

# Rookie goalie Jeremy Figler learns the indoor soccer game with one of the best



Blast back-up goalie Jeremy Figler warms up at a practice. (Amanda Bowrosen/For City Paper)

Dante Barboy

Baltimore Blast's rookie goalie Jeremy Figler learns the indoor soccer game with one of the best

**The shot sneaks in** at the near post, past the outstretched hand of the [Baltimore Blast](#)'s Jeremy Figler, hitting the back of the net and making a hard, metallic bang after contact with the platform behind the goal. He curses and yells in frustration. It's only practice—the Blast are preparing for back-to-back games against the Detroit Waza Flo and Harrisburg Heat in early January—and Figler, as the team's backup goalkeeper, will not dress for either game. But he takes the job very seriously.

After the goal, he walks out and talks to his defenders, gesturing and giving directions on how to improve tactics and positioning for the next play.

Figler arrived in Baltimore last October to try out with the Blast having never played the indoor game. After a stint with a professional team in Sweden, he came here hoping a job with Baltimore's indoor soccer team would serve as a bridge to whatever comes next in his still-young outdoor career.

"I didn't really have any expectations because I didn't have any experience playing indoor whatsoever, so I just tried to keep an open mind," says Figler after practice at the Royal Farms Arena.

[William Vanzela](#), starting goalkeeper for the Blast, has mentored Figler since in the intricacies of arena soccer, which is played on a much shorter and narrower turf field with a smaller goalkeeper area.

"William actually helped me out a lot during the tryouts. He was standing behind the goal kind of giving me directions. [At the] end of the day as long as you make saves—that was the thing I maintained when coming to the tryout. I was able to make saves, and now I've been able to learn the actual game after that," Figler says.

As a co-team captain who has won both Most Valuable Player and Goalkeeper of the Year in previous seasons, Vanzela is an ideal teacher, but his incredible play also means Figler has even less of a chance of playing. Still, Figler puts in the work.

"I see a guy that wants to get better and learn about the game," Vanzela says of Figler. "I try as much as possible to help [Figler] out. I know it's hard to transition between outdoor and indoor, especially for a goalie because you gotta learn how the boards work, how the game works, and I try to give him all my experience that I have gained along the years."

Originally from Grand Island, New York, Figler started playing soccer at a young age, but it wasn't until 15 that he started playing at a more competitive level, joining a youth soccer club, Black Watch Premier. In 2010, he began his college career at the University of Buffalo but struggled with injuries and faced a lot of competition for playing time. That experience shaped him as a player.

"It got me mentally prepared, physically prepared, and even emotionally prepared," he says. "[I]t set the standard."

After a coaching change at Buffalo between seasons, and faced with the task of having to battle for a spot with more players set to come in on scholarship, Figler decided to transfer to St. Bonaventure University, after a friend contacted him and informed him that they were in need of a goalkeeper and that he would be awarded a scholarship if he attended.

"[The school] basically offered me the opportunity to play every game," he says. "It wasn't something where I was looking for that; it just kind of came up and it happened and it would've been silly for me to not take that opportunity to play."

After graduating from college in 2014, Figler was uncertain about whether he would pursue a professional career. But after being invited to train with the New York Cosmos, a club that plays in the North American Soccer League—our country's second tier—for a few months in early 2015, he knew he was capable. Following his release from the Cosmos, Figler joined Bridges FC in Chicago, a program that trains players and schedules exhibitions with European clubs, hoping to showcase their talent for professional contracts overseas.

Figler's performance led him to sign with a fourth-division club in Sweden called Sävsjö FF, where he spent three months last year immersed in a different game and a completely different culture.

"The European style is more technical, even at a lower division. It gave me a different type of experience playing-wise and helped me grow in a lot of ways that maybe I wouldn't have been able to had I stayed in the U.S.," he says.

Living in Sweden exposed Figler to a different way of living. "I met a lot of great people at the club I was with [who] took really great care of me. The people over there were excellent and the culture shows that; the way they are hard-working [and] genuine. It was a great experience and it definitely allowed me to grow as a person."

It was through a teammate in Sweden that he heard about the Blast.

"I felt indoor would be a beneficial thing to try and allow me a chance to improve my game," he writes in a follow-up email. "I chose Baltimore because they are historically a tremendous program, and if I was going to try and play indoor, I wanted to try and play for the best club."

Because the coaches of the team choose to not include a backup goalkeeper in the 15-player roster for games, Figler is left off and not eligible to play. He often warms up and helps Vanzela prepare before home games. If his work schedule at the comedy club Magooby's Joke House allows, he says he will watch the games from the stands dressed completely in civilian clothes, blending into the crowd of fans.

Although he's the backup, Figler's mindset remains the same: "I'm just eager to learn, and if that's eager to learn in training or eager to learn on the bench, it makes no difference."

Figler is adapting well to life in Baltimore. He keeps a busy schedule, working shifts at Magooby's several days a week to make ends meet and spending the few hours that he does have between practice and his job at the gym.

"I'm busy and I'm tired and I get worn out, but at the end of the day I'm doing something that I've always wanted to do and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to make that possible," he says. "If it's working 14 hours in a day, then I'll work 14 hours in a day, and I'll get right back up and do it the next day too, so it's just about keeping the dream I have alive."

Fairly soon, Figler has to decide where his career will take him next. He currently has offers from Sweden and Australia, and is planning on taking the deal that is best for him on the field. Until then, all his attention is on the Blast.

"Right now I'm just focused on being here, finishing up the season the best way I can, and doing what I can to help improve the team or help improve myself and then kind of going from there," he says.

During a practice near the end of January, in the Northeast Regional Recreation Center in the county, a solid thud echoes in the mostly empty, high-ceiling training facility as Figler puts his whole body in front of a very close-range shot, taking the impact on his chest and impeding the ball from flying into the net.

The Blast are playing an 8 vs. 8 scrimmage before traveling to play the Syracuse Silver Knights, another chance for Figler to demonstrate his talents and the progress he's made in front of the coaching staff.

Figler quickly gets to his feet, anticipating the next shot. As one of his teammates plays the ball back to him, Figler quickly takes one touch before clearing it out of danger, showing composure under pressure.

He makes about three great saves before they pause for a water break