

CAL SOUTH ABROAD

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Making Adjustments Across the Pond: An American in Paris

APART FROM HIS FRIENDS, what 15-year-old Eric Fabre misses most about Southern California is going to the beach. Well, going to a beach with a generally hot climate.

Moving to France last year to play at the U17 youth academy for Ligue 1 pro club Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), Eric did get a chance to go to a beach along the English Channel, but discovered it wasn't quite as comfortable as the sun-soaked ones he left behind. He also had a wake-up call regarding weather in his new home in Paris. "It gets really cold. It snowed during the winter. It's the first time I'd experienced snow falling."

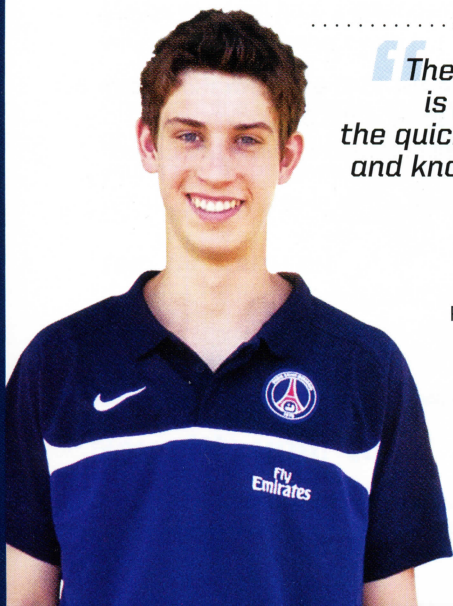
Holding dual nationality, the 6'2" defensive midfielder had visited his father Oliver's homeland roughly ten times before his family relocated there last year. Obsessed with soccer since he was three, Eric's skills grew to the point where he had not only made the Cal South ODP '94 pool, but also helped his West Coast FC side capture the BU14 US Youth Soccer National Championship in July of 2009.

"The year before [in 2008], I tried out [at Rodez AF] and made the team, but we weren't ready to move. I told my dad I wanted to come back next year. So, my dad contacted the president of [PSG] out of the blue. When my dad asked them what made them interested in me, it was because I had won a National Championship the year before." Oliver Fabre, who tried out with pro club Nîmes in his youth and still plays at 42, was eager to move back home after spending half of his life in America.

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ERIC FABRE

Paris Saint-Germain U17 Academy
Defensive Midfielder



Moving, however, meant big adjustments for Oliver's family, the first of which was the language. Eric joined the Lycee International School, and early on had to endure twelve hours of French instruction per week, versus the three that other American students took. But, in order for the lone American student on the second team at the U17 PSG Academy to be accepted by his teammates, it was a necessity. "It was tough to communicate. Then I met this Canadian kid and a Scottish kid on the first team, and they helped me. Once I knew the language, it was much easier. Now I feel totally a part of the team."

Eric also discovered the pressure of an increased training schedule at a pro academy. "Eight times a week: practice on Monday, two each on Tuesday and Wednesday, one on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and then a game on Sunday. Yeah, it's a lot." There's an upside, however. "Saturday's really light... just a light training."

Playing against other highly talented teams in the Ligue de Paris Ile-de-France, Eric found he was in a far more immersive soccer culture than in America, where there is a variety of other sports that compete for youth attention, and where soccer is still often seen as a novelty. The greater European focus on soccer was noticed most by Eric in the game itself.

"The biggest difference is the speed of play... the quickness of decisions, and knowledge of the ball. You really need to get quicker. Every practice, you're fighting for a spot. It's something you don't have [in America]. There are 22 kids on the roster; you can only take 14 to the game. You are trying to win your place on the team and not get cut out by another player."

Eric has his sights squarely set on the present, trying to get everything he can out of this experience. But he does hope to use his time at PSG as a launchpad for an eventual pro career in Europe, perhaps trying out for other clubs in Italy, Switzerland, France or Spain, if he doesn't advance through PSG's system.

However, when Eric was asked, given the choice thanks to his dual citizen status, which national team he would prefer to play with – France or the U.S. – his answer arrives with a hearty laugh. "Right now it's the United States, due to the World Cup results!"