

# Encino soccer player defending America's honor at Maccabi games — Jewish Journal

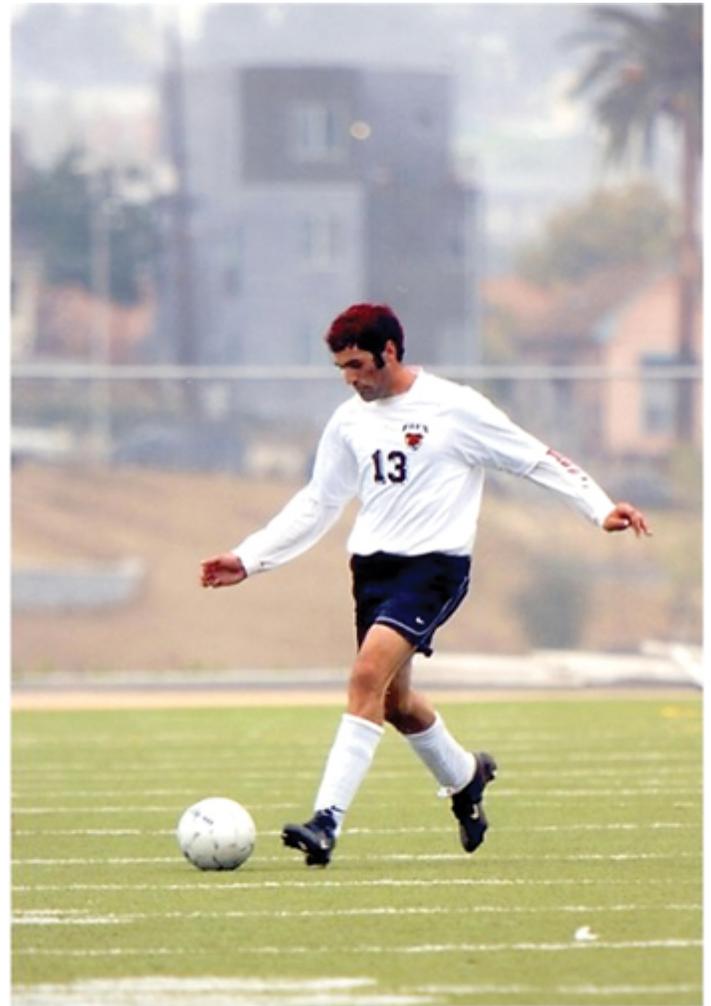
By Ashley Zeldin | PUBLISHED Nov 19, 2010 | Lifestyle

---

Michael Pourat has sacrificed blood, sweat and teeth for soccer.

Pourat, 21, took an errant elbow to the mouth seven years ago — “I don’t think it was on purpose,” he says — and only in September, after years of surgeries, did his braces come off for good. He had a bone graft, “and there’s still metal up here,” he says, pointing to his upper lip while smiling proudly.

“I have to sacrifice myself at times, and it’s great knowing I have that responsibility, that it comes down to me,” says Pourat, who plays defender.



Pourat has played the “beautiful game” almost his entire life. The last line of defense, he tracks attackers as they attempt to kick or head the ball past the goalkeeper behind him. And he will take his place on the turf for the U.S. Maccabi Open Men’s Soccer team this December at the second Maccabi Australia International Games in Sydney, proud to represent his country and religion.

“There’s a lot of pressure, but I don’t think about it too much,” the soft-spoken Pourat says. He lets his soccer ability do the talking.

Pourat certainly stood out to U.S. Maccabi Open Men’s Soccer coach Preston Goldfarb.

“For these games there are no tryouts, so we had to go by their playing history and references, and when we checked out Michael, he’s a solid defender who has a very good soccer background,” says Goldfarb, in his 28th year as head coach at Birmingham Southern College. “We were looking for experience, and certainly he brings ability and credence.”

Pourat hopes to follow in the footsteps of 2005 Maccabiah Games silver medalists Jonathan Bornstein and Benny Feilhaber, who played for the U.S. National Soccer Team that won its group at the World Cup in South Africa last summer.

In fact, Feilhaber caught the attention of European clubs as a result of his play on the U.S. Maccabi team in Israel.

“[The Maccabi Games] is a great stepping stone for them,” Goldfarb says of his athletes. “I think we have the strongest competition of any sport.” His open team will compete against teams from Brazil, Mexico and host country Australia, to name a few. “I think we’re good enough to win. We have a solid roster.”

Already Pourat was invited to an open tryout with the Houston Dynamo of Major League Soccer, but the Pierce College student hopes to transfer and play collegiate soccer first. He was recruited by the likes of Syracuse and Adelphi universities, but he admits, “I wasn’t prepared to go out into the world on my own. Now I am.

“As a player I always try to find the next level,” Pourat says. “Just knowing I can play internationally at my age really got me excited.”

A two-time selection to the U.S. Maccabi team, he played in the youth division at the 11th Pan American Maccabi Games in 2007 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he frequented the only kosher McDonald's outside of Israel.

For Pourat, who keeps kosher and attends services at Chabad of Brentwood, an established Jewish community is important wherever he goes.

As his mother, Penny Pourat, recalls of the Argentine experience, "He didn't know I was watching, and all of a sudden I see him put tefillin on, on the side of the field, right before the game. It was a rewarding moment."

To her credit, Penny Pourat has played an integral role in her son's success. A soccer mom in the truest sense of the word, she constantly shuttled Michael to practices and games, as he played for as many as three club teams at a time. As the head coach of Encino's Balboa Park All Stars, for which she was named AYSO Coach of the Year, she led Michael and his teammates to the 1998 Amateur Athletic Union Junior Olympics in Virginia Beach, Va., where they improved on their bronze California State Games showing by winning the gold.

And Michael Pourat, a 2008 graduate of Taft High School in Woodland Hills, made it to the California Interscholastic Foundation City Section Semifinals with the Toreadors.

Michael's trophies once filled an entire room of their Encino home, Penny Pourat says. She says it's hard for him to imagine not playing soccer, but he knows there will be life after soccer. "When I'm not playing, it feels like I'm missing something," he says. He plans to study sports medicine. "Anything to keep me in sports."

For now, Pourat is looking forward to his trans-Pacific opportunity: "Maccabi is a great way to see the world while playing soccer, and I feel really honored to represent the U.S."

