

# Acts of Kindness: Fueling Soccer's Soul

**footy 4**  
**My soul.**

Beautiful Growth



By Justin T. Van Til  
Creator, Footy4MySoul



*All proceeds donated to*



**GREATNESS WINS**

# *NAVIGATING ACTS OF KINDNESS*

Embracing Players .....	3
Embracing Parents .....	18
Embracing Coaches .....	27
Our Unsung Heroes .....	36
Grassroots to Pro .....	45
Our Community .....	54
Our Recent Podcasts .....	63
Let's 'Merch' to a Cure .....	71
Substack Community .....	78



Let's work <sup>2</sup>together as acts of kindness nurture into standards of care...players, parents, coaches, mentors, clubs, school, community and all!



# *Embracing Players*

Teammate's Trust: Building Bonds Beyond the Field	4
From Bubble to Breakthrough: Encouraging Every Player's Journey	6
Thank You, Coach: The Power of Gratitude	8
Compassion in the Face of Injury	10
Referee's Respect: Humanity on the Pitch	12
Spirit of Rivalry: Respect Between Competitors	14
Behind Every Goal: Thankful for Caregivers	16



## Teammate's Trust: Building Bonds Beyond the Field

Soccer isn't just about the goals scored or the victories celebrated—it's about the bonds built along the way. A teammate isn't just someone who shares the field with you; they're your equal, someone who understands the highs and lows of the game because they're living it with you. It's the shared struggle, the collective triumph, and the quiet moments of connection that truly define the game.

Think about the moments when teammates show up for each other: offering a hand after a tough tackle, sharing a laugh to lighten the pressure, or giving a heartfelt "you've got this" before a direct kick. These seemingly small acts are the foundation of something much greater. They transform a group of players into a team, united by kindness, respect, and a shared purpose.

We embrace players who see the bigger picture—those who understand that greatness is not just about individual skill but about the impact they have on others. These are the players who lift teammates up, lead with compassion, and show respect even in the heat of competition. They recognize that when they choose kindness and connection, they not only elevate their team but also grow as leaders and human beings.

For these players, the game becomes more than just a sport; it's a platform for building trust, developing resilience, and learning to navigate challenges with grace. This growth extends far beyond the pitch, shaping them into individuals who value relationships and see the power of working together toward a shared goal. These are the stories that endure—the stories of players who choose to lead with heart, proving that compassion and competition can thrive side by side.





# From Bubble to Breakthrough: Encouraging Every Player's Journey

As players progress in soccer, the divide becomes clear—first team versus second team, varsity versus junior varsity, or college roster versus club or recreational soccer. At every level, there are the elite, the bubble players, and those who are cut.

The inspiring stories often come from players who didn't make the team but persevered, fueled by heart, soul, and dedication. These players can achieve greatness—if they stay in the game. Yet many drop out, especially during their early teenage years, feeling excluded and losing faith.

For those who make the first team, there is an opportunity to show compassion. Recognize the efforts of those who just missed out, motivate them, and encourage them to keep going. Early success often favors athleticism, speed, and size, but as players grow, the game shifts to understanding and strategy. At every age, a player who has been cut or who is on the bubble can make a difference on the first team someday—anything is possible.

Embrace those actions when first-team players lift up their teammates who didn't make it. It's about fostering belief and confidence, reminding them of their value and potential within the game. Kindness can be shown in moments like offering words of support after a tough tryout or inviting them to train together outside of practice. There's nothing more powerful than belief, and the kindness is to help those players who have been cut to keep believing.

We thank those who encourage players to keep playing. Your encouragement can be the reason someone keeps playing, showing that soccer is about connection, compassion, and the journey we take together.





# Thank You, Coach: The Power of Gratitude

The relationship between players and coaches is central to the soccer experience, one that extends far beyond the pitch. Coaches do much more than develop tactical strategies and push players to their full potential—they invest emotionally, personally, and tirelessly to help their teams succeed. Yet, players may not always realize the immense pressures coaches face. From grassroots to professional, they shoulder broad responsibilities, including player development, team selection, and fostering team cohesion.

In the earlier years, they navigate the additional challenge of managing relationships with parents and caregivers, while at higher levels, the focus shifts to recruitment and media scrutiny. Combined with the universal expectations for performance, winning, and player well-being, these responsibilities create a demanding and often stressful environment.



It's also important to recognize that, while coaches may sometimes express stress in imperfect ways—raising their voices or being overly critical—these moments usually come from a place of care and passion.

Writing personalized notes of gratitude, sharing moments when a coach's words or guidance made a difference, or organizing a simple recognition ceremony can all demonstrate to coaches that their hard work and sacrifices are seen and valued. Small actions, like helping pack up gear after practice, checking in with a simple "How are you doing?" or including coaches in team dinners and gatherings, can foster connections that extend beyond the game itself.

By building this two-way relationship of respect, gratitude, and understanding, players and coaches can strengthen a bond that often outlasts the game. We embrace when players recognize their coaches' humanity and emotional investment. The best coaches become more than leaders—they remain lifelong mentors, role models, and sources of inspiration.





# Compassion in the Face of Injury

Injuries can take a toll not just on the body, but on the mind and spirit as well. For players sidelined due to injury, the hardest challenge is often feeling left out while their teammates continue to play. But what if these moments were reframed? What if an injury became an opportunity—not just for the injured player to embrace fortitude, but for teammates to embrace their role as a support system?

An injury is more than just a pause in play; it's a chance for the injured player to reflect, refocus, and grow in new ways. It's also a time for the team to come together, showing compassion and care in ways that strengthen bonds and build character. Through unwavering encouragement from teammates, family, and the soccer community, these moments can transform into powerful stories of resilience and recovery.

Every player's journey is different. Injuries are a temporary setback, but the kindness of a team can turn them into an opportunity for fortitude and growth. When we lift up our injured teammates with steadfast encouragement, we send a powerful message: You are valued, no matter what.

This approach doesn't just create better players—it builds better people. It highlights the human capacity to overcome adversity and achieve greatness, reminding us that we are stronger together.

Today, take a moment to check in with someone on your team—or in your life—who might be feeling sidelined, physically or emotionally. Let them know they are not alone. Be the teammate or friend who provides unwavering encouragement and inspires hope. Together, let's embrace challenges as opportunities to grow stronger—individually and as a team.

In moments of adversity, we discover what's great about humanity: the courage to keep going, the strength to lift others up, and the beauty of coming together as a team.





## Referee's Respect: Humanity on the Pitch

Soccer is a game fueled by passion and defined by its moments of unpredictability. It's a sport where precision and close calls can shape the outcome, reminding us of the beauty in every decision made on the pitch.

The relationship between players and referees often shapes the tone of the match—not just through calls made, but through the respect shown on both sides. Referees have the unenviable task of making split-second decisions. Players may feel frustration when a critical call doesn't go their way—an apparent offside that wasn't flagged, a goal allowed to stand despite protests. These moments test the resilience and sportsmanship of every player.

Instead of letting frustration take hold, players can recognize that this is one moment in a 90-minute match—a single thread in the tapestry of the game.

Even at a time when parents and coaches may be yelling from the sidelines, players who take the higher ground demonstrate true leadership and sportsmanship. Perseverance and respect, even in adversity, elevate the game itself. At the final whistle, regardless of the result, a handshake or a simple “thank you” to the referee speaks volumes about character and respect.

