

Where are all the boys going?

Once again I signed my two boys up for soccer this year. They play house league soccer and no I'm not disappointed that they are not playing rep AAA or Premier or Provincial or whatever you call it. I'll talk about that later though.

What I am disappointed in though is that the number of teams we are competing against has drastically been reduced. And it seemed to happen almost overnight. He is playing in the under 14 age group but he is twelve years old, grade 7. For the first time, the age groups are combined with another age division. He was born in 1988 and the boys born in 1988 and 1987 are combined. The disturbing part is that there only 8 teams in this age group. When I got the schedule and checked this out I called the local club to see if maybe there were two separate groups of 8 or if there had been some sort of mistake in the schedule. No, was the answer. We only have enough boys to field 8 teams in those age groups.

It occurred to me that only a few short years ago, there were tons of boys in this age division. So I looked back at some statistics I had kept. Three years ago in the boys born in '88 age group, there were 3 groups of 6 teams each playing in one age division. That's a total of 18 teams. Three years ago the teams each had 16 players as they do today so there are no changes there.

I then looked at the boys born in 1987 three years ago and found that they had 14 teams in that grouping. That's a total of 34 teams of boys born in 1987 and 1988. At 16 players per team, that's 544 players playing house league soccer in 1998. Today, for the 2001 season we are down to 8 teams X 16 or 128 players. What happened to the 416 players who are no longer registered with this club? Where have they disappeared to? Somehow, we have lost 76.5% of players before they have left elementary school. Could all these 12 and 13 year olds have jobs? Maybe they are busy with their girlfriends? Are they all playing Nintendo? Are they hanging out in plazas? Are they studying for medical exams?

What the heck is going on? Does anybody care?

Do our associations really even know? After all, the CSA, at \$5.00 per player for registrations has just lost \$2080.00 in revenue. The OSA at \$987876 per player has lost 85429765 in revenue from this club alone. Are they addressing the problem and if so, how?

The overall numbers are still up but mainly because of the girls and both will be going south too. The same club has experienced a leveling of growth at the lowest age group for the first time ever. In fact, the club is 4 teams short of what they anticipated getting at the youngest age group. Overall numbers are still up and the club has surpassed 4,000 members but there are some disturbing numbers that need to be looked at.

Apparently, lacrosse registration is up. In Toronto, The Rock, the pro lacrosse team, broke a world record for attendance at a lacrosse game with over 19,000 spectators at the ACC. Girls on the other hand has experienced an alarming increase in participants that have padded the numbers and their drop out rate is actually lower than boys, This bodes well for the Women's national team but disappointing for the men's. WHY is this happening?

In my presentation "For the Love of Soccer" none of this is a shock or surprise. Demographics and the importance of a future explain it all rather simply. Boys do not see a future in Soccer in Canada. Girls do.

What's disturbing about these latest numbers is that in 1995 when I first presented the drop out rate of soccer, it had the highest drop out rate of all team sports by age 13 hovering around 69%. For boys, this number seems to have increased to closer to 75%.

There are solutions to the problems and my 10 steps to making soccer more successful are presented in the presentation "For the Love of Soccer". If you are interested in having this 2 1/2 hour slide and video presentation presented in your community, please contact the NSCAC. Please note: the presentation is

geared to people who love the game of soccer and who would love to help see it become a major spectator sport in Canada. It is not geared for those who are new to the game and want to learn more about it but are not passionate about it.

In a recent survey I conducted with house league coaches, 75% did not even know the name of our pro team in Toronto. The same percentage could not name one player from our Men or Women's National team. 82% though did know of Mia Hamm and Brandi Chastain. There you have it. Now you know why all the girls want to play soccer. They want to be considered in People's magazine as one of the world's top 50 most beautiful people in the world (Mia Hamm) or they can't wait to score a goal and take their tops off!