

Yavapai College Soccer

Alumni Match: Icon Rico returns to play with son

Doug Cook: The Daily Courier / Photos by Matt Hinshaw: The Daily Courier



PRESCOTT - On a weekday afternoon in the fall of 1988, Yavapai College soccer coach Mike Pantalione visited inner city Las Vegas on his first recruiting trip for a new Roughriders program that was in pursuit of a diamond in the rough.

At the time, a singular venue - the old Silver Bowl Fields - played host to all of the city's high school matches, and Pantalione drove there to scout for talent in the formation of what would become his 1989 inaugural team.

During the first match he watched that day, Pantalione spotted a young player from Las Vegas High School effortlessly blast a 30-yard shot into the opposing team's goal.

He soon found out that the boy's name was Edson Rico, a stocky 5-foot-10 up-and-coming star midfielder who grew up poor in a violent Las Vegas neighborhood.

Rico was looking to escape the clutches of the city, and Pantalione held the key.

"He came up to me after the game and asked me if I was interested in coming to Yavapai," Rico said from the Roughriders soccer team's alumni match Saturday at Ken Lindley Field. "After that we kept in touch and he got me to come up here for a weekend, and I liked it. It was a different experience for me."

A gifted passer who had a knack for scoring, Rico would go on to become one of the first players ever to sign a letter of intent to play for Yavapai soccer - and he remains one of the 23-year-old program's iconic figures.

In 1990, the unselfish Rico helped guide YC to the first of the Roughriders' seven all-time National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) titles.



On Saturday, the former JUCO All-American and NJCAA Hall of Famer came back to play in an exhibition match with his 19-man alumni squad against a 2011 Roughriders team that has his eldest son, sophomore attacker Donovan Rico, on the roster.

"He made the most of his two years at Yavapai College," Pantalione said of Edson Rico, the Roughriders' leading scorer in the 1989 and 1990 seasons (36-1-2 overall record), this past week. "He's such a quality human being in many ways. He certainly was an example of the type of individuals we like to have associated with this program."

During Edson's playing days at YC, he quickly became the target of opposing defenses and suffered from nagging injuries. Pantalione says Edson probably averaged more goals per match than any other player in the program's history. He remains third on Yavapai's all-time scoring list with 48 goals.

In the 1990 national tournament, Edson did not play in the quarterfinals or semifinals because of an ankle injury he says he suffered in practice leading up to the postseason.

Nonetheless, he managed to return for the national championship, notching the assist on the game-winning goal of a 2-1 double-OT upset win in sudden death over Passiac-N.J.

After he left Yavapai, Edson played professionally in Europe for four seasons. These days, he's the director/coach for the Inferno Soccer Club and the Sonoran Foothills Soccer League in Phoenix.

Prior to Saturday's alumni match, Donovan Rico said he tries to model his play after his father's. Donovan added that he would like to help YC return to the national tournament in hopes of erasing last fall's regionals tourney loss.

Edson said he's thrilled that Donovan's competing in one last season under Pantalione this fall.



"He's in great hands," Edson said. "Mike is one of the top coaches that I've seen that coached me throughout the years, especially playing in Europe. He knows what he's doing, so I'm happy for Donovan to be here."

Current sophomore soccer player Donovan Rico (left) is joined by one of the pioneers of the soccer program, his father Edson Rico (right) at the 2011 Alumni soccer game held on August 20th. Yavapai's only head soccer coach Mike Pantalione (center), in his 23rd season, joins the first father-son soccer combination for the Roughriders. Edson scored 48 goals in 1989 and 1990. He was a two-time All-American for the Roughriders.