Such acts aren’t just about sportsmanship—they’re a statement of humanity. When players show gratitude and respect, they remind us all that soccer is as much about character as it is about competition.

Have you witnessed or been part of a moment where players demonstrated kindness and respect toward a referee, even under challenging circumstances?

We believe that kindness and gratitude on the pitch create a ripple effect, uplifting soccer for everyone. Together, let’s honor those who uphold the beautiful game with fairness, integrity, and mutual respect.





# Spirit of Rivalry: Respect Between Competitors

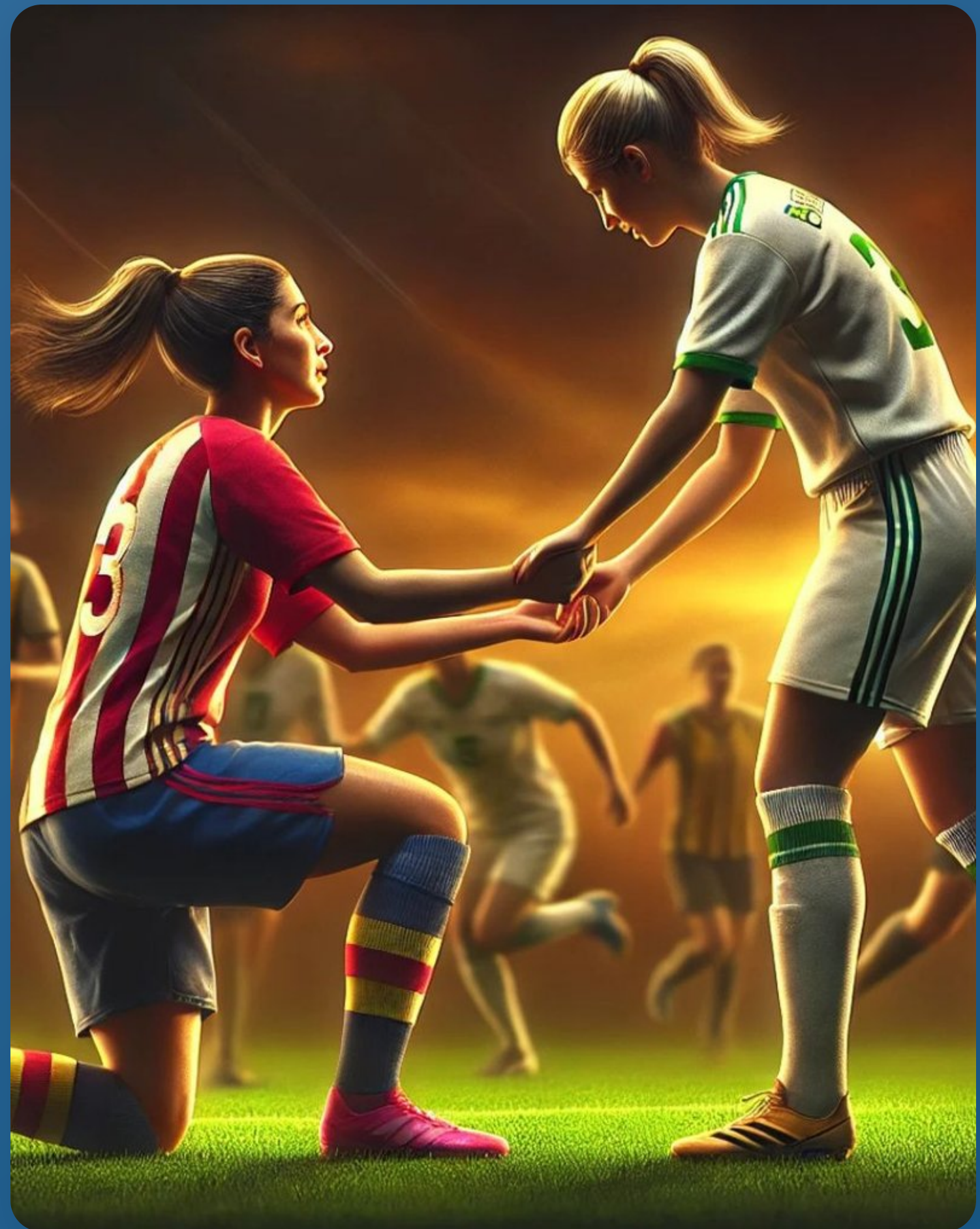
Imagine a day when every match begins and ends not just with rivalry, but with mutual respect. Think of the moments where fierce challenges on the field are balanced by acts of sportsmanship—where players lift each other up, both physically and emotionally, even in competition.

Picture this: a high school player drops to the ground, injured in the heat of the game. The whistle blows, but before the coach or medical staff can step in, a player from the opposing team is already there, offering a hand to help them up. These moments are bigger than goals or trophies—they are acts of leadership that ripple far beyond the field

True greatness lies in the ability to balance competition with empathy. When a player with vision sees the bigger picture, they recognize that lifting someone up—whether it's a teammate or a rival—elevates the game for everyone. Acts of kindness amidst the intensity of a match don't weaken a competitor; they define them as a leader. The ability to compete fiercely while showing compassion leaves a legacy far greater than any scoreline.

Imagine a future where this spirit of rivalry, grounded in class and respect, becomes the norm. A world where players instinctively pause to pick up an opponent who has fallen, or offer a pat on the back to a rival who gave everything in the match. These moments inspire others to see that kindness and respect are as much a part of the game as skill and strategy

Together, let's celebrate these acts of kindness that transcend rivalry and inspire us all to approach the game with heart and humanity. These moments inspire others to see that kindness and respect are as much a part of the game as skill and strategy.





## Behind Every Goal: Thankful for Caregivers

Embarking on the journey of youth soccer in the United States requires significant commitment from families, particularly parents. For those aiming for collegiate or professional levels, the prevalent pay-to-play model entails substantial financial investments. Over the course of a player's development, these expenses can accumulate to nearly \$100,000. Even town and recreational programs can be costly, demanding considerable time and energy from families.

Beyond the monetary costs, parents invest considerable time and energy, balancing work commitments and personal sacrifices to support their child's passion for the sport. This dedication often involves transporting children to practices and games, attending tournaments and ID camps, and providing emotional encouragement throughout the ups and downs of athletic competition.



We embrace those players who recognize these efforts and express genuine gratitude. Simple acts, such as assisting with household chores, dedicating extra time to studies to achieve better grades, or spending quality time with siblings and grandparents, demonstrate appreciation and contribute positively to family life. Even a heartfelt “I appreciate you, Mom” or “Thank you, Dad” on a random morning or before bedtime can deeply resonate with caregivers.

It's essential for young athletes to maintain a genuine understanding that they are sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, before they are players. Recognizing this perspective helps them appreciate their familial roles and the support system.

Let's commend those acts of kindness that not only show respect and gratitude for the support received but also foster personal growth and a deeper connection within the family. By going the extra mile, players can reciprocate the dedication their parents have shown, creating a healthy and sustainable balance between pursuing athletic dreams and nurturing family bonds.



