



Report of the Technical Director Dean Foti

The 2019/20 season was unlike any we have experienced to date. Each and every year we set out with the intent to provide high level programming and outstanding membership service with an eye toward our ultimate goal; promoting and growing the game of soccer. While few could have imagined how 2019/20 would ultimately unfold, almost everyone will concede that the impact of COVID-19 has in some way altered the way we now go about our daily business.

The fall of 2019 began like many others, with robust participation levels across our many programs. The NYW Academy, Olympic Development Program (ODP) tryouts, Coaching Education offerings, TopSoccer and our newly created “Introduction to Youth Soccer” events aimed at attracting new players to the sport, were but a few of the programs to get off to a great start. The momentum from this encouraging start propelled us into winter programming that featured strong ODP numbers, the staging of record high levels of coaching courses, a reinvigorated TOPSoccer program spearheaded by a first of its kind pilot student-led program on the campus of Binghamton University and a buzz from the “Introduction to Youth Soccer” events that initiated plans for the creation of a pilot after-school program within the Rochester City School District. As it turned out, all of these promising programs were to be put on “pause”.

As with every other industry, the COVID-19 global pandemic brought all operations to a halt in early March. The ensuing shut down forced all youth sports to alter, readjust and re-imagine how to move forward during a pandemic. Like many others, we looked to technology and transitioned to the world of virtual learning and communication. A “We Kick Corona” resource link was created on our website to connect players and coaches to



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a myriad of videos offering individual and small group training activities, a monthly newsletter (“Soccer for Soccer”) providing sample training sessions for youth soccer coaches was established and the weekly zoom series “NYS Spotlight” was created to feature member clubs, highlight their programming and promote their eventual spring/summer tryouts. In partnership with the US Soccer Coaching Education Department, the entire coaching education platform for delivering coaching licenses transitioned to various modes of remote learning (i.e. online assignments, instructor-led interactive zoom meetings, classes combined with some in-person training). The prospect of a “new normal” was also the impetus for NYSWYSA to improve how it communicates with its members. We placed greater emphasis on the enhancing of our social media presence and ventured into the world of Esports and the digital gaming environment.

Even with the challenges at hand, we aspired to serve, engage and be a resource to all of our NYSWYSA members. We continued to establish and develop valuable relationships with our members, while working together with them to identify, develop and create needed programming/services. In 2019/20 the Women Coaches Initiative took shape in the form of a 12 member committee formed to promote, advocate, educate, mentor and provide opportunities for women in the New York State West soccer community.

Our commitment to our goals remained the same in 2019/20 but our pathway to achieving them was anything but traditional. Technical support that normally took the form of providing guidance on player/coach development now took the form of interpreting NYS COVID-19 guidelines



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(i.e. gathering limits, travel restrictions, quarantine requirements, etc.) and youth sport “Return to Play” protocols. As always, the health and safety of all our members was our top priority.

Olympic Development Program

Participant numbers in traditional ODP (i.e. 12U-17U) rose 6% from 2018/19. Pre-ODP (i.e. 11U) participant numbers declined by 25% from last year, while 19U ODP participant numbers remained the same as in 2018/19. All Combined, the total number of ODP participants in 2019/20 decreased by 2% (8 players).

As there was no ODP Tournament, nor an East Region ODP Camp, there are no team results or participant numbers to report. Prior to the shut down in mid-March, NYW was on track to send its usual 14 teams to the ODP Tournament which ranks in the top 6 (out of 15 state associations) who send the highest number teams each year to the ODP Tournament.

Due to COVID-19, there were no ODP foreign trips to report on. Having said that, NYW ODP had 22 players selected to their respective age group’s East Region ODP player pool (in comparison to 21 in 2018, 21 in 2017 and 26 in 2016). This was based on play during the summer of 2019. Additionally, there was an attempt to conduct the new boys and girls ODP Inter-Regional event at the Orlando Omni Resort in November, 2020 (which was ultimately cancelled due to COVID-19 travel restrictions). It is worth mentioning because it brings to light the outstanding work and integral part that our member clubs within the NYW footprint play in producing some of



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the region's top players. Notably, the ODP East Regional Coaching staff selected 26 NYW ODP players to their respective East Region ODP Teams that were scheduled to participate in this inaugural ODP Inter-Regional event. This event was where the evaluation process was to begin for player selection to the respective ODP National Teams.

I want to acknowledge and applaud the exceptional work that our member clubs and their fine coaching staffs do in continuing to develop talented youth soccer players. I am committed to continuing to build relationships and meet, interact and collaborate with as many club coaches as I possibly can. As always, my goal is to make the ODP program a valuable and viable supplement to the outstanding work that the club coaches do in developing their players. Our goals are the same - to provide the youth players of NYW with good soccer experiences that will help each one of them reach their potential. We have worked hard over the last decade to create an ODP schedule that will best compliment the many school and club calendars/competitions. It won't get any easier as we all contend with the impending uncertainty and impact of COVID-19. We remain committed to the constant communication required with players, parents and coaches to always maintain safe playing environments and to also avoid scheduling conflicts. I admire the fine work that our NYW clubs do in developing players – your outstanding work shines through every time your players take the field, no matter what color jersey they are wearing.

