

How competitive clubs *and their coaches* help players grow by Pat Grecco



The Author - Pat Grecco

Pat has helped more student athletes get to college than anyone on the planet. Here she is honored for her College Advisory work, with induction into the Hall of Fame at LIJSL, the nations largest league of 70,000 players.

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This story is not about blue chip ODP teams whose coveted rosters guaranty membership in The Golden Circle ... and underwrite dreams of college and soccer.

This story is about two club teams ... one boy's and one girl's ... who had their college dreams, too. But more important ... they had a battle plan!

The Boys' Plan - Sure, the team had a few ODP players on the squad, but most were solid Select and Varsity level athletes. Together ... players, parents, team manager and coach ... made the strategic decision to hire a professional coach to prepare the boys for the years of trench fighting that could lead to college and berths on top teams.

Money for coaching, travel, tournaments and expenses was minted. Parents and players signed on for a year-around commitment of hard work at mandatory practices, clinics and tournaments. The boys were in 8th grade.

Did their plan work? Every one of those boys played college soccer. Here's how they did it ...

They trained and trained. As high school sophomores, they were ready for competitive tournaments. They pushed themselves relentlessly to find and play against the best competition, anywhere. They fought their way through the USA Cup, the Sun Bowl, The Columbia Invitational and Potomac Invitational, then attacked the best teams in the Carolinas. With every battle ... they grew.

Team managers maneuvered into position, collecting player GPA/SAT's, stats, references, preferences, photos with which to create their projectiles ... player profiles ... to be launched with deadly accuracy at college coaches in their offices and at tournaments. Revision after revision was published and launched, flooding the college coaches with accurate, timely player profiles. Simultaneously, players phoned, wrote and faxed target coaches, pinning the college coaches in a deadly cross fire.

When the team twice won the New York State Championship college coaches capitulated and surrendered, unconditionally. Documents were signed.

As the smoke of battle cleared and the players were packing for their next mission ... college soccer ... our club coach, himself a veteran of many campaigns, mused,

"To watch boys grow into men with purpose and dedication makes all the hours of hard work worth it. It was our investment in their future. Now those college coaches all agree, there will always be a place for the blue collar player, as well as the blue chipper, on their college teams."

The Girls' Plan - If the boys' battle plan reminds you of a General George Patton tank attack, the girls' plan may be likened to General George Washington's skillful campaign. Washington used innovative tactics, and chose to his battles carefully. His brilliant diplomatic maneuvers abroad, helped George to achieve his objective ... not to defeat England ... but to win our independence.

In 8th grade the girls team contained several talented players. Their soccer skills developed, many qualified for ODP, and their academic skills were outstanding.

Their head coach, a parent, did not employ a full time professional coach, but chose to lead the attack himself, offering his players clinics, camps and outside instruction with professional coaches. Preparing his players for the highest level soccer, he led them to carefully chosen tournaments offering a strategic advantage.

The Dallas cup - very difficult and selective - playing here signals that you can play almost anywhere.

WAGS - the premier women's tournament - 85% of all recruited college players, play here. (won 1st place)

Haarlem (Holland) Cup - Europe's best women annual maneuvers preparing for The World Cup. (won 1st place)

Miami Orange Bowl - last recruiting tournament of the year. Coaches bring their checkbooks ... ready to deal.

When the parents and team management met to discuss college plans, and the preparation of player profiles, it was clear that every player had acquired valuable assets. In addition to their club team success, they had been decorated for valor in ODP and high school combat, while maintaining the highest academic standards.

Saturation bombing of college coaches commenced, hundreds of faxes, letters and phone calls were launched, and victory was ours. precisely on schedule.

Victory ... meant achieving our objective. In some cases our objective was winning a scholarship, in other cases it was gaining entry to a college where the girls might otherwise not have been accepted. Ivy league colleges were among our targets.

The years of dedication and hard work clearly defined our girls' strength of character ... through soccer ... before college selection boards. This was life. Real life.

Admissions officers, numbed by endless applicants droning on in self-serving essays and thinly fabricated community service projects, were electrified by our story. They sat bolt upright and read our story.

They reread our applications and shared them with co-workers, perhaps wondering how differently their own lives could have unfolded, if this soccer experience had been theirs, too. Our girls were heavily recruited.

Player and parent commitment was essential, but most important, was the leadership of a dedicated club coach.

How do you begin? Find a team and coach whose agenda matches yours; interview players they have helped.

Take core and AP courses and earn good grades. Take and retake the SAT/ACT until you are proud of your scores. Believe in yourself. Serious players with strong academic scores always have more options.

Real life begins here and now.