# *Embracing Parents*



Sibling Support: Family Ties in Soccer .....	19
Beyond the Sidelines: Volunteering in Soccer .....	21
Creating Space for Players to Reflect .....	23
The Gamekeeper's Grace: A Parent's Role in Respect .....	25



## Sibling Support: Family Ties in Soccer

Imagine a soccer game where the sidelines aren't just filled with parents and friends but with siblings who cheer, support, and inspire one another. Siblings bring a unique dynamic to the game—they're often the first teammates, the first rivals, and the first fans in a young player's life.

Think about those moments where older siblings pass down advice, younger ones share in the joy of victory, or they simply console each other after a tough loss. These bonds shape not only the players but also the family connection, turning soccer into a shared journey of growth, joy, and inspiration.

As parents watch these sibling connections flourish, they're reminded of the beauty soccer brings to their family—not just as a sport, but as a source of deeper ties and shared memories.

What role have siblings played in your soccer story? Whether it's an older sibling teaching a new skill or a younger one cheering from the sidelines, these moments remind us of the unique beauty that family brings to the game.

To the coaches, clubs, and organizations shaping the future of soccer: how can we elevate the game by fostering support and connection within families? Let's celebrate the bonds that siblings and families create and explore ways to make soccer a shared journey of growth, joy, and inspiration.

We are committed to highlighting these family ties and their impact on and off the pitch. We must celebrate the power of soccer to strengthen family connections.





# Beyond the Sidelines: Volunteering in Soccer

While parents can get all fired up on the sidelines sometimes, they are also often the quiet champions, ensuring everything runs smoothly behind the scenes. At the grassroots and club soccer levels, they contribute by leading refreshment tables, coordinating team apps, and organizing carpools. As players advance to collegiate and elite levels, their roles evolve, but their unwavering support remains just as important and deeply valued.

Let us embrace the moments when parents do more than what's expected, embodying a spirit of service that uplifts everyone around them.

It's the parent who notices a new family finding their footing and takes the time to guide them, offering support, encouragement, and a genuine welcome. It's the parent who steps forward unprompted, providing a ride, donating gear, or being a steady presence for those in need.

These acts of care forge bonds, break down barriers, and remind us of the humanity that lies at the heart of every team.

Sometimes, extraordinary dedication means mobilizing volunteer efforts with charities or creating opportunities that make the game more accessible for families facing financial challenges. It's the parent who leads initiatives to cover costs, ensuring that no player is left behind. By representing the players, teams, and organizations with grace and dedication, these parents inspire the spirit of the game far beyond the field.

We are most grateful toward the exceptional parents whose compassion and dedication make the beautiful game even more beautiful through their actions. Their selflessness ripples outward, showing us that kindness isn't just something we do—it's who we are.





## Creating Space for Players to Reflect

Moments after a practice or game are filled with complexity. Players may be replaying key moments, questioning their decisions, reliving successes, or dwelling on mistakes. The emotions are raw—whether it’s the exhilaration of a great performance or the frustration of a tough game. It’s a time when they are deeply immersed in their own thoughts, trying to process what just unfolded on the field. This is their journey—a personal experience of growth, learning, and striving to do their best.

We embrace the parents who recognize the importance of this approach. Your respect and patience send a powerful message: that their effort and joy matter more than any single outcome. By giving them the space to reflect and the kindness of listening, you reinforce their confidence and build their love for the game. You teach them that their value isn’t tied to a win, a goal, or a perfect play but to the passion and effort they bring to the field.

As parents, our role is to support without intruding. The car ride home or the first conversation after a game is an opportunity to show respect by letting them lead. Allow them the time and space to decompress, free of critique or pressure. When they are ready to talk, curiosity is far more valuable than judgment. Asking questions like, "How did you feel out there?" or offering simple affirmations like, "I love watching you play," opens a door for connection and reflection without adding unnecessary weight to the moment.

It's not our place to judge their performance, the calls of the referee, or the choices of their coach—this only detracts from their experience and growth. At any level of soccer, from grassroots to the highest levels of competition, this lesson is universal.

Let's embrace all caregivers in their respecting the player's journey fosters an environment where the game remains a source of joy and learning.







# The Gamekeeper's Grace: A Parent's Role in Respect

Imagine a day when every parent on the sideline becomes a champion not just for their own child and team, but for the game itself—respecting the effort of every player, including opponents, and the referees and line judges who make the experience possible.

Picture genuine support and recognition that uplift not only the athletes but also the officials who ensure the integrity of the match. Imagine gratitude replacing criticism, as parents acknowledge the successes and contributions of everyone involved. A handshake, a kind word, or a smile exchanged with the referee can turn a routine match into a celebration of respect, teamwork, and community.

Let's take a moment to recognize and appreciate those moments of kindness and respect that make soccer truly special. From parents encouraging young players, to referees keeping the game fair, these acts of respect deserve to be highlighted and shared.

Help us celebrate the goodness you've witnessed on and off the pitch by sharing stories or thanking those who create a positive soccer experience. Together, we can make respect and kindness commonplace in every game.

We are committed to bringing about this vision of mutual respect, higher standards, and stronger community in soccer.



# *Embracing Coaches*



Partnerships Power Player Success 🏆 .....	28
Coach's Compassion: Nurturing Growth and Well-Being	30
Coach's Presence: Guiding Gratitude .....	32
Coach's Drive & Dedication: Above & Beyond .....	34



## Partnerships Power Player Success

When parents and coaches work together, the result is a powerful support system for players. Parents see their children's passion for the game and trust coaches to guide them in skill-building, teamwork, and advancement as effective footballers. Coaches, in turn, appreciate parents' complementary efforts towards soccer development, focusing on instilling commitment, reinforcing practice habits, and nurturing a love for the game. Together, they create a shared environment where players thrive.

Embrace a soccer community where parents and coaches respect each other's roles, recognizing the value each brings to a player's development. Parents trust the coach's decisions about player positions and game strategies, while coaches honor parents' desire to understand these choices. A transparent preseason meeting to align expectations fosters this trust.

Coaches who provide fair, open communication pre-season and post-season reflections on growth strengthen the connection between parents, players, and the team as a whole.

By collaborating, coaches and parents create a dynamic built on empowerment, mutual respect, and clarity. This partnership provides greater joy and fulfillment for both parents and coaches, as clear expectations and aligned goals ensure a productive and harmonious relationship.

As players progress through their journey, the dynamic between parents, caregivers, and coaches naturally evolves. At the collegiate and professional levels, players take on full independence in their relationships with coaches, shaping their own paths.

We honor the vital connections between parents and coaches, working together to elevate the game and its players. By fostering collaboration and transparency, we can create a soccer culture where every player is supported to grow, both as an athlete and as a person.





## Coach's Compassion: Nurturing Growth and Well-Being

A great coach does more than teach match-day tactics and training-day techniques—they inspire players to grow not just as footballers but as people. Through their guidance, they instill courage and creativity, helping players find confidence in their respective abilities and joy in the game.

Imagine a coach who takes the time to care deeply about their players, guiding them with authenticity, curiosity, and genuine caring. They notice when a player is struggling and offer encouragement, celebrate successes no matter how small, and foster an environment where mistakes are part of learning. These moments of connection between coach and player create a foundation of trust that extends far beyond the field.

Compassionate coaches understand that every player comes with their own unique challenges, strengths, and stories. They adapt their guidance to meet the needs of individuals while building a team that thrives on mutual respect and support. Their empathy creates a safe space where players can be vulnerable, knowing that their growth as a person is valued as much as their performance on the field.

