

“Amongst all unimportant subjects, soccer is the most important”.
- Pope John Paul II

For me, the high school soccer season begins a new cycle of coaching environments. As a career coach, I still get asked why I continue to work at the high school level. The simple answer is that I still enjoy it and also that it “fits” with the other soccer entities in which I’m involved.

These are a few of my favorite things about high school soccer:

I like the challenge of building a team in a short amount time - I like the 6 days-a-week rhythm - I like the challenge of playing the hand you’re dealt - I like that the players are already there, at school and are a captive audience - I like the variety of competition - I like pasta parties and road rally’s - I like that there are different levels, similar to a mini club - I like how the underclassmen revere the seniors - I like vertical integration and moving young but deserving players up - I like that we have a coaching staff that is on the same page - I like knowing that when you play against our school, you’re playing against the players, the coaches, the athletic trainers, the AD, the secretary, the principal, the grounds guys, the parents and the other students - you get us all! - I like that the parents care - Most of all, I love how close the players become - I love to watch their bonds develop - I love to observe how they arrive at conflict resolution, and dealing with the demands of the game - I love teaching them new skills and seeing application in the game - I love helping them navigate the highs and lows of a competitive season - I love to watch them celebrate - And then, more often than not, in the end there will be tears.

The tears are a product of the investment. 83 days and 370 hours of classroom and field for us this year. But also, just knowing it’s the end. Especially for the seniors. So this year, as I’m laying awake in the wee hours of the morning after our last game, I got up and wrote a little something for our players (and parents) to help them cope.

FRAMING THE EXPERIENCE

The athletic experience only has meaning if we can draw something from it beyond the game. Your heart doesn’t understand systems, or shape or tactics, but it bleeds an indomitable human spirit, and this spirit goes beyond sport. It will serve you in every aspect of your life, from cooperating with a future co-worker, to dealing with health issues, to working out differences with your future spouse. There is a range of experiences in soccer that can test you in many ways. It can be euphoric and it can be devastating. Your reaction to everything in this range will demonstrate the depth of your character. This is where athletics has value. This is really why we play. -TK

So I sent this out to the team. Ironically, later that Sunday, while studying the Tao Te Ching, I came across these two statements:

PONDERING THE END

“Amidst the rush of worldly comings and goings, observe how endings become beginnings”.

“The muddiest water clears as it is stilled. And out of that stillness, life arises”.

So I sent these to the team as well. I asked the guys to write about one or both of them and here are some of the responses (edited for clarity and/or brevity!):



Hunter Hollingshead - “Amidst the...” This quote basically means that the end of something means the beginning of something else. For example, with our loss on Saturday, it means the beginning of my Academy/Club season, much like the end of school means the beginning of summer.



Nick Smith - Soccer is the gateway to an abundance of life-long friendships that will never be forgotten. The commonality we share is soccer and our love for the game which is the foundation of our friendship. The memories we have had together define a portion of our experiences in high school. Personally, the soccer seasons have been the highlight of my high school years. The ending of our season signifies a new start to the next phase of life. I am proud to have had the opportunity to grow with the seniors, because they have made me a better player and person.



Joey Kaufman - “Amidst the...” This quote makes me think of the friendships, fun times, and the trust that I shared with my teammates. Life moves on and eventually I will leave the game, hang up the boots, leave the pitch, however the game will never leave me. I am going to carry the lessons that I have learned with me for the rest of my life. So while the end is finally here the beginning of the rest of my life is here as well.



Stephan Kovacevic - I came into this as just another player, but I’m leaving a better person, player, and friend. The varsity team has not only taught me how to be a better player, but it has also taught me to value the game itself. It may be the end in some people’s eyes, but it’s the beginning to bigger and better things in my eyes.



