

# RYE BROOK Westmore NEWS

Youth Soccer scores goal with 'house a trainer' program

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**By Lailina Nadell**

They are infectious around young soccer players, but it's a good thing because these kids are catching the soccer fever. In Rye Brook, Red Bull trainers are a welcome addition as they bring a refreshing dimension and enthusiasm to youth soccer.

And they not only coach here, now they also live here.

Five of the six Red Bull trainers assigned to Rye Brook Youth Soccer are from the UK. Through the club's "house a trainer" program, they currently reside with local host families.

The program was originally developed to help reduce costs for the club, and it has become an enriching cultural exchange for trainers and the families who house them.

It began as a pilot program in Rye Brook during the fall of 2008 and is now in full swing. Brian Grodin, vice president of RBYS, spearheaded the "house a trainer" program. "The feedback I've received from both trainers and host families has been very positive," said Grodin.

"It's nice to have someone from the UK around to expose the kids to the culture, and they love soccer," said Neil Flanagan, whose two sons are U9 and U11 players. During this spring season, the Flanagans are housing Omar Saleem, a trainer from London, England.

Each trainer also coaches at another soccer club during the week but makes time to interact with his host family. And while a host family is only expected to provide a bed and the use of a shower, many have provided meals and integrated the trainers into the family.

"My kids watch soccer with Omar," said Flanagan, "and as a result they have become Red Bull fans." They also showed him how to throw a baseball, and they are amused that he catches it with bare hands as he would in cricket, a popular sport in England.

With a son in the pre-travel program and a daughter on a U10 travel team, Sherry Feuerman's family decided to host a trainer because her kids enjoy soccer. "And this is a way that our family can contribute to it," said Feuerman.

Her kids think it's special to have a "big brother" around, with trainer Adrian Sutcliffe, who is in his early twenties, staying with their family. "(In partnering) with the Red Bulls, Rye Brook Youth Soccer makes the program become part of the community," Feuerman noted.

"The Red Bulls have done a good job promoting soccer and getting kids to professional games," added Feuerman. On May 30, more than 150 Rye Brook Youth Soccer players and family members attended a special event called "Stadium Session," where young players engaged in activities on the field. This event was held at Giants Stadium in the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, N.J., and it was followed by a game between the New York Red Bulls and Colorado Rapids.

Last year, with a goal to improve its program, Rye Brook Youth Soccer formed a committee to find a new organization to provide weekly training sessions for pre-travel and travel soccer players from 1st grade to high school. After an extensive search, RBYS hired Red Bulls New York in the fall of 2008, replacing UK Elite.

The Red Bulls trainers coach skills sessions for each team they are assigned to, and they also work alongside those teams' coaches at weekend practices and games.

The philosophy of the Red Bulls Training Programs is simple: to create a fun and challenging environment where players have the opportunity to play. "The goal is to provide a level of education and training for players suitable to their age and ability level," said Dave Jervis, Director of Training Programs.

Red Bulls trainers are recruited locally and internationally, with a vast majority from the UK. "Among 400 people applying each year to become trainers, only 50-60 are selected," Jervis noted. "The process includes an interview, practical coaching assessment, orientation, and background check centralized through the police department in the UK and outside services in the U.S.," he added.

Pete Kay, a trainer who was involved in recruiting other Red Bulls trainers in the UK, said, "It's not enough to only look at the qualifications of coaches, but also at their personalities and ability to work with kids. They need to be able to relay their knowledge to the kids, to get down to their level."

But the Red Bulls Training Program is not just about player development, it's also about coach development. With more than 20 Rye Brook travel soccer teams coached by parents, Red Bulls trainers lead a coaches' education workshop each season, with a follow-up online curriculum available.

"Some coaches at the grass roots level, where youth teams are at the beginning of their soccer development, have not played the game before," said Kay. "The trainers work alongside the parent coaches to ensure we're working toward the same goal."

Kay was hired by the New York MetroStars before the club was purchased by the Red Bulls and renamed in March 2006. Having lived in two different homes this season, Kay finds the host families to be "accommodating, relaxed, and welcoming."

As a participant of the "house a trainer" program, families can choose to host from one to 12 weeks. As it has been such a positive experience for many families, some have requested to host again next season. The hosts describe the trainers as "nice guys" and "perfect gentlemen."

With four kids, including their oldest son who is a U11 player, Steve Beal's family hosted one trainer in the fall and another this spring. "It's a nice thing to do to support the club...gives one-on-one time between trainer and kids, and I also gained a buddy to watch sports with—it's a win-win situation," said Beal, referring to Kay who stayed with his family for four weeks this season.

Housing trainers has become a more popular and economical option in other youth soccer clubs, including Armonk. "The difference in cost to the club is about 20% between housing and not housing trainers," says Grodin, whose efforts as Red Bull liaison, along with the support of RBYS, have led to the program's success.

"It's been a great experience for the trainers and many host families, and we would still like to recruit more families to house our Red Bull trainers," Grodin added.

Another incentive to be a host is receiving a \$100 credit in club fees for every three weeks of housing a trainer. So, a family who hosts for 11-12 weeks would receive a \$400 credit.

The Partons, a host family with a son on a U10 team, has seen an overall change in players on the field. "Players are more revved up about soccer. The trainers are young, knowledgeable, and have a good attitude with the kids," said Olivia Parton.

"The kids look up to the trainers," she said. "They're increasing self-confidence on the field and having more enthusiasm."

Omar Saleem, a trainer who started playing soccer in England when he was 4 years old, said, "The Red Bulls is about fun, learning, challenging players."

"It's also about sportsmanship— respect for the coach, teammates, and the opposition," added Saleem, "And the goal is to help kids develop a love for soccer."

*For more information about Rye Brook Youth Soccer, go to [www.ryebrooksoccer.org](http://www.ryebrooksoccer.org)*

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