The ripple effects of a coach's compassion reach far beyond their players. Teams built on trust and care often develop unshakable bonds, fostering camaraderie and resilience. Families and communities feel the positive impact as players bring the lessons of empathy, respect, and courage back into their everyday lives. A compassionate coach doesn't just shape better athletes; they shape better people.





# Coach's Presence: Guiding Gratitude

In a world filled with distractions, one of the most meaningful lessons a coach can impart is the value of presence. Before the first pass or the whistle to start training, coaches who take a moment to gather their players—bringing them together in reflection—set the tone for unity, focus, and gratitude.

Imagine a circle formed on the pitch as the sun rises or sets, players and coaches alike standing shoulder to shoulder. A coach facilitates a moment of mindfulness, urging players to leave behind the day's conflicts, the noise of social media, and individual worries. Through this act of purposeful leadership, the team reflects on their shared goals, their connection to one another, and the privilege of playing the game.



These moments of gratitude and focus transcend the game itself, nurturing trust, emotional resilience, and mutual respect. Mindful leadership like this helps players not only grow as individuals but also as better teammates—more aware of their collective strength. By building this foundation of gratitude and reflection, teams can cultivate a culture of positivity and collaboration, leading to greater cohesion and, as a natural byproduct, success on the pitch.

Have you witnessed or been part of a team that embraces gratitude or reflection as part of their routine?

We believe that instilling gratitude, focus, and purposeful connection before training shapes not just stronger athletes but better teams. Together, let's celebrate the power of pre-training reflection and mindful leadership to elevate the game and the community.





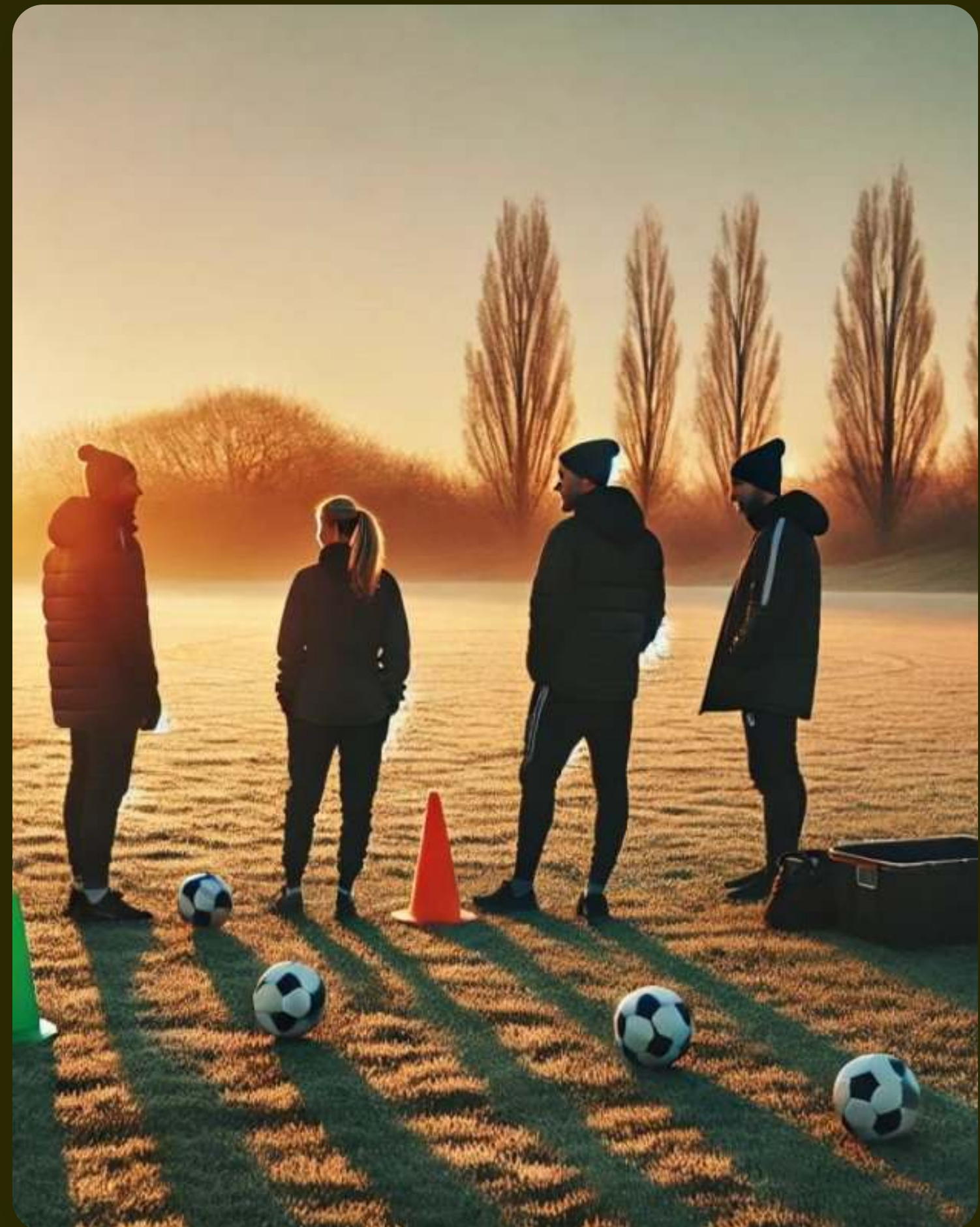
# Coach's Drive & Dedication: Above & Beyond

Coaches are often seen as the architects of a team—guiding players, running drills, and leading games. Many fulfill these expectations admirably, but this reflection is for those extraordinary coaches who go above and beyond. These are the coaches who care deeply and take immense pride in being the best they can be for their players.

