gonzale: Okay. And, um, and you played organized soccer through the?

Mike Slenczka: The Park District.

John Mc-Gonzale: The Park District, great. Um, and you always played in the Park District since Chicago?

Mike Slenczka: Uh, yes. Um, there was, only the Park District Rec League until I was probably about 12, 15. Then it started to be, uh, select teams, and I got on a couple of those. But the majority of my coaches were just parents that had never played before.

John Mc-Gonzale: What was that like?

Mike Slenczka: Um, some of them were all right. Um, even my high school coach, um, my, the varsity coach, had never played soccer before, he learned soccer out of a book. So my junior varsity coach was a much better coach 'cause he played somewhere in Mexico, I don't remember where. And he played semi pro. And I learned more in my freshman and sophomore years than I, than I learned in my junior and senior years.

John Mc-Gonzale: Does it make a difference for learning about soccer to have lots of like Mexican communities in Chicago? There's a lot of Polish as well.

Mike Slenczka: Yeah.

John Mc-Gonzale: Don't you have a Polish name?

Mike Slenczka: Yes it is. Um, I played in an all Mexican league for about three years. Uh, I was literally the only non-Hispanic in the league. Um, I learned a lot about physicality in that league. Um, how to, I guess, play strong without being too dirty.

John Mc-Gonzale: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Slenczka: Um, yeah, it was definitely an interesting experience.

John Mc-Gonzale: How to play dirty, how to keep your space, how not to push with your shoulders?

Mike Slenczka: Yes.

John Mc-Gonzale: Work the hips.

Mike Slenczka: Uh-huh.

John Mc-Gonzale: Yep, yep.

Mike Slenczka: Unfortunately they didn't pass very well. They-they wanted to, uh, try and do everything themselves.

John Mc-Gonzale: Oh. That's how I grew up playing soccer.

Mike Slenczka: Yeah?

John Mc-Gonzale: As well. Which comes through sometimes. Um, so you played rec league, Mexican league, and then you came to Austin. How did you find soccer in Austin?

Mike Slenczka: Um, I actually just Googled 'Austin Soccer League' and this is the one that popped up. I looked for a team that was needing players. Um, I don't think you guys are actually on the, on the list for needing players, but you were towards the bottom of the standings and I'm like, "Oh, I'll go watch and see."

And then I approached Frank afterwards and asked if he needed anyone. And, uh, he gave me a little try out, and went to a few games, and he said, "Yeah, you're good to play."

John Mc-Gonzale: Um, for the record, I can't believe Frank tried people out (laughs).

Mike Slenczka: Well, I don't think I was a permanent part of the team.

John Mc-Gonzale: Oh, okay.

Mike Slenczka: I think, I think there was only like three or four games left in that session, that season-

John Mc-Gonzale: Okay.

Mike Slenczka: So, um, but I was invited back for the next session, the next season.

John Mc-Gonzale: What's different about soccer in Austin compared to soccer in Chicago?

Mike Slenczka: Um, the biggest difference is that in Chicago you have your own home field, um, and you travel. So all the games are, for the most part, the same

time. You play at, uh, 9:30, 9:45, I don't remember exactly what the time is. But you just travel.

Um, here you have the same home field 80 to 90% of the time, um, but your games vary. I kind of like knowing that my games are going to be at 9:30 every single week, so that I can plan out my week a little bit better. Um, the two 4:00 starts really-

John Mc-Gonzale: Suck.

Mike Slenczka: Suck (laughs). Because it ruins your whole day.

John Mc-Gonzale: Yeah. And, um, if there any difference in styles?

[crosstalk 00:04:43]

Mike Slenczka: I will say that I expected when I came down here, um, a much faster, uh, technically skilled game. Um, I was a little disappointed because I figured you guys played soccer, they all play soccer here year round. Um, I believe, in my opinion, that the-the technical game up North is actually a little bit sounder. [inaudible 00:05:08] we gotta play them.

John Mc-Gonzale: Did you play on turf or on grass?

Mike Slenczka: Um, there was some teams that played on turf but a majority of our teams played on grass.

John Mc-Gonzale: And did you ever play in any comp-company leagues?

Mike Slenczka: Company leagues? Yes I played in couple company leagues. I also played in, uh, you know like forge teams, um, Illinois National Team, um, once a year. I played in Russia, Germany, uh, what else, I played, uh, Denmark ... And other countries that I can't remember off the top of my head.

John Mc-Gonzale: You said Demark, Russia, Germany, maybe Sweden?

Mike Slenczka: No, it wasn't Sweden. There's all these small little countries but ... Went to four counties, started in London, um, it was a fun experience.

John Mc-Gonzale: Wow. That's amazing.

Mike Slenczka: Yeah [crosstalk 00:05:59].

John Mc-Gonzale: For the record: That's amazing. (laughs).

[crosstalk 00:06:03]

Yeah, no wonder you're disappointed with the technical skills.

Mike Slenczka: No, I-I will say that, uh, I've ... The majority of that was, um, just my-my hustle, kind of like today. I mean, I'm not the most technical skilled player. I hustle, I play good defense, um, and I've been willing to sacrifice my body when others are not (laughs).

John Mc-Gonzale: Uh, thank you very much, um, Mike Slenczka. This, is, uh, interviews over.

Mike Slenczka: All right.

John Mc-Gonzale: Um, I'll thank you-