

Lirim Hajrullahu - Feature

By Michael Vavaroutsos

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Lirim Hajrullahu describes the majority of his practices like this: practice two to five days before gameday, kick for an hour or so, and head up to the suites at BMO Field to get some work done.

With the CFL season just over two months away, it's almost that time for the Toronto Argonauts kicker to start balancing his work as the Business Development Lead for Richter LLP, a business and family office, with his football career. After returning from playing football in the United States, the 34-year-old says he was ready to retire and focus on his professional career, but the Argonauts gave him a compelling offer that he couldn't resist.

"They told me I'd be able to still work and play," Hajrullahu said. "I spoke to our COO and they shared that the Argos wanted to bring me back and explained how it would work if I were to do it."

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime type opportunity."

The veteran CFL kicker began working at Richter in November 2023 after spending the season with the USFL's Philadelphia Stars. Prior to that, he spent time in the NFL (2020–2022) with the Los Angeles Rams, Carolina, Dallas, and Washington.

Hajrullahu was born in Gjilan, Kosovo, but his family immigrated to Canada when he was 9-years-old in 1999 to escape the civil war there. His family stayed in military dorms in Kingston before eventually settling in St. Catharines.

Football wasn't on Hajrullahu's radar when he first arrived in Canada, but that changed thanks to D'Arcy McCardle, his former football coach at Governor Simcoe Secondary School in St. Catharines.

“I was playing (soccer) in grade nine, and coach D’Arcy McCardle heard about my soccer skills and that I had a really big kick,” Hajrullahu said. “He wanted me to try to play football, but my parents were like no, it’s too dangerous.”

After some convincing, Hajrullahu agreed to give it a try.

“I went up to him and told him to try it out, and if he didn’t like it, he didn’t have to play,” McCardle said. “Once we got him, he really enjoyed it.”

Now, nearly 20 years after they first met, the relationship between the Hajrullahu and McCardle families has grown from player-coach to something much stronger.

“After his Grey Cup win in 2017 where he kicked the winning field goal, we had a moment on the field where he said thank you for this, everything I have is because of you now,” McCardle said.

As the Business Development Lead at Richter, Hajrullahu’s main focus is on bringing in new business from across the Greater Toronto Area. His flexibility as a kicker makes it possible to balance this with his football career.

“If I was a quarterback, there’s no way I’d be able to do this,” Hajrullahu said. “I don’t have to be there as often, but if I’m not there it’s because I have to go to work or have some other game plan.”

The Western University graduate has a bachelor’s degree in kinesiology with a specialization in sports management. He also has an MBA in finance from Niagara University.

The three-time CFL All-Star began his pro career with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in 2014 after signing as an undrafted free agent. During his first stint with the Argos in 2017, he won his first Grey Cup—ironically, against the Blue Bombers. He went on to play two seasons for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats in 2018 and 2019 before heading to the NFL and USFL.

Now in his second stint with the Argos, Hajrullahu is coming off another Grey Cup victory. Last season, Hajrullahu hit the second most field goals in the league, converting 55-of-61 attempts

while also going 35-of-37 on converts, including a game where he kicked eight field goals—a club record and tying the CFL record.

Much like football, balancing both of his careers requires discipline and clear priorities. Hajrullahu says that staying organized with a schedule and communicating with both sides about what needs to be done helps him stay on track.

“Richter’s support with me in football is one of the main reasons why I love working there,” he said. “I’m still able to support them to the best of my ability, and same as for the Argos.”

For most, juggling two jobs is stressful enough, but McCardle can’t help but admire how much Hajrullahu gives back to the people he cares about.

“He’s the first to always take your phone call or text,” he said. “I can’t even imagine how many texts this guy gets in a day between football and his professional life as a businessman too.”

Hajrullahu says that his family has been an instrumental part in his development and support. Without them, he wouldn’t know if he’d be able to do what he does today.

“Without my wife and family’s support and without that backbone as a professional athlete, it’s very tough because you go through some very different stages,” Hajrullahu said. “My family and I are just so fortunate to be able to be alive today and to live in a free country.”