

= Steve Zakuani =

Steve Zakuani (born February 9 , 1988) is a Congolese former association football player . He was born in Zaire ? now the Democratic Republic of the Congo ? and grew up in London . He had a successful college career before playing for Seattle Sounders FC and the Portland Timbers .

Zakuani played for the Arsenal youth academy but as a teenager he struggled finding a team . He attended the University of Akron on a soccer scholarship and excelled as a forward . In 2009 , Seattle selected Zakuani first overall in the MLS SuperDraft . He quickly became a fan favorite as a winger who had the speed and ability to take on opposing defenders . He had success in 2010 , scoring ten goals and debuting for the Congo DR national football team in a friendly . However , in 2011 , he suffered a leg injury that almost ended his career . He returned in 2012 but failed to recapture his early success , and retired after playing the 2014 MLS season with the Portland Timbers . After soccer , Zakuani has pursued helping young athletes through charity .

= = Career = =

= = = Youth and college = = =

Zakuani was born in Kinshasa , Zaire ? now the Democratic Republic of the Congo . When he was four , his father , Mao Zakuani , moved his family to London for political and professional reasons after receiving a job offer as a translator . The family switched homes often and lived with extended family for long periods . They later settled in a north London neighborhood with other African families , where Zakuani attended White Hart Lane School .

At the age of nine , Zakuani attracted interest from West Ham United 's youth program . He later tried out for the youth team of Queens Park Rangers , and in 1997 , he joined the Arsenal Academy . Zakuani became cocky and brash while not focusing on schoolwork and was released . His off @-@ the @-@ field issues culminated in serious injuries when he was involved in a crash while riding on a moped that one of his friends had stolen . Zakuani was unable to play for 18 months . After losing interest in soccer and renewing his efforts in school , his teacher and mentor Paul Goodison took him to watch motivational speaker and evangelist Myles Munroe . This inspired Zakuani to renew his commitment to becoming a professional player and , although unsuccessful , he tried out for the senior teams of Queens Park Rangers , Wigan Athletic , AZ Alkmaar , and Real Valladolid .

Zakuani attended the University of Akron after he was noticed while playing at north London 's Independent Football Academy . In his freshman season , he scored six goals with the Zips and received a professional offer from Preston North End . He was already committed to the university and declined the opportunity . In 2008 , Zakuani scored 20 goals and 7 assists over 23 games to become a finalist for the Hermann Trophy ; an award given yearly by the Missouri Athletic Club to the country 's top college soccer player . He also became the second sophomore to be named Soccer America 's men 's collegiate player of the year . He played a portion of the 2008 USL Premier Development League season with the Cleveland Internationals , with whom he scored nine goals and made four assists in 11 matches .

= = = Professional = = =

= = = = Seattle Sounders FC = = = =

Zakuani was selected by expansion side Seattle Sounders FC as the number @-@ one pick in the 2009 MLS SuperDraft on a Generation Adidas program contract . He declined offers from two English clubs so he could sign with Major League Soccer ; the deal allowed him to set money aside for future college tuition . He started 24 of 30 regular season games in 2009 and played in the

Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup final , when the Sounders became the second MLS team to win the tournament in their inaugural season . Zakuani provided a much @-@ needed attacking presence from the wing ; he was the third @-@ best scorer with four goals throughout the regular season . The press considered him a candidate for Rookie of the Year because he had the highest number of goals and assists of all new players . The award eventually went to Omar Gonzalez . A local reporter praised him for improving his assistance to the defence and making better offensive runs as the season progressed . Although Zakuani was already known as a top young player , coach Sigi Schmid wanted him to improve his on @-@ field decision making and increase his fitness before the next year .

In 2009 , a shoulder injury that had limited Zakuani 's ability to play the full 90 minutes per game forced him to undergo surgery during the off @-@ season . In his second professional year , Zakuani scored ten goals , equalling the score of striker Fredy Montero for the team lead . He also made six assists . Zakuani was named MLS Player of the Week twice ; the first was after recording both goals in a 2 ? 1 win over Colorado , and the second was awarded for both a goal and an assist in a 2 ? 1 victory over Chivas USA . Fans around the league voted the strike against Chivas as the Goal of the Week . Zakuani also won the award for his perfectly timed break past the defensive back line for a one @-@ on @-@ one situation with the goalkeeper while scoring a goal against Toronto FC . He also recorded the fastest @-@ scored goal in club history with a fourth @-@ minute tally against Columbus Crew , beating the previous record he had set the season before . Zakuani was again in the starting line @-@ up for the 2010 U.S. Open Cup final , which Seattle won to become the first team since 1983 to repeat as Open Cup champions . On November 7 , 2010 , he scored the Sounders ' first ever playoff goal in a 2 ? 1 loss to the Los Angeles Galaxy . He received his green card after the season ; this helped the team because MLS limits the number of international players available to each team and receiving permanent resident status exempted him from the cap .

Zakuani scored two goals and had two assists in his first six appearances of the 2011 season . On April 22 , 2011 , a harsh challenge by Brian Mullan led to Zakuani fracturing his tibia and fibula three minutes into a game against the Colorado Rapids . He was airlifted to hospital and underwent surgery the same day . During recovery , doctors feared that his leg would require amputation because of compartment syndrome . The concern was caused by a lack of blood flow that hurt the nerves connecting the area to his foot . Mullan initially defended the tackle , saying he would make the challenge again . He later apologized in the face of increasing scrutiny and received a 10 @-@ game suspension and a \$ 5 @,@ 000 fine . Zakuani missed the remainder of the season . Zakuani 's injury was one of several to key players throughout the league that year , leading to criticism that MLS play was aggressive to the point of " thuggery " .

