

Homeschooling a High School Athlete

by Cindie Edmunds

My son has played soccer since he was 5 years old. He was serious about it almost from the moment he scored his first goal. And he loves this game. I can see it in his face when he moves the ball up the field, weaving through the opposition with a finesse that's become almost second nature to him. He stands a little taller when he's done something particularly gutsy. Jake is a natural athlete and derives a great deal of self-esteem from his soccer success, but he's also worked hard to get where he is and he's given up a lot. He's missed friend's birthday parties (and even had to give up a few of his own because they conflicted with tournaments), overnights, vacations and trips to visit relatives. Between practice and game schedules (he plays year-round), league and tournament fees, soccer camps, travel expenses, uniform and equipment costs, there's been little time or money for "extras".

So, when he wanted to try out for our high school soccer team, it seemed the next logical progression. Soccer, at the level Jake plays, is highly competitive and in order to stay competitive himself he has to play with others of the same ability. During the fall, this means playing for the local high school. High school soccer games are also a good place to be seen by college recruiters (a video tape of a player's best highlights in high school soccer games is almost a necessity when contacting prospective colleges). Fortunately, we live in a state where homeschool athletes can try out to play on the high school team. He needs to submit yearly test scores that stay above a certain percentile (this seems fair since his public school teammates have to maintain a certain grade point average), pay the same fee as the rest of the players and travel on the bus with his teammates to away games, but the rest is up to him. Try-outs are in late summer and the fact that Jake is a homeschooler rarely comes up. Those that know him from previous years are aware of it, but it's of little importance on the soccer field.

Jake's teammates could not care less where or how he's educated as long as he can move the ball up the field, pass with accuracy, and put the ball in the back of the net. Granted, at the start of the season there are generally one or two new players with the same comments and questions he's heard many times before:

"Wow, you get to homeschool, if I did that, I'd probably watch TV all day."

"Sometimes I do, but I'm usually way too busy."

"What do you do all day?" (Generally, they're amazed at the variety of things he lists).

And the classic (taken from a recent conversation with another soccer player):

"I wouldn't want to homeschool because you never get to socialize."

"We're socializing right now aren't we?"

"Yeah, but that's not really socializing."

"Well, I hang out with other homeschooled teens, go to movies, do karate, Destination Imagination, Civil Air Patrol, and see my school friends on the weekends when I'm not too busy."

"But I mean REAL socializing."

"Whatever!" (While he was relating this conversation to us his brother did offer to call him names and try to pick a fight with him once in a while so he wouldn't miss out on any of this "real" socialization.)

However, by the second or third practice, he's just another team member. Since high school teams are generally made up of boys from sophomores through seniors, most of them rarely see each

other during the day, anyway. They do their bonding on the soccer field, at practices and games. Some of these kids become good friends and see each other off the playing field and many of Jake's good friends were "soccer buddies" first. We've never had any problems with high school coaches, players, or school officials we've dealt with. I have to admit, I wasn't too sure about dealing with school officials at first, but they don't treat me any different than any other parent and some have gone out of their way to make sure all our paperwork gets to the right people.

Occasionally, I've gotten some comments from other homeschoolers, (as if I've suddenly let my son consort with the "enemy" or we're betraying some cause) but NEVER from anyone who knows us. Most other homeschoolers, whether adults or other teens, are very supportive of Jake. His friends know how important soccer is to him and are glad he has an avenue to play with other kids who love the game as much as he does. For me, what it boils down to is that this is Jake's life, playing college soccer and maybe even professional soccer is one of the goals Jake has set for himself. He's dedicated a great deal of his life to this sport. Jake's not one who'll ever win a national spelling bee or get a perfect score on his SAT's, but put a ball at his feet and you can see magic happen. As his parent, I'll do whatever I can to make his dreams come true.