

THREE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE FALL 2016 SEASON

By John Hannan

I would like to use my first article of the new soccer year to 'Welcome Back' our returning players and families. And 'Welcome To The Roadrunners' to our new players and families. I am very happy you have chosen our club for your child's soccer development. We will do all we can to help your child achieve their dreams.

I wanted to share with you the challenges that this fall season brings. The beginning of each new year brings much excitement, but also new challenges. The challenge is compounded this fall with the US Soccer Mandate regarding the new age cut-off. Some clubs decided to go with the full year of birth to determine rosters (i.e. 2006's), while other chose to keep teams similar to the past knowing that the younger age players would be playing up an age (i.e. 2008's playing on a 2007 team). This occurs more often within smaller clubs where the player pool is smaller and limits options. And still others did a combination of the above, as we did in some cases ourselves. So as you can imagine our leagues are challenged with the proper placement of teams within their divisions. And clubs, too, are challenged with its recommendations of where teams should be placed. As a club, we tried our best to provide the leagues with input as to team placement and the leagues have used various factors to determine final placement. But the reality is that it is at best an 'educated guess'. I ask all of us to be patient this fall as we, along with our opponents, may see some lopsided scores where more parity has existed in the past. It will take a season, or two, for leagues to have more balanced divisions. In the meantime, enjoy the matches and our coaches will help the players manage their expectations with the goal of playing the game with purpose, thought and effort, regardless of the short term outcome. Good habits win in the long term.

Speaking of good habits and long term goals, our club has continued to seek out new opportunities to enhance our player's development. For this fall, we have entered some of our teams in exciting new opportunities. Within our girls program, our 2005, 2004, 2002, 2000 & 1998 Select teams are playing in the new NISL Women's Chicago National Premier League (CNPL) division. This next level division allows our girls to experience the same wonderful opportunity that our top 2005 and older teams enjoy with matches played under the lights midweek at Olympic Park in Schaumburg. In addition, our boys 2003 Select I team is participating in the Midwest Regional League (MRL). This opportunity provides the players a chance to play some of the better teams within the Midwest. Finally, we have our boys 2002 thru 1998 players that have chosen to play club this fall, playing in the new NISL HS Boys divisions with matches played at Olympic Park on Saturday evenings. Also, our 2001-1998 boys fall program has teamed up with CORE1 to enhance the player's speed/agility/strength. CORE1 has done an outstanding job and it will be a partnership that I will look to develop and provide this opportunity to other players within our club.

Lastly, and this is particularly important to newer families to our club who have limited experience within the Roadrunners, I ask our coaches to use the matches to evaluate where the team and players are and as self reflection of their trainings. This cannot occur if a coach is up and yelling like we see in our American sports. Coaches need to be calm and encouraging and pick their moments to interject information to the players without wasting time being a cheerleader. Players have a hard enough time training to manage the ball, their teammates, the opponents, the conditions,... How can players possibly stay engaged if a coach is constantly trying to get their attention with usually just reminders or things they already know? They can't ! So as a club that wants to help players learn the game and not just participate in it, coaches must allow for players to grow in their ability to solve problems while encouraging them and providing valued, but limited information, while the match is in progress. Coaching occurs when players are off the field and at halftime but more so within the trainings. Here is when coaches should be providing and equipping the players with the appropriate insights on how to better their play individually and collectively. This is why I always stress that the MOST IMPORTANT thing that we do is the trainings. Coaches being organized and having short and long term goals while providing players the information in a way that a player can understand and players that are attending trainings regularly and consistently over the long term, is the ONLY way player development will occur. I ask you, the parents and supporters , to also be an example of maturity on the touchlines in matches allowing the players to learn to game without undue verbal interference that only distracts the player from enjoying our wonderful game. Encourage, support but do not coach.

So there is a lot to be excited about this fall and some challenges that we will approach with patience and always with our goal of your child's soccer development at its heart.

Enjoy the fall and Welcome!