



WW-PSA undergoes two-year makeover

Program hoping to strengthen teams

Posted: Tuesday, April 1, 2008 8:44 AM EDT

The West Windsor-Plainsboro Soccer Association has undertaken a significant makeover over the past two years and is showing the fruits of their efforts.

Starting in early 2006, WWPSA committed to improving the strength of its programs and bringing its disparate interests together under a single Club identity. With over 3,000 participants in year-round programs — Pre-K soccer for 3-5 year-olds; Recreational soccer for Kindergarten through High School players; Travel soccer for teams playing on Under-8 through Under-17 year-old teams; and Adult Recreational and Travel teams — WWPSA is one of New Jersey's largest soccer programs.

This commitment was shown through many examples.

The first step was to rebrand the Club under a new logo, commensurate with a new website (www.wwpsa.org) that was launched in April, 2006.

Next was a focus on how to improve the facilities used by WWPSA players, starting with completely regrading, irrigating and laying sod on the two fields at West Windsor Community Park, resulting in one top-quality lit game and one high-quality lit practice field. Another field at Conover Park had a similar face lift, providing another high-quality field that could be used for day games or practices.

WWPSA also introduced a conversion of how the game was played at the youngest ages by reducing field sizes and the number of players on each field to encourage more contact with the ball for every player, sparking interest amongst entire age groups in the game.

Training programs were rolled out that allowed any player to learn specific skills from professional trainers who were paid by the Club, in many cases completely subsidizing the cost to the player. Many of these professional trainers have national team, Olympic or even World Cup experience.

Even further changes were witnessed in 2007-08.

The WWPSA Board of Directors approved a Mission Statement, Vision Statement and identified WWPSA's Core Values/Guiding Principles to demonstrate exactly what WWPSA represents.

WWPSA and PUMA North America (www.puma.com), a global provider of athletic footwear, apparel and accessories, formed a strategic alliance on March 2, 2007. The two worked together to advance WWPSA's goal of providing youths and adults the opportunity to play instructional and competitive soccer at the highest level commensurate with their ability, potential and interest.

PUMA was attracted to WWPSA on their size, breadth of programs, relative position in terms of development and commitment to players of varying skills and commitment.

After learning from other high-profile Clubs around the U.S. what helped to support their success, the WWPSA Board decided in the spring of 2007 to initiate an extensive search to find its first full-time employee to oversee the Club's operations. Robin Dean, a local coach, former Board member and Adult Soccer participant, was hired into the position of Executive Director in June, 2007, and has tirelessly worked with all of WWPSA's volunteers to improve the quality of its programs.

In recognition of their stellar play, the WWPSA Challenge U-14 Girls team was accepted into the Region 1 Premier League, consisting of the United States Youth Soccer (USYS) State Associations within Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia. Only 16 teams are selected to participate in Region 1 play, making the Challenge one of the top teams in their age bracket. The Challenge are WWPSA's first representative participating in Region 1 play.

WWPSA launched Goal Fest, their first-ever Recreational Soccer 3v3 Tournament in October, 2007. For a nominal fee per player, participants were guaranteed three officiated games that resulted in non-stop, high-scoring action as teams competed in varying age groups from kindergarten through high school. Open only to players registered in Fall '07 WWPSA Recreational Soccer programs, all participants received gifts from PUMA and the top three teams in each age group received medals recognizing their achievement. The response was so positive that Goal Fest will become an annual event on the Fall Recreational Soccer calendar.

One of the tenets of any successful soccer program is the quality of the trainers hired to instill skills in its players. Over the past two years, WWPSA has attracted a significant number of trainers who hold national coaching licenses and possess Olympic or World Cup experience. In many cases, these trainers sought out WWPSA specifically to join a Club growing in both the number of participants and the quality of play. Many of these trainers have been assigned to work with WWPSA's Travel Soccer teams during the 2007-08 seasons.

"Attracting high-quality trainers was one of our priorities over the past two years," said Dean. "The best trainers are attracted to programs with both high-quality teams and those teams that have the potential to improve. By attracting these highly-qualified trainers to our Club, we expect our general quality of play to improve, which attracts better trainers, etc., and then spawns a self-sustaining cycle of improvement that will ultimately benefit players across all of our programs."

In February, WWPSA and the New Jersey Wildcats (www.njwildcats.com) announced a strategic partnership that will combine one of New Jersey's largest recreational and travel soccer programs with the locally-based semi-professional Wildcats women's soccer team. An alliance with one of the top women's teams in North America enables WWPSA to create learning and training opportunities for all girls participating in its recreational and travel soccer programs.

The NJ Wildcats will participate directly in the development of girls' youth soccer, developing potential future team players while creating a local fan base. WWPSA will also offer practical support, hosting some Wildcats practices and providing operational staff for Wildcats home games. WWPSA and the Wildcats also plan to work together to seek Corporate sponsorship for future development initiatives.

