

AN OPPORTUNITY, A CHANCE O AND...

The moment that I've been waiting for ever since I was 6 years old and told my parents that I would play professional soccer in Europe. This moment happened for me November 7, 2009. I flew from Toronto Pearson International Airport and Landed in Paris, France, nine hours later. My destination: Caen, France. North of Paris in the Normandy region. Objective: my first international trial (for the U17) with the club, SM Caen.

My name is Jason Mills. I'm 16 years old, born July 18th, in Toronto. I currently attend my local high school in Richmond Hill, Ontario and have been playing soccer since I was 4 years old. My inspiration is my older brother, Brandon. I silently watched him play "house league soccer" with my dad coaching for two years, before I could give the sport a try.

As I lay in bed the night before my first official try-out, I kept thinking, what would the next week be like? I realized that it would be much different than the soccer life I had in Canada, but how different? I also understood that a new, exciting chapter of my life was about to begin. I was nervous. I won't even begin to say that I wasn't. **This was IT! EUROPEAN SOCCER. Most soccer kids from North America dream about this. And here I was, a normal teenager getting geared up to make and leave an impression on the coaching staff of SM Caen. WOW!**

The first couple of days were tough. The language barrier obviously made it difficult to communicate with the other players. I didn't know anyone expect the U17 coach, Francois Rodrigues (who btw, along with Bassam Naim (ANB Academy Director who traveled with me) were the people that made this opportunity for me happen. At the SM Caen Formation Centre (where all the players of the club live), I was given a tour of the campus and training grounds. I shared a room with a very BIG guy named Jerome who spoke very little English. He was curious about me. He wanted to know if I was American. I said, "non. Canadien."

My first day at training, was individual. There were only 2 other players as the rest of the team had class. We started with warm-up, then technical work. As the training session went on, I became a little more comfortable. Then it was dinner time. I was clearly the "man-out". The whole club, all its players were at dinner. And I



JASON MILLS AT SM CAEN, FRANCE.

OF A LIFETIME

By: JASON MILLS

was the new kid, from "America", trying out. That was a hard feeling. It took a few days for the guys to warm up to me. Eventually, regardless of the language, we all spoke the same: SOCCER (to us North Americans) but it is FUTBOL to the Europeans!

On Wednesday, November 11th, I played my first game with the team. I started left midfield. I had some chances and should've scored twice. Second half, I played striker and had one good chance but didn't capitalize. All in all, I think I played well. The next day was training again but this time with the U19 Team. These were not ordinary boys. These were MEN! I was apprehensive but excited at the same time. The players were great! At the end of the training session, I participated in a game with the U19. I was shaking in my boots! And because I was so nervous I didn't play well. **Friday November 13th. My last day at the Formation Centre. My last day to give it my all. To show the French that I had it in me....to play FUTBOL. I trained again with the U19 team. I played in the game also. I was more comfortable. I took a hard hit. But shook it off and resumed playing. I was in my element. I wanted IT. What an experience!**

Before I left for France, one of my coaches asked me, "why are you going to France?" I answered (quite simply), "for a try-out". My coach said I was right and wrong. I didn't understand why he said that. So, throughout the week I had in France, I realized that I had to adapt to many things such as the environment, the people, the language, the style of soccer they played, the mentality that these players truly "ate, drank, slept: FUTBOL". In France the players "fight" on the field, they understand and know that each player wants the same thing: to move on to the next level. During my stay, I experience THAT. I asked my coach, "why was I wrong?!" He said that I needed to look past the try-out and realize that I had to adapt to the lifestyle of an athlete. I did end up noticing that and my view of the game has changed. I realize that soccer and my love of the game is a "culture".

I have been invited back to the SM Caen Club in March for a month. If I was a French citizen, I would've been invited to stay. I am happy to return to Canada, to write about my experience and tell those that ask. I am THRILLED to return to France for another try. This time, I will be taking the advice my coaches have given me from here and from France to be successful.

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