

SOCCER AMERICA **YOUTH SOCCER LETTER**

Edited by Dan Woog



CATALYST SC

NEWS Briefs

■ Former New York Cosmos and U.S. national team member **Ricky Davis** has been named director of coaching for the Junior United Soccer Club of Yorba Linda, Calif.

■ Players of the **Poolesville (Md.) Stars**, a third-grade recreational team, created a quilt out of 12x12-inch squares. All were based on the question "What do we want to hear from our parents on the sidelines?"

■ **"Soccer Systems and Strategies"** is a new book by Jens Bangsbo and Birger Peitersen, two Danish federation staff coaches, who present soccer's four primary systems of play (4-3-3, 4-4-2, 3-5-2 and 3-4-3) and explain their variety of attacking and defensive styles. For information contact Human Kinetics, 1607 N. Market St., PO Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825, tel: (217) 351-5076; fax: (217) 351-2674; Web site: www.humankinetics.com.

■ **iSignUpNOW.com** (iSUN) and the **National Alliance For Youth Sports** have formed a partnership to further the use of the Internet to improve organized youth sports. iSUN will

become the Alliance's online provider of sign-up services, helping the non-profit organization educate volunteer coaches, administrators, officials and parents by creating opportunities for secure registration and enhanced communication via the Internet.

■ The Oklahoma Secondary Schools Activities Association has adopted the old MLS Shootout to decide tied matches in regional playoffs. According to OSSAA soccer director **Ed Shaekely**, "We had to find a way to get teams home or on their way home before midnight."

■ **John Cirillo** has been named the North Carolina Youth Soccer Association's new director of coaching and coaching education. A USSF "A" license coach, he is a former assistant coach at his alma mater, the University of New Hampshire, and North Carolina.

■ At the urging of soccer volunteer **Andy Marcoux**, a retired police officer, the Dublin (Calif.) United Soccer League has begun fingerprinting adult volunteer coaches. The need for background checks was illustrated recently by the news that a former girls soccer coach in nearby Pleasanton was arrested for possessing child pornography and charges of indecent exposure.

Where skill is the No. 1 priority

A Northern California 'club' focuses exclusively on teaching children ball technique.

At 9 a.m. on a mid-June Sunday, the Aptos (Calif.) Polo Grounds swarms with 7- and 8-year-olds. All wear green T-shirts and black shorts. Each has a soccer ball. And, just as in Europe or South America — but rare in this country — every child seems completely comfortable with the ball.

They juggle, using every body part. They pull the ball back with either foot, lean low, then cut back in the opposite direction. They do it with grace and at just the right soccer tempo. It is as smooth a demonstration of U-9 skills as can be found anywhere in the United States.

The T-shirts say Catalyst Soccer Club, but this is not your ordinary soccer club. Catalyst does not field elite teams. The club is not into matches or competition. It exists to teach skills. Skill-building, the club's founder believes, is the key to success — and, equally important, soccer enjoyment.

Dozens of young children and their parents fervently agree.

The Catalyst coaches — founder Paul Holocher, a former San Jose Clash player, now the men's coach at UC Santa Cruz; Bob Poser, longtime club coach; and a dozen or so top male and female players from nearby colleges — are obsessed with their mission.

They take the field 15 minutes before players arrive, juggling and

demonstrating moves for their young charges to emulate. They refer often to "skill-builder cards," pocket-size lists players use to check off juggles and moves they've worked on at home.

But they are still kids. When Poser says, "You can juggle with any part of your body," one boy pipes up, "Even your butt?" Everyone laughs.

EVERY SUNDAY. The Catalyst mixes strong instruction with high standards, constant incentives and close, personal relationships. The result keeps children coming

Paul Holocher, a former San Jose Clash player and NCAA title-winner with Santa Clara, founded Catalyst SC.

back, week after week.

