



Good Morning NRU,

Firstly, I hope that this email finds you, your family, and loved ones in good health, not having anyone within your various circles affected by this pandemic. Over the weekend, I was informed that a soccer colleague and his wife up north had contracted the virus and the initial emotion was one that I hope most of you won't have to deal with. Thankfully, they're on the road to recovery, as are the majority of people who do contract the Coronavirus, and thoughts and prayers continue to go out to those directly or indirectly affected.

After hours of consultation with various soccer stakeholders, members of health agencies in various constituencies, leaders within our league, our club, the extended community, and with family, close friends, and associates, I have finally landed back in front of the computer to deliver an update on where our club presently stands with respect to COVID-19.

Some of you will be receiving this first thing in the morning, while others like myself who may be burning the midnight oil may receive it earlier, but ultimately, my hope is that this message resonates with each and everyone in the same way.

It is a message that intends to deliver hope, reassurance, the knowledge that we as a club and a community intend to persevere and thrive through this period and beyond. We are all in this together, and our unity is what will give us the strength to see us through. It is a time that many of us including myself certainly never envisioned facing in our lifetime, let alone me, in the first year of a new role leading this organization. But solace comes from the fact that we are not alone in this by a long shot, and through the collaborative ideas and efforts of others who are also navigating this, possible solutions continue to arise.

On the heels of a Monday morning league board meeting, Governor Northam announced that all Virginia schools will remain closed through the end of the school year. The possibility of such an announcement was tabled during the meeting and certainly the MCPS was very accurate in its assertion that this announcement would have created many questions about your child's education for the rest of the year and the trickle-down effect of that with respect to other school-based events.

We have taken lots of cues from what the schools are doing given the fact that our membership base is primarily comprised of the families of the students affected by this decision. We also echo the sentiments expressed asking for a bit of your patience as hopefully more answers to some pertinent questions will arise over the next

few days from many of the entities leading the discussions on how to continue to combat the spread and our individual and group responsibilities in this regard.

It would be remiss of me to not give credit where it is truly due, and I would like to take the time to highlight the response of Cheryl Johnson who is another leader of extra-curricular activity in our community. I haven't yet had the privilege to meet Cheryl in person, but her organization faces a number of similar challenges, and the ideas on how to face this head-on certainly mirror ideas that we have also floated around in our leadership meetings. Additionally, there were other very innovative ideas proposed and hopefully, I will be able to brainstorm with her and other community heads in the coming days. In a community as small as our, undoubtedly there is an overlap in membership with different extra-curricular programs and together, we will surely be able to come up with solutions that see us all through and to a place where we are able to provide the platforms for our kids to participate in the activities they love.

In the coming days, we have a myriad of highly important meetings which will help us to further provide some alternatives to families while also ensuring that we remain fiscally viable through these times. We are in the process of getting answers from all the different stakeholders, facility providers, and groups on which we rely to be able to deliver programming to your kids. There are so many internal and external considerations that will affect many people and families causing us to constantly revisit our operational budget over the last couple weeks, as that gives us ideas on what solutions are viable and those that may not be during these times.

Again, we ask is that families exercise a bit of patience and understanding as external answers are not always as forthcoming and expeditious as the ones we try to forge internally. Also, we know that there are member-families who have been immediately tremendously affected by this situation, and we have tried to be especially vigilant to and cognizant of their circumstances while working through this.

At this point, we do not have enough details to know when it may be possible to resume full time training sessions and programming. Ideas of pushing leagues and programs into June and potentially July have been tabled at different levels and in the interim, we have begun to deliver Personal Development Plans (PDP's), online sessions and activities, e-learning modules, and by the end of this week, an Individual Action Plan (IAP) that will give our players very specific resources on how to continue their soccer development during this period of uncertainty. These may have been sent on by coaches or managers of teams, and if not, I will begin to send them out as well to the different groups within the club.

Some may ask, why not just cancel the Spring season?

As much as we take that sentiment into account, the answer is not that simple! Of course, there is a definite fact of how much soccer/sport/extra-curricular activity benefits us. The physical, mental, and social well-being sport provides cannot be understated or undervalued. There is a belief within the National Federation, our league, and our member clubs that continuing to provide these benefits and fulfilling these needs have to be our goal. Our soccer community is a diverse one. We strive to ensure stability and survive the plethora of adversity that

may arise. This may be your child's first venture into organized sport, or you may be a seasoned vet having gone through years of your kids playing the beautiful game. Whether it is an outlet for exercise, the opportunity for non-school social time, the benefits of a coach-player mentorship relationship, the stability and learning experiences that come from being involved in a team sport, or the fact that it could be the main positive outlet for our kids, one or all of these benefits could be applicable to your child or any of the other who may be affected by cancellation of the season.

There are tangible concerns across the board about organizations and businesses survival through these times, and soccer clubs aren't immune to this. Most if not all clubs the youth soccer clubs in our region are non-profits and as such there aren't many that carry the extensive financial reserves necessary to make it through the events we are facing. The economic impact is massive not just in our community but across the state and certainly nationally when we look at the youth participation numbers in soccer.

As such, most of our ideas will focus on creative mechanisms to provide future opportunities to offset whatever time we may ultimately lose this spring. It will allow us and the other clubs in our region to have soccer immediately accessible to your child and the families as soon as we are able to return to play and to ultimately be able to provide the services that were postponed due to the pandemic. We believe it is imperative to focus on the future, pulling through this together as best as possible, so that our children have a sense of normalcy as our various communities emerge from the present situation!

I know that this has been quite a lengthy message, but I believe it was a very important one to deliver at this juncture. We will continue to update you in the coming days and weeks and the hope is that the messages grow in positive content! We want nothing more to be back on the fields and seeing the smiling faces of our children. In the interim, please continue to be safe and healthy. Extend a helping hand when possible to those who will certainly need it in these times. Have a wonderful and blessed day!

Let's continue to GO NRU!

Warmest Regards,

Leslie