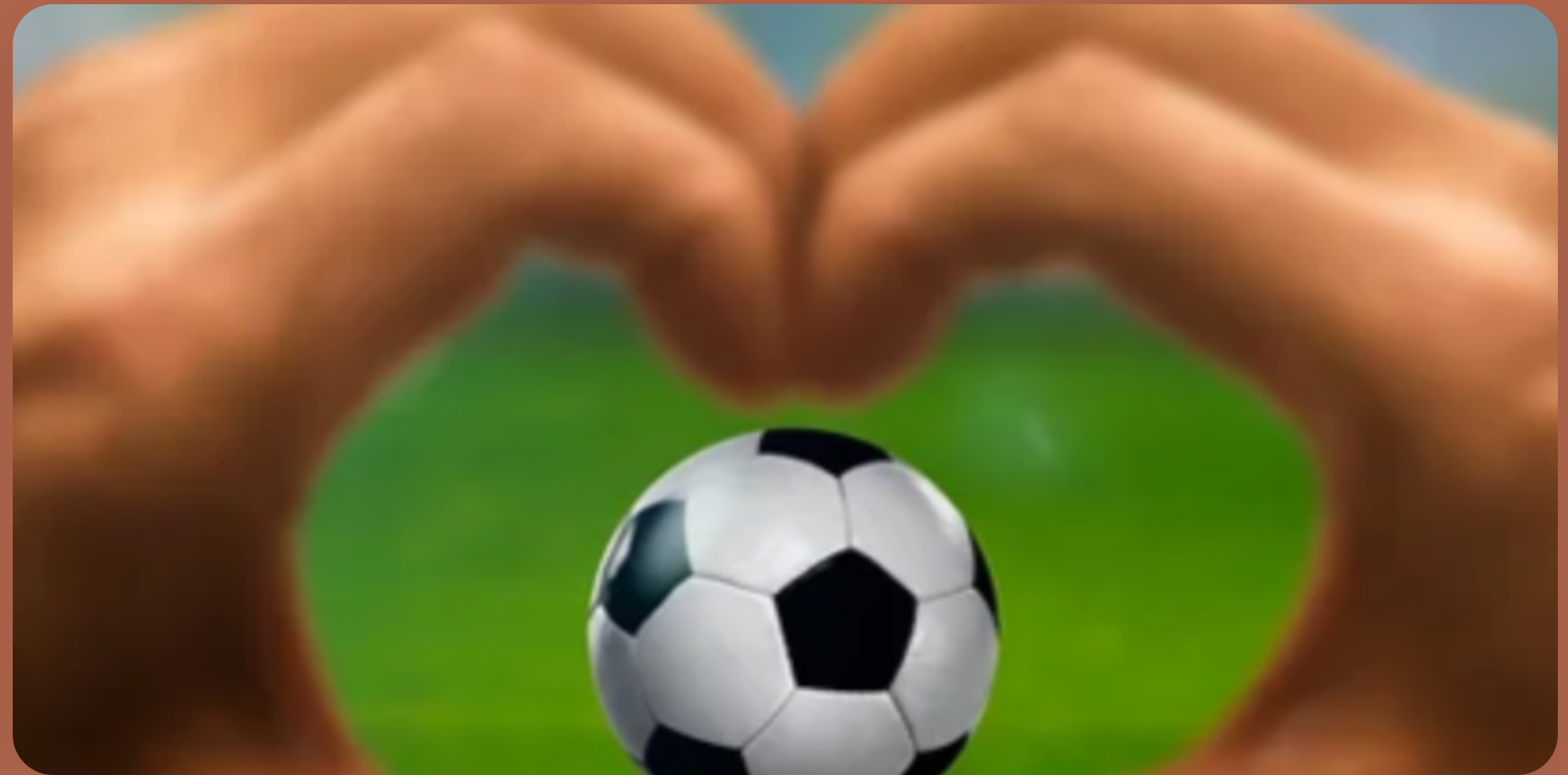
They design practices with care, tailoring each session to challenge the team and players to continually improve. They arrive early to prepare the field, ensure every cone is placed with purpose, and oftentimes review game footage late into the night to find ways to elevate their team...relentless level of effort.

This dedication often comes at personal cost. From the volunteer coach at the grassroots level staying after practice to teach a player how to juggle to the high school, college, or professional coach analyzing hours of film, all of them spend their weekends on the sidelines and their mornings crafting thoughtful feedback.

Their care and commitment shape players into better athletes and, more importantly, set the best example for our youth. We are grateful for their time, effort, and commitment. Their intense desire to do more reflects as much on their players and team dynamics as it does on setting a high standard of care that the broader community recognizes and admires.



# *Our Unsung Heroes*



Mentor's Light: Guiding the Next Generation .....	37
Trainer's Touch: Caring for Body and Mind .....	39
Before the Whistle: Thanking Those Who Set the Stage .....	41
Soccer's Steady Wheels: A Tribute to the Bus Drivers Who Keep Us Rolling	43



## Mentor's Light: Guiding the Next Generation

The bond between an experienced player and a young aspiring star is about inspiring confidence, modeling resilience, and encouraging a lifelong love of the game. Mentorship expands a relationship, maximizing joy both on the pitch and in life. It's a shared journey where the older player takes the time to truly understand the needs of the younger one, offering encouragement after setbacks, celebrating small victories, and empowering them to believe in their own potential.

Effective mentorship is rooted in the importance of vision and perception. Great mentors influence and inspire younger players, helping them see opportunities, process challenges, and make thoughtful decisions. This guidance enables aspiring players to recognize their full potential and align their purpose both on and off the field.

Imagine a mentor helping a younger teammate understand the new 3-5-2 system which may affect where and how they play, sharing lessons from their own journey, or guiding them to embrace a growth mindset—seeing challenges as opportunities to grow. These acts of mentorship create a ripple effect, fostering leadership, kindness, and clarity of vision that transcend the sport itself. Through mentorship, players learn to dream bigger and play with a sense of purpose that goes beyond the game.

Have you been guided by a mentor who helped you see the bigger picture or inspired you to grow as a player and a person?

We believe mentorship is the foundation for building future leaders. By fostering vision, confidence, and connection, we can inspire the next generation to shine brighter both on and off the field. Together, let's carry forward the light of mentorship to elevate soccer and its players.





## Trainer's Touch: Caring for Body and Mind

Athletic trainers are the unseen champions of the beautiful game. They are the ones who ice the sprains, wrap the ankles, and ensure every player is ready to take the field—both for training and on match day. But their role extends far beyond physical care. Trainers are conduits of trust, bridging the gap between players, coaches, and concerned parents. They are the steady hands that protect players' journeys as athletes.

Every taped ankle, every word of encouragement during recovery, and every late-night session spent managing an injury demonstrates the deep care they have for the players they serve. Trainers understand that time on the pitch is not just about game day—it's about recovery, resilience, and readiness. Their ability to provide emotional support, whether it's calming a nervous player before a big game or lifting their spirits after a tough injury, is just as vital as their medical expertise.

For the youngest grassroots players, this trainer could even take the form of a parent or sibling, offering comfort and care in informal ways. As athletes progress into high school, college, and professional ranks, trainers become professionally educated experts in their field. Yet, no matter their background, their role will always be at the foundation of an athlete's success.

Athletic trainers remind us that every athlete's journey is as much about nurturing the human being as it is about building the competitor. Their dedication allows players to dream bigger, train harder, and perform at their best. Embrace those moments when a trainer extends a warm smile, a reassuring nod, or a simple act of kindness that uplifts a player's well-being and spirit

Let's shine a light on the unsung heroes who help players stay fit, recover stronger, and thrive both on and off the pitch. We believe that the heart of soccer extends beyond the field, with trainers playing a vital role in protecting and empowering athletes on their journeys. We appreciate all of you!







## Before the Whistle: Thanking Those Who Set the Stage

Soccer doesn't just happen. It takes effort, care, and commitment from people we don't always see—the athletic directors and grounds crews who ensure fields are ready, games go on, and soccer thrives in our communities.

ADs and their staff are the unseen organizers who make soccer possible. They schedule games, manage field availability, and coordinate with other teams to keep everything running smoothly. Their work—late nights, endless calls, and countless logistics—ensures players can play, coaches can coach, and families can enjoy the experience. Without them, there would be no matches or tournaments. day—it's about recovery, resilience, and readiness. Their ability to provide emotional support, whether it's calming a nervous player before a big game or lifting their spirits after a tough injury, is just as vital as their medical expertise.

Grounds Crews are the caretakers of the game's surface. At dawn, they mow the grass, paint the lines, and secure the goals. After the final whistle, they stay to clean up and prepare for the next match. Their physical, often weather-beaten work is unseen but essential—the foundation every game depends on.

The act of kindness at its core invites teams to include them in celebrations—banquets, team dinners, or post-game gatherings—to show they are valued members of the soccer community.

