

## NASHUA SOCCER

598

By James Collins

In 1978, Nashua New Hampshire started a Youth Soccer League. The league grouped teams by age and the majority were between the fifth and eighth grades of middle school. The kids were all enthusiastic and the coaches and parents were supportive. At one of the meetings between the coaches and the parents, it was decided to bring a professional soccer player from England, specifically from the Manchester Rowdies, for a weekend to coach all of the teams in the rudiments of good soccer.

As a coach for one of the teams, I had the opportunity to have lunch with this gentleman and a number of other coaches right after a very informative coaching session. This was his first time in America and he was having a ball. He was very pleasant and the kids hung on his every word. After lunch, we were sitting around having coffee and just discussing our process. I asked him what did he think of America and what surprised him the most. His answer has stayed with me to this very day.

"America is the most amazing place. You train everybody for everything. That doesn't happen in Europe."

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Look at me sitting here in Nashua New Hampshire training a large number of American kids on the basics of soccer. You hired me and paid my airfare and living expenses to come over here and train your children. This would never happen in England. There is no formal training for anything in England. I learned how to play soccer on my own in the streets of Liverpool. Then as we get older, local towns select us to represent them but there is little or no money involved. After a little more experience, the professional clubs look at you and if you are good, they pick you up as a professional and you make some money. That's the process in England."

"We brought you over here to help train them because we feel we were not knowledgeable enough about the sport. We read about another team down in New York who brought over an English soccer professional to train the kids and we thought it was a very good idea. Actually, there is very little soccer in this country and Americans do not follow the sport. We do it so the kids can have a good time and develop some skill."

"You Americans train everybody all the time in everything you do. Just the fact that your group brought me over here tells me that in 20 years or so America will be a significant presence in the soccer world. No other country in the world would think of training the young players to be soccer aficionados. I expect to hear that the American soccer teams in both the Olympics and world soccer will be a force to be reckoned with in 20 years."

**His comments on his foresight were right on the money. 30 years later, America is now a recognized force in the soccer world and in the Olympics. Obviously the training America supplies really works.**

**THE END**