

2020-2021 Report of the President & DOC

<https://columbusmssoccer.org/>

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Board of Directors 2021-2022

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Overview

Columbus Soccer Organization (CSO) is a non-profit that offers four distinct soccer programs in the area. These programs are recreational soccer, competitive soccer through Columbus United Soccer Club, TOP Soccer for players with special needs, and adult soccer for players 19 years of age and older. CSO offers player and coaching development opportunities to our members as well as the community. In addition to our programs, CSO is proud to support the sport of soccer throughout the area.

CSO is a community-based organization rooted in the Golden Triangle. It serves the community and gives back to the community—in this report I will note many ways in which CSO gave back to the community this year. As a membership organization it also represents the community and is responsive to the needs of the community we serve.

The 2020-2021 year has been a challenging one. The organization grappled with the challenges presented by Covid. And, as will be described in this report, navigated those challenges exceptionally well. CSO's operation of recreational soccer independently of CRD was another challenge that was handled with great success. And, overall, CSO has the challenges common to a dynamic and growing organization. Let us call them growing pains. How do we continue to serve an ever-growing number of players? How do we stay focused on the good of the entire organization as we grow when some would prefer "business as usual"? How do we keep our door open and welcome new constituents while keeping current ones? And how do we confront and manage the challenge of being one of only a handful of independent soccer organizations in the area?

To all these challenges and questions, I feel certain that CSO will manage them as we have in the past. By individuals putting their oars in the water and working together.

CSO Accomplishments

This year was one full of challenges but also accomplishments. Below are some of the major accomplishments of this year. This section references accomplishments of the organization as a whole and not specific programs.

- CSO completed its third full year of the new governing structure by a board of directors. Importantly, CSO nominated and approved 4 new board members at the AGM. This is important. It shows that the organization “has legs” and will thrive when there is the normal and natural turnover on the board and other positions.
- CSO Soccer Closet
This year CSO is officially launched “The CSO Soccer Closet”. This allows anyone to donate gently used and washed soccer gear—cleats, socks, balls, shorts, keeper gloves, even training apparel like t-shirts, sweatshirts, and backpacks. In the fall dozens of recreational players used the closet and in the spring adult and competitive players utilized the closet. Donations to the closet are brisk and in fall of 2021 we will be able to offer more gear than ever for free to our membership.
- CSO awarded the first “CSO Collegiate Scholarship” to help one of our players as they moved on to higher education. This scholarship is open only to individuals who played for CSO.

The scholarship fund was established by generous donations in honor of Marolyn Albertson, the grandmother of Columbus United coach Dave Albertson. A local business has committed to the fund for the next three years. The first recipient of the \$500 scholarship was Coen Velek. In the spring of 2021 addition funding was added to the scholarship account so that CSO could honor its commitment to the availability of renewal. In the spring of 2021 Reagan Greenhaw was awarded the scholarship and the scholarship was renewed for Coen Velek.

- In 2020-2021 CSO reached a record level of community support. The following sponsors sponsored CSO which benefitted the organization as a whole and all of its programs.
 - Trout Family Dentistry
 - J 5
 - Dick’s Sporting Goods
 - King & Associates Cardiology
 - Columbus Orthopaedic
 - TGV Properties, LLC
 - Next Stage Media
 - Dex Imaging
 - Allstate Insurance
 - Columbus Recycling
 - 4 County Foundation—Grant to support TOP Soccer

So far in 2021 we have the following sponsors—this includes two sponsors who generously donated in the fall of 2020 after the annual campaign was completed. They will be recognized in 20-21.

- TGV Properties, LLC
- The Rowdy Foundation
- JDS Wealth Strategies
- King & Associated Cardiology

- BankFirst
 - Financial Concepts
 - Trout Family Dental
 - Dick's Sporting Goods
- CSO installed the new sponsor's sign at the Lowndes County Complex.
- CSO continued a strong working relationship with the Lowndes County Recreation Department. LCRD provided training space for Columbus United teams, a field for TOP Soccer, and partnered with CSO to offer adult soccer and recreational soccer.
- CSO continued to present a dynamic, relevant, and regularly updated web and social media presence. We are grateful to Next Stage Media for the creative work and web design.
- CSO presented a series of successful "special event" night in the fall during the recreational soccer season. These included our very well-received "Salute to Law Enforcement" and our "Salute to Sponsors" night catered by Huck's.

