

“A Real Full-Circle Moment” St. Louis CITY SC’s Wan Kuzain Comes Back To His Soccer Home

by Nathan Tucker

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ST. LOUIS - St. Louis CITY’s midfielder Wan Kuzain grew up in Carbondale, a not-so-short drive from the St. Louis Area. The area, and specifically Ralph Korte Stadium in Edwardsville, holds a special place in Kuzain’s heart.

Kuzain played soccer in the St. Louis Scott Gallagher youth system. SLSG would train at Ralph Korte Stadium, where Kuzain now plays his trade for St. Louis CITY 2.

“My parents would drive me back and forth hours to practice,” remembered Wan Kuzain, in an interview with me on Thursday. “I remember practicing at Ralph Korte Stadium. We had one patch of the field for practice, now being able to play there and experience it from the professional side is really special.”

“Some of my earliest memories of soccer are on that field (at Ralph Korte Stadium) and in the St. Louis area,” said Kuzain. “It’s a real full-circle moment.”

Playing in high-level youth competitions with St. Louis Scott Gallagher opened up the eyes of the US Soccer world to Kuzain’s skills. Kuzain played for the United States U-17 team, and was signed by Major League Soccer’s Sporting Kansas City as a homegrown player.

“At the time I was so young, 18 or 19 years old, it all happened so quickly it was like living a dream.” Wan Kuzain described his time in MLS during our interview. “I remember scoring the goal, (his first and only MLS goal, so far) it didn’t really hit me until a couple of weeks later that ‘wait, I scored my first goal in MLS, at home, in front of a lot of people. It’s huge, and it’s something I want more of at the end of the day, to be that player at the highest level.”

Currently, that path back to the highest level is with St. Louis CITY 2, playing in MLS NEXT Pro. CITY 2 is fielding a strong team with many players experienced at higher levels, including Kuzain, who signed with St. Louis CITY SC back in February.

When asked about coming back and playing here in the St. Louis area, Kuzain praised St. Louis’s loyal soccer fans, some of whom followed his journey before there was professional soccer in the area. The group known as the “Louligans” has made their presence felt at many levels of soccer for more than a decade around St. Louis.

“I remember playing for a Scott Gallagher PDL team, a U-23 team, and seeing all the Louligans out at the game,” said Kuzain. “I remember being with Saint Louis FC and playing preseason games at Ralph Korte Stadium, and seeing all the Louligans on the hill when it was negative 30 degrees. It’s another full-circle moment, remembering those games.

“There was always at least one thing you took away from playing in St. Louis,” continued Kuzain. “It’s that these fans are the real deal, they’re going to be some of the best fans in MLS if not the best, and at the end of the day they really care. They want the best for all the players.”