WWPSA is excited to announce that US National Team Captain Christie Pearce Rampone and Olympic Gold Medalist Shannon Boxx will participate in the WWPSA/New Jersey Wildcats Camp of Champions in West Windsor, July 7-11. Christie and Shannon will be in camp on July 7th and 8th only a few weeks before they travel to Beijing, China for the 2008 Olympic Games. In addition to soccer skills training, the camp will include individual Speed and Agility testing and an ACL injury prevention DVD from the G.O.A.L.S. (Girls Opting Against Ligament Surgery) Training Series.

After two years of negotiations and discussions, WWPSA and West Windsor Township signed Memorandums of Understanding that specifically identify responsibilities for each party regarding facilities utilized by WWPSA within West Windsor Township.

"These MOUs are crucial to clearing the way for WWPSA and West Windsor Township to implement significant improvements in the facilities our players depend on," states WWPSA Board Chairman Justin D. Stein. "We have broad plans and proposals that we have wanted to initiate. But first wanted to establish protection for both WWPSA and West Windsor Township by entering into a long-term use agreement that gives both parties confidence that any investment made to upgrade fields within West Windsor Township will be consistent with our common visions."

Proposed plans under consideration by the WWPSA Board include:

Establishment of a high-quality, lit field at Conover Park that can be used for both practices and games, and can be configured as either a small-sided (U-10 and under) or full-sided (U-11 and older) field. Construction began the week of March 10 and the field may be ready for use by the end of the spring.

Installation of irrigation systems throughout Conover Park to maintain the utility of the fields used there. As part of a long-term strategy, the three fields located closest to South Post Road will be irrigated in spring 2008, while the remaining two fields near the PSE&G towers will be irrigated in the future. WWPSA worked with West Windsor Little League to configure the work being done so that the system will be able to be used to irrigate baseball fields within the park at some point in the future.

Improve the lighting at Conover Park to fully illuminate an established high-quality field to support use by older teams who require improved lighting to safely practice at night.

Begin development of new soccer facilities at Duck Pond Park along Meadow Road. Long-term proposals include: full- and small-sized fields with team seating and fan bleachers, comfort facilities, concessions and shelter and permanent office space for use by WWPSA as a base of operations.

Significant repair is required to resolve drainage and surface degradation at Zaitz Park, in addition to damage stemming from Centex's installation of a sewer line to support its adult community on Old Trenton Road. So WWPSA plans to examine several options for improving this facility, including: regrading the surface, installation of drainage and irrigation systems, permanent comfort stations and shelter, dedicated training and practice area, permanent lighting and installation of a synthetic turf field to be used as a top-quality practice area.

WWPSA launched an Educational Seminars Series to bring information to their parents and players that have a direct impact on their lives.

"WWPSA has always provided training classes to its players, coaches and referees, but we felt we needed to go further and present seminars that would provide real value to our constituents," said Stein.

Seminars presented in 2008 have included:

"So You Want to Play College Soccer", held on Jan. 14 to help provide high-school-age players and their parents with information that could help the players get accepted to the best college for them.

"Non-Contact ACL Injury Prevention for Female Soccer Players Ages 13+", held on Jan. 30 and Feb. 3, provided female players with valuable insight into how they can work to avoid incurring a devastating ACL injury, an all-too-common occurrence among girls age 14 and older, no matter which sport they play.

"The College Recruiting Process", held March 11, built on the earlier seminar to explain the ins and outs of how prospective college athletes are recruited.

"Non-Contact ACL Injury Prevention for Female Soccer Players Ages 10-12", held on March 13 and 16, provided on-field instruction to female players as to the specific movements and exercises that can help to avoid incurring a future ACL injury.

Plans for future seminars include:

"Parents' Introduction to the Rules of the Game": helps parents become better informed as to the rules specific to soccer in the hope of improving their enjoyment of the game and reducing on-field confrontations with coaches and referees.

"Introduction to WWPSA Programs": intended for those parents new to our area or whose children might be ready for a different level of play. This seminar will be conducted by program directors and Board members to provide valuable insight into what programs are available, what to expect and how to get more involved.

"How to Become a Referee": directed at the youngest age-eligible referees, this seminar will help prospective referees learn how to effectively manage soccer games and promote safe enjoyment of the game for all participants.

WWPSA's 14th Annual Sunburst Tournament, scheduled for May 31 and June 1, will be held in its traditional location at Mercer County Park and Conover Park. The tournament is a highly-anticipated event in our area, bringing over 200 teams and 4,000 players, parents and siblings from all over the northeastern U.S. for a terrific weekend of competitive soccer. PUMA used Sunburst 2007 to kick off its relationship with WWPSA and is planning even more fun activities and events for Sunburst 2008.

"We've been on an exhausting and exhilarating journey these past two years," said Stein, "and only through the help of our over 500 volunteer parents, league coordinators, program directors and Board members that we are able to deliver the high-quality programs our players and parents have come to enjoy. It's tremendously rewarding to be able to shape the activities enjoyed by our community's children and to learn from all those who have given so much of themselves to this great game and amazing organization.

"All of our volunteer parents need to know that how far we've come has more to do with their involvement as anything else. I'm excited to glimpse what the next two years will bring and know that we're well-positioned to grow and continue to serve our players and parents well."

[Close Window](#)