

A young man with dark hair and a slight smile is looking towards the camera. He is wearing a dark blue soccer jersey with a white logo on the chest and the number '6' on the front. He is standing in front of a yellow and green soccer goal net. The background is a bright green wall with a yellow grid pattern.

SOCCER *or*

BY ALEXANDRE MACHADO VASCONCELOS

Like other prospective missionaries, Lohran Saldanha Queiroz had to make a choice to serve a mission or not. But besides deciding whether to give up school, work, family, and friends for two years, Lohran had another tough choice: serve a mission or have the opportunity to play professional soccer in Brazil?

Lohran, a member of the Barra da Tijuca Ward, Rio de Janeiro Brazil Jacarepaguá Stake, has soccer in his blood. His father, Milton, is known simply as Tita throughout Brazil. He has played professionally in five countries, won many titles, been a top scorer in the state, and played on the national team.

Tita noticed his son's ability early on. "I grew up with a soccer ball always close by," Lohran remembers. "My father has always encouraged me. I started accompanying him to his practices when I was three or four and have been around professional players ever since."

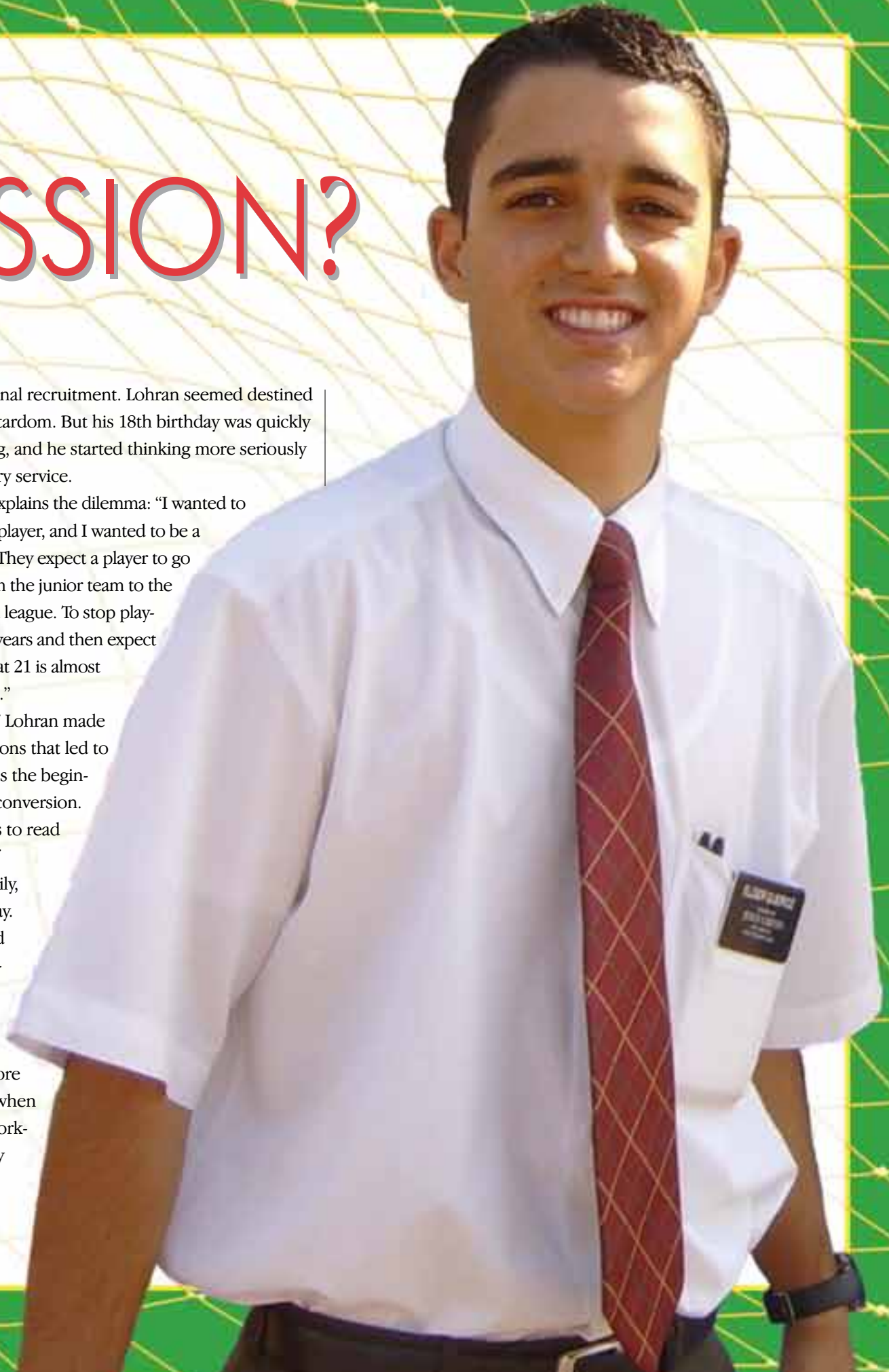
Formal training began for Lohran at age 6 in Mexico, where his father was playing soccer at the time. By age 12 he was playing in elite competitions back in Brazil. And when he was 17 Lohran played in the junior league—the fast track