Austin Bergstrom - After the stands cleared out and only our team was left on the field, it really sunk in that this would be the last time I would be on the pitch with the whole team. The fact that I am not playing soccer in college or for a club this year and it was my last game really weighed heavy on my shoulders. I know I will play again with most of the guys on the team for fun, but never again with a Neuqua jersey on my back. Soccer always kept me on a schedule, kept my best friends close, and kept me out of trouble. The end of it will bring the true test of my character; to see if I will be the same person without it. As the muddy water of my busy life becomes still, it will become much clearer who I really am. My only hope is that the lessons I learned on the pitch will carry over into everyday life, which I have already seen done. Being able to work with others to achieve a common goal. Being able to push myself harder than others in order to excel. Being able to respond positively to negative situations and to take losses with my head up. All these things are lessons that have become evident in my life.



Andrew Kovacevic - This ending will be a new beginning as I continue to apply the new "soccer stuff" I picked up. As the 5th pk shooter for North made his pk and ran towards the crowd of students to celebrate I fell to my knees in sadness and astonishment, the power house once again was upset. While sitting there and crying TK came up to me and said "Kovac, how you feel about this"? "It sucks," I replied. "Then TK told me remember how it feels, it will motivate you for next year." Now I sit at home depressed yet motivated for winter training, summer camp, and 2011 fall soccer season.



Pat Kaindl- For the seniors, like myself there is no next high school season. But no one can take away the great experiences we've shared for past three months. Those of us that take these experiences and learn from them can become great in anything and everything they do.



Kevin Skrip - "The Muddiest..." When one door closes, another one opens. When going through a tough time if one looks ahead an opportunity will arise that is positive. We can use the mentality that we used on the field and transition it to college or a job. Determination, integrity and teamwork are all viable characteristics are used in a successful life.



Brian Benjamin - This team was the closest team I've ever been on by far. It was great how we came to practice everyday and ran through 3 and 4 hour practices and still managed to want to be together! I'm so glad I had the chance to play with all these guys this year because I improved massively and had a ton of fun.



Sammy Diad - After losing it felt like all the time and effort we put into training went for nothing. but after reading the notes TK sent out I understood that there was meaning in all of our effort. I realized that what we really trained for was not just to win soccer games, but it was to learn about life.



Jacob Brindle - With every struggle in life there is something to be learned. There are always going to be struggles and difficult times in life that make it hard to believe that there will be an end to the misery. However, once the turmoil settles, the true meaning of life can be observed. Although soccer is just a game, it has taught us all about teamwork, hard work and dedication; three essential characteristics needed to be successful in the real world.



Alex Karkazis - This quote describes the friendships that I have made on the team. The group of friends, and guys that I know would have my back, in any situation. The friends that I see in school and stop to say hello to. Even as the season ends, the new friendships that I have made could be the beginning of something deeper. Throughout a year that is supposed to be the best of your teenage years, I will continue to spend it with these guys!



Pat Doody - Since our loss I've had numerous people tell me that "this is only the beginning". I've been getting reminded of Indiana and all the great moments I have ahead of me. I don't mind hearing this, but I don't fully agree with it. Neuqua soccer is over for me. Soon my senior year will be over, too. My life changes forever. Right now I'm feeling like I just want to hang on to this for a while.



Joe Carlson - As my soccer life comes to a close, my career life begins. The road that soccer has taken me on has taught me the value of comrodery and the importance of team and famliness. Now that I have concluded my soccer career, I can take the lessons learned from this game and apply it to the beginning of my new life, the one that will affect my overall being forever. It is time for a fresh start into whatever path I choose, whether it be writing, business, or law. Regardless, I am ready to move to the next full chapter of life. I do not regret this year or my soccer career, as it has brought me those who I wish to hold dear for years to come. However it is time my new life commence.



Connor Domek - The athletic experience I believe helps us grow as people, in such a way that it develops our character and we learn to discover who we truly are. The feelings of loss and letdown are feelings that will make you stronger, possibly find your way in life. There is no way of hiding your emotions in the game of soccer and that is how I believe we learn to start expressing those emotions outside of soccer. Throughout many years of playing soccer, it seems to me that I have grown in different aspects of life that I could not have developed in without it. I really hope that through this experience I will have gained knowledge that may help me later in life.

Click the link on previous page to see Neuqua's "Homage to the Beautiful Game" video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHG37w66huw>