NYW Academy

The NYW Academy, which takes place each fall and is open to all boys and



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girls ages 9 to 14, was conducted at five sites throughout the NYW footprint in 2019 (i.e. Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Elmira and Jamestown). In an effort to foster our region's young talent, the Academy is designed to expose young players to focused training sessions provided by nationally certified coaches. The Academy stresses a curriculum focused on improving fundamentals via a heavy emphasis on technical work and small sided games. The program stresses fun and progress in a positive learning environment. In 2019, participant numbers showed a slight increase (1%) of over those of 2018.

Coaching Education

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, our NYSWYSA Coaching Education Department has had a busy 2019-20 year. This marks the second year of full integration of US Soccer's transition to Grassroots Licenses (GR) and the new D-License delivery/methodology. The Grassroots Licenses - both the online and the 4-hour in-person version - and the newly redesigned D-License, all came online during the 2017/18 cycle. During 2019/20, due to Covid-19 and multiple restrictions on travel, US Soccer initiated a "blended" Grassroots and D-Course option. This means that part of the courses were to be delivered via the internet, hosted by an US Soccer Educational Staff member, and part of the course were still hosted on the field "in person". All things considered, this new process has been applauded by candidates and instructors alike and will continue into the 2020/21 cycle.

In 2019/20, with a full complement of staff instructors who have now all attended US Soccer Coaching Education Department workshops as well as completed the US Soccer Instructor Certification Course required to



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conduct/teach/lead the licensing program, all courses were up and running with certified instructors. During the 2019-20 season, 18 total courses were conducted (attended by a total of 310 candidates). The most popular GR License was the 9v9 and 11v11, of which 5 courses each were conducted with a total attendance of 182 candidates. Additionally, a total of 4 D-Licenses were conducted with a total of 82 candidates in attendance. If not for the COVID-19 induced four and a half month moratorium on conducting courses, we were on track to significantly surpass last year's numbers across the board for total number of coaching courses offered and total number of attending candidates. Nearly 75% of the conducted courses noted above were conducted prior to this moratorium. A total of 10 courses were cancelled in 2019/20, including the long anticipated C-License which we were finally granted permission by US Soccer to conduct. We are hoping to retain the blessing of the federation for 2021 and are currently working to identify potential dates (spring/summer) to re-schedule it.

The current 2020-21 GR's, D-License and potential C-course schedule is posted on our website. Please be sure to check the website regularly for scheduling updates as courses are routinely added throughout the year. Questions regarding upcoming course offerings and/or opportunities to host a course should be directed to Assistant Technical Director and Director of Coaching Education, Scott Craig (scraig@nyswysa.org).

Connecting Kids to Colleges

Even with the presence of COVID-19, NYSWYSA remains committed to bridging the gap between youth players who aspire to play at the collegiate level and the college coaches who scour the landscape looking for talented



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players to add to their rosters. No doubt the NCAA's indefinite extension of the recruiting Dead Period in 2019/20 and other imposed recruiting restrictions has made the task of bringing prospects and coaches together a bit more daunting. Our ODP coaching staff (nearly half of which is made up of current head or assistant college coaches) continue to counsel players in the program. Despite ODP outdoor training being halted in 2020 during the height of the pandemic, information on the college recruiting process remained a core component in the lecture portion of the ODP indoor training phase.

In 2019/20, New York West ODP continued its college prep training program for boys and girls players in the 19U age group ('01 and '02 born players). Traditional ODP at the state and regional level tops out at the 17U age group nationwide. NYW independently made the decision to expand its programming to include this 19U training program to serve the serious and committed player looking for high level training to supplement their club and/or high school training. The program is open to all age eligible players and provides competitive training for players who have an eye toward playing soccer in college. The training program is highlighted by "friendlies" scheduled in the spring against local college programs so players get a real taste for college level competition. In 2019/20, college round robin "play days" were set up in April with Division III programs. Unfortunately, they were called off due to COVID-19.

Introduction to Youth Soccer:

In mid-April of 2019, we welcomed Diana Groth to our technical staff, to fill the position of Assistant Technical Director for Membership Development.



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Diana hit the ground running by conducting signature NYWYSA “Intro to Youth Soccer Days” for first time soccer players. By staging these free events in the suburbs, inner city and rural areas, she introduced new youth players to the game while simultaneously promoting the local recreation and “starter” youth soccer programs as entry points for them to continue playing the game. Diana worked closely with elementary schools and youth organizations (i.e. YMCA, scouts, daycare centers, etc.) to find first time players (primarily ages 11 and under). By exposing new players/parents to the game and connecting them to our member clubs our objective is to help replenish entry level soccer programs throughout the state. In 2019/20 nearly 300 first time players attended events that were staged in Brockport, Arcade, Webster, Buffalo, Lakewood and Johnson City (additional events in Silver Creek and Rochester were subsequently cancelled).

