

SPORTS & LEISURE

GSC's new coach 'not starting from scratch'

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

One of the first tasks facing the Georgetown Soccer Club's new head coach is to dispel some of the misconceptions surrounding a province-wide initiative currently being implemented at the youth levels.

Daniel Leko, 26, was hired on by the GSC during the winter in part to help oversee a "wave of change" through the Ontario Soccer Association, which has adopted for its 4-12 age groups an approach called Long-Term Player Development.

On a recent balmy afternoon at the sprawling new Trafalgar Sports Park, Leko surveys several of the empty fields with an enthusiastic outlook, then grimaces when it's suggested that the LTPD model might take the competitive aspect out of the game.

"We're not tearing everything down and starting from scratch. It's just building on some of the good things

we've done in the past and taking it to the next level—fine-tuning our approach to training," said Leko, a learning facilitator with the OSA for the past eight years and a former player with Toronto Croatia of the Canadian Soccer League.

"The club has all the recipes for success and now it's a matter of putting all the programs in place using the tools that we have. We're always looking for the next best thing to help the players out. By training the players age-appropriately and making the training sessions player-centered, we're using the best ways to train and make sure they're developing the right way."

The LTPD is nothing new to most of the top soccer nations in the world. Allowing younger age groups to learn the



Twelve-year-old Parker Drenzo can't wait for league play to start this Saturday as the Georgetown Soccer Club's Opening Day has a full slate of games running from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Trafalgar Sports Park. The theme for this year's Opening Day for the house league divisions is the upcoming Euro 2012 tournament to be held in Poland and Ukraine. Every pitch at TSP on Saturday will be named for a participating European country and its flag will be displayed on the field. Smaller flags will be available to purchase for \$2 apiece, with the names of the entrants placed into a draw to win the larger flags. For a full Opening Day schedule, visit the website www.georgetownsoccerclub.com.

game in a stimulating, enriching and fun environment, rather than over-emphasizing winning, is the LTPD's basic premise, with the objective of develop-

ing each player to his or her true potential.

Leko has met with the GSC coaches to explain the changes and in turn, the

Photo by Eamonn Maher



DANIEL LEKO



The Georgetown Soccer Club became one of just 13 clubs in the province to achieve Gold Excellence status with the Ontario Soccer Association and received the official designation at the OSA's recent Circle Centre Awards banquet in Toronto. Accepting the award on behalf of the GSC (from left) were: Head coach Daniel Leko, registrar Eustace Collins, president Alice Strachan, Jennifer Granger of the OSA's Club Excellence Program, and Karen Bajic, GSC director of public relations.

Submitted photo

players and parents are up to speed on the new initiative as well. The education, preparation and training of coaches is a major part of the LTPD and the OSA has launched new certification levels such as Active Start, Fundamentals, Learn 2 Train and Soccer for Life. Referees and administrators are also incorporated into LTPD as it will impact every facet of the sport in this province.

One of the challenges the GSC has faced is the departure of elite-level players who choose to move on to clubs in larger population centres. Leko is confident that the LTPD will establish a development structure that is suited to players of all calibre.

"We hope to keep those players here because the more members we have in the club, the better," he added.

"We're going to add training programs for those who want to take it more seriously and with higher-performance training programs, but also not forgetting the other side of things as well. What we're trying to establish with the club is to provide all avenues possible for each player, whether it may be the house leaguer who just wants to play recreationally, no matter what level they're at, up to the highest-level player."

With approximately 2,000 players registered in house leagues alone and about 800 more in rep programs, the GSC has been able to allot more practice time to its teams after new fields recently became available at TSP, Georgetown District High School and Christ the King Secondary School.

"There's a trickle-down effect that comes with additional practice time and within that framework you build the club up in terms of helping the coaches develop," Leko said.

"If you make better coaches, you make better players, so it's that sort of top-down approach by educating the coaches. It's about allowing players to make mistakes and learning from those mistakes so they're getting away from that mentality of winning at all costs. The idea is to make practice drills both fun and engaging to the players, constantly challenging them and their abilities."

**LOOKING FOR
SERVICE DIRECTORY?
SEE PAGES 18 & 19 OF TODAY'S REAL ESTATE LEADER**