

My 2018-2019 report is being done as a review of my 2017-2018 report, with an added conclusion that highlights key areas where we did well, and where we can still improve as an organization.

2017-2018 Director of Coaching Report

Throughout this year we broke a lot of new ground that has set our organization up to take some important next steps.

President Jake Wilkins and I attended one of the first Grassroots Coaching License Courses in Rochester, NY in January of 2018.

Meeting held at Fredonia High School with potential house league coaches to cast the vision for the new coaching licensing process.

Assessed and actively recruited coaches to both house and travel side of our organization.

Set up a Grassroots training on March 10, 2018 hosted at Fredonia State, drawing coaches from our club and from as far away as New York City.

Grassroots training held May 19 & 20 4 v. 4, 7 v. 7, 9 v. 9, and 11 v. 11 over two days for our club coaches, and from as far away as Toronto, Canada.

Coached the 17-19U girls team, and shared the 13U boys team with Coach Aaron Pietro.

Attended, observed, and/or participated in coaching training sessions/match play of the 6U, 10U, and 12U House league teams, and the 17U Boys, 15u Boys, 13U girls teams, in addition to the two travel teams (17-19U girls and 13U boys) that I coached.

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Based on all of the observation, assessment, and coaching I was able to do as your DOC this past season, I will now share where I see the “State of Soccer” in our organization, and where it needs to go in order to develop complete soccer players.

**US Soccer asks us to focus on 4 pillars:
Technical, Tactical, Physical, & Psycho-Social.**

After many meetings and discussions throughout this past season with Technical Director, PJ Gondek, it is our shared belief that we need to change our instructional approach as an organization. **We did this by hosting technical training only sessions with multiple age groups, once a week. (Ages 15UG, 16UB, 19UG & 19UB). This was a resounding success.** The glaring need is an intentional focus on building a curriculum that addresses the deficiencies of soccer players today. Chief among them is their technical and psycho-social development. **If a curriculum is to be built it will require anyone in a Director role to not be coaching a team as a Head Coach. There is simply not enough time to do both and honor the person(s) family time.**

For example, by the time a player reaches Concord FC as a 13U player, they should be able to perform basic technical skills at a proficient level. Skills such as passing, receiving, first touch, dribbling, shooting, etc... Many, if not all, of our coaches on the complete side of our organization are spending a lot of time teaching those technical skills, as players are not coming through our House League with the ability to do them when they arrive on the travel side. We have not given much time, if any in some cases, to an organized approach to psycho-social development of players. This is a need, and a huge opportunity to help our players develop. I have a process that can be used to address this, in combination with the technical curriculum Coach Gondek will develop. **Again, if this is to be implemented across all age groups, the Director needs to not be a Head Coach of a team, so that the focus can be on the psycho-social development needs of our student-athletes in addition to the technical, tactical & physical training received in their Head Coach led sessions.**

While it may be possible to teach a player the tactics, help them get into better physical shape, and address decision making skills as they get older...it is far less likely that an athlete can learn the technical skills needed to compete at the higher levels (travel, High School, College, etc...) once they reach their teen years.

In order for our organization to address this challenge, we need to answer a very important question, and then adjust accordingly.

WHO ARE WE?

Are we an organization that has a desire to develop the whole soccer player, from the youngest age on through to reach their maximum potential? I believe we are currently two organizations functioning under one umbrella. Travel & Academy.

If we are, continued changes are needed, and I will lay those out next.

It would be my recommendation, in agreement with Coach Gondek, to revamp how we teach the player the game of soccer.

Our "House League" would be renamed the Concord Academy. **We did this.**

Our current format would be as follows:

