

# The 'Duke of Soccer' makes appearance in North Augusta

7/29/2008 11:37 PM

By MAC BANKS, Staff Writer, Aiken Standard



**Staff photo by Mac Banks. Duke Hashimoto provides instruction to the Georgia-South Carolina Bulls Soccer Club Tuesday at North Augusta Middle School.**

NORTH AUGUSTA -- For the past couple of weeks, North Augusta has had some soccer royalty teaching some of its younger kids the game. Professional soccer player Duke Hashimoto, 23, has been working with the Georgia-South Carolina Bulls Soccer Club in hosting soccer clinics in the area. Hashimoto is currently rehabbing a left knee injury and is training in hopes to get back to the professional level. He tore his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in his left knee in June 2007 and reinjured it in September of that same year. He is currently without a team, having not caught back on with his former Major League Soccer's (MLS) Real Salt Lake in March. He has been working with the Honolulu Bulls since then, before coming out to the CSRA recently.

A standout player in his home state of Hawaii, Hashimoto was named Hawaii's state player of the year his senior season in high school in 2002 and played club soccer with the Honolulu Bulls, where he led the to the U-19 boys national championship.

He played college soccer at Southern Methodist University (SMU) where he scored 26 goals and has 20 assist in 71 games. While at SMU, he had a season-ending ACL injury in 2004, seeing limited action before the setback. However, he bounced back in 2005 to help lead SMU to the College Cup, soccer's version of the Final Four, before losing to Maryland.

In January 2006, Hashimoto was drafted by the Columbus Crew in the fourth round (38th overall pick) as part of the MLS SuperDraft. He was traded to Real Salt Lake just months later, where he saw action in a dozen MLS Reserve Division games between Columbus and Real Salt Lake, scoring three goals for Real Salt Lake.

He played in just three games for Real Salt Lake Reserve Division in 2007 before getting hurt. Hashimoto tried to comeback in March of this year with Real Salt Lake, but he quickly saw there was no room for him on their roster. Hashimoto tried to get on with a United Soccer League (USL) team this year, but when that didn't work, he decided to take time to return home and help out with the Honolulu Bulls. But now, he said he is optimistic about his future. "I'm fully recovered and good to play," he said. "But I know its not going to happen this year."

He arrived in the North Augusta area when the Honolulu team asked him to come stateside to help with camps, while he trained to get back to the pro level. Now that he is helping out, he said he might have found a new calling once his playing days are over.

Hashimoto said he will try to return to the MLS or a USL team in 2009 and if that doesn't work out he may hang up his cleats and pick up the clipboard. He said he would like to coach older kids, but will work with any age.

"At first, I didn't think I could coach, I didn't think I was cut out for it," he said. "But I'm good to work with any age group. Coaching older kids is good, because you are working with more technical stuff. That is what is enjoyable for me, seeing kids improve."

Local Georgia-South Carolina Bulls directors say they are just glad to have Hashimoto's presence on the field for the soccer camps.

"Anytime you can bring in a professional player, you want that for the players," said Forrest Wimberly, coaching coordinator for the Georgia-South Carolina Bulls Soccer Club. "He really connects with the kids. He is very down to earth and he is what the Bulls are about. He has been great to be around."