Above and beyond, meaningful gestures might include sharing their story on social media, presenting them with a signed team jersey, organizing a special 'thank you' day in their honor, or creating a tribute video featuring messages of gratitude from players, coaches, and families.

These gestures, big or small, carry meaning when done with authenticity—not out of expectation or entitlement. The fields, pitches, and games we enjoy so much exist because of their quiet, consistent efforts.





## Soccer's Steady Wheels: A Tribute to the Bus Drivers Who Keep Us Rolling

Every team's journey begins with someone who prioritizes safety, reliability, and care—our bus drivers. These unsung heroes are the first to greet us with a smile and the last to wave goodbye after a long day. Rain or shine, they ensure players, coaches, and families get to their matches and trainings safely, often waiting patiently on the sidelines while the action unfolds.

For many drivers, the role goes beyond simply transporting a team. Some were footballers themselves, carrying memories of their own days on the pitch. They understand the thrill of the game and the camaraderie of the team.

Yet, their work can sometimes feel lonely—they stay by the bus, ensuring everything is ready for the next leg of the journey, while the rest of us celebrate victories or process the sting of defeat. They see both sides of the emotional journey and handle it all with calm, steady balance, quietly supporting the team no matter the outcome. Learning their name, asking about their journey, or sharing a moment of thanks as players board or step off the bus can brighten their day.

Let's embrace those coaches and teams that consider bus drivers part of the soccer family experience. Since a team may have multiple bus drivers throughout the season, it might be logistically difficult to invite them to a team celebration or provide a signed card. However, small random acts of kindness and moments of gratitude can brighten their day and remind them that their role matters and is appreciated.

We embrace the bus drivers who make our journeys possible. They don't just transport us—they carry our dreams, our memories, and the spirit of the game with every mile they drive.



# *Grassroots to Pro*



A Kinder Pyramid: Keeping Players in the Game for Life .....	46
Investing in Dreams: Scholarships .....	48
Fields of Opportunity: Gift to the Community .....	50
Investing in Coaches, Enriching Players: A Club's True Impact	52



## A Kinder Pyramid: Keeping Players in the Game for Life

The structure of soccer can sometimes overlook the opportunities surrounding the sport that can be enriched beyond playing professionally. By reimagining this traditional framework, we can broaden the base of opportunities, ensuring that the longer individuals stay engaged with soccer, the more avenues they discover to contribute meaningfully.

Clubs play a pivotal role in reshaping this paradigm. By fostering an environment that values diverse contributions, clubs help players recognize the multitude of opportunities within the soccer ecosystem. Through thoughtful leadership, clubs demonstrate that success in the sport isn't limited to achieving professional status—it's about building skills, connections, and a lifelong love for the game.

Embracing a shift in perspective means valuing all roles within the sport. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders—including parents, educators, coaches, mentors, and community leaders—are essential in transforming this vision into reality. Together, these groups can trust and support clubs, schools, and soccer organizations in shaping a player's journey.

We embrace the idea that by inverting the pyramid, we can keep more players in the game for longer, allowing opportunities to expand over their lifetimes. This act of kindness not only enriches their personal soccer journeys but also empowers them to pass on their love for the game to future generations. That continuity is what truly makes soccer beautiful.





# Investing in Dreams: Scholarships

In most of the U.S. soccer system, from grassroots to premier levels, the pay-to-play system is both a reality and a challenge. While it allows the better clubs to grow and deliver quality programming, it can also leave many talented and passionate players behind—those who don't have the financial means to access the game. Accessibility in soccer is about far more than just identifying the next star; it's about fairness, opportunity, and making sure as many of our youth as possible have the chance to experience the joy, growth, and connection this game offers.

For families without the economic resources to afford club soccer, scholarships can be life-changing. They open the door for young players to step onto the pitch, dream bigger, and experience the thrill of being part of a team. But the greatest act of kindness goes beyond offering scholarships—it's when clubs make inclusivity a central part of who they are.



The clubs that go above and beyond don't just waive fees; they welcome scholarship families with dignity, treating them as equals and ensuring they feel seamlessly integrated into the team. Kindness is shown when these clubs remove stigmas, provide gear, offer transportation assistance, and extend emotional support—making players and their families feel valued at every turn.

The reality is that for every player who receives a scholarship, there are countless others who dream of playing but are left out entirely. Let's embrace the idea that money in soccer can be a force for good when it's used to benefit more groups, including the many who lack financial means.

We understand that the pay-to-play system operates within a free market—where organizations deserve a fair return for their efforts. At the same time, by doing their part to make soccer more accessible, they are creating more loyalty and a virtuous cycle where communities thrive, clubs grow stronger, and we end up with better soccer players—and more winning—both on and off the pitch.





# Fields of Opportunity: Gift to the Community

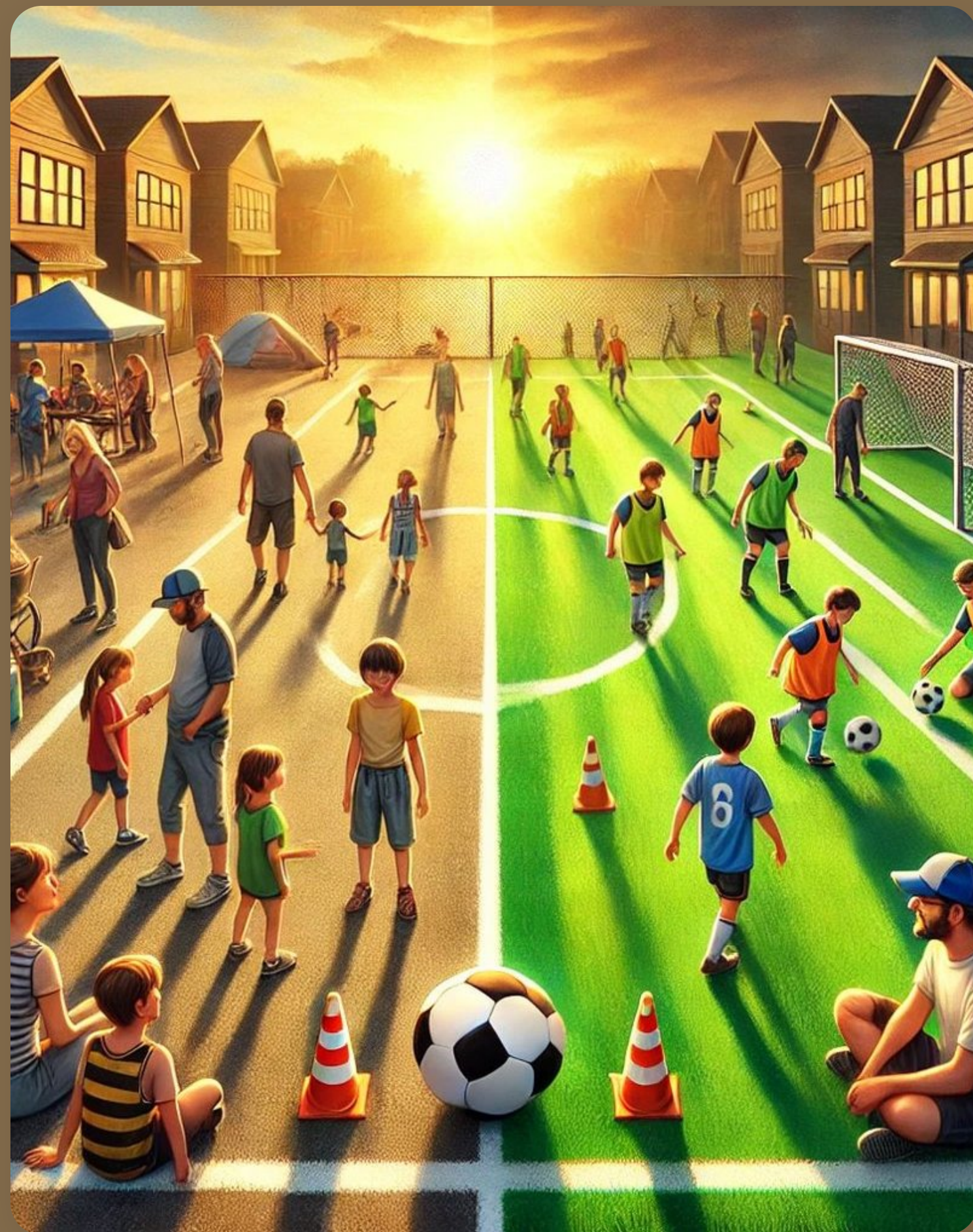
Imagine a world where soccer becomes a true equalizer—a place where every child, regardless of their family's financial circumstances, can experience the joy, growth, and community the game offers. Clubs have the unique opportunity to lead.

