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Teaching children to win on soccer field and in life

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Devotion: As time goes by, a soccer coach remains a constant in the lives of his players, teaching them the value of being good sports.

Howard At Play

April 23, 2000 | By Rick Crow | Rick Crow, SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Of all the many hundreds of coaches the Soccer Association of Columbia/Howard County has had since its 1971 founding, only one has lasted 26 seasons.

That's Bill McCormack, who at 52 tops SAC/HC in seniority and is coaching this spring, as he has since 1974, a girls team at the recreation level. Except for a brief stint with his daughter Karen's [clinic](#) team in the late 1980s, his squads have carried the same name: the Green Machine.

Those teams have won more than 330 games, captured 10 age-group titles, and earned runner-up honors 15 times in SAC/HC's girls program. In 1996, McCormack received SAC/HC's Jack and Ellie Boussy Award, presented annually at the Columbia Memorial Day tournament, for outstanding contributions to county youth soccer.



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"Bill McCormack is the dean of all SAC coaches," said Jim Carlan, who is second in organizational seniority, the group's president, and father of two daughters who played for McCormack. "He's the same guy he was when I was his assistant [in 1975]. He hasn't gained a pound in 26 years, and I can't say the same about myself. He's never talked about quitting, so I expect another 15 years out of Bill."

Typically, McCormack takes charge of an under-9 team, stays with the squad for three years, then repeats the cycle.

"What I really enjoy most of all is working with kids," said McCormack. "I started with girls, because at the time I thought that, in the sports world, they were treated as second-class citizens. I like the rec program, because all of the games are played in Columbia. Coaching recreational teams also gives me the luxury of losing a few games while looking for ways to win games."

In a quarter-century, more than 500 girls have played for his teams. He estimates that more than 40 percent have played subsequently on select teams, with many earning spots on high school and college rosters.

Stephanie Magro (Maryland), Kit Carson (Arkansas), Lan Gardner (Loyola) and Joy Mulholland (Salisbury State) are four with success at the collegiate level. Many former players have returned to coach SAC/HC teams or have their children in the program.

Heather Murphy, on McCormack's first team in 1974, was coordinator for the Women's Soccer Association of Columbia from 1993 until 1999.

"I don't remember whether we did all that well, but we had fun. And I still enjoy playing," said Murphy, holding her baby daughter, Emily. "I hope that Bill will be coaching my daughter some day."

McCormack's teams became known as the Green Machine in 1975, when his players insisted that he name the team after his car.

"I had a 1967 Buick LeSabre that I called 'the green machine,' " he said. "They were kind of a metallic-green when they come out of the factory, and I had mine painted a bright, Kelly green."

McCormack, who will complete 30 years as a Bell-Atlantic engineer next month, grew up in Ellicott City and was introduced in the mid-1960s to soccer in gym class at Baltimore's Mount St. Joseph High School. A few classmates played on the school's varsity, and McCormack tagged along to watch a few games.

He began playing competitively on a club team at St. Charles College in 1966. His collegiate career ended when he transferred to Loyola College, but McCormack resumed play -- on the Stevens Forest men's neighborhood team --

shortly after moving to Columbia in 1974. The same year, he volunteered to coach a SAC/HC Under-10 girls' team in Stevens Forest.

Asked his advice for new coaches, McCormack replied, "You shouldn't worry about winning. If you look at my record, you will see that about 75 percent of the time the Green Machine comes out with a win or draw.

"But we've also finished in last place eight times. I want the girls to learn how to win and lose, because it's part of life."

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