The not-for-profit Catalyst organization offers three levels of training, at a cost of \$150-\$250 per season. The Premier Development Program meets every Sunday for two-hour sessions at three age levels: U-9, U-11 and U-13. There are 45 boys and 45 girls in each age group. Players are se-

Positive Coaching Alliance

The Catalyst Soccer Club gets high marks from parents for its player-centered approach to teaching. Part of the reason, says club spokesman Bob Poser, is because the club embraces the ideals of the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA).

The PCA is a non-profit, Stanford University-based organization whose motto is "Transforming youth sports so sports can transform youth." Its mission is to change the nature of what it means to be a youth sports coach by promoting a "compelling mental model of the positive coach" and instigate a nationwide dialogue on ways in which youth sports can best foster positive

character traits.

The PCA's "Positive Coaching Mental Model" includes three main points. "Honoring the game" means demonstrating respect for rules, opponents, officials, teammates and traditions. "Redefining 'winner'" means focusing on effort, learning and improvement rather than the Scoreboard, and developing the courage to make mistakes and rebound from them. "Filling emotional tanks" means recognizing that athletes need positive reinforcement to play their best.

The PCA works with national and local youth sports organizations to promote the positive coaching principles. The PCA offers "Standards of

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lected through tryouts (which Catalyst calls "play days"), based on skill and motivation.

The second level, Advanced Skill Builders, is for the 20-30 children in each group not chosen for the Premier Development Program. The Skill Builders group meets once a week, but there are no tryouts. There also is a weekly program for 4-, 5- and 6-year-olds. None of the programs conflicts with players' regular club teams.

Catalyst calls itself "complementary" to other teams and seeks to serve all clubs in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Holocher calls it "a sustained mentoring program." In reality, it is less a club than a 14-week-long camp. But what a camp it is.

Shawn Percell, who scored three goals in last fall's NCAA tournament for national runner-up Santa Clara, has been a Catalyst coach for two years.

"I didn't get real training until I was 14," he says. "And because my technique was not real good, it took me longer to get tactics. Today kids get technique much earlier. That's important for good soccer."

In the two-hour sessions, which include individual moves, dribbling and passing techniques, and passing and possession games that emphasize problem-solving, Catalyst coaches encourage players to experiment, even make mistakes. Most training is game-related, and every session ends with a short-sided scrimmage.

Paul Lester, head women's coach at UC Santa Cruz, directs

the Catalyst's girls team. He says, "Because this progresses over a 14-week period, we can give bite-size information that eventually all fits together. I've seen more success here than at any single-week camp I've done — and I've done a lot.

"Because this is not about team-building, with all that pressure to win, we can really stress getting better and having fun. There is competition, but it's all in the context of training and improving."

LOCAL CLUBS BENEFIT. Some of the parents are club coaches picking up pointers for their own training sessions. Parent Mike Martin notes: "This is better than what I got growing up in England 30 years ago. I played every day with my buddies, but I learned bad habits as well as good ones. If I had this when I was a kid, I might have ended up playing for Liverpool."

Mimi Kreeft adds: "They really learn respect because each kid is treated as an individual. The young coaches are great role models: polite, clean-cut, the kind of people I want my child to be around." (The Catalyst Soccer Club has embraced the principles of the Positive Coaching Alliance. *See accompanying story.*)

Area club coaches seem to welcome the Catalyst. "It's great individual training that kids can't get in a team environment," says Tom Morano, Scotts Valley U-12 boys coach. "Local clubs can't bring in pro and college players

as high-quality coaches. Here kids can play different positions without worrying what it means for the upcoming game. And it's great that kids from different teams come together here and develop friendships."

The Catalyst enjoys a good relationship with the San Jose Earthquakes, the MLS team that plays 45 minutes away. Catalyst players visit Spartan Stadium, and players reciprocate with public appearances. Justin Evans told Catalyst players, "When I was your age, I did, like, 10 juggles. So those of you who do 70 or 80: You're a lot better than me!"

But the best advertisement for the Catalyst Soccer Club comes when Holocher arrives at the Aptos Polo Ground at mid-afternoon on the final Sunday of spring season. He'd just finished his "A" license coaching course and drove three hours to make it back before the U-13 session ends.

