

### A former pro sets his sights on a youth soccer league



Ábor Pásztor is the coach we all wish we had as kids. This effervescent former pro soccer player with legs like steel cables quotes Gandhi to describe his approach: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

Pásztor is founder and top dog at Athletic Club Miami, a nonprofit soccer program created in 2013 to provide physical education, athletic scholarships, mentorship, and competition opportunities for Miami’s Upper Eastside.

On a recent Wednesday night, Pásztor races the setting sun while adjusting one of two large portable lights. He smiles at my seven-year-old, who runs off the field, grabs a few gulps of water, and rushes back to the maze of orange cones set up for passing drills.

Legion Park, where his soccer league is based, has no lights, so Pásztor went out of pocket to provide them for his practices.

I asked him what makes an excellent sports program for youths. “A coach always has to know when to sit down the best player in the middle of an important game because he/she has misbehaved and disrespected the team,” he says. “In my club, I only work with those who have a real passion -- not only for sports, but also for kids and life itself.”

## Good Sports

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor  
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As the father of two young boys, that's music to my ears. My kids are average athletes, so discipline, respect, and sportsmanship are as important, if not more, than the fundamentals of kicking and passing.

That said, the soccer training is far from the typical scrum managed by overeager soccer dads. Practice begins with laps, with extra laps for tardiness.

When the whistle blows, kids run to line up, hands at their sides, eyes forward. The drills are precise and clever, providing challenging yet digestible physical tests for even the least proficient child.

Skill-wise, the program has a number of superb players in the mix. Yet attention is paid to all, and no child is turned away for financial reasons.

Pásztor is keenly aware that the challenge many of us face today is getting our kids off their devices and into the open air.

"A great soccer program creates an environment where the player feels excited and challenged," he says. "A great location that offers a wide scale of activities, superior equipment, conditioning area, together with drills focused on quality over quantity, is part of our mission.

"Our coaches will never let a kid stand still," he adds. "We believe in effort, and we aim to develop a healthy athlete mentality where confidence and hard work go together."

We're fortunate to have a wide menu of youth sports programs along the Biscayne Corridor. Gymnastics, basketball, baseball, and soccer at Miami Shores. Swimming at Miami Country Day, to name a few.

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But to a large degree, those programs rely on volunteer coaches, often parents, to lead the charge. There is great added value in a program driven by professional athletes devoted to planting their beloved sport deep into the soil of our community.

Pásztor's vision is to turn Legion Park into ground zero for youth soccer training in Florida.

"The next thing that sport-loving youth deserve," he explains, "is a City of Miami-based youth soccer league, and a City of Miami track and field school championship. I think every athlete and parent would love to compete in our own area, instead of driving hours."

We currently haul our boys all the way to Sunny Isles Beach on Saturdays for games. "Many smaller towns are already organizing leagues," explains Pásztor. "I believe we could make a much better one."

If anyone can build a destination soccer program for our children, Pásztor can. Or should I say, we can.

Let the City of Miami know that this is what we want for our kids -- a safe and affordable program focused on instilling character and grace. This city link has contact information: [www.miamigov.com/parks/contactUs.html](http://www.miamigov.com/parks/contactUs.html).

Watching the kids scrimmage, a 38-year-old mother says, "I've got two girls that pretty much play on all-boy teams. For the coach, it's not necessarily about winning, but how the team does better each session."

She clarifies that the word "better" applies to both sport and behavior, and that her girls were "certainly gaining a lot of confidence. My kids don't want to miss soccer," she says.

Practice ends, and my kids come off the field red-faced and sweaty. They immediately find a ball and kick it around on the sidelines with a couple of new friends they've made on the team.

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A breeze blows in from the bay. Sitting in our little beach chairs, my wife and I smile, hoping to spend our Wednesday evenings in this lovely public park for years to come.

To get your kids involved and learn more about Athletic Club Miami, visit [www.cac-miami.com](http://www.cac-miami.com).

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