

Let's Play Soccer

By Morri Namaste

I couldn't help but hear the frustration of a group of parents as the Washington Park Flyers went through another game, not just without a win, but without even scoring a goal. This group of five year olds was having fun even if their super-charged parents weren't. I knew nothing about soccer when I volunteered to coach a team who had no coach and wouldn't be a team if someone didn't volunteer to be the coach. I figured that with five year olds the technical aspects of coaching would consist of don't touch the ball with your hands, kick it that-a-ways, and try to spread out.

This recreational league was just supposed to be fun. Twice a week practices with games on Saturday. The league was in operation for the spring and fall seasons. That's a lot of soccer for somebody who has never watched or participated in what happens to be the most popular game on the planet. We didn't play soccer in Philly.

The kids were great but the parents, well, not all of the parents, but it doesn't take but a couple to turn the tide. These were high achieving parents who wanted the best for their children. I was clearly not the best. But nobody else stepped up so they got what they got.

After hearing enough of "Why can't we win a game or even score a goal?" I'd had it. So I devised a plan.

As we gathered for a practice one afternoon, I said that we were going to do something different. It would be the kids against the parents for soccer supremacy. David versus Goliath. Earthlings versus alien invaders. The kids immediately bought into it. The parents thought I was crazy. "This would be no contest," they said. "We're bigger, stronger and faster," they said. "Prove it," I countered.

The match began with the parents dominating and scoring what seemed like goals at will. But after about fifteen minutes things began to change. One by one the parents dropped like flies. Lying on the ground sucking air and pretending to play. The kids came alive and eventually won the game. Two athletically endowed parents were no match for eleven hyper children looking to exact revenge for all of the "Go to bed early" limits.

This was indeed a teachable moment, not for the kids, but for the parents. I reminded the parents that their kids were working really hard in an effort to please them and chided them to remember that it is effort that is important. Wins and goals would come. Over the five years of soccer we even made the playoffs one year. To this day I am certain that every kid remembers The Game. It remains one of my most favorite memories.