

Hooked On Recovery

June 23, 2006

Letting Go

I'm sad. I'm grieving. Nothing major happened. I had to let go of something I love.

It started at Joshua's tryout for a regional soccer Premier team. One play defined his session. He was playing the right midfield position and another kid steamed down the left wing. Joshua moved in and made a clean swipe of the ball, deftly flipped the ball with the outside of his right foot, skipped over a sliding opponent, and in one motion delivered a 30 yard pass down the sideline onto the foot of his teammate. Both coaches looked to their clipboards and made a few notes. However, he played extremely well the entire session; showing strong skills, great speed, innate soccer sense and vision. Being a foot taller than any of the other 65 young men vying for the 18 spots helped him stand out too. My heart swelled not so much at his skills, but because of his presence on the field. Joshua thrives on the competition. He carries himself with confidence; he is "the man" and has earned the respect of his teammates, opponents, officials, other parents and his dad. I look at him, I watch him, and I am now seeing glimpses of the man he will become.

Later that evening we received The Call, he had made the U12 Premier team. So obviously the other coaches thought highly of him too, so I'm not just a proud father embellishing his skills (although I'm allowed to according to the Fatherhood Privileges Provision written in the Parenting Resource Manual). However, with The Call, my travel coaching stint came to a grinding halt. I've been Joshua's soccer coach since he was 6 years old; spanning three years of Club soccer and three years of competitive Travel soccer. I wasn't ready to let that go. I always hoped this time would come, that he would excel at something and have a desire to challenge his skill and ability. This team will do all those things. I just didn't think it would come so quickly. I thought I might have a couple more years.

I'm pretty sure I can move into the role of the supporting Dad, but what I was not prepared for was the intensity of the sadness I feel in having to let go of the team. I quickly came to the conclusion that I could not continue to coach, get Joshua to his new commitment and handle my obligations to my wife and four other children. There simply is not enough time in the day. So I had to say good bye to 18 other young men and their families. Luckily, a trusted assistant coach will take on the responsibility, so the team will be left in highly capable hands.

Thank God for recovery. Being clean and sober for so long has taught me that I'm allowed to feel more than one emotion at a time. That kind of goes against the grain of most men. We like things simple, cut and dry, black and white. I also know through recovery that "acceptance is the key to all my problems today". So, I'm sorting through my stuff. Writing this is helping me sort through my stuff. I'm enormously *proud* of Joshua not only because of his soccer skill, but because of his character. I'm a little *angry* that I allowed all this to sneak up on me and catch me off guard. I'm *happy* that Joshua is so excited and that three of his teammates will be moving up with him. I am *satisfied* with the job I did as a coach; being able to build into the lives of several special young men. I'm *content* with the memories I've stored. I'm *grateful* to God for giving me recovery, because without recovery I would have had nothing to build with or to teach from.

But mostly, I'm *sad*. I'll miss the fun in practices, the competition of the matches, discussing the team with the assistant coaches and the interaction with the parents. But mostly I'll miss the young men with who I have shared many, many hours. Our last game as a full squad was Father's Day. I flew in from Arizona and made the game just before kickoff. I sat quietly on the sidelines soaking it all in one last time. We went into the second half tied 2-2. I asked the boys to embrace this moment, to play their last half together as hard and as well as they could, to give it all they had. They responded. They scored 4 goals to the opponent's one! After the 6-3 victory, I said a few words; it was all I could muster. I told them all how proud I was of their effort and their learning over the last three years. I couldn't have asked for a better Father's Day gift. I was wrong.

As we all walked off the field, Joshua handed me a card, but I couldn't bear to read it just then. I stuck it in my pocket. I opened it later that evening. "They say that a job well-done is its own reward, but still, you should know how much your hard work means to those around you. Thanks for doing such a good job", signed Ryan, Tyler, Patrick, Jeff, Ben, Jamie, Emmanuel, Jeffrey, David, Avery, Brian, Connor (who also added "you're a great coach), Dylan, Kyle, Brendan, Javon and Jovan. The last one was from my son who wrote, "You're the one who inspired me to play soccer" - Josh.

And I cried.

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.