

Questions and Answers Concerning Youth Soccer

The parent of a child with a strong interest in soccer often finds that it is difficult to navigate through all the different options available in our area. In an effort to help parents select the best program for their child, we've assembled a list of common questions and answers regarding youth soccer in the Kenmore-Tonawanda community:

I Have a Child That Is Interested In Playing Travel Soccer In the Kenmore-Tonawanda Area. What Are My Options?

Three primary options are available in the Kenmore-Tonawanda community:

- 1) Our club, the Kenmore Soccer Club, was founded in 2006 by a group of longtime coaches who were interested in building a great club from the ground up. We have grown to over 250 players and 22 coaches.
- 2) If your child is not ready to play travel soccer, or your family cannot make the commitment to fit travel soccer into your schedule, we highly recommend KidsPlay, the area's premier instructional sports program for children ages 4-12. For more info on KidsPlay, go to www.kidsplaywny.com.
- 3) Other soccer programs operate within our community, including church-based groups and other travel soccer clubs.

The best piece of advice that we can give to parents is to research the coaches, structure, and operating philosophy of all clubs in an effort to make an informed decision for your child.

What Makes the Kenmore Soccer Club Unique?

Our Coaches- We believe that the most important element of a strong soccer club is coaching. It is the coach who:

- * Decides the material that will be covered in each practice.
- * Assigns playing time and positions to each player on the team.
- * Dictates the goals and philosophy of the team.
- * Holds players and parents accountable for their actions and behavior.

If you look around at other clubs in Western New York, you'll find teams with more expensive uniforms and more finely-manicured fields, but you won't find a club with a stronger roster of coaches than the Kenmore Soccer Club. We are the only Club in our community where every coach is licensed by the United States Soccer Federation, and we are the only club in Western New York with more than one "A" License USSF coach- the highest license available in the United States. In fact, there are only 9 coaches in western New York with an A License, and 3 are with the Kenmore Soccer Club.

Focus- Many clubs get distracted by unimportant issues that have no tangible impact on the children who play for their club. At the Kenmore Soccer Club, we have no interest in running a snack stand or coordinating awards dinners for our board members and sponsors. Our club exists to give young soccer players a healthy playing environment that is focused on learning, building skills, character development, and fostering a love of the game.

Community- An average travel soccer player is surrounded by adults who sacrifice time, money and energy to give kids a great soccer experience. We believe that it is important for our club and its players to give back to their community.

Fiscal Responsibility- Careful observers might note that our travel fees are significantly lower than most area clubs. That's because we only charge parents for tangible items (uniforms, equipment, registration fees, etc.) that have a direct impact on our players. At the Kenmore Soccer Club, your fees will never pay for billboards, warm-up suits for our coaches, or pizza and chicken wings for our board members.

What Qualities Should I Look For In My Child's Coach?

Some clubs will tell you they have "quality" coaching, or that all of their coaches are "certified". Ask them what that means? Instead of focusing on nebulous terms like "quality", "certified", or "dedicated", look at the **credentials** of their staff. Are they licensed as a coach, and if so, at what level? What experience does the coach possess? In addition, look at how long they have been involved coaching soccer, and what levels – college, high school, etc. Some clubs will tell you that all of their coaches are licensed, when they are not. Or they might claim they have college coaches, when in fact no one on their staff coaches at that level. Second to credentials are the **personal values** that a coach possesses. Are they involved in other community services, and do they support the role of community service in the development of players? Are they role models? Do they have the values that will help our players become better citizens in our community? Finally, look at the coach's **motivations**. Are they involved in youth soccer to help children become better soccer players and citizens, or for some other motivation? While there is nothing wrong with coaching your own child, coaches need to ensure that their focus is on doing what is best for all of the players, and not just for their own child or for their own ego. At the Kenmore Soccer Club, the majority of our coaches do not coach their own child.

What Kind of Time Commitment Is Expected From Players and Their Family?

Each individual team is different, but the progression of training/games throughout the year generally looks like this:

Fall-Winter Training (November-January) - Teams practice one night per week at a school in the Ken-Ton District. Some additional training is scheduled at the Epic Center in Williamsville.

Winter Training (January-April) - Teams practice one night per week at a school in the Ken-Ton District or at the Epic Center. Some teams play in an indoor league that meets once each week at the Epic Center or at Sportsplex in North Tonawanda.

Travel Season (May-early August) - Teams practice 1-2 nights per week at a field in the Ken-Ton School District. League games are played once a week (same time-same night every week). Most teams participate in 1-3 weekend tournaments throughout the summer.