I was particularly proud to organize and execute our "Grilling for a Cure" evening. At that event local grill masters came to the complex to grill their favorite dishes to raise money for North Mississippi breast cancer charities. In total \$1500 was raised in a single evening for donation.

- I was happy to be able to write the grant in cooperation with Anika Perkins to International Paper for new equipment for the concession stand equipment. Two years ago, all the equipment was destroyed by the flood. We are grateful to International Paper for the grant to buy new equipment. The concession area was an important part of our recreational league and spring tournament.
- I was happy to write the grant request to the 4 County Foundation in support of our TOP Soccer program. I was thrilled when we received the funding for two of our coaches to go to Kansas City to earn their national TOP Soccer coaching credentials. Unfortunately, first postponed, and then ultimately canceled the symposium and training. I look forward to exploring ways in the future to allow our coaches to have this opportunity.
- CSO worked out an agreement with Michelle Remson to run our concessions through the year. She has done an excellent job. Certainly, we want concessions to add to the bottom line of CSO, but we also want it to enhance the atmosphere of our programs. It was certainly nice to be able to delegate that to an individual who did such a great job.
- CSO was able to bring two camps to the area in 2021. We are the only organization doing this work. Both camps were well attended with one being "sold out".
- After being canceled in 2020 due to Covid, the Friendly City Shootout soccer tournament was back April 17th-18th at the Lowndes County Soccer Complex. The tournament registered over 40 teams from across the state of Mississippi and Alabama. Age groups started at U8 and went

up to adult with eight teams competing in the adult division. Over the weekend Columbus teams had considerable success.

Challenges remain. We never rest on our accomplishments. However, this list is evidence of a dynamic organization that is constantly evolving and finding new ways to serve our members and the soccer community.

Program Evaluation

CSO offers four distinct soccer programs to the area—recreational, TOP Soccer, competitive soccer, and adult soccer. The motto for this year and next is quite simple: “Maintain and build”. As an organization we want to maintain the significant success we have had with all programs as well as build on that success.

- TOP Soccer

Registration was down a bit for TOP Soccer. This is unsurprising given the vulnerable status of the players in this program in the age of Covid. Overall enrollment was down the program itself was very successful. Held every week in the fall at the complex TOP continued to provide an incredible experience for players with special needs and the “buddies” who work with the program. Incredibly cooperative weather meant that we did not have to go inside once. Cindy Buob and Evans Dawson continued to serve as the main “coaches” for the program and the YMCA continued to serve as our partner in this important program.

I was pleased to be able to conduct the Buddy Training for new and returning youth assistants to the program. Thank you to all the young people who came out to train and serve in this program. It is great to see so many young people interesting in helping. And a special congratulation to the TOP Soccer Buddy of the Year-- Micah Zellner!

We are also grateful to the Rowdy Foundation for a donation that will ensure that the program will remain FREE to players for the next several years.

I was happy to represent CSO during the annual Autism Community Resource meeting presented by the Lowndes County Public Library.

I am hopeful that with Covid in retreat we will be back to our typical levels of participation in fall 2021.

- Adult Soccer

As I mentioned earlier CSO experienced growing pains this year. This was evident in our adult soccer program. I was thrilled to be able to reinstate this program in 2019. In 2020 the grew to 105 players from 60 the year before. The season had a pause for Covid in the spring and then returned to complete much of the season in early summer.

In the spring of 2021, the program grew again and had a record number of registrations—114. The league was once again broken into two divisions with a total of 8 teams. In addition, we were able to add for the first time a “Ladies League” for two females only teams. Thank you to Heather Albertson for bringing the idea forward and help form a team, as well as Laura Vernon for helping form the second team.

More big news—in the summer of 2021 we were able to work with the YMCA to offer for the first time an adult indoor league. 30 players have registered. Thank you to Salem Gibson at the YMCA for working with me to make this a reality.

The success of our adult league is testament to the desire of people at all ages to play this wonderful sport. CSO is pleased be able offer a forum for all ages to play.

- **Recreational Soccer**

Without a doubt the most challenging and time-consuming endeavor was the CSO Recreational Soccer League. I am very grateful to Lee Milam and Roger Short for their countless hours helping make this newly independent program a success.

