



Letters from the President

May 12, 2010

Measuring Success

Hello Crew Families,

This will be the first in a series of communications to the club in an effort to help everyone understand more about the Grand Rapids Crew Juniors. Some of the letters will be responses to frequently asked questions about topics such as:

- How does leadership in the club work?
- How are dues and fundraising money spent?
- What are the future goals of the club ?

The theme of this first communication is "Measuring Success."

Club-wide success

At the highest level, the club is able to measure its success at one event annually, tryouts. If, in the eyes of the community at large, the club is successful, tryouts are the few days at which the last year's activities are validated as a success. Since the merger of GVP and GRASA, tryouts have grown larger and larger each year. We see that as the community's validation of our club's success. This doesn't mean the Crew Juniors are perfect, but we take it as a vote that our direction and efforts are leading us down the right path.

Team success

The Board of Directors has established short and long term objectives with measurable goals to act as check points along the way as we evaluate our teams' success. These goals vary based on age groups and competitive levels of teams.

U8-U12 teams

Throughout all ages player development is a key to our success. At the younger ages the player development primarily focuses on increasing technical skills and increasing the speed at which technical skills are executed on the field. Our club puts tremendous emphasis on this, both in terms of the regular team practices and the amount of additional training offered. We find that the training hours offered in the summer camp, our Friday night trainings, and our winter academy are a great supplement to the regular season training hours. Those players that take advantage of all those opportunities demonstrate more advancement in terms of technical proficiency and the speed at which technical skills are employed in games.

At these ages our teams compete in the Grand Valley Soccer Association(GVSA), primarily against teams within an hour's drive of Grand Rapids. The result of our emphasis on skills is that generally our top teams find little competition within their own age groups. Rather than "beating up" on teams and not being challenged in competition, our top younger teams tend to play up an age group. Playing against older players who are a bit more physically developed provides that competitive environment for our top teams to learn to employ their technical skills at faster paces and against competition that makes them "work" for their success.

As a result, one of our key measurements for team success in the U8-U12 age groups is that our top teams demonstrate enough quality that they need to move up an age group in order to find the right competition. For the 2009-2010 year, we are pleased to note that on the girls' side, our top team in each age group has had to play up to get competition. On the boys' side, the top team from every age group but one has had to play up to be challenged in competition.

You may also be surprised to learn that at these ages we don't look at wins and losses as a measurement of success. If we are putting our players in the right divisions where they are truly challenged then we would not expect them to win all their games. As a matter of fact, if they are winning all of their games, that is probably an indication that we have missed the mark as far as advancing them enough to find a challenge.

U13 and older-Premier team

Once our players reach the U13 age group they have the choice of trying out for premier teams that require an extreme amount of commitment or continuing on in the local league. This choice is difficult because there is a sacrifice in terms of time for other activities when playing at the highest levels. There are many players who have the ability to play at the Premier level who simply make an informed decision to focus on other things in their lives. Academics, jobs, other sports are examples of fine reasons that great soccer players sometimes choose to forego Premier soccer.

For those players who do pursue Premier soccer and successfully make a team, they move from competing with local teams to a State-wide pool of opponents. Commitment is more year round and development starts to shift from almost exclusively focused on technical skills and speed to growing tactical awareness and decision making.

The Premier league is all about wins and losses. Advancement to higher divisions or relegation to lower divisions is based exclusively on game results. The best teams in the State league have the opportunity to apply to play in the Midwest Regional League(MRL) where they would face off against the best teams the Midwestern States have to offer. Fewer than ten teams from Michigan per age group qualify to go into the Midwest Regional League.

Another opportunity at U13 and older is the ability for any team to apply for entry into the State Cup tournament. This is considered by some to be the purest competition in the State. It is open to all,

there are no guest players, and the State assigns the referees so there is much less chance of the appearance of bias refereeing impacting the game. The top teams entering the tournament are seeded and the rest are assigned to brackets using a double-blind draw system. Each bracket plays round robin and one team emerges from the bracket to carry on into the quarter finals. A team that makes the quarterfinals has earned the right to be considered one of the top eight teams in the State.

The eight teams in the quarterfinals are grouped and each team plays one game, the winner going on and the loser going home. The four teams that win in the quarters each have another single elimination game to determine which two will square off for the State Championship. The eventual winner has accomplished something very challenging and worthy of special recognition. Every year there is debate on whether or not “the best” team won, but at the end of the tournament one team stands as Champion.

When the board evaluates our premier program we look at one key element. How many of our teams have been recognized or earned recognition as a top ten team in the State? There are ten of our 1st division premier Crew Jr teams eligible for play in the Midwest Regional League. Seven of them qualify and currently play in that league. We have high expectations that that number will increase next year.

For all boys and U13 girls, Spring-time is State Cup tournament season. The quarterfinals have been completed and we are proud to announce that of the eight teams we entered into State Cup this spring, six of them have qualified for the quarter finals. Vardar has eight, the Hawks and Wolves have six. Our level of success is on par with the best clubs from Detroit.

By evaluating our level of qualification for the Midwest Regional League and our level of success in State Cup, the board of directors feels confident that our premier program continues to do the right things to grow our players and establish ourselves among the best in the State.

Conclusion

There are many other levels of success that we look at for the club, the various age groups, the teams, and the individuals. This communication has focused on how we measure the top teams in the various age groups. We look at the success of every team in the club, whether at the top of the table or the bottom. As a club we face challenges every season. We are continuing to grow and change for the better as an organization, just as we work to help the players grow and change.

As a whole, the continued growth of our tryouts is a great measure of the community’s view of the club. The unprecedented success of our top teams within the club tells us that our results on the field are consistent with our results in the community.

Chip Hoebeke
President
Grand Rapids Crew Juniors