

One for all

Timbers' midfielder Diego Valeri is a phenomenal soccer player – with a bent for human rights, fine literature and rock 'n' roll

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El Maestro. El Rey. St. Valeri. Since arriving in Portland in 2013, Timbers midfielder Diego Valeri has accumulated an array of adoring nicknames. With his outspoken love for the city of Portland, Valeri has worked his way into the hearts of Timbers diehards and the casual fan alike. The Argentinean has achieved great on-field success, with one Major League Soccer championship under his belt. In 2015 he was named Most Valuable Player in the MLS Cup final, where he scored a key goal en route to Portland's first league title. Valeri is on pace to become the Timbers all-time leader in assists, and he could eclipse the record for goals as well. He plays with fierce urgency and sublime style, and is rightly renowned as one of the silkiest, most skillful attacking midfielders in the league. Valeri has also represented the Argentina National Team three times in international competition.

But beyond all the soccer accolades, Valeri has an ethical metric that clicks to the rhythm of social justice. He and his family – wife Florencia and daughter, Connie – dedicate themselves to an array of causes, from book donation drives to assistance with foster-care families. Simply put, Valeri is not your average professional athlete. The 31-year-old brims with extraordinary off-field interests: he reads theological texts for pleasure, strums his guitar to relax, contemplates French poetry. What's immediately apparent is that Valeri adores his family. They live in the Pearl District of Portland where they soak up

the city's gifts and grapple with its complexities. Valeri has suggested he'd like to retire in Portland, and the Timbers recently signed him to a contract extension that stretches through 2019.

At the request of Valeri, the interview was conducted in English. ("I have to keep going in English because I have to improve," he insisted.)

Jules Boykoff: *Let's start off with books, since they're important to you.*

Diego Valeri: For sure, books are important for me and for my family, and for everybody. The time spent reading creates in you many positive things. It's very important. I love reading theology and philosophy, and I love St. Augustine and his book "The City of God." I like to read St. Thomas Aquinas, too. There's also Eduardo Galeano and his "Soccer in Sun and Shadow" but his politics writing, too. There are a couple books by Galeano that I really like: "Open Veins of Latin America" and "Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World." I love the way he writes. And I like poetry, for sure – yes, of course. I like "Flores del Mal" ("Flowers of Evil" by Charles Baudelaire). I like Leonardo Castellani, an Argentinean poet who always talked about "Flores del Mal." But mostly I like to read theology and philosophy.

J.B.: *You don't hear that sort of reading list everyday from a soccer player. And you also enjoy music, and you play guitar. What type of music do you like?*

D.V.: I like rock 'n' roll, and the blues. Christian music, too. More acoustic guitar, but to be honest, I like rock.

J.B.: *You and your family are avid supporters of the Portland Thorns. In fact you've been called a "Portland Thorns superfan" by one soccer magazine. What is it that you enjoy about the Thorns?*

D.V.: A lot of things. First, to enjoy with my daughter that spectacular moment in the stadium. For me it's weird because I'm used to being inside, on the field. So when I'm outside in the stands, supporting the team and watching them play, looking around at everything in the crowd, it's great to share with my daughter. She loves it. Loves it. She understands the game and she's very involved in the game, and that makes me feel really good. Watching the Thorns, it's amazing.

And to be honest, I don't think I could really do it in



"If everyone did at least one good act per day, it could help change the people around you and eventually change your city."