

Argentina because it would be a bit dangerous to be with a kid who's eight years old at most of the stadiums there.

J.B.: Pope Francis, who like you is from Argentina, is a lifelong soccer fan. In fact, his favorite club, San Lorenzo, catapulted from the brink of relegation to the league title in 2013, sparking speculation of divine intervention. But beyond soccer he's a massively influential figure, and not just within the Catholic Church. You've read his book, *El Nombre de Dios Es Misericordia* (The Name of God Is Mercy). Pope Francis has spoken out on social issues, stating that "Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation." He has openly criticized a world where, "An unfettered pursuit of money rules (and) The service of the common good is left behind." You've become very active in Portland in "service of the common good." Please tell us about the activities and programs you have been participating in that you find exciting. What do you think everyday Portlanders can do in "service of the common good"?

D.V.: Pope Francis was very focused on the idea of mercy in our community. But everyone has a different role, and I don't think you have to do a lot of things. But if everyone did at least one good act per day, it could help change the people around you and eventually change your city. Sometimes we think we need to do something really, really big and we forget that in doing something small we can start something that's possibly big. If every day everyone did a good act for someone in need, that would change a lot. There are a lot of people in this city, and there are a lot of people in need. So, it could be time, it could be food, it could be a shoulder, or a place where you can rest, but if everyone did something we would see real change.

J.B.: You've been involved in helping foster kids as well. Can you talk about that?

D.V.: Yes, I was involved through a friend from Timbers Army. We helped fix up a room (for family visitations at the Hillsboro Department of Human Services Child Welfare Office) for children in the foster care system. Too many kids are victims in so many situations, so they need to be helped. This is something that my family and I are really focused on. I want to do more, to be honest. You feel like everything you do is not enough, because kids need a lot. But we try to do what we can do. Sometimes soccer is a very busy life, but I want to be more involved and I think people in Portland should know that there are a lot of kids who really need someone, who need time and love.

J.B.: You've also been outspoken on issues around domestic violence and violence against women.

D.V.: Yeah, because sometimes we think we should respect women because you have a sister or mother. But that's not the way to understand this problem (of violence against women). All people need to be respected and loved. That's something that is a right, a human right. That's the way to think about this cause.



PHOTO BY DIEGO DIAZ

Diego Valeri goes airborne during competition. Valeri said that win or lose, he strives to be honest with himself and other teammates on the Timbers. "To do your best to be the same guy, in the good moments and the bad moments – that comes first, because that transcends countries and cultures," Valeri said.

J.B.: You mentioned human rights, which has been in the news recently in Argentina where we've seen widespread protests over a Supreme Court ruling that reduced the sentence of someone convicted of crimes against humanity during the military dictatorship period (1976 to 1983). Then, the Argentinean Congress responded, passing a bill that disallowed shortening the prison terms for crimes against humanity. The vote was almost unanimous, which is extremely rare in Argentina's polarized political scene. The ruling could have opened the floodgates for other human-rights abusers who have requested similar leniency. You recently expressed criticism of this possibility. Why are memory, truth and justice so important in this instance?

D.V.: These concepts are very important because corruption is not something new from the last couple weeks but corruption has long been a way to live and that's why in Argentina we're in this position. All this is about one of the darkest parts of our

history, and so the people spoke out in Argentina, saying what they needed to say. People want justice. And that's something that is really good because Congress or presidents or whatever, they have an authority, but people have the power, too. Those protests come from the heart of the people – they want justice and they know it can happen.

J.B.: Switching gears, you have a special relationship with the fans of the Portland Timbers, including Timbers Army. Right now, in fact, you're wearing a "No Pity Originals" jacket designed by the group.

D.V.: Yes, I think we have a special situation here in Portland because of our crowd. They are very organized and you can join up with them off the field, which would be very difficult and rare in the rest of the world's clubs. In Argentina, this would be very difficult to do because of ulterior interests held by supporter groups. We have a crowd here in Portland that's involved in

the community – not just soccer – and it has that passion, that emotion. Their sole interests are to support the community and the club. That's why I am involved. I try to do what I can. I don't have all the free time that I'd like, but I support them every time that I can.

J.B.: What do you do with the wooden slabs that Timber Joey gives you for scoring goals?

D.V.: It depends. Most likely, I donate them. Some to fans, some for an auction for foster care rooms so they can get some money to fix them up. Yes, so most of the time I donate them.

J.B.: Have you kept any for yourself?

D.V.: Only one. The one from the MLS Cup final.

J.B.: You're in a locker room with guys from all over the world with different languages and nationalities. What do you do as a leader in the locker room to make sure everyone's getting along and feeling included?

D.V.: The first thing is to be yourself and to be honest with yourself and your teammates. Always the truth. Regardless of the result, you maintain the same relationship. Because sometimes competition creates a very different feeling from when you win and when you lose. I try to always be the same. All the time, every day. To do your best to be the same guy, in the good moments and the bad moments – that comes first, because that transcends countries and cultures. So, that's first. And then, obviously, to be a good professional, to be a good teammate. That's very important, because we spend many hours together.

J.B.: Former Timbers player Maximiliano Urruti, recently said in an interview that you were not only a good teammate but "a phenomenal man."

D.V.: Phenomenal man – that's too much!

J.B.: He was saying that you and your family brought him in when he arrived in Portland and insisted that he stay at your place rather than a hotel. What was your thinking there? Same idea?

D.V.: I think there was a bit more to it because he was Argentinian and he was 21 years old. He was young and he was just traded from Toronto so he was very shocked about the situation. And so I wanted him to feel warm and in a good place as quickly as I could. So, that was the idea – to make him feel at home. At our home, everybody's waiting for you, you have a room, you have breakfast when you wake up.

J.B.: Your wife Florencia recently said about Portland, "This place hasn't stopped surprising us since the moment we got here." What's something that you've been happily surprised by recently in Portland?

D.V.: We were happily surprised about this (points to copy of Street Roots). Just the other day my wife first told me about this newspaper and said, 'We should support them.' We learned about the work that you do. And it's amazing – we want to support it.