



President Curtis R. Regruit

Before presenting a summary of the 2015/2016 year I would like to thank all of our members (coaches, clubs, leagues, players, and families) for your collective dedication to youth soccer. A friend of mine asked me recently why I continue to be involved given that my children are no longer in youth programs. The simple answer was that like all of you, I love the sport and enjoy being able to contribute to it.

New York State West Youth Soccer Association (NYSWYSA) and our membership benefit from the corporate sponsorships and cooperative partnerships that support the programs we administer. On behalf of NYSWYSA, thank you for your continued support.

- Admiral, apparel provider for NYSWYSA
- Dick's Sporting Goods
- Pullen Insurance
- Demosphere
- Sports Logic
- Rochester Rhinos
- Western NY Flash
- NY 529 College Savings

The commitment of our NYSWYSA Staff and Board of Directors is exemplary. We are very fortunate for their dedication and efforts.

Last year I stated that the primary mission of NYSWYSA is to "Promote the game of soccer by providing superior, value-added, youth soccer programs and services for our members." As NYSWYSA President, embarking on visits to each of our districts to meet with our membership enabled me to better understand the issues that are important to you. The common themes were as follows.

- 1) Managing the competitive recruitment of youth players by clubs by agreeing to and adopting best practice guidelines amongst clubs.
- 2) Facilitating league play to ensure it is open to all teams/clubs while also aligning the appropriate competitive balance within league division assignments.
- 3) Enabling modest flexibility within State Cup play down game scheduling.
- 4) Parent education to help them understand the landscape of youth soccer programs and how to identify the best fit for their children.
- 5) Managing the escalating cost of participation in youth soccer.
- 6) Optimizing coach education to meet the diverse needs of soccer programs (i.e. recreational and competitive).

Your collective input on the above themes was valuable as it is guiding us to focus our strategic initiatives in the directions you have indicated are most important to you. We, NYSWYSA and our members, need to meet and work together to effect improvements in all of these areas. With that in mind I offer my thoughts below to consider as we endeavor together on a path of continuous improvement.

Collectively, NYSWYSA, along with our member clubs and leagues, successfully provide many terrific, valuable programs for the players, coaches, and parents. Specifically, we provide a safe, healthy environment in which players can enjoy soccer, and learn the benefits of teamwork, hard work, and commitment. In the process we also provide opportunity for coaches to develop and education for parents to help guide them to the programs best suited for their individual children.



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As stated above, I spent much of my first year in this role listening to members of our soccer community (state, regional, and national) and gathering information to facilitate understanding of what youth soccer issues are most important. Having accomplished that, we have some challenges ahead of us. They are surmountable, and I am confident that collectively we have leaders within our community that can collaboratively work toward a common cause to achieve our objectives.

From my meetings with you, there was one most common theme that presented itself that is impacting youth soccer while also contributing to challenges for parents trying to make the appropriate soccer decisions for their children. The theme is “the monetization of youth soccer”. It is not a problem provided it is managed properly. However, successful management is dependent upon the continuous, cooperative, collaborative commitment of our soccer community leaders to be steadfast and singular in our focus. Together, we must ensure that our individual and collective focus, and the actions that we take, are truly justified based primarily on their potential to improve youth soccer while providing valuable services to players and their families as affordably as possible. As the NYSWYSA President, I plan to facilitate discussions and collaborative efforts with our local club and league leaders to accomplish this, starting at our 2016 Annual General Meeting (AGM). I hope that you will consider being there to contribute to the effort.

The monetization of youth soccer is manifesting itself in numerous ways. Given the “pay-to-play” design of youth soccer in the United States, one of the primary challenges is that it is increasing the cost of participation, resulting in limiting the opportunity for some to participate and increasing the expectations of those paying to participate. Also, the potential for increased liability for program providers, coaches, clubs, etc. due to regulatory issues regarding player safety may increase liability insurance costs and coach training costs for program providers.

As the sport’s popularity continues to grow in the United States, opportunities to financially profit from that growth increase. Again, this is not an issue as long as it continues to be managed effectively and responsibly. The opportunities include among others

- Increasing the number of soccer academies and player development programs.
- Salaried coaching opportunities.
- Salaried employment opportunities within youth soccer clubs, leagues, and governing organizations.
- For-profit youth soccer organizations.
- Youth soccer tournaments.
- Proliferation of local, regional, and national youth soccer leagues.

As the number of opportunities for academies, player development programs, leagues, clubs, and tournaments increases, so is the confusion for parents when trying to decide which path will be most beneficial for their children, and how to pay for it. Upon making the decision, due to the monetary cost and the associated player commitment, the parents’ expectations are very high, sometimes increasing tension between players, coaches, parents, club officials, governing bodies, etc.

Given that the general population of Western New York is currently stable at best, continued growth in participation in youth soccer can only come from increasing the percentage of the population that participates. Without accomplishing that, the leagues and clubs trying to grow can accomplish it in only one way, by acquiring market share from other leagues and clubs. This is why it will be so important for a collaborative effort to manage the growth of the sport that we love so much. It is why we must



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collaboratively agree to principles and best practices regarding player recruitment practices, player development, coach and parent education, and league participation.

Consistent with the western New York population, after a previous population decline and subsequent stabilization, the number of players registered with NYSWYSA has remained relatively constant at approximately 60,000 players. Interestingly, however, the number of registered recreational players has declined while the number of registered competitive (travel) players has increased. This trend is increasing the competition to attract skilled, competitive players among clubs. To an extent, it also results in players entering more competitive environments when remaining in more developmental programs may be in their best interests.

How we manage these trends while ensuring best practices for youth player development, coach development, and making soccer fun is crucial. I hope as many of our club and league leaders as possible consider participating in this discussion at our 2016 NYSWYSA AGM. The future is bright, and we can accomplish great things together.

2015/2016 Highlights

- 2016 National Championship Series
 - o 4 NYSWYSA teams reached the US Youth Soccer Finals (a record for NYSWYSA)
 - Syracuse Development Academy U13 Boys
 - Syracuse Development Academy U16 Girls
 - Syracuse Development Academy U18 Girls
 - Greater Binghamton United FC U14 Girls
- Olympic Development Program
 - o 2 teams won the Region 1 ODP Championships
 - 2001 Girls: Advanced to the 2017 ODP National Championships
 - 1999 Girls
 - o 4 NYSWYSA ODP teams competed in the 2016 Region 1 ODP Championship Game (first state to accomplish this)
 - 1999, 2000, and 2001 Girls
 - 2000 Boys
- Recreation Initiative
 - o Highly successful soccer festivals were held across the state footprint. These events continue to attract large numbers of players.
- State Cup
 - o For the fifth consecutive year participation on the State Cup tournament grew.
- Financials
 - o NYSWYSA ended the fiscal year in very good standing, continuing our history of strong financial stewardship.

On behalf of NYSWYSA, thank you all for a terrific year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Curtis R. Regruit
President, NYSWYSA