- We would hire qualified Head Coaches to lead the different Academy age groups (Little Kickers, 6U, 8U, 10U, and 12U). **This was done backwards against the advice we shared about hiring coaches before registering players.**
- Each Head Coach would be required to complete coach education prior to coaching. **Only about half agreed to do so.**
- Each Head Coach would use technical curriculum developed by our Technical Director, and Psycho-Social elements from The DOC in their training sessions. **We taught this during the two Saturday Coach training sessions provided by the Technical Director and Director of Coaching.**
- Each Head Coach would have a group of facilitators to assist him/her. **We changed this approach.**
- Facilitators would not be required to have the same level of coaching education or knowledge as the Head Coach, but would agree to help monitor, assist, and implement the curriculum during their assigned time slots, under the direct supervision of the Head Coach. For example...If 50 6U kids are in a time slot, their would be 1 Head Coach, and 5 facilitators. The Head Coach would move from group to group to keep everyone on task. The facilitator to player ratio would be no more than 1:10. The facilitators would stay with the same group of players throughout their Academy journey within a season. Each session, the 50 kids would come together for a large group activity, and then split into their pods for more specific curriculum training. **Upon further review we changed this approach.**
- The focus of our Academy moves away from a "league" and hones in on holistic player development. It addresses the 4 pillars of soccer. The players will see the value of physical activity, be taught what it means to develop mental skills (decision making, problem-solving & critical thinking skills) within a group environment (psycho-social), learn tactical awareness, and have the necessary time spent on technical repetition to build soccer specific skills. **After assessing many Academy training times, I saw this come to life from the coaches who took the time to attend the coach training mentioned above. It was quite apparent where this did not come to life from individuals who chose not to, or who could not attend the coach trainings.**
- The goal of the Concord Soccer Academy is to generate excitement about becoming a proficient soccer player that has the ability to compete at the next level.
- Our Concord FC Travel League would remain largely the same, with some additions. (i.e....Psycho-Social coaching elements, Service Project per team in season) **The topic of a wider volunteer base would allow us to implement the Service Project idea. Our coaches are currently tasked with far too much to also lead all of the off the field activities that our teams could participate in.**
- Concord FC will continue to compete in the BWNYSL (home games are now part of our schedule), with the hopes of continued growth. With an intentional feeder Academy focused on skill development rather than a game schedule environment we have reason to believe our travel comment will grow in their abilities. **I believe this is our disconnect. It's only my opinion but I don't see the connection between the Academy and Travel side developing unless something significant were to happen. I generally don't see the interest in those coaching Academy to connect to Travel. Travel players are born from**

the relationship building of our Travel coaches, and a players own interest (supported by parents commitment) to want a more involved playing experience.

In order to do all of this, we need a specific process. We need a system and structure to how we do what we do. The structure needs to be rooted in who we are and why we exist.

That structure should address our need for, and desire to build a successful soccer culture.

There are two sides to a healthy soccer culture that I believe we should focus on: The internal and external.

One complements the other.

Internal

Recruit: How do we find our coaches? (Focus on building relationships over time) **This has never been a problem on the Travel side, and continues to be in Academy.**

Hire: How do we know if a coach is a fit for our organization? (We need a vision and set of core values we expect every coach to buy in to) **Again, works for Travel, but disconnect at the Academy level. We are rushing to find enough coaches in Academy because we open the sign-up floodgates before we know if we can handle the numbers that sign up. This is backwards.**

Train: How do we educate our coaches? (Internal training from Technical Director and DOC, combined with formal US Soccer based education required) **We were incredibly intentional about this at the Academy level this year. The fruit from this was obvious when you watched coaches who had the training coach vs. those that did not.**

Retain: How do we engage our coaches so that they feel valued and want to return? (Technical Director and DOC check-in's on a regular basis throughout the season) **This was done on an ongoing basis, and we repeatedly said we are here to support our coaches in any way we can, and that was lived out this year.**

External

Marketing: How are we telling the NCSA/Concord FC story? (Who is doing this, what is their background for it, and what is the calendar year plan for it?) **This was hit and miss simply based on volunteers and person(s) to do it beyond the current volunteer base.**

Customer Service: How do we care for our coaches? (What are we doing to promote the excitement to coach and prevent burn-out amongst our Academy and Travel coaches and facilitators?) **We stayed true to checking in regularly with coaches (I saw them all train, attend tournaments, matches and practices), and tried to do little extras where we could (gear for them). The next step is a DOC that doesn't have to head coach a team that can have the freedom to check in with coaches and attend more practices and matches having more time to do so than they do now.**

Philanthropy: How do we equip our coaches to teach being a servant-leader to our players? (How are we reinforcing the need with parents to volunteer and teach that to our kids?) **This was a "miss" this year. We need to identify someone willing to take the lead role on this with all teams. The Southern Tier Storm does a FANTASTIC job of this with a key person. We should reach out and ask how they make it work so well.**