Three dozen youngsters run over, hugging and high-fiving the charismatic Catalyst founder. His toddler son, Lucas, climbs in his arms. But a 9-year-old player wants Holocher's attention, too. "I scored three goals today!" he shouts.

Holocher gives him thumbs-up. And as every other Catalyst player starts describing his own latest success, Holocher beams.

(For more information on the Catalyst Soccer

Excellence" to outstanding "educational-athletic" organizations and a "Tool Kit for Change Agents" to help youth sports leaders implement those standards. The PCA also sponsors four types of workshops for coaches, parents and youth sports leaders, and it publishes a quarterly newsletter.

PCA's founder and director, Jim Thompson, teaches courses in coaching and leadership at Stanford. The staff includes Ed Anderson, a three-sport athlete at Williams College, University of Colorado School of Law graduate and current Stanford assistant lacrosse coach; and Neil Phillips, former Harvard University Athlete of the Year.

Robin Ove, vice president of the Scotts Valley/San Lorenzo Valley (Calif.) Soccer Club, is a

PCA supporter. She explains: "In their heart of hearts, coaches want to do the right thing. They know the importance of sportsmanship and camaraderie, but they don't always have the tools to teach it. The Positive Coaching Alliance gives manageable bits of information. You can leave their two-hour workshop and see immediate results. For coaches who already coach positively, it's validation. For other coaches, it's a different way of looking at things."

(For further information, contact: Positive Coaching Alliance, Department of Athletics, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6150; tel.: (650) 725-0024; Web site: www.positivecoach.org.)

Club: PO Box 1288, Aptos, CA 95001; phone: (831) 688-1505; Web site: www.catalystsoccer.com.)

Danny Pena, now with the LA Galaxy, celebrates a Fram Culver's Bobak-coached 1986 McGuire Cup win.



PHIL STEPHENS PHOTOS

Bobak coaches champions 14 years apart

In 1986, Tad Bobak coached Fram Culver to the McGuire Cup (boys under-19) national championship. In 2000, he led a second team to a U.S. youth crown. This time it was another Southern California team — the Blues — but the trophy was the U-16 Patricia Masotto Cup. Yes, the Blues are a girls team.

Tad Bobak (left) has again brought a youth national title to Southern California.

The national tournament has changed a great deal in 14 years, says Bobak. The 50-year-old professional coach — who inaugurated the California Youth Soccer Association-South girls ODP program and has served as head women's coach at UC Santa Barbara — recalls traveling to New Britain, Conn., for the three-day McGuire Cup semifinals. The winners stayed on; the losers went home.

Today's national championships involve 32 teams in eight age groups (boys and girls U-16 through U-19). The tournament spans eight days; each team plays three round-robin matches before the finals. "It's a lot more draining now," Bobak says.

Competition was tough back in 1986, but this year Bobak found it even more so. Every Blues game was decided by one goal; the final went to overtime before the Region IV champs eked out a 1-0 victory over Virginia's Prince William Sparklers. "That's great for soccer," Bobak says.

The New Britain event was well organized, but was a much lower scale than the 2000 tourney. Held at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., this year's festivities began with a spectacular opening ceremony, involving music, videos and an enormous banquet.

Bobak says: "The hotels, restaurants and environment were first-class. And the soccer complex is state-of-the-art."

But some things have not changed much. Fram Culver and the Blues shared an ambition to be the best and prepared long and hard to reach the finals. The boys squad worked together for seven years; the girls spent six. Both teams traveled, Bobak says, "a long, tough road with plenty of high, low and controversial moments."

The Fram Culver team featured several players who achieved success after their youth days were over, including U.S. pros Marcelo Balboa and Danny and Carlos Pena, and Salvadoran national team member Waldir Guerra. Perhaps

14 years from now the Blues will boast similar famous names — and perhaps Tad Bobak will be back at the tournament, coaching another national champion team.