

JOSH GARDNER'S REACHING GOALS ▶▶▶

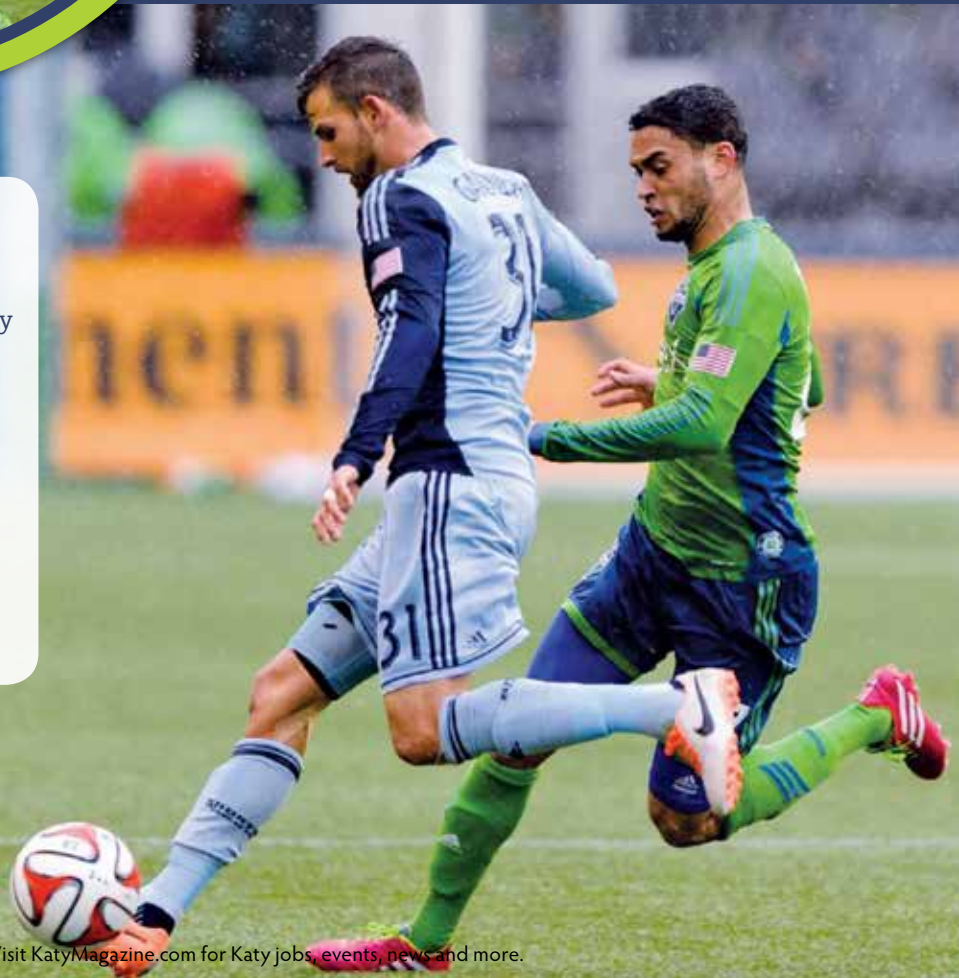


From Mayde Creek High School to professional soccer player, Katy's hometown champ now coaches for Sporting Kansas City

*Written by Kennan Buckner
Photography courtesy of Josh Gardner*

JOSH GARDNER **SOCCER STATS**

- ⚽ 2013 MLS Cup with Sporting Kansas City
- ⚽ 2007 USL First Division Championship with Seattle Sounders
- ⚽ 2005 MLS Cup and Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup winner with the LA Galaxy
- ⚽ 2004 selected 13th overall in MLS superdraft
- ⚽ 2003 led the Cincinnati Bearcats in points
- ⚽ 2002 Second Team All-Conference USA



Josh Gardner didn't expect to become a professional soccer player, but he ended up having an 11-year career and now coaches for Sporting Kansas City. "I knew I was gifted in the sport, but thought that I would use my scholarship in college to finish my degree and join the design world," Gardner says. "I believe that Jesus Christ wanted to use me in the game to share the love that He has for people. I credit His will over my life as the reason why I was able to play for so long and meet the people I was supposed to meet."

STARTING YOUNG

Gardner moved to Katy when he was 7 years old and attended Bear Creek Elementary, Mayde Creek Junior High, and Mayde Creek High School. "I led Fellowship of Christian Athletes with a couple of other students," he says. He first played for the Bear Creek Rex soccer league and later the Houston Hurricanes - now the Albion Hurricanes. "I didn't really learn the game until I was coached by Glenn Davis, Tony Johnson, and Alfredo Martinez - all of whom are still in the Houston area," says Gardner.



Gardner has received his U.S. Soccer Federation A license and is currently working on a French coaching license. While he often misses playing the game, he loves coaching and hopes to help young athletes grow both their physical and mental game.

He first realized he might have a chance to go pro after his sophomore year at the University of Cincinnati. "The U20 national team was playing in Houston and was in need of a few local boys to round out their roster for a game," says Gardner. "I ended up starting at left back and had the assist on the lone goal of the match." An agent was watching and contacted him after the game. "From then on I focused most of my attention on becoming a pro," he adds.

PLAYER TO COACH

In college, he earned a call-up to the U.S. Men's National Soccer Team in 2003. He played left-sided defender and midfielder and gained pro experience with the Los Angeles Galaxy, Seattle Sounders, Carolina Railhawks, Columbus Crew, and Montreal Impact before finishing his career at Sporting Kansas City in 2014. Some of his favorite memories are playing in Costa Rica with the L.A. Galaxy in the CONCACAF Champion's League.

One of his best games as a professional was with a goal and an assist with the

L.A. Galaxy against Saprissa. Winning the U.S. Open Cup and Major League Soccer (MLS) Cup in 2005 with the L.A. Galaxy, winning the United Soccer League championships with Seattle Sounders, and the MLS Cup with Sporting Kansas City were also some of his professional highlights. "Meeting some lifelong friends and sharing these memories with them is priceless," says Gardner.

"Eleven years later and a few teams in between, I'm still in the game coaching for the Sporting Academy team," he says. He credits his career development to amazing coaches. "They taught me a lot about who I was as a player and who I could become as a coach," says Gardner. His professional experience has allowed him to play with and against world class players making him an even greater coach.

ENJOYING THE JOURNEY

Nothing could replace Gardner's hometown Katy support, including his older and younger sisters who also played soccer. "I'm pretty sure my parents have recorded every game I have ever played," he says. "They were my biggest fans growing up."

Gardner's goals for the future are simple. "I want to be the best father and husband to my wife and kids. I want to raise my kids to love Jesus with all their heart and to love others. God has given me this amazing platform to spread the good news of his Gospel, so I want to honor Him in all I do," he shares. Gardner also hopes to watch his Sporting Kansas City athletes move on to the pros. "As far as coaching, I don't know if I want to stay in the youth game or coach at a higher level, but for right now I'm enjoying the journey." KM

KENNAN BUCKNER is a former left-handed hitter for the Spurs - the Devine Little League Tee-ball team of course.



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