

"What Youth Soccer Has Meant To Me"

Anthony Burgess, the British author of *A Clockwork Orange*, once said "Five days shalt thou labour, as the Bible says. The seventh day is the Lord thy God's. The sixth day is for football." I have been giving my days for soccer for as long as I can remember. I have played soccer for about 14 years and it has had, perhaps, a greater impact on my life than anything else.

As a young boy I vaguely remember my father and mother asking me if I wanted to play soccer. I excitedly said yes, as any boy would, no matter how much or how little he knew. The decision I made that evening as a young kindergartener was perhaps the biggest decision of my life. Over the next 14 years I would go on to play in many soccer games, and regardless of winning or losing, I always had fun. I remember my first days practicing at Ridgecrest Elementary School in Midwest City. My dad, Rick French, was the coach and neither of us really knew much about soccer at that point. I remember my dad asking the team what our team name should be, and I remember saying "The Bulls" and the whole team agreeing as young children do. That name is something that I, along with former teammates and friends, often reminisce about nostalgically. From then on we changed names and teammates many times but one thing remained, my dad coached me.

I played recreational soccer until I was 11, and then our club started a competitive team known as "United '85". We suffered many losses as this was our first time ever playing competitive soccer. Shortly after that experience, our team began playing in the recreational division once again. In the 2000-2001 season, I began playing competitive soccer again with George Steadman's "Fusion '85" out of Midwest City. After a season with mixed results, I began playing with "Celtic '86" under coach Raymond Oguno and had the most success I had ever had at such a level. One thing changed, however, and that was the coach. Soccer has always been something that my dad and I could bond about; it was what we always had between us that really brought us together. In 2000, my final year playing recreational soccer, my team, The Revolution, was in the finals of the Day of Champions tournament. Regulation ended in a tie, and after two overtime periods, we went to a shoot-out. We ended up losing that game but I remember vividly the moment when my dad dropped me off. I said to him as he was leaving, "Dad, thanks for coaching me", and both of us, with tears in our eyes, hugged each other as he said, "Your more than welcome son, I am glad to have coached you all these years." And so it was, that my last days playing for my dad ended with a loss for our team but with a triumph for a father and a son that grew to love the sport of soccer.

Youth soccer has meant very much to me over the past 14 years; it has kept me healthy, taught me some of life's lessons, provided for many fun times, and brought me closer to my father. Without soccer, I could not have achieved all that I have today.