

Stouffville Sun-Tribune
SPORTS

Soccer club shoots for development, not titles

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It's nice for a soccer club to have highly competitive rep teams that can win matches, league titles and prestigious tournament or provincial championships, right?

Mark Kozak-Holland feels it's not the be all or end all.

As president of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer Club, a position he's held since 2001, Kozak-Holland suggested in this day and age it's far more essential for clubs to take an approach to develop participants over the long haul.

Known as a long-term player development program, that's been the prescribed plan of attack the Stouffville club has been on during the last seven years.

And it's one they do not intend to stray from this season.

Especially since Kozak-Holland feels players will remain in the game for a longer period of time because they will enjoy it and at the same time, develop their skills on the pitch.

"Our focus is on development, that's our club philosophy," he said. "It's a move away from the competitive aspect, where we've got a single mantra — soccer is a sport for life — to keep people within the game so they will enjoy it."

"It's a move away from the competitive aspect because we've seen too many kids who get burned out from the game way too early in their lives."

"We're pleased with what we've done so far. We've got the direction right."

While Kozak-Holland feels the group has taken the right approach, he was quick to point out other organizations have or are beginning to take similar steps, some having done away with rep teams at the younger age brackets.

In adhering to their philosophy, the club will employ something new in its program this summer when they team up with the Doncaster Rovers Soccer Club to run a Summer Soccer Camp.

Tailored for boys and girls from under-eight to under-13, the camp will take place at the Stouffville Arena fields from July 2 to 5.

Founded in 1879, the Doncaster Rovers Soccer Club competes in League One of the English Football League.

Stating negotiations to bring the Rovers to Whitchurch-Stouffville began last August, when club coach Oliver Dixon was in England to earn his B national coaching licence, Kozak-Holland was quick to note the partnership was created in large part because both groups share similar soccer philosophies and core values.

"We were careful which club we selected," he said. "We didn't select a monster club, but we selected one that's compatible with our approach."

"Doncaster is in a populated area with small to medium to large towns that are close

by and their club can't compete in terms of bidding for players like some of the more popular teams do. They don't have the financial clout. Their approach is to get local players.

"It's similar to our club where we try to create localized teams and avoid importing players from other clubs. That creates problems," he said. "But we're excited to have them come here."

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It's just one of many foreign clubs that are finding their way to the GTA to run similar academy camps.

It's thanks in large part to the game's growth in popularity that in part can be attributed to social media and the manner in which the electronic media gives coverage to the game.

"You will see a lot more of the bigger clubs doing this. The popularity of the game is going through the roof."

"In the last 15 years, soccer is the biggest sport in Canada and the United States," said Kozak-Holland.

"It could be something we do each year, but it's too early to tell yet," he said.

Camp registration is \$200 before June 1 and \$225 after that period.

For further information, call 905-640-1800 or e-mail the club at: admin@wssc.info

CLUB EXPECTS 1,600 PLAYERS TO KICK OFF 2013 SEASON

In looking at the overall club operation for the upcoming season, which is set to begin just after the Victoria Day long weekend, Kozak-Holland anticipated the organization expects to have close to the same number of registrants as a year ago.

That being close to 1,600 participants in the house league and competitive rep programs, ranging from four years of age to 70.

What could be a concern down the road, though, are playing facilities. There could be a shortage if Teva Canada were to part ways with the pitches they currently allow the club to use for their under-four to under-eight house league programs.

"We still rely on Teva to provide us with their field for a large block of games," Kozak-Holland said. "We haven't moved away from that model."

"That is an area that will have to be addressed in the near future."



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Officials with the Whitchurch-Stouffville Soccer club hope many of its 1,600 members will play the game all their lives.

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