

Monday March 1, 2010

ACADEMY TEAMS FARE WELL AT HOME

U16's win 3-0, lose 1-3, U18's win 5-0, draw 1-1

The Charlotte Soccer Academy's (CSA) two US Soccer Development academy squads had some good results over the weekend. On Saturday the U16's blanked the Richmond Kickers 3-0 before falling to the Richmond Strikers on Sunday 1-3. The U18's went unbeaten, beating the Richmond Kickers 5-0 and then drawing with the Richmond Strikers 1-1.

Coach Gunn: Saturday saw a quality performance from the team. We dominated the game from start to finish, defending well and creating good chances. Having had the better of play and not scored, we conceded a penalty on a counter attack and could have gone a goal down. Jaron Bradley came up with a great save to stop a good penalty and the score stayed at 0-0. Later in the first half Charlotte took the lead with an incredible long range shot from Drew Brown. The team had played well and thoroughly deserved the lead. The second half saw the same dominance of possession and play with the game always going Charlotte's way. The second goal came off a mistake from a Kickers goal kick. Ben Burdon was alive to capitalize and sweep home a shot after the Kickers defenders and keeper played their way into trouble. Goal number three came off a wonderful run from Ben Kern. He went on a mazy through the Richmond defense before crossing to Conor Keeley to deflect home. Late in the game some of the developmental players joined in the action and acquitted themselves well with the team looking comfortable to the end.

Sunday was certainly a day of frustration result wise despite the team having a very good first half. Charlotte came out of the blocks playing arguably some of our best soccer to date, with clean incisive attacking passing and movement. It was a case of full marks in the build up play and then we just lacked the finishing touch in a half where we could have easily been a few goals to the good. The Strikers managed to soak up our pressure and then catch us on the break a few times, scoring once and hitting the post on another occasion. We can give the Strikers credit for their resilience and good attacking, but I felt we were all frustrated to have finally conceded a goal after a run of five games without conceding.

The second half showed promise as we battled our way back into the game and scored a goal by Conor Keeley to make it 1-1; something that would hopefully kick start a comeback. Richmond struck back almost immediately and took the wind out of us. From then on it was all hard work and not much reward. The Strikers played to their game plan perfectly, sitting back with numbers and then countering well to pick up a third goal. Our second half was quite frustrating for the players, with the Strikers truly content to soak up pressure. The Strikers were very solid defensively, and really didn't have to come out of their shell, something that they were allowed to do being up in the game. The game was truly frustrating, but a great learning opportunity in two ways. The first showed how different a team can play when they are happy to defend a lead and not commit bodies forward - the game would be very different if we were leading by a goal. The second is that we need to keep to our passing and patiently look for openings. Quite often we played into numbers down areas and really didn't get much joy. From the game we can be happy that we started so well and played some great soccer, but we really can look at the goal mouth action and say that we can make improvements at both ends.

Coach Butler: The U18's got off to a fast start against the Richmond Kickers on Saturday when Jono Grad scored a volley at the back post after a deep cross from Jason Chapman in the second minute. The U18's set the tone of the game by defending very deep in their opponents half and pressing them all over the field. In the 23rd minute Evan Kent released Nick Barnhorst into the right channel with a curled ball over the left back. Barnhorst ran with the ball for forty yards before beating the Kickers goal keeper one on one at the near post. Just three minutes

later another deep cross from the left from Chapman found Barnhorst at the far post which he met with a half volley to make the score 3-0. After the break Jake Keating got down the left hand side and crossed to an open Sean Cogan. Cogan controlled the ball well, got it on his right foot, and calmly struck the ball into the top left hand corner from 15 yards out to make it 4-0 in the 62nd minute. The team was not finished there and added a fifth goal in the 85th minute when after some good one touch soccer down the right, Andrew Sperr whipped in a curling ball into the six yard box where Michael Nelli tapped in at the far post.

On Sunday it was more free flowing soccer from the U18's but unfortunately not the same number of goals. Again the team started off quickly against a Richmond Strikers team that opted to play 4-1-4-1 and counter attack. The team played good combination soccer going forward and was rewarded with a good goal after 15 minutes. A corner from Conner Miller was headed out but back to him. He looked up and played a curling ball into the six yard box where Jono Grad met it on the volley to score his fifth goal of the season and second in the last two games. The lead only lasted 20 minutes when in the 35th minute the Strikers were awarded a free kick 25 yard out down their left side. A ball curled into the six yard box was not dealt with by the CSA back four or goal keeper and a Striker player was there to nod the cross home from three yards out. The teams went into half time at 1-1. The U18's came out strong again in the second half and played some very good soccer. In the 7th minute of the half Jake Keating was brought down by the Strikers goalkeeper and a penalty kick was awarded. Conner Miller stepped up to take the kick, beat the Strikers goalkeeper but unfortunately hit the left upright. It was one way traffic from then on with CSA piling on the pressure without getting the winning goal. The team was very strong defensively in the second half, limiting the Strikers to one shot on goal.