

LANGLEY PARK

The Beginning of a Journey

It's all down to street football

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As my brown Honda turned the corner onto Merrimac Drive, the Spanish faces began to appear. I was entering Langley Park, the heart of the Latino immigrant community, for my first time, but definitely not my last. This community would become a part of me. I would spend the next decade in Prince George's County teaching young Hispanic, African and Caribbean children how to play soccer the right way. For fun!

It was the spring of 1998. This particular day I was meeting with Ronald Luna, a Latino high school student. The purpose of this trip was to discuss soccer and how we could attract more children in the community to play. Ronald, with his strong roots in the community through his soccer program, was looking to expose his kids to competitive soccer outside of Langley Park.

Our first meeting was a huge success. You could feel the energy. You could feel the passion. You could tell he wanted to make a difference. Coming to America with his parents' at age 6, he encountered difficulties in his early years in the educational system, but through hard work and parental involvement, he was able to excel in school. When I first met Ronald he was completing his senior year at Springbrook High School in Silver Spring, Maryland. After graduation he attended University of Maryland where he obtained his undergraduate and masters degree.

Soccer was very much alive in Langley Park. It was not uncommon for the kids to share the field with the adults. Ronald's program reflected the demographics of the community; mostly El Salvadoran, a few Hondurans, a hand full of Guatemalans, and the rest were African or Caribbean.

All the players in the program attended Langley Park - McCormick Elementary School. The school was surrounded by single family homes and apartment complexes of mostly, first generation American kids who may have spoke English, but had parents who did not. Because of this, it was very easy for each player to manipulate their parents due to the language barrier. Parents, in turn, were very reluctant to get involved in the educational process. Through soccer I was able to gain insight in to this subject.