Public Relations: How are we being accountable, consistent, and transparent while still supporting the needs of our coaches? (What feedback loop options do we have that allow everyone to be heard, but done in a way that isn't taking shots at anyone?) **I think this was done well this year. At no point was a coach "out in the wind" on information they needed. Either the DOT, DOC or Technical Director made sure they had the information and support they needed and/or requested.**

It is my desire to spend this next season working with our Technical Director to develop the necessary curriculum, so that I can use it as a filter to hire qualified coaches. From there, it will afford us the opportunity to build a team of facilitators that is excited to help advance the game of soccer in our community through intentionality. Gone will be any notion of personal preference winning out over the club's vision. We will always be open to feedback, but for it to be considered it will need to pass through the filter of WHO we are as an organization, and WHY we exist. We will give every young player the same opportunity to learn the game (it's four pillars). This should, and will, give parent volunteers the confidence to help our kids grow in the game, because they will be supported by a Head Coach at every turn that really knows their soccer. **A DOC and Technical Director that don't have to be Head Coaches (notice a**

theme, here? :)) would have more time to do this. And to be honest, we need to be proud of having an exact vision and values that we operate under. We need to stick to them in the face of adversity, or opinions that are shared with the intent to create division in our organization. I was proud to stand by our NCSA President, VP & DOT, and Technical Director as we navigated some tough conversations that honored WHO we are and WHY we exist so no person can push an agenda that is not in the best interest of the development of our student-athletes and coaches.

One of the biggest needs to be addressed is the order in which we register players to the Academy and hire coaches.

It is my professional opinion that we should be hiring Head Coaches, and gaining the commitment of facilitators, prior to opening registration. **This didn't happen this year, but after conversations with leadership I believe it will next year.**

If we don't do this, we are upside down out of the gate on player development. Last year we didn't have enough qualified coaches to meet the demand of the number of registrants. In order to offer a program based on excellence, we must have the Head Coaches and facilitators in place so that we can keep effective player development as our focus. Overall numbers should never be our goal. While we want to serve as many people as we can, we shouldn't be doing that at the risk of a poor offering. We'd do better to serve fewer numbers with quality instruction. If we don't, we cannot function as a true Academy that builds soccer players.

In closing, I want to make sure something is very clear...

I am so very thankful that so many people over MANY, MANY years have taken the time to provide a soccer experience for the children of our community. My assessment and recommendations today are about our future. Like any journey in life, next steps many times require change. Change can come easy for some, and more difficult for many. The only true way to bring everyone together?

Two things...

Vision and an unwavering commitment to it.

My hope is that we can honor where we've come from while simultaneously making the necessary changes to take our kids where they need and deserve to go.

In 2019 CONCLUSION...

I absolutely believe we made progress in some incredible ways:

- **BWNYJSL: Many teams moved up divisions and finished in the top half of their new divisions. NO RED CARDS FOR PLAYERS OR PARENTS.**
- **14U Boys and 19U Girls won Tournament Championships. 16U Boys finished 2nd in their league's division, 16U & 14U Boys Clarence Finalists.**
- **We fielded not 1, but 2 10U teams to build our travel base.**
- **We hosted not 1, but 2 coach training days for Academy Coaches.**
- **We honored who we are and why we exist to support our coaches and club in some unique & challenging situations.**
- **The addition of facilities (Fredonia State & Dunkirk HS turf fields). This was a MAJOR win for our organization.**
- **The intentional relationship restoration (Dunkirk Schools) and building (Fredonia State) that took place. This was HUGE!**

Where I believe we have work to do:

- **Our DOC and Technical Director roles are too broad to also be Head Coaches.**
- **We need to add an Academy Director and several assistants to that person to be sure our Vision & Values are being implemented, not suggested.**
- **We need to have an open conversation about the very real gap between the Academy and preparing players for Travel.**
- **We need to make our Director of Travel a paid position just like the DOC and Technical Director. The Academy Director should be paid as well.**

- **We need to be more intentional about celebrating the "Wins along the way" publicly. By this I mean identifying a media person that will help us tell the stories of what is happening in the lives of our soccer families...not just athletically, but academically, & in service to our community as well.**