On July 7 , 2012 , after 15 months away , Zakuani returned in a match against Mullan and the Rapids . His return as a substitute with five minutes left in the game met provoked emotional cheers from the fans . Having already publicly forgiven Mullan , the two hugged and exchanged shirts after the whistle . Within two months , he appeared to further his recovery with an assist against FC Dallas and then scored a goal against San Jose Earthquakes . He finished the 2012 season with one goal in 320 minutes over eight matches and went on to play in three playoff games before the team was eliminated .

During the 2013 season , Zakuani made only nine appearances across all competitions before being sidelined with a sports hernia . In that time , he recorded one assist in league play , and assisting in the game @-@ winning goal against Mexico 's Tigres UANL in the CONCACAF Champions League quarterfinals . He was later placed on injured reserve and twice underwent surgery on each side of his groin . Zakuani 's contract was allowed to expire , effectively ending his five @-@ year career with the Sounders , during which he started in 67 of 78 appearances in league play . At the time , he was the club ? s third @-@ leading scorer with 17 goals .

= = = = Portland Timbers = = = =

On December 12 , 2013 , Zakuani was selected by Portland Timbers as the number two pick in the MLS Re @-@ Entry Draft ; a yearly draft that allows teams to select players who are out @-@ of

@-@ contract or have had their options declined by their current teams . The Timbers traded up for the opportunity . Zakuani was reunited with Porter , his former Akron coach , who had become the Portland manager . His pay was cut by \$ 60 @,@ 000 to \$ 120 @,@ 000 a year . Zakuani was expected to receive additional minutes immediately because first @-@ choice winger Rodney Wallace was recovering from injury . Zakuani appeared in the Timbers ' opening match of 2014 against Philadelphia Union as a substitute in the 85th minute . The Sounders and Timbers are fierce rivals ; when the teams met in the 2014 Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup . Zakuani assisted former college team @-@ mate Darlington Nagbe in the Timbers ' only goal during the 3 ? 1 loss to his previous club . Zakuani scored his first goal for Timbers on August 19 , 2014 , scoring the opening goal in a 4 ? 1 win over Alpha United in the 2014 ? 15 CONCACAF Champions League . After the match , Porter spoke to the media about the need to bench Zakuani because of his persistent muscle strains .

2014 was disappointing for Zakuani ; he scored no goals and only three assists . On October 29 , 2014 , Zakuani announced his retirement in a blog post . Having scored only one goal and five assists in the previous three seasons , he cited his difficulty recovering from numerous injuries . He had lost much of his precision , pace , and confidence since being hurt . He retired at the relatively early age of 26 ; his retirement after his initial promise led Sports Illustrated to describe his career as a " roller coaster " .

= = International = =

Zakuani was eligible to play for both Congo and England . He considers London his hometown but still sees himself as Congolese . Of his five siblings , as of April 2015 , his older brother Gabriel Zakuani plays for English club Peterborough United and is a member of the Congolese national team . He might have been able to play for the United States if granted citizenship . He expressed interest in representing the Congolese national team early in his professional career , but considered his chances of playing for England " a long shot " . Later in his career , he expressed interest in playing for the United States , saying , " of the three , I prefer the States as this is where I made my name as a player " .

In 2010 , Zakuani accepted a call up from Congo for a friendly match against Mali . In a press release , Zakuani called it the highest honor of his young career . It was a challenging decision for him but the wait to become eligible to play for the United States was too long . The game was played in Dieppe , France , in November 2010 . Zakuani started the match and came off at half @-@ time with Congo in the lead . Mali rallied in the second half , beating Congo in a 3 ? 1 loss .

= = Playing style = =

Zakuani was a right @-@ footed player who preferred being on the left of the field . He played on the left wing in a 4 ? 4 ? 2 formation with Arsenal ; later he was a forward in college before converting to a winger professionally . Zakuani said he played with a style he learned at Arsenal 's youth academy and that he tried to emulate the style of former winger Robert Pirès . Zakuani often sought advice from former Arsenal star Fredrik Ljungberg when they played together in Seattle . Zakuani was a quick , agile player who liked to take defenders one @-@ on @-@ one . While coaching him at Akron , Porter said many of Zakuani 's goals came after long runs that beat multiple players .

= = Kingdom Hope = =

As a teenager in London , Zakuani began " mixing with the wrong crowd " . He was distracted from soccer by girls and parties . He said in an interview , " A lot of the people I grew up with ended up in prison , taking drugs , and never made it to university " . He has strong feelings about the increase of knife crime in London since one of his friends was killed . In 2010 , he founded the non @-@ profit organization Kingdom Hope to run youth soccer camps in the greater Seattle area . He

remembers being focused on soccer instead of education in Europe ; the organization is focused on providing collegiate scholarships to young athletes . Zakuani has said his ultimate goal is to open an academy to teach life @-@ coaching and soccer to teenagers to provide a " bridge between talent and actually making it " .

= = Career statistics = =

As of November 3 , 2014 .

= = Honors = =

= = = Club = = =

Seattle Sounders FC

Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup (2) : 2009 , 2010