

## **Sherwood Soccer Board Members, Parents, Coaches and Players:**

I wanted to take some time to highlight some things before my formal resignation from Sherwood Youth Soccer Club (SYSC) as Director of Soccer Programs at the conclusion of this season.

First, I have really enjoyed my time with the club. We are very fortunate to have a great group of volunteer board members who were supportive of my efforts and truly care about the kids and don't have an agenda to run or politics to play amongst each other. It is rare to find that.

My decision to step down is based on many reasons. The primary reason is simply the time necessary to run the program. Each year I volunteered 200-300 hours working on club responsibilities. A large part of that was building and adding to the coaches site, which most will never see unless you coach a team. This site provides a lot of resources for our coaches to support their efforts, manages our practice schedules, manages placement drafts, links to our game schedules, maintains a variety of stats and much more. When I was elected to the board, I was shocked at how little we provided for our coaches to help them be successful and how little data we collected. Although there is always room for improvement, I think that we have done a great job in giving coaches the tools they need for teaching the sport to our players, even if they don't know the sport. We are also now collecting game scores, recording registration stats, gathering coach feedback on players to better balance teams and will start to ask for feedback from parents on how our coaches are doing.

Three years ago, I came to the board as a concerned parent and coach. What I saw were a lot of kids not getting the fundamentals of the game, lots of standing in lines and boredom at practices (not engaging kids to have fun) and horribly imbalanced teams. Nearly all of this was gleaned from talking to parents and experiencing it myself as a coach. I presented the board with a plan that I had to make some sweeping changes and attempt to improve the SYSC program. The board agreed with the plan and voted me in as Rec Director (a volunteer unpaid position). Any time you make changes or mess with someone's kids you can plan on hearing an ear full. Well, that is exactly what happened when I put in place the academy program and placement program. I literally spent 2 days answering emails from angry parents and coaches and started to wonder if I really wanted to upset parents of nearly 1000 kids. However, I made a few changes to the original plan and pushed forward with the support of our board. The ironic part is this year when fields were closed for the placement practices, I got a barrage of email about how terrible this will be, how I am not doing my job and coaches complaining about how we will have unfair teams. You really cannot win no matter what you do!

I am very pleased to say that I believe our academy program (Kinder thru 2<sup>nd</sup>) and placement program (3<sup>rd</sup> thru 5<sup>th</sup>) have been successful in developing players and creating more balance for teams. Looking thru the stats, our 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade teams who had gone thru the academy are 62-35-16. We didn't maintain stats or collect game information when I first started, so I can't compare it to when I started, but that is an impressive record for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade ages who went thru our academy program. In fact, we have a different problem and that is blowout games. Game scores have been tracked the past 2 years and we reinforce that coaches keep games competitive and not allow score differentials to exceed 5 goals. The intent is to make sure ALL players leave the field with a good experience and teach kids sportsmanship. Our 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade coaches are finding it challenging to keep things level on the field and we have had far more blowout games than I would like to see and that is across multiple teams, not just a few coaches. It is a tough balancing act to make sure players are getting the chance to play all out and score while also not demoralizing other teams. I attribute the jump in blowout games to our focus on development and building player skills early on and advancing our play versus other clubs.

One other thing of note is that we are seeing far higher retention of players at the younger ages. In fact, where Sherwood soccer loses the most players is at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boys where they generally move to play football. This year we lost 3 players. Last year we lost 18 players and in 2015 we lost 24 players. The academy focus and primarily the curriculum being used by most of our academy coaches is really making a difference. We are engaging players and they are having fun in my opinion. I think as we continue to work to develop our coaches, improve the curriculum and essentially give coaches the tools they need to run quality practices with a focus on age appropriate skill development and technique, we will continue to see players return and have a great time out on the field, both in practices and games.

Looking thru the game results, I think we have a few struggling teams where the lack of our placement program this year has led to some potential imbalances. My hope is that next year whoever is running the Rec program will be able to return to the placement program. I firmly believe it helps to level the playing field with our teams and gives players an opportunity to learn from a variety of coaches. It also helps build new player friendships between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade levels instead of having the same teams year in and year out, which I believe is better suited for the 6<sup>th</sup> thru HS ages.

I want to thank those individuals who sent me messages of appreciation or told me their child was having so much fun with soccer. It was what kept me going. As a volunteer, it is tough to get the complaints and jabs at whatever you are trying to do to improve things. There are always two sides to any disagreement, but in the end, nearly every individual I communicated with was professional and understanding whether they agreed with me or not. I also want to thank all of the coaches and parents who make this entire club possible. The coaches volunteer their time and efforts and it is very much appreciated. We wouldn't have a club without them. Our parents get their fall schedules blown to pieces on the weekends and work diligently to get kids to practices. Lastly, I want to thank my wife for her support and guidance thru all of the challenges I faced in the position. She was always there thru the highs and lows and time dedicated to the position.

To conclude, there are many things that I will miss as I step away from this wonderful experience. I had a chance to meet so many terrific people and build some lasting relationships. Being out on the field with the kids was always rewarding and I am glad that I can look back and feel like I had the opportunity to make a difference for the players. I think this is a great board with many great things to come. I feel reassured knowing our Sherwood kids are in good hands.

James Grothe  
Director of Soccer Programs