Picture fields filled with skill-building, connection, and joy, where clubs work to eliminate barriers and ensure the game's love and lessons are shared with all. Some clubs already embody this vision, hosting free clinics, providing scholarships, and fostering programs that make soccer a tool for empowerment and inclusion. These acts of kindness create more than athletes—they build stronger, more connected communities.

For families without the economic resources to afford club soccer, scholarships can be life-changing. They open the door for young players to be part of a team.

Have you seen a club go beyond the pay-to-play model to create opportunities for everyone? Share those stories and help us celebrate organizations that embrace accessibility and inclusion. Let's amplify the work of those who see soccer as more than a game—it's a bridge to connection, empowerment, and equality.

We are committed to highlighting these stories and supporting the leaders who make soccer fields a space of opportunity for all. Watch for upcoming episodes where we explore how clubs can transform their communities and reshape the future of the sport.





## Investing in Coaches, Enriching Players: A Club's True Impact

Grassroots, high school, and club coaches play a vital role in shaping not just footballers but great people. By fostering growth mindsets and creating a positive culture for each player, they instill confidence, foster teamwork, and build resilience both on and off the pitch. Their role extends beyond teaching the soccer skills, tactics, and techniques. By equipping coaches with resources like the art of effective communication, they can guide players to develop and grow their confidence, along with other important skills, practices, and mindsets.

Clubs and schools that value holistic coach education create transformative change by equipping coaches with skills in communication, resilience, mental health awareness, nutrition, mentoring, and more.

These areas provide measurable support for players, enhancing their development throughout their football journeys.

True impact is achieved when clubs and school programs prioritize investments in professional coaching development, recognizing its importance for shaping players both on and off the pitch. Clubs should value this development on par with the standards set by coaching licenses such as those at the Grassroots or D-A levels. Far too often in the game today, these are regarded as routine requirements rather than essential strategic priorities for the club.

We celebrate clubs and organizations that support this crucial development by making it accessible and integral to their mission. This commitment is truly an act of kindness, creating a ripple effect that shapes well-rounded players and inspires their teammates. It strengthens teams, elevates clubs, and ultimately enriches entire communities.



# *Our Community*



Soccer as the Great Unifier .....	55
Honoring Adaptive Soccer and the Players Who Inspire Us	57
Sponsor's Spirit: Investing in Dreams .....	59
The Beautiful Connection Between Generations in Soccer ...	61

# Soccer as the Great Unifier

Football is the world's game. It has the power to bridge gaps, break barriers, and bring people together across cultures, races, religions, and generations. But for the sport to truly live up to its potential, we must stand against the forces of discrimination and intolerance that threaten its unifying spirit.

Prejudice – subtle or overt – can harm players, coaches, referees, and fans alike. Whether it's unfair treatment, exclusion, or hateful words, these actions erode the values of teamwork and respect that make soccer so special.



For Players: Be champions of inclusion. Celebrate the diversity of teammates and opponents, embracing differences in race, religion, identity, and personal beliefs. A simple act of solidarity, like standing up to harmful words, can speak volumes.

For Coaches and Parents: Set the tone. Build teams where respect comes before results, and every player feels valued, regardless of their background, faith, or personal freedoms. You shape the culture that young players carry into the game and into life.

For Fans at Games: Lead with respect in the stands. Your words and cheers should uplift, not tear down. Discrimination, slurs, or hateful behavior of any kind have no place in the game. Cheer for the love of soccer, and accept every player as part of the sport we all share.

For Clubs and Organizations: Act boldly. Commit to zero tolerance for discrimination in all its forms and implement programs that promote education, equity, and inclusion.

To truly make this beautiful game even more beautiful, we must stand for unity, dignity, and respect for all.







# Honoring Adaptive Soccer and the Players Who Inspire Us

Football is often celebrated as the world's game, but its true beauty lies in its ability to adapt, include, and inspire. Adaptive soccer reminds us that courage knows no boundaries. While it may not always receive widespread media attention, the players participating in power soccer, blind soccer, and other adaptive formats redefine the game with resilience and passion.

Organizations and events such as the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA), FIPFA (Fédération Internationale de Powerchair Football Association), United States Power Soccer Association (USPSA), the Paralympic Games, and the IBSA World Games create opportunities for athletes with disabilities to compete at the highest levels, demonstrating the game's inclusivity and boundless potential.

For those who play soccer without physical or cognitive challenges, it's easy to overlook the freedom the game offers. Adaptive soccer players remind us to appreciate that freedom and to celebrate those who overcome barriers to step onto the pitch. Their stories of grit and perseverance inspire us all, showing that the love of the game transcends all limitations.

Players, coaches, parents, clubs, and organizations fortunate enough to enjoy the game at full capacity have the opportunity to give back. Supporting adaptive soccer can take many forms—donating to organizations that fund these programs, volunteering at matches, or inviting players with disabilities to join local soccer events. Acts of kindness, whether large or small, help create a more inclusive and compassionate soccer community.

We all embrace and celebrate adaptive soccer players and the communities that uplift them. May we all draw inspiration from their courage and strive to give back in meaningful ways.





# Sponsor's Spirit: Investing in Dreams

Sponsorship in soccer goes beyond logos on jerseys or banners on a field—it's a partnership rooted in genuine care and shared goals. Sponsors—whether businesses, brands, or booster organizations—empower teams by providing resources that make the game accessible and impactful.

Imagine a sponsor who attends games, engages with players, and takes pride in their role as part of the team's story. In turn, teams and coaches reciprocate by learning about the sponsors' mission, showing gratitude through actions, and even participating in sponsor events. This symbiotic relationship reflects the best of what sponsorship can be: an active, genuine connection that uplifts both sides.

Beyond these interactions, sponsors and teams often find a common purpose in giving back. Together, they collaborate to make a difference in the community at large—organizing charitable initiatives, hosting youth clinics, or volunteering for local causes. These acts of collective generosity create a ripple effect, strengthening bonds between the team, sponsor, and community. It's not just about support on the pitch but about creating a legacy of shared purpose and impact.

