

HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES ...

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May 3, 2008

"May Madness" is upon us as playoffs are just around the corner. Teams are trying to get into top shape and hoping for a long run all the way to Stone Stadium. Watchful eyes are on the rankings, region finishes, and those flashy non region match ups that just might be foreshadowing events of things to come in a week or two. These are the Wando's, Dorman's, Airport's, and Brookland-Cayce's that capture our attention and have us rooting for or against. But life exists outside these ultra competitive and uber talented teams. This is a story about the forgotten ones. Welcome to life as Berkeley, Blue Ridge, and Westside high school know it.

As we speak, the teams reside in 4th (BHS) and 5th (WHS) in their AAAA regions, and 5th (BRHS) in AAA. Other than their low region standings, they share several things in common – the absence of soccer tradition/winning history, lack of long serving coaches in past years, and to a degree the finances to play soccer year round in a competitive environment. Lastly, they share coaches that are finally committed to bringing quality training, a little bit of craziness, and a whole lot of TLC to a deserving group of kids.

Coach Chass and Coach Roseberry both fell into their Berkley and Westside jobs early in their teaching careers when the position came open after another disastrous season. Roseberry had just started teaching and said "I had a roommate doing it across town so I figured it couldn't be that hard." Chass was working with the tennis team in the previous year and volunteered his time when possible. He was originally offered the boys position, but after already knowing the Lady Stags he knew that was the group for him. Coach Sumwalt took a bit of an alternate route as the former girls coach switched to the boys side. Having recently retired and with a daughter on the coachless squad, he stepped up for a team needing some stability. "It sounded like fun and it's not like I didn't have the time!" he laughs.

Taking the job was the easy part, getting them to be competitive in every game is another story. All three without knowing the others response answered the following question the same: What was the hardest part when you first took the job? Their answer? Attitude. "It's fun convincing girls to pay \$500 and give up their free time to try and play catch up to teams that are already doing the same and beating them 8-0." pipes Roseberry. Chass says "It's hard to convince girls to appreciate the strides they have made when they start out losing 18-0 to Wando." and a place none of us want to be "The attitude was hard to change as they've been beating pretty bad in the past, but try disciplining your daughter in front of her friends!" comments Rollie.

Walking into a program that is already established is a luxury that a few coaches get to enjoy. Maintaining it and even making some small improvements is their goal – and that can be difficult. But nothing compares to what these programs are facing to reach the next level. Explaining traveling teams to parents, convincing AD's to allow them JV teams (which all three have been able to do), obtaining matching uniforms for both home and away games, and changing the mindset of Susie and Sally to give up their jobs at Chik-fil-A that pay car insurance to come to practice every day is no picnic. Progress is made in small steps. For the Stags it's improving on the previous year's record and finishing fourth in the region. For the Lady Rams it's making playoffs, scoring more goals, and giving up less. For the Lady Tigers, it's beating one of the top four teams, getting 10 wins for the first time, and trying to break some team records. These are all modest goals that may be easily achieved elsewhere, but are real celebrated accomplishments for teams like these. Watching the celebration of Wando or Eastside girls winning state shows how hard they work and how much it means to them, but you wouldn't see any less enthusiasm than when Westside recently beat Easley in pk's or Berkeley did the same to Goose Creek. It's all relative in high school soccer, and it's all very real to these girls.

So here is a little shout of praise to all the Ryan Roseberry's, Rollie Sumwalt's, and Will Chassereau's out there. We all know the urge to leave for greener, more talent rich pastures is out there – but those kids need you and finally have the chance to receive the same training and security all the other big dogs get. Thanks from all of us for improving the soccer in our state.