

## A Cherishing Moment

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Stepping into a low-lit office, a television played a replay match of Brazil and another South American team. There I found Maziya Chete sitting at his desk chair, watching intensely and soaking up every ounce of the sport. Soccer fills the room: on the television screen - to the walls - to the desk and within the mind of Maziya. Those who know him best refer to him as just Mazi (MA-zee).

Within the Tri-Village area in Columbus, Ohio, Santos F.C. has remained a successful and influential soccer club for nearly two decades. Mazi has played a pivotal, executive role, partnering alongside Seymour Alleyne as the Director of Coaching.

The title, Director of Coaching; is after all just that, a title. Using the vast amount of experiences Mazi has had in his lifetime, he has become much more than just a coach. He is a mentor and a student to the game of soccer. He entered into coaching in the most unlikely of circumstances and never planned to dedicate his life to soccer, but as Mazi said during our time together, “the game just draws you in.”

Growing up in Jamaica, Mazi was active in several sports. He played cricket, table tennis and was even persuaded to try track and field for a time. While all the sports were interesting, none affected him like the game of soccer.

“It was love at first sight,” Mazi said. “I guess it was in my DNA or something.”

There were never any youth teams in Jamaica when Mazi grew up, so he spent most of his younger years following his brother around as he played soccer. Mazi would join in games with kids older and more knowledgeable than him. He could not recall a time when he wasn't playing. He found a deep love for soccer that continued to foster the more he was out on the field.

“A day never went by when I wasn't playing, I just kept playing till I was good at it. The whole point is to try and find out what you're good at and pursue it.” Mazi said.

In Jamaica, the Jamaican National League was the highest level. The rough intensity of the game along with the level of play is comparable to that of the United States MLS, or the English Premier League in England. The high school games in the league were played in the national stadium in front of a full crowd of 20,000 people.

“That's a big moment for every high school player, playing in that stadium,” Mazi said.

Mazi played soccer for the high school team and was named to the All-Kingston-team during his time playing. For several players a certain moment stands out, whether it was the first time they stepped on the field in front of a stadium. Or the first championship they won.

His moment is one that he recalled on with a grin and something that only one word could describe. Special. Mazi took the ball forward, all 20,000 eyes in the stadium fixated on him as he let off a rocket of a shot from 40 yards. The first goal of his high school career was in the back of net and the stadium erupted in bedlam.

“You can't describe the feeling, there are no words. I mean scoring a goal like that, set you apart,” Mazi said. “That's probably what got my name on the map, scoring a goal like that. Your picture is in the paper, and everybody knows you.”

That moment and the moments to follow sent Mazi on a journey that would lead him next to America. He stayed with one of his brothers and two friends, whom he credited as people that he found inspiration in while he was with them in Washington D.C.

“I never thought about academics, at least after high school, it wasn’t an option for me,” Mazi said.

“I was around my brother and his friends. I was living with three of them and they all went to Howard University. There I was in that environment and that inspired me,” Mazi said.

Mazi attended lectures frequently at Howard University to see if he could do the academic load and the interest he found in them. The environment of hanging out with his friends and the school impacted him more than he could have realized.

“The whole time I didn’t know if I was good enough to go to college academically, but just being around them influenced me and helped me focus on where I am supposed to go,” Mazi said.

In 1983, he was offered a scholarship spot and the opportunity for a college education at Maryland University. In terms of soccer, Jamaica was tougher than Maryland. He was an honorable mention All-American in the same year. But the whole Maryland experience was educational, Mazi said.

“One of my professors at Maryland actually sat me down and gave me a whole lesson on writing. I wasn’t very good at English, and I didn’t write well. She showed me how to write a paper.” Mazi said.

Education became the option for Mazi, and while it was difficult, he learned quickly, Mazi said.

“I never thought about what I wanted to be. Playing professional soccer wasn’t an option, the National League in Jamaica was the highest,” Mazi said.

“College became my ticket, college became a means to which I could sustain a life and a career,” Mazi said.

With a focus and better understanding of college, Mazi dedicated himself to his studies but faced prejudices on multiple occasions.