Sponsors see their investment as a way to nurture potential and strengthen the bonds of community, while teams reciprocate through gratitude, involvement, and action. Together, they foster resilience, gratitude, and a collective belief in making a difference far beyond the game itself.

We believe in the power of genuine sponsorships to not only elevate soccer but also give back to the communities it touches. Together, let's celebrate the brands, businesses, and organizations that invest in making the world a better place through soccer.





# The Beautiful Connection Between Generations in Soccer

Within our beautiful game, the bonds forged between generations of players go far beyond the field. The grassroots teams—those small, hopeful squads of young players—are where dreams take root. These teams are the foundation of not just great players but also thriving communities.

Across our neighborhoods and towns, we see inspiring moments of connection: grassroots teams playing scrimmages at halftime during high school, college, or pre-professional matches. The younger players gaze in admiration at the older athletes they aspire to emulate, while the established players are reminded of where their own journeys began. This cycle of inspiration and gratitude creates something truly special.



## The Beautiful Connection Between Generations in Soccer

Within our beautiful game, the bonds forged between generations of players go far beyond the field. The grassroots teams—those small, hopeful squads of young players—are where dreams take root. These teams are the foundation of not just great players but also thriving communities.

Across our neighborhoods and towns, we see inspiring moments of connection: grassroots teams playing scrimmages at halftime during high school, college, or pre-professional matches. The younger players gaze in admiration at the older athletes they aspire to emulate, while the established players are reminded of where their own journeys began. This cycle of inspiration and gratitude creates something truly special.



## *Our Recent Podcasts*

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| 'Eyes Up': How Vision Training Transforms the Pitch to Life with TJ Kostecky, College Soccer Coach, Author, Motivational Speaker | 64 |
| Why Transformative Leadership and Kindness: From Futsal to Rosati Leadership Academy with Founder & Exec Dir. Chris White        | 65 |
| How Athletes Can Make Money and an Impact with Name, Image & Likeness (NIL) with Greg Glynn, Founder of Pliable Marketing        | 66 |
| How 'The Dream' Has Transformed Women's Soccer with Greg Rowe, Executive Director of The Boston Dream Soccer Association         | 67 |
| Holistic Wellness & Performance Nutrition with Beth Wolfgram, MS, RD, CD, CSSD, CSCS, for Caregivers, Coaches and Players        | 68 |
| How the Pathway to Pro Works: From Dreams to Contracts with Joe Ferrara, Commissioner of United Women's Soccer League            | 69 |

These are from  
October to December  
of 2024. Subscribe on  
YouTube, Spotify, or  
Apple! We do a few  
every month

# 'Eyes Up': How Vision Training Transforms the Pitch to Life with TJ Kostecky, College Soccer Coach, Author, Motivational Speaker





# Why Transformative Leadership and Kindness: From Futsal to Rosati Leadership Academy with Founder & Exec Dir. Chris White



# How Athletes Can Make Money and an Impact with Name, Image & Likeness (NIL) with Greg Glynn, Founder of Pliable Marketing



# How 'The Dream' Has Transformed Women's Soccer with Greg Rowe, Executive Director of The Boston Dream Soccer Association



# Holistic Wellness & Performance Nutrition with Beth Wolfgram, MS, RD, CD, CSSD, CSCS, for Caregivers, Coaches and Players



# How the Pathway to Pro Works: From Dreams to Contracts with Joe Ferrara, Commissioner of United Women's Soccer League



The Footy4MySoul podcast holds a deeply personal meaning. It is rooted in my love for football, a sport that has shaped my life in countless ways, but it also reflects my journey with multiple sclerosis (MS). Now in my fourth year of a clinical trial for MS, I've had to step back from being as active in the sport I love.

*Soccer remains my therapy—a source of strength and inspiration—and the reason behind the "4" in Footy4MySoul: **Curiosity, Caring, Courage, and Creativity**. These are the values that shape how I see the game, how I strive to live my life, and how I hope to impact others.*

100% of the net proceeds from our merch in 2025 will be donated to **MS4MS.org**, an organization helping to support MS research at Johns Hopkins University. Supporting this cause is deeply personal to me, and I am endlessly grateful.

# Let's 'Merch' to a Cure

[CLICK HERE FOR TRUCKERS HATS!](#)



Free shipping in the US. 100% net proceeds to MS4MS.org



[CLICK FOR  
WOMEN'S TEE](#)

Free shipping in the US. 100% net proceeds to  
MS4MS.org



**CLICK HERE  
FOR COACH'S  
HATS!**



Free shipping in the US. 100% net proceeds to  
MS4MS.org

**CLICK HERE  
FOR FLEECE  
VEST!**



I wear this on the podcast recordings and love it!  
Free shipping in the US. 100% net proceeds to  
MS4MS.org

**CLICK HERE  
FOR UNDER  
ARMOUR  
COLLAR  
SHIRT!**



I wear this on the podcast recordings and love it!  
Free shipping in the US. 100% net proceeds to  
MS4MS.org

**CLICK HERE  
FOR OUR  
HOODIE!**



Free shipping in the US. 100% net  
proceeds to MS4MS.org

**CLICK HERE  
FOR COLOR  
MUGS!**



I own the the 15 ounce mug...it's really nice quality! Free shipping in the US. 100% net proceeds to MS4MS.org

# Substack Community

The screenshot displays a website interface for a podcast. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for Home, Podcast (highlighted), Notes, Archive, and About. The main content area features a large video player with a dark green background. The video title is "Experiences Connected from Footy4MySoul Episodes", with a subtitle "Curiosity + Caring + Courage + Creativity. From innovative strategies to heartfelt stories, we're here to inspire and inform." The video player shows a silhouette of a person kicking a ball against a sunset background. Below the video player, there are four video thumbnails arranged in a row. Each thumbnail includes a play button, a title, and a duration. The thumbnails are: 1. "Acts of Kindness: Fueling Soccer's Soul & The Butterfly Effect" (1:18), 2. "My Perspectives in Play" (19:00), 3. "The Impact of Sleep on Performance" (1:45), and 4. "Holistic Wellness and Sports Nutrition with Beth Wolfram" (1:52). Below each thumbnail is a corresponding title: "Happy 'Day After'", "'My Perspectives in Play'", "The Impact of Sleep on", and "Experiences Connected".

Home **Podcast** Notes Archive About

## Experiences Connected from Footy4MySoul Episodes

Curiosity + Caring + Courage + Creativity. From innovative strategies to heartfelt stories, we're here to inspire and inform.

LATEST · 1:18  
HAPPY "DAY AFTER" THANKSGIVING AND ACTS OF KINDNESS

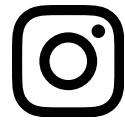
**Acts of Kindness: Fueling Soccer's Soul & The Butterfly Effect**  
1:18

**'My Perspectives in Play'**  
19:00

**The Impact of Sleep on Performance**  
1:45

**Holistic Wellness and Sports Nutrition with Beth Wolfram**  
1:52

**Happy "Day After"**   **'My Perspectives in Play'**   **The Impact of Sleep on**   **Experiences Connected**



# ACTS OF KINDNESS

FUELING SOCCER'S  
SOUL

DIGITAL BOOK FROM THE CREATOR OF FOOTY4MYSOUL  
JUSTIN T. VAN TIL