The success of these events initiated efforts to look at the feasibility of starting an after-school program in the Rochester City School District. While the project got derailed by COVID-19 it is now currently on hold.

Additionally, in 2019/20 Diana was responsible for stepping up the production of the now monthly “Soccer for Soccer” newsletter for coaches, enhancing our social media presence, website design and marketing efforts for all of our programming. With the onset of the pandemic and in an effort to keep kids connected to the game, Diana also researched and engineered NYSWYSA’s entry into the world of Esports and the digital gaming environment. Her work in this area with Global Digital Sports insures a safe playing environment for kids and provides tournaments throughout the year (including the FIFA Fest National Championship) and a



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soon to be established eState Cup.

Women Coaches Initiative:

NYSWYSA's mission is to provide a lifelong positive experience by engaging, supporting and advocating for female coaches in the New York State West footprint. In 2019/20 NYSWYSA President Curt Regruit tabbed Assistant Technical Director, Diana Groth to head the project that started when he and Anna Lesa Calvert spearheaded a grant writing campaign to secure funding for the initiative. The project now includes a thirteen person committee, Chaired by Groth, who meet regularly and are planning among other things, an outreach program to member clubs to introduce this initiative and its mission, conducting a female only coaching course and identifying barriers and promoting ways to increase the number of women's coaches. If you are interested in learning more about the supporting women in coaching and the Women Coaches Initiative please contact Diana Groth: dgroth@nyswysa.org.

Recreation Soccer

While our goal in 2019/20 was to provide a vast array of services to the recreation soccer community, we were unfortunately sidelined to a large degree due to COVID-19. We were limited in our ability to deliver what we normally take great pride in annually providing to our membership. While we were able to (pre-COVID-19) conduct some events, we look forward to the time when we can get back to staging unencumbered our usual number of Recreation Festivals/Youth Development Days, Jamborees, Indoor



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Soccer/Futsal events, Grassroots courses, Intro to Youth Soccer Days, coaching clinics and numerous consulting ventures that have enriched player, coach and parent experiences far and wide. Many thanks to Assistant Technical Directors, Scott Craig and Diana Groth, Recreation Soccer Director, Tom Darpino, Executive Director, Alex Brame and Director of Operations, Pam Whitcomb for their commitment to NYSWYSA recreation initiatives and for the integral role they play in delivering extraordinary service and programming.

TOPSoccer:

TOPSoccer (The Outreach Program for Soccer) is a New York State West and US Youth Soccer official program. This program is designed for children with disabilities, ages 5 to 21 and accommodates all disabilities whether mental or physical. This is an exciting program that brings the joy of playing soccer to players who have not traditionally had a place in the youth soccer system. In 2019-20, TOPSoccer programs were conducted in Binghamton, Syracuse, Rochester, Canandaigua, Olean and Buffalo. A new feature in 2019-20 was the addition of an innovative TOPSoccer program in Binghamton. The program was initiated at Binghamton University and designed as a student run TOPSoccer program serving the surrounding community. Nearly, 100 BU students were certified as TOPSoccer coaches and buddies. The pilot program is in the process gaining official sponsorship by the BU Student Association. Assistant Technical Director, Scott Craig led the project and once fine tuned, will look to take the concept to campuses regionally and nationwide.

If you know of someone who might enjoy participating in TOPSoccer



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programming or someone who might like to volunteer (i.e. start/host a program, become a session leader or participate as a “TOPSoccer Buddy”, etc.) please contact Scott directly (scraig@nyswysa.org).

Youth Soccer Amidst a Pandemic:

Our entire NYSWYSA staff, including Executive Director, Alex Brame, Director of Operations, Pam Whitcomb and our entire Technical Staff (Dean Foti, Scott Craig, Diana Groth), have strived to continually be a reliable resource to our member leagues, clubs, players, coaches, referees, administrators, volunteers and the entire youth soccer community as it relates to navigating local, county and New York State guidelines as they pertain to COVID-19 safety precautions. We have worked hard to provide accurate interpretations and timely assistance (i.e. “Return to Play Update” link on our website: <http://nyswysa.org/nyswysa-return-to-play-update>, weekly “NYSW Newsletter” and periodic email blast updates to our membership) in an effort to help our entire membership stay safe during these uncertain times.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the entire NYSWYSA membership for continuing to make health and safety your top priority during these fluid and often difficult times. While we all look forward to the day when we can move out from under the cloud of COVID-19, it is important to stay positive and find innovative ways to stay connected with each other and to the game we all love.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy holiday season!



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Respectfully Submitted,
Dean Foti
NYSWYSA
Technical Director