“There were several instances, like being inside the game room on campus and the police walk in asking for my ID,” Mazi said.

While studying in the library one evening, he left on his bike to get food. As he rode, he was stopped by the police, handcuffed and put in the car. The next thing he knew, he was standing in front of a woman as they asked her, ‘is this the man that robbed you?’

“Things like that tainted me, to a certain extent, those instances hardened my heart. But all those things shaped me, and they were learning experiences. You’ve got to take the lesson; I never understood that when I was younger, I was just more angry than anything else,” Mazi said.

“When you’re angry, you don’t rationalize and you begin to generalize. Once you start to generalize, you’re in trouble, and I see that now. Generalization just leads to irrational behavior,” Mazi said.

Racism triggered him to have an anti-white heart and form a group into a category, Mazi said.

“There was a point where I thought every single white person was a slave master, and that’s not true. My impression was that every white person hated black people. That was a false impression I was under. But when you begin to interact, you realize, ‘this isn’t what I thought or what people were telling me’,” Mazi said.

“If you don’t think for yourself, you’re going to believe what other people are telling you. You’ve got to broaden your experience,” Mazi said.

By 1987, Mazi graduated from Maryland with a degree in public policy. Beginning with a major in accounting, he quickly discovered that he was more attracted to the social sciences

with political science and history. Upon graduation, Mazi sought out a semi-professional team in D.C.

“I tried out and made the team, but there wasn’t enough money to sustain so I left. I should have stayed but I couldn’t stay. I couldn’t find a job in D.C.,” Mazi said.

He then headed to New York City to find a job. He played in the Bronx for a team named Mandela, after Nelson Mandela. Mazi played but never saw soccer as a serious option for him.

In Manhattan, Mazi applied for multiple internships and searched for jobs within the city. During 1988, Bank of America hired him on a Wednesday, however the person who hired him was downsized and thus there was a hiring freeze the Friday he finalized the job.

Due to the freeze he didn’t get the job and walked around the city searching for a job. He arrived home that evening and found a letter of acceptance into the graduate program from The Ohio State University.

“You’ve got to be learning to be living. Every experience is an opportunity to learn and grow. You can learn and wallow in it, or learn and grow from it. I chose to grow,” Mazi said.

When 1989 arrived at OSU, Mazi was attending graduate classes with an intention to achieve a PhD. He lived in Columbus and played in the Columbus Men’s Open League for the time he was at school. There he met Seymour Alleyne, the same person he would go on to coach beside for two decades. He was one of the persons that triggered him into dedicating his life to being a coach.

“I started hanging out with him a little bit and they were just coaching around with different teams,” Mazi said. “I would just go with them and hang out. Then being in the environment, you start to help out until someone goes, ‘hey, why don’t you coach this team?’”

“That’s how I got into it,” Mazi said with a smile and a chuckle. “Just helping out and coaching teams, right there, I just got back into it. And that’s when I decided, yeah, I’m going to do this.”

In 1992, Mazi left graduate school and knew what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. He didn’t plan for soccer to reenter his life, but the game has a way about it that Mazi couldn’t stay away from it.

“When I got out of (OSU), that was it. I got caught up in the world of soccer, I just kept doing it,” Mazi said.

It came in one of the unlikeliest of circumstances and was an opportunity to do something for himself. Seymour and Mazi teamed up together and began the soccer club Santos F.C. in Upper Arlington and the Tri-Village area. Coming into the city, the hardened experiences he had with racism were ever present. Until meeting Dr. Bob Davis, Susan Boylan, Ben Suffron, Bill Snellgrove and several others, Mazi continued to see prejudices.

“The Arlington community changed me,” Mazi said. “The way they treated me was totally different, and being around this community right here, I see people for who they really are.”

“There was a certain prejudice I faced while on campus. But being here, all the illusions fade when the reality sets in because these are not people who hate you,” Mazi said.

Santos F.C. got onto it’s feet with a deep-rooted philosophy and motto of “Skill = Fun”. The emphasis on skill and fundamentals is a philosophy that is held all around the world with every coach of the game. It is a philosophy that is well respected and is the framework for every player.

