



# SHORT PASSES

DID YOU KNOW...

## AN INSPIRING EVENING

... Monte Vista High School of Danville, Calif., is mostly white and wealthy. Richmond High School of Richmond, Calif., is mostly brown, black and poor. Their differences are as simple, and as complicated, as that. But in a strange series of circumstances these two high school soccer teams have connected in an inspiring way. It began this past March with the applause of one Richmond fan. It's astonishing the impact that one person can make. ...

... The recent movie, "Coach Carter," starring **SAMUEL P. JACKSON** is about Richmond High. It's a gritty school, where a large percentage of the students will never graduate. Gangs, drugs, drive-by shootings and poverty are part of daily life in Richmond and its connected sister city, San Pablo. (In a recent trial about the shooting death of a young, college-bound high school football player, a man was asked why he'd given a gun to the teenage shooter. His reply, in essence, was: "If he'd asked me for my car keys, I would have given those to him. How was this any different?")

... The No. 1 seed Richmond boys soccer team hosted a playoff game with Monte Vista. Richmond's coach, **RENE SILES**, said he wanted local fans to get to see the game. Games were usually played at Monte Vista because Richmond's field is a gopher hole mess, and Monte Vista's field is a green carpet in comparison. It was a night game, and Monte Vista fans arrived with understandable trepidation. The area around the school is dark and urban-scary. As Monte Vista parents exited their cars, they stayed in groups and moved quickly through the parking lot to the field. They got behind their team's bench and stayed there. The stands on the Richmond side of the field filled up quickly with a mostly Spanish-speaking audience. The night was rainy and cold. The Richmond coach was right: This

wasn't an audience that would have likely made the journey to suburban Danville. ...

... The game itself was fierce. Favored Richmond played its heart out. It was arguably its best game of the season. Monte Vista countered at every turn, but if it were any sport other than soccer, Richmond would have walked away with a trophy. But as every soccer fan knows, the luck of the game is that any team can win on any given day. And with minutes to go, the ball stopped dead in a puddle, Monte Vista knocked it in, and the 2-1 result held to the final whistle. ...

... At that closing whistle, Richmond players broke down in tears. The fans alternated between jeers, shouts and silence. Then the Monte Vista players and fans realized they were going to have to walk through the Richmond crowd to get through the only exit back to the team bus. It was going to be a very long walk. At that moment, the Richmond security guards seemed woefully inadequate. ...

... After the teams lined up and slapped hands, the Monte Vista parents and coaches sheltered their players and began that long walk. But something happened along the way. The crowd began to part for them. One Richmond fan began to clap. Then

another. And another. Cheers and shouts of congratulations were heard. The Monte Vista team was getting a champions' salute from the crowd. The team was stunned. Monte Vista parents and their coach **FRED WILSON** were quoted in the papers saying they'd never experienced anything like it. "... never have I been as moved as by what this school did," said one parent. The team bus driver, who also occasionally drives for the Richmond team, later told a Richmond parent that he'd never seen a more stunned group in a post-game journey home. ...

... So what's the result of that one game on that one night? Well, for starters, letters to the school district from the Monte Vista parents thanking and congratulating Richmond's players, coaches and fans. Then a column in the *San Francisco Chronicle* telling the entire area about this unique sports moment. Then certificates to the Richmond players and coach from the Richmond City Council honoring them for their sportsmanship. And finally, in honoring **BRAD BLAKE**, the retiring soccer coach of the girls San Ramon Magic and the Monte Vista High School girls soccer team, a gift of \$2,000 was given by the soccer players and parents in his name to Richmond High's fledgling girls team to support its development. They said that the genesis of the donation was the

sportsmanship of the Richmond High School soccer community exhibited on that March night. Wilson, the Monte Vista boys coach, has stepped down to return to graduate school. In one more special kindness on that night, he took the Richmond team captain aside after the game, to compliment his performance and wish him well in his soccer career. ...

... For purposes of full disclosure, my nephew is the captain of that Richmond team. He'll play for the University of San Francisco in the fall. But for some insight into my feelings about his neighborhood, well, I was mugged in front of my sister's house on my way to his baby shower! But on this one rainy, cold night, soccer helped make something special happen. And as someone who was there, I know I will never forget it. ...



Richmond High School principal Doris Avalos accepts a gift of \$2,000 for RHS's girls soccer team. Richmond boys players pictured are Victor Ceja-Orozco (second from left) and Manuel Ledesma (fourth from right). Also pictured are RHS coach Rene Stiles (third from left) and Monte Vista's Brad Blake (second from right).

COURTESY OF PAUL BERNARDETTI, CONTRA COSTA UNITED SCHOOL DISTRICT