Every coach has a different attendance policy, but most Kenmore Soccer Club coaches expect players to attend 70-80% of all team activities throughout the year.

Can My Child Play Other Sports Besides Travel Soccer?

We encourage our players to pursue other interests outside of soccer with a goal of becoming a well-rounded adult. Children should be using other muscle groups and skill sets in an effort to discover their life's passion. That said, children must also be taught to honor their commitments. Travel soccer requires a significant commitment of time. If a parent is unsure that they can commit to having their child attend 70-80% of team activities, we respectfully suggest the register for KidsPlay or pursue other travel options.

How Does Kenmore Soccer Select Players For Their Travel Teams?

First, we conduct a fair and fun evaluation for potential players. We recognize that many children- especially those in younger age groups- might experience anxiety in trying out for a travel team. Our coaches do an effective job of easing anxiety and insuring that every player is having fun, and we do it as part of our normal team training events. Our coaches weigh a variety of factors in deciding whether a child is ready to play travel soccer. Physical skills are just one factor. More importantly, our coaches look for "the coachable player", a child who is attentive, respectful, hardworking, and can thrive within the structure of a team.

Why Can't Kenmore Soccer Accept Every Child That Wants To Play?

Pushing a child that is not ready to play travel soccer onto a team is akin to teaching a child to swim by throwing them into a pool. There is a chance the child may rise to the surface and discover their stroke, but there is a greater chance that the child will be overwhelmed, panic, and need to be rescued. Be very wary of a club that says they will find a place on a travel team for every child that wants to play. It is likely that club views players as dollar signs or as a means to generate revenue, rather than as young athletes. Kenmore Soccer is willing to tell you if we don't believe your child is ready (yet) to play at the travel level.

What Is "U-9 Developmental"?

This is an excellent idea that has been successfully piloted by our partners in the Amherst and Hamburg soccer clubs. The U-9 Developmental team is designed for young players born after 7/31/2001 who possess a strong interest in playing travel soccer someday. Players selected for the team practice once a week from November to July. In addition, the team will play a limited schedule of indoor and outdoor "friendlies" against teams from nearby clubs. We believe this is an excellent way to introduce U-9 players to the structure and expectations of travel soccer without pushing them into a full-fledged travel league. Because U9 Developmental does not play a full schedule of league games and tournaments the fee for this program is \$75.

Why Does Kenmore Soccer Train at the Epic Center in the Winter?

Kenmore Soccer rents gymnasium space through the KenTon School District, but also rents time on a 40 by 70 yard turf field at the Epic Center in Williamsville. We believe training on the turf in the winter provides a much better training venue for team to prepare for the travel season.

While the costs to rent the turf field are significant, it is factored into player fees which remain the lowest in our community.

What Is the Role Of Clinics and Conditioning Programs In Youth Soccer?

Specialized clinics are always appropriate. For example, Kenmore Soccer conducts clinics for goalkeepers, since it is a highly specialized coaching area. However, clinics to learn how to dribble or pass or shoot are usually reflective of weak coaching. Clubs that offer clinics in those areas may be doing so since their coaching may not be at the level necessary for Travel soccer. Strength and conditioning programs are an issue of personal choice. Most young children are still developing and will not benefit from such a program. In fact, programs of that nature can be harmful to their physical development, particularly when they are run by someone who is not professionally trained. On the other hand, training in areas such as speed running may be beneficial. Those that work with "running ladders" can help players become faster or develop better motor skills. If someone is interested in a Strength and Conditioning program, we recommend Proformance Sports Training operated by John Opfer, who possesses a certification in this area from Ohio State University.

How Are Travel Fees Determined, and Why Is Kenmore Soccer Lower Than Other Area Clubs?

Fees are determined annually based on a budget that incorporates all projected expenses. This includes fees paid for league participation, referees, player insurance, gymnasium rental, field rentals, goalkeeping clinics, turf field rental at the Epic Center, field paint, team equipment, etc. Kenmore Soccer does not amass a surplus; rather, we recognize that it is your money and we do our best to maximize the value you receive in return. We have partnered with local businesses to secure sponsorship dollars that also help us to keep your fees to the minimum necessary to provide you with the best soccer experience that the Kenmore-Tonawanda community offers.

We hope that when you compare local clubs you will decide that Kenmore Soccer offers the environment you are seeking.

If you have any questions about Kenmore Soccer, its staff, or its values, please feel free to contact Operations Manager Ken Voght at 837-1627, or via e-mail at voght@msn.com.