“When you play, you are supposed to enjoy the game, it’s automatic. When I was playing, even though I was competitive and intense, I was enjoying the game,” Mazi said.

People appreciate the skill that players are able to produce. He believes that being big and fast will only take you so far but the skill of a player will carry you as far as you want to go.

“When you are able to execute these skills, it is the greatest feeling, at least for me. To know, I can pick up a ball and dribble past two or three guys and score a goal,” Mazi said.

He described that there is no other feeling like performing a skill and hearing the crowd in awe.

“I live for those moments, and the only way to accomplish something like that is to develop the skills,” Mazi said.

A lot of players he has coached don’t look at the game as a career move but through the skill work they develop a love for the game.

“We try to develop relationships and not look at players as commodities or customers. Our approach is that we are looking to develop the total person. Soccer is just another piece of the puzzle,” Mazi said.

There is a distinction to a Santos player that coaches from all around Ohio acknowledge, the skills, Mazi said. The attitude of players developing and improving on their skills translates to all aspects of the game, in regard to their touch on the ball, tactical awareness, and basic understanding of the game. Santos has sustained for a period of two decades and has grown considerably since its creation.

Through the ups and the downs of the club, Santos has become a club known for exactly their motto: the skill and the fun. The teams continue to compete at the highest level and the club has expanded with coaches, and the acquisition of a training facility for the winter months. The hope for the club in the future is the formation of a Santos Professional Development team, Mazi said.

“Where do I see Santos ten years from now? I don’t know, we could be one of the top clubs in the US. That’s where I would like to be and were slowly moving in that direction,” Mazi said.

The lesson Mazi would want people to take away from him is cherishing every moment, and learning the lesson that every opportunity is teaching. When one learns from the opportunity, life is going to be richer and fuller because of the position to pass on the knowledge, Mazi said.

“To know that everybody is not going to be the same. Pass on the knowledge, don’t keep it for yourself, share it. And that can only occur when you embrace every moment. Embracing every moment, you realize the extent, which you connected to everyone in your life,” Mazi said.

Mazi never anticipated he would dedicate his life to coaching, but like a lot of opportunities in his life, it’s something he didn’t take for granted. As a coach, Mazi serves as a mentor to hundreds of kids and young men and women.

“There is nothing difficult about coaching because I love to do it,” Mazi said. “There are moments where you might have a challenging kid. To me that is not a difficult moment, every moment is an opportunity to learn,” Mazi said.

“Every single moment presents itself as a learning opportunity, no exception. Being a coach is something I want to be, and I choose to be,” Mazi said.

If there was one thing that Mazi finds difficult at times, it is players who do not believe in themselves. Mazi works to see each player succeed and transcend the relationships they build and skills they learn into everyday life.

“I may appear to be frustrated at times but that is more of wanting the desire in the player to believe. If there is a frustrating moment, it is trying to tell a player that they are good enough but they won't believe,” Mazi said.

The rewarding times of being a coach are an endless list for Mazi. It is the moments he is able to have with current players and old players, young ones and old. Mazi relishes every moment a player is on the field playing, and he smiles during the times he talks with old players and remembers when they played. The times that he has been able to build the relationships he has are what he loves.

“The whole purpose of life is to develop relationships, which transcend all us in life and it is those relationships that you cherish,” Mazi said.

He looks at the relationships he has been able to build and gleams over getting a text message from an old player or having dinner with a team. He remembers his own moment on the field but the times he's had with players is his reward.

“Moments on the field? There were a lot of them. But it's these moments right here that you cherish. Getting to sit down and talk with old players about life or soccer, that's the moment right there,” Mazi said.

The moments and relationships are what Maziya Chete has cherished and lived for. Soccer has led Mazi on a life-long journey, facing prejudices, difficulties and triumphs, different experiences and life lessons. The television in the room shut off when the Brazil game ended; Mazi and I stood up and strolled out of his office together. Mazi departed with a handshake and a smile. He walked out onto the field steadily to the players he cherishes and with the sport he dearly loves, and there isn't anything in the world he would rather do.