

Youth Sports Make a Difference!



BY NEIL MCNAB, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RUSH UNION
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Game day...there's nothing quite like it. I remember waking up as a young child and being so excited for those days. Rushing to get my grass-stained uniform on, getting my pregame cereal and packing up my ball and water bottle. The ritual, the excitement, the anticipation... it's as vivid as if it were yesterday, and boy, did I love it.

Fast forward many years, after a long-time youth career, a professional playing experience, multiple continents, championships and years of memories that feel like yesterday, I'm even more grateful to work in youth sports full-time. While my professional playing experience made my resume shine, it was my years playing in youth leagues that really laid the foundation for what was to come. The coaches who invested knowledge, the administrators who spent countless hours organizing, the referees who gave up their weekends, and the parents who manage not only youth sports schedules but also family life in general, made it so awesome for me....and so many others. Youth sports taught me about commitment and sacrifice. We all know soccer means dinner in the car sometimes, missing sleepovers and late-night runs to the store for a school project!



Beyond the commitment lessons, youth sports also developed a resilience in me, allowed me to really value the team, and gave me forever friends with whom I'm still close today. Sports showed me what great coaches and mentors look like (and what some bad ones look like too) and built a passion so lasting that I chose to endeavor into the world of sports as my livelihood. I want to share it with anyone who gets within 30 ft of me. Youth sports made a difference for me, and in me.

Game days are still fun for me but generate a whole new set of emotions, different anticipations, and a very different nervous energy. Now I wake up hoping the rain didn't cause our fields to be washed out; hoping all the referees and teams show up to their games; and thinking how fun it would be if no one yelled at the officials or coaches today! Some things don't change though—pre-game cereal. Always.

In my experience as a player, a coach and now the director of a program, the main goal is to create a culture that drives kids to come back every season. There's an

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obligation to help create great memories for these young people and even when things go off the rails in a game, adversity can be the best portal for greatness and defining, memorable moments.

We can create this culture through structured developmental, competitive, recreational and referee programs that engage players in the sport—no matter what role they want to take. We want kids to get excited about the sport so that it stays with them through the years. One of the most meaningful signs of that for me is when I see former players come back to coach. I love seeing them leverage their talent and history to help create the next generation of soccer enthusiasts!

I want to thank all the coaches, teachers, administrators, volunteers, referees, and family members who made a difference in my youth sports career. I also want to thank my own staff, coaches, and volunteers for making a difference in the lives of our own children. It's an impact we don't often measure but one that's meaningful long-term.


Although game day is different for me today... I still get to see my own children rushing to get their uniforms on, eating the pregame cereal and packing up their soccer bags beaming with excitement. Youth sports leaves a legacy for the players, parents and spectators. We hope you consider continuing that legacy with Rush Union Soccer.

RU Ready? Come join us!



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