

Washington Youth Soccer Resolves ECFC - SYSA Conflict

About the Ruling

A decision released Friday, January 15th, by a blue ribbon panel assembled by Washington Youth Soccer resolves an outstanding dispute between Seattle Youth Soccer Association (SYSA) and Emerald City Football Club (ECFC), affirming SYSA's right to form, organize, and control advanced soccer development within SYSA. **The ruling underscores SYSA's authority to consolidate all U11 through U14 team play under the direction and control of its new club, Seattle United FC, beginning in May, 2010.**

The Seattle United club is the product of years of thoughtful and careful planning by SYSA leadership to unite all select and premier teams, players, and coaches into one, collaborative program. The SYSA Board of Commissioners, representing the 15 clubs that make up the Seattle Youth Soccer Association, voted by a resounding 12 to 2 margin in July, 2009, to form a united club to direct all advanced development play in SYSA. All neighborhood clubs except one – Ballard, Beacon Hill, Capitol Hill, Hillwood, Lake City, LVR, Magnolia, McGilvra, Mt Baker, Queen Anne, TOPS, and Woodland – voted in favor of the reorganization and establishment of the new club.

The leaders of SYSA's previous advanced development club, ECFC, chose to resist the SYSA Board decision, refusing to cooperate or collaborate in the development of Seattle United. In November, 2009, ECFC filed a grievance with District 1 and ultimately Washington Youth Soccer, contesting the authority of SYSA to develop and control their advanced development program. The grievance, similar to a lawsuit, was adjudicated by a five-member panel of attorneys with strong backgrounds in youth soccer. A hearing was held on January 9th, and the panel's ruling was released today.

The panel affirmed the right of SYSA to organize and control the formation of an advanced development club designed to deliver the services needed to its member children and families and those in the future. The conclusion of the ruling reads:

"SYSA legitimately felt there was a systemic problem with its select program and, after extensive lengthy evaluation and discussion with all club representatives under its association, by a commissioners' vote of 12-2, the decision was made to alter its select process for the benefit of the select players and SYSA as a whole. The SYSA bylaws allow for amendment of those bylaws by a 60% majority which was exceeded in this case.

Emerald City was, and still is, a club member of SYSA, subject to SYSA's bylaws. While it is unfortunate that Emerald City, with its long history with SYSA, will be eliminated in its present form, nevertheless, that is SYSA's choice and to categorically prohibit any change in the select process would not benefit soccer in the long run."

The ruling affirms SYSA's authority to empower Seattle United to deliver training and other programs to SYSA's members as it deems appropriate, including enforcing the original Seattle United transition plan adopted in July 2009. That plan mandated that all SYSA U11 to U14 select and premier teams for the 2010 playing year would play under Seattle United, while permitting ECFC to continue to support existing teams at U15 and above in 2010, until those U15 teams move through their playing time and finish at U18 in 2013.

ECFC and US Club Soccer

In addition to filing a grievance, ECFC has also threatened SYSA with forming teams outside SYSA and Washington Youth Soccer, proposing to register teams in the US Club system. Presently US Club represents less than 5% of all players in Washington State. **SYSA advises parents and players to understand the implications of such a move to another organization outside the Washington Youth Soccer and SYSA umbrella.** Players registered to teams outside Washington Youth Soccer will have access to fewer leagues, no access to Washington Youth Soccer sponsored tournaments (including WYS State Cup tournaments), and much lower competitive levels. Washington Youth Soccer offers the link with the national ODP system, and direct affiliation with the Sounders FC development program. Furthermore, SYSA will not be allocating practice or game field time to teams registered outside SYSA. **SYSA strongly believes that playing within SYSA and Washington Youth Soccer is in the best interest of all players in the Seattle area.**

About the Seattle United Club

With tryouts just a few months away, Seattle United is building momentum as it prepares to deliver the highest level of training, competition, and fun for SYSA's competitive players.

Seattle United has a fully functioning Board of Directors, working at a high level to provide an outstanding soccer experience for its players starting in spring 2010. Seattle United has run two advanced development academies with over 200 participants in each, and is about to commence a third on January 15th. A Center of Excellence program launched on January 15th as well, providing high quality training and playing opportunities for those invited to participate.

Great progress has been made in hiring soccer operational leaders. **Seattle soccer legend and Sounders FC golden scarf recipient Jimmy McAlister has been hired as the first Seattle United Director of Coaching.** Jimmy offers “The significant foundation and infrastructure that have already been established by the [Seattle United’s] club board and are operating today in Seattle will allow our leadership team to hit the ground running. I am looking forward to the challenge of building a nationally respected club.”

Joining the coaching leadership team as Technical Director is Seattle-born professional soccer star and former Washington Rush coaching director **Jason Farrell.** In addition, **Pete Fewing,** another local product and former Collegiate National Coach of the Year, **has been tapped as a Regional Director and team coach.** “I’m extremely excited to be coming to Seattle United and to be a part of the incredible potential Seattle has for high-level youth soccer – we have the opportunity to enhance the soccer and life experience for hundreds, if not thousands, of kids,” Jason Farrell said during his hiring announcement.

Seattle United represents an exciting new approach for Seattle’s youth soccer players, coaches, and families. Seattle United’s core philosophy is one of collaboration and inclusion. The club organization is structured to provide the highest quality, full service soccer experience for all its players, families, teams, and coaches, while taking responsibility for a leadership role in the development of all youth players in the Seattle Youth Soccer system. It offers both high-level, premier “citywide” teams and numerous select teams (grouped by geography as much as possible), and provides top competitive play and training opportunities using regional options, seamless vertical integration, player mobility, and good governance principles.