MISSION?

to professional recruitment. Lohran seemed destined for soccer stardom. But his 18th birthday was quickly approaching, and he started thinking more seriously of missionary service.

Lohran explains the dilemma: “I wanted to be a soccer player, and I wanted to be a missionary. They expect a player to go straight from the junior team to the professional league. To stop playing for two years and then expect to be hired at 21 is almost unthinkable.”

At age 17 Lohran made some decisions that led to what he calls the beginning of his conversion. He set goals to read the Book of Mormon daily, fast, and pray. He attended Mutual, fire-sides, and other Church activities more often. And when he began working regularly



Previous pages:
Lobran turned
in his soccer

uniform for the
white shirt and
tie of a missionary.

Below: Lobran
shows his athletic
skills at a young
age. Top right and
bottom: Lobran with
his father and with
his father's team.



with the missionaries, he found a love of the people he visited and prayed for. He wanted them to have the blessings of the gospel. His desire to serve a mission began to grow. But when would it be best for him to serve? And what would happen to his soccer career after a two-year interruption?

Lobran sought to learn God's will through fasting and prayer. That very week, he noticed the recently delivered issue of the *New Era* magazine in his home, and he began thumbing through it. He was attracted to the article "Ice Dreams," about ice skater Chris Obzansky, who interrupted a promising skating career to serve a mission at age 19, losing the opportunity to compete in the 2006 Winter Olympics.

One passage in particular caught Lobran's attention: as Chris was in sacrament meeting listening to his Young Men president talk about his own mission call, the Spirit told Chris, "You need to serve a mission when you're 19, or you're going to have a tough life." Chris said, "The message was so clear I actually turned around to see if someone was there. The feeling came back 10 times stronger, and I knew I had to go on a mission."¹

Lobran smiles. "When I read that, I felt it had been written for me. Age 19 is the age prescribed by the Lord. I realized that was the answer I needed, and it was like an

enormous weight was taken off my back." The time for Lobran to serve a mission

was now. He talked to his bishop, made the necessary preparations, and never looked back. "It was not even difficult to make the decision of leaving soccer behind," he says, "for I knew it was the right time to do it."

Lobran served in his country's capital, in the Brazil Brasília Mission. He was known as "Elder Happy" because of his contagious enthusiasm. "I am exceptionally happy serving people, sharing with them what I know is true," he says. "It is so gratifying to see people change their lives after learning the gospel."

Like all missionaries, though, he experienced his share of hardships. "Obviously, missionary life is not all fun," he says. "There are difficulties, moments of weakness and loneliness, but all that is next to nothing compared to the treasures of a mission. These are years I'll never forget, that I'll always have in my mind and, more important, my heart."

A few months ago he finished serving a successful mission. Now that he's home, he has joined a soccer team in Rio de Janeiro and believes more chances to continue his soccer career will come his way. With faith he says, "I am now waiting for the opportunities to come, opportunities that our Heavenly Father will bless me to enjoy." **NE**

NOTE

1. Quoted in Shanna Butler, *New Era*, Jan. 2004, 22.

