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Michael Petrasso believes soccer is on the rise in Canada

Written By ROBERT BELARDI

The Canadian Premier League was supposed to begin this past Easter Monday.

This sophomore season might provide a better glimpse into the future.

Canadians have a reason to be optimistic that soccer will carve itself into the identity of the country. A paradigm shift is growing along the horizon and the pathway to finding success is currently in progress.

A part of that path, is Woodbridge, Ontario native Michael Petrasso. The 24-year-old winger says, that Canada continues to improve in the sport.

?I think in the next six years, you will see a lot of players come out, from young ages and even older ages, that will try to grasp this opportunity. The World Cup is coming here in North America, I think the level can only go up for Canadian players,? Petrasso explained.

He began his soccer playing days with Kleinburg-Nobleton SC around the age of four. He would watch soccer whenever it was on television and idolized, England's bulldog, Wayne Rooney.

At the age of 13, Petrasso was called up for a match in the local area with other Canadian prospects.

The opposition, lost a player due to illness and Petrasso pounced on the largest opportunity in his young life. He made an exceptional first impression in front of the coach of the national team at the time, Sean Fleming.

?I did really well that game, you know, luck of the draw there,? Petrasso said.

?Sean Fleming approached me after the game, and he said he wanted to have a look at me at the next coming camp. I was at a one-year difference from the national team at the time. That's when I started to kick off and I went as a part of the national team program the next year.?

Toronto FC scouts came lurking around and gazed their eyes on the youngster. He was asked to join the Toronto FC academy in 2010.

In January 2011, Petrasso helped lift Canada through qualifying in Costa Rica. The Canadians were rapt for the chance to compete in the U17 World Cup in Mexico.

Canada was placed in Group C with England, Uruguay and Rwanda. Petrasso had never competed in front of a stadium filled with fans, while his family was in attendance. He started all three games. He even went head to head with one of the most prolific wingers in the Premier League today; Manchester City starlet, Raheem Sterling.

Exposure on the global stage granted the youngster trials oversees. Petrasso went to try out for A.C Chievo Verona and Frosinone Calcio. Making neither squad, one of the coaches for Queens Park Rangers, Marc Bircham ensured that Petrasso would have an opportunity with QPR.

?I remember being driven to the airport after the training by Marc Bircham and he said, okay, we're going to offer you a two-year professional contract and we want you back over in the next month or so.?

In 2012, Petrasso began his young professional career in White City, London. In the midst of this glamorous chance to grow as a player, Petrasso was forced to face the bitter reality of staring maturity dead in the eye; even if he wasn't quite ready to do so.

In the first six months, he would continuously call home. His friends would post on social media of their nights out together. He felt forgotten all on his lonesome. This ate away at his mental strength and affected his performances on the pitch.

He had to grow up. There was no other option. In front of a harsh English media that comes bellowing down on poor player performances, he knew he had to change.

If he was punished by his coaches, he would respond to the scowls by returning to training the next day to prove the leaders wrong. His game picked up and he was not only proving it to the media, but to himself.

Throughout his first two years on the senior team at QPR, Petrasso was sent out on loan to Oldham Athletic, Coventry City, Leyton Orient and Notts County, before finishing his last three months with the club he signed for. Above all, he had his coaches to thank for his development.

?Both of them simplified my game. I was a winger. I used my strength I was fast. So, tactically, they showed me where I needed to position myself.?

In his journey away, while recording caps for the junior Canadian national team, the senior men's team called. He got his chance, to dawn the red and white of the national uniform on June 3rd, 2016 in a friendly against Azerbaijan.

In 2018 it was time for Petrasso to return to Canada. He signed with the Montreal Impact, ready to demonstrate how far he has come beneath the tutelage of Octavio Zambrano and former Canadian International and Gold Cup winner, Paul Stalteri.

He could not have imagined a short tenure with the club. He was ultimately, pushed out from the organization leading to one of the most downtrodden moments of his career thus far.

But, when there's a will there's a way. Everything about his career had been copacetic until this moment. Surely there was a way to turn it around, none other, than playing for Valour FC in Winnipeg.

In 18 appearances in the inaugural season of the Canadian Premier League, Petrasso netted home six goals.

Travelling throughout the country, Petrasso saw the potential of the Canadian soccer culture first hand.

He became a known celebrity in Winnipeg. He saw the raw passion of committed fan bases everywhere.

Now it's time to come back home with York9 FC. Petrasso is currently living at home with his parents for the first time in nine years.

He always thought, that if he wanted to come home to play soccer it would have to be for Toronto FC. Truthfully, he never saw a league in Canada that the country can name their own.

?I didn't actually think the league in Canada would actually come. It's given a lot of kids the opportunity, that haven't played pro before that are needing that opportunity that I got.?

Awaiting, for the start of the second season, Petrasso is edging to suit up for the nine stripes. He says, he hopes to play a major role for the team in the league, and wants to rejoin the Canadian national team.

How could you blame him? The World Cup will be here before you know it.