

## **The Incredible Journey of Thorns Star Nadia Nadim**

By Renae Bringman | October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Inside Providence Park on a Sunday evening 17,000 fans eagerly watch as Thorns striker, Nadia Nadim, places the ball on the penalty spot. The whistle blows and she takes three confident strides striking the ball and sending it into the side netting. The crowd erupts as Nadim sprints toward the goal line and hurdles the barrier while roaring at the top of her lungs in celebration. In that moment Portland Thorns fans witnessed Nadim's passion for soccer as well as her fearless style of play on the pitch, both she credits to her experiences in life.

At the age of 11, Nadim and her family fled their home country of Afghanistan after learning the Taliban had executed her father. Their path went through Pakistan and then Italy and their final stop was in Denmark where Nadim played soccer at the club just outside her family's refugee camp in Copenhagen. Nadim describes soccer as her escape from the pain of losing her father and the fear that has accompanied her since his death.

Nadim's passion for soccer grew every day and soon she was recognized by a local club coach. She quickly climbed the club ranks and at the age of 18 gained citizen ship, allowing her to join the Danish National team and become the first international player to do so.

After years playing professionally in Denmark, Nadim played for New Jersey's Sky Blue FC where she continued her offensive dominance. She spent three years in New Jersey, until the 2016 season in when Nadia was traded to the Thorns.

While Nadia loves playing professional soccer she often remembers her past saying, “I’ve been helped a lot in my life. At some point I want to be able to help a lot of people myself,” which is why she enrolled at Aarhus University in Denmark where she is completing a six-year program to become a reconstructive plastic surgeon. Nadia continues to find ways to give back as she is also an advocate for the organization “From Street to School,” a Denmark-based organization. Its’ goal is to send street children from Afghanistan back to school.

Nadia uses her past as motivation for her future. While playing professional soccer is a demanding task, Nadim has managed to learn five languages, continue her studies to become a plastic surgeon and use her platform as professional athlete to inspire young girls to see what is possible. At the conclusion of the 2016 NWSL season, she will return to her home in Denmark and finish the remaining six months of her University’s program.

At some point she plans to visit Afghanistan again saying, “have you heard about Doctors Without Borders? I’d like to be a part of that and see if I can make a difference that way. As a doctor, you can change people's lives, and to be able to do that at some point will make me happy." But for now you’ll find Nadim on the pitch inside Providence Park practicing the game she loves.