The story behind CSO no longer working with Columbus Recreation Department in recreational soccer is well documented. Suffice here to say that it was the desire of CSO to continue that relationship and the decision of CRD not to continue to embrace it. As a result, in the fall of 2020 there were potentially two soccer recreational soccer programs in the area, but in the end CRD folded and CSO flourished with over 350 players registered. We also had a very successful recreational soccer sponsorship campaign—with 29 businesses and individuals sponsoring. Recreational soccer is extraordinarily time consuming.

There is no need to recount here the various tasks involved. In the weeks leading up to the beginning of the season and during the season I would estimate that it was a 20 hour per week job including nights “on call” at the complex. I am thankful to a great support staff including Lee Milam, Michelle Remson, Addie Ambrosier, and others. Roger Short went above and beyond to do the match scheduling, complex maintenance, and much more.

We introduced several new things to recreational soccer. These included:

- All-Star team and matches for u12 boys and girls
- In response to years of parent requests we updated the uniforms
- Provision of full uniform for u8 and above
- Player of the week award for boys and girls U8 and above
- New series of special event nights including Salute to Law Enforcement
- Grilling for a Cure special event night
- New coaching development course
- Return of inter-program play with Caledonia
- Support for CSO families through a special Breast Cancer Awareness match. Read more about the event here: <https://columbusmssoccer.org/2020/11/19/more-than-a-game/>

- **Columbus United Soccer Club**

United had 158 players registered including those in its U8 Development Program for boys and girls. These are strong numbers. More important is the experience that the players had and the competitive level they were able to achieve.

With a return to full play in the fall of 2020 United teams made strong showings at several tournaments throughout the area. Coach performed at a high level and continue to strive to improve. Several coaches finished major national licenses including myself and Dave Albertson. Several completed USSF Grassroots licenses as we work to get all our coaches D licensed. In

addition, all coaches participated in several local coaching development sessions conducted by me.

We had one major coaching issue which was dealt with according to policy. We had several smaller issues with coaches, uniforms, parent behavior, etc. In all cases the protocols set up by the club worked well.

We had several new coaches join the club this past season including Curt Rogers as assistant coach for the U10 boys and Layla Wilson as head coach of the U8 Development girls' team. The end of the season brought the predictable change in coaching with several coaches moving on, as is common.

This brings us to one of the biggest challenges I face as DOC—recruiting and developing new coaches. Quite simply, there is not a large pool of soccer coaches in the area. In addition, once some one comes forward to coach, they typically serve a season as an assistant coach. They then need to get the required licenses (which CSO pays for). Only then are they ready for a head coaching position. That process generally takes about a year. Often after coaching just a year or two the coach has moved on in their work or education and I am left with starting the process all over again.

United also must be aware of the challenges presented by being one of only a few independent soccer clubs left in the state. Most clubs in our area are now part of a non-local monolith soccer organization. While every local area must do what it sees as best, I am committed to the fact that a club rooted in the area it serves and controlled by individuals similarly rooted in the community is preferable to one directed by a distant dolmen.

To retain our status and success we must redouble our efforts to player and coaching development. We must have a fully licensed coaching staff. We must be welcoming of new players, coaches, and families. We must work together to manage group and marginalize no one.

Speaking of managing growth—2021 tryouts attracted over 200 players. This record is a testament to the hard work of all members of United and our reputation as a player centric program. At the time of this writing, we have 142 players registered—this does not count our U8 Development program teams as they register after recreational season.

This growth resulted in “growing pains” and consternation on the part of some. However, those issues were worked through to the best resolution possible. It is important to remember the old saying “Everyone want progress until they realize it involves change.” We can't move forward if we are not willing to change and adapt. And, if we do not continue to progress then United will not remain a viable entity. I continue to impress upon coaches, parents, players, administrators that my job is to think about the “whole” and how that is sustained and succeeds in the future.

Conclusion

As president of CSO and DOC I am accountable to each member, player, coach, family, and supporter. I provide this report as a summary of our organization to all those groups. However, I am always open for questions and comments.

One of my favorite and guiding principles is “More Oars in the Water”. A boat moves much faster when lots of great people are in it with their oars in the water working. People working together will move an organization forward much faster and more efficiently than one person determined to run everything by themselves. CSO has a great many oars in the water. Please note all the members of the board listed at the beginning of this report as well as our treasurer and registrar. Thank them if you see them.

Thank you to all those who coach, manage, cheer, sponsor, and in so many other ways support the work of Columbus Soccer Organization. The future is bright with so many oars in the water.

Regards

Dr. Thomas G. Velek
President, CSO
Director of Coaching & Special Programs