**COLUMBUS SOCCER ORGANIZATION/ALLEGRO**

**PLAYER HEALTH & WELLNESS INITIATIVE**



**Rationale**:

Both empirical and anecdotal evidence abounds regarding the importance of health and wellness in sport. For instance, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services research and reports. We have witnessed a rush by athletic organizations at the professional and collegiate level to embrace and enhance health and wellness (defined holistically) for players, coaches, and recruits. There is, however, no active model for a similar initiative in the youth sports and rec space. Currently CSO does not know of another organization in the state spearheading such an initiative.

However, it is indisputable that there are underlying problems. Kids are “burned out” (Brenner & Watson, 2024), athletes are “stressed out” (Wertheim, 2021), college athletes say that feel “overwhelmed” (Lindberg, 2021). Sports related injuries for athletes 18 and under have jumped. Repetitive strain injuries have become almost common place. And many young participants leave sports never to return. This robs them of the positive experience and benefits of participation when young and often derail healthy levels of activity as adults.

 In part, this seems entirely predictable. For instance, insofar as we live in a hyper-competitive sporting culture of “higher, faster, stronger.” A culture in which a medal won is often the only measure of “successful”. There is a sport-media bubble which preaches “win or go home.” It not surprising that many athletes (both children and adults) will experience sport as one more form of work rather than as play. Worse yet, it would follow that physiological and psychological health will often be neglected or ignored in the pursuit of “more”, be it more victories, more achievements, more attention or more profit (Twietmeyer & Johnson, 2022).



The CSO Health and Wellness Initiative intends to counteract these societal trends. Not

because soccer is a trivial frivolity where winning and losing, effort and struggle, skill

and achievement do not matter, but rather because our kids should be pursuing soccer

(and all the excellences it involves) out of a sense of love rather than a sense of

obligation. True success (both on the field and off) means soccer is part of developing a

well-rounded person and winning is a part, but not the whole of success (Twietmeyer,

2021). Therefore, our initiative aims to reemphasize the importance of physiological and

psychological health as integral, but oft-neglected aspects, of the overall well-being of

our players.



“Health and wellness” are central concerns for CSO. These twin concerns do not

invalidate, nor do they denigrate, winning, skill or excellence. They simply place each in

their proper context. Soccer is the beautiful game. To play the beautiful game requires

skill. To teach the beautiful game, requires a commitment to skill development

(technical and tactical excellence). Yet, we also need a deliberate, consistent, and

systematic commitment to the health and well-being of every athlete in our care. Our

“Health and Wellness Initiative” will make this a reality.

**Method:** This health and wellness initiative will target the two main stakeholder groups who directly impact the health and well-being of young athletes. That is, coaches and parents.

1. We will engage coaches to better train them to recognize, understand and navigate issues related to athlete health and wellness. This initiative will have a course-based structure using a Canvas hub (online course management software) to organize, present and disburse information. Face to face seminars and/or on-field coaching education sessions will be used when appropriate.

Topics will include:

i. CSO Policy review/policy justification.

ii. What is age-appropriate training?

iii. Speed and agility training.

iv. The importance of “free-play” (Aspen Institute, 2023).

2. Tryouts & Player Evaluation

 i. What is age-appropriate evaluation?

ii. How do coaches and parents understand potential, differing development rates, etc.

3. Addressing Directly Player Health & Wellness

i. Rest and recovery, and down time.

ii. Avoiding burnout.

iii. Injury prevention. Recent research related to knee-injury prevention

iv. Role of warmups & cool down

v. Weather emergencies (heat, lightning, etc.)

vi. Nutrition and Hydration.



**Mental Health & Wellness**

Topics will include:

i. What counts as success?

ii. Confidence? Over-confidence? Learning to deal with success and failure. Intrinsic and extrinsic goods, etc.

iii. Team building and conflict resolution.

iv. Interacting with/communicating with parents.

**Role of Parents and Supporters**

We will engage parents and supporters as well. This will be done via direct outreach (both face to face and digital), as well as vicariously through coaches, team managers and CSO staff.

Topics will include:

i. Understanding the game better.

ii. Sideline behavior.

iii. Coach interactions.

iv. Rest and recovery, and down time.

v. Weather emergencies (heat, lightning, etc.)

vi. Nutrition and Hydration.

vii. What counts as success?

viii. Understanding recruiting, college soccer, etc.



**Public Engagement—Health & Wellness Experts Series (TED for H & W)**

CSO & Allegro will present two high profile public events each year. These will target other individuals in the athletic, sports, leisure, health, and fitness spaces—coaches, administrators, physicians, gym owners, players, supporters, students at area universities, etc.



This element of the initiative will expand its impact and help transform the conversation in the community about sports, fitness, and health & wellness. It will fit nicely into other programs that are beginning to evolve the perception of our community. It will be an important part of enhancing the quality of life in our area and the impact of sports, athletics, and leisure fitness activities.





THE ALLEGRO/CSO PLAYER HEATLH & WELLNESS INITIATIVE



THE ALLEGRO HEALTH & WELLNESS EXPERTS SERIES

This series of speakers will provide impactful and groundbreaking presentations on health and wellness that will translate into a community dialogue. We intend for the series to become a destination series that will bring together coaches, families, athletes, administrators and more to discuss, learn, and develop professionally and personally.



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