

Soccer Connects People

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Their homes are 5,750 miles apart from each other, however, on the pitch they are only few yards away. Coming from completely different cultures, ethnicity, nations, and having different perspectives on life and its purpose, MMU student athletes, Nikola Petrovic from Serbia, and Dane Lee from Jamaica, are best friends thanks to soccer.

They met each other in Waterloo, Iowa during the Hawkeye community college soccer pre-season in 2016. Since then, they've spent a lot of time together in class, at work and on the field.

“Moving to live on my own far away from my family was a hard challenge for me,” Petrovic said. “I was lucky enough that I came to a welcoming environment where I met many great people and one of them was Dane. He was in a same position as me, moving far away from home to a completely different and new community.”

“In the early ages, when people were exposed to danger, they tried to face it together in order to survive,” Lee said. “The same happened to me and Niko, we knew that both of us were new here, so we started hanging out and became friends.”

He added that their friendship started on the soccer field and later on in classes and out of them too.

Now they even work together on campus. During their free time, which is hard to find especially during the soccer season, they love to play the video game FIFA on PlayStation.

“Dane is one of my best friends, but I have no mercy when I beat him in FIFA,” Petrovic said, laughing. Lee denied this.

Before coming to the United States, Petrovic spent his early school years in his hometown of Belgrade, never leaving Europe. His only friends were Serbian, who come from the same culture and have the same mentality as him.

On the other side, Lee was born and raised in Calerndon, Jamaica; he had never been in Europe in his life. Both of them decided to come to U.S., and later on to Mount Mercy to pursue soccer and a college education.

“Soccer is my biggest passion, but I couldn’t ever imagine to meet someone from another part of the world playing it with me and becoming one of my best friends,” Lee said.

The Mount Mercy men’s soccer team has players from 17 different countries. Petrovic, who is also the captain of the team, says that his teammates all come from different cultures, but on the field, they all play as one.

“I feel like soccer connected us, even though we are so different, we became a family,” he said.