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Long Island Soccer sat down with Head Coach Frank Camuglia of Floral Park Soccer Club's GU14 team the Rovers. The Rovers play in LIJSL and are currently in Division 2. The Rovers are a rare example of players who have played their entire soccer career for the one team they started with. According to their coach the team is comprised of players from the 3 local schools and have formed a team bond that has become more important than the game itself. The Rovers have been on a spectacular run since 2018. They have since moved up a division, played in their second Long Island Cup Final and won their first Championship. The team has a large roster of 18 players which Coach Frank has been coaching for the past 6 years.

LIS: Good morning coach thank you for joining us.

Coach Frank: My pleasure thank you for having me.

LIS: Let's start with how long you have been coaching youth soccer.

Coach Frank: I have been coaching for about 8 years now.

LIS: All with the same team?

Coach Frank: Well I coached 1 season in intramurals, then started with travel. I originally coached my daughter's 1st travel team for a season before coming over to the Rovers.

LIS: Now how long have you coached the Rovers then?

CF: I have been coaching this team for the last 7 1/2 years.

LIS: Wow that's quite some time. All the same players?

CF: Yes, mostly. I still have the same original group that started and then obviously, we had new players join, but we have been able to keep this group together for all this time.

LIS: You say we, you have other coaches?

CF: Yes of course. We have 2 other coaches, Coach Mike Redmond and Coach Joe McKie.

LIS: Up until now, how has your season been going?

CF: Well we had our best Fall season yet. We moved up to Division 2 and finished 1 game above .500 so that was a good accomplishment. We also won our first Championship at the Western Lehigh Fallfest Tournament. And over the winter we won 2 games against Division 1 Teams and actually tied an EDP team 3-3. So I would say we have been on a great run.

LIS: In our questionnaire you filled out, you mentioned playing in the Long Island Cup 2 times, what was that like?

CF: Yes that's correct. So unfortunately we did lose both times in the finals, but the whole experience was so much fun not just for the girls but the parents and coaches too. You know as that tournament goes on and your team goes further and further, the atmosphere around the team is just electric really. That's all the girls talk about and it's really intoxicating. My girls have definitely played some of their best soccer during these tournament runs. We are also the only team from Floral Park that has made it to the Cup Finals 2 times (*2 times in three years,*) and they wear that as a badge of honor.

LIS: That is a great accomplishment! It sounds like your team plays well under high pressure situations.

CF: That's absolutely true. Almost everytime their backs are against the wall or they need to step up they do. In our first L.I. Cup Final, we were down 3-1 with about 15 seconds remaining and we got a goal from our centerback (*it was her first goal ever*) right before the whistle blew! They never gave up. In the Lehigh Tournament, all the teams in our division were EDP teams, so we weren't even thinking about actually winning a game let alone the whole tournament. We actually lost the game before the finals like 4-1 to the team we beat in the finals 3-1, how's that for resiliency. That was probably the best soccer this team has ever played. I remember parents saying that they could not believe the game they just saw their girls play.

LIS: Let's shift to how you and your coaches run the team. You had said that you believe in giving all of your players equal playing time. This is a very unpopular method with most coaches. In what way has this helped or hurt the players?

CF: So this was taught to me in the LIJSL coaches meeting. After hearing the instructor's points about how this would be beneficial in the long run, we fully practiced the method of equal playing time. Our Coach Joe actually uses his stopwatch so we can try to make the changes as even as possible.

I believe that this was the best decision we have made for this team and that by doing this, it has made our team what it is today. On every team you have strong, middle, and weak players, but you can never know who has a lot of room for improvement or who has already plateaued. By playing everyone equally from the start, you are giving the weaker and middle players a chance to improve their game. As they improve that in turn will give the stronger players a chance to improve their game because they are not only helping other players along, but now they are playing with better players. So as a whole everyone is improving. I go back to our championship and cup games, every player played almost half the minutes of those games. The other side of it is that we as coaches need to remember, kids signed up to play, not sit and watch.

LIS: Those are great points and a great example of following the league's suggestions. Are there any drawbacks do you think?

CF: Well yes. It does take some time for the results to get there, so in the beginning winning in higher divisions is tough. And once the girls get to a certain age, they need to start competing and earning their playing time to prepare them for high school sports, so that is a tough transition period for them and parents as well.

LIS: So would you recommend to other coaches to do this?

CF: I most definitely would. In the end you are left with a team that is fairly equal in terms of their skill level and you have kept everyone interested so there will be less drop offs. It's also good for team spirit knowing that they all had a part in winning or losing.



LIS: After visiting the team website, it is clear that digital communication plays a large roll in your team's landscape. Can you talk about this and explain the intentions and benefits or drawbacks of doing this?

CF: Yes, I rely heavily on all things internet, video and social media. This age group grew up on social media so it is a natural connection they have to it and an extremely useful tool for me. Our website has past videos, images and any information the team and parents need which makes it easier for them. I use a chat app for all my players and coaches so we can all stay connected. And of course social media keeps the girls engaged. All this in addition to their own team chats and video chats.



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Due to recent events, we have been using meeting apps to hold practices a few times a week and I am even doing a live stream on YouTube where I do player interviews and show videos. The players and parents love it and it is a great way to keep the team connected and it gives everyone something positive to do during a very negative time.

LIS: Yes I did catch the last podcast on YouTube and it was very entertaining. So have there been any drawbacks?

CF: Well not really. Except for one time the girls had me take down a YouTube video from our page which in hindsight I understand why.

LIS: What happened there?

CF: So every year we have an end of the season party that I call an Awards Night. I hand out some team awards but also do a video presentation containing images and videos from the past season. I project it onto the wall of my neighbor's garage so it is a movie like atmosphere. Anyway, I had this video up on our YouTube channel thinking parents or players could access anytime. But apparently some boys from school stumbled upon the video. The girls were embarrassed and told me to take it down. So I did have to rethink the private side of doing this.



Players left to right: Kayla, Abby, Gabby, Grace, Mia, Michaela



Rovers Captain Abby M.

LIS: Ok I gotta ask, from all the images you submitted, there has been 1 thing constant in all of them. Eyeblack. I have never seen a girls team wear so much eyeblack, especially in colors! What's up with that?

CF: (laughs) That's great you noticed. So that started on Halloween my first year with the team. The girls asked if they could wear their makeup from their costumes. Some did, some didn't, but my daughter brought hers with her. So for the one's who didn't, I gave it to them. They liked it so much, we decided eyeblack for the team would be the way to go. It has become part of our uniform. We have about 8 or 9 different colors we wear and have been wearing it since then, about 5 years now. And there are other teams who say "oh, you guys are the team that wears the eyeblack." Again, just another thing to keep it fun. We don't play without it.

LIS: Going forward as the girls have gotten older, how has the team changed or how has your approach to coaching them changed if at all?

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CF: Oh yeah the team has changed and we as coaches have had to adapt. With them going into Junior High and laying other sports, their schedules have become crazy. So rather than shove soccer upon them I have taken the stance of just being there for them when they have time. For ex. I have almost the whole team playing soccer for the high school and they practice everyday, so that means for the Rovers really no practices for the Fall or at least until the school season ends. But again my goal now is not to win the World Cup, but to keep them all playing together for as long as I can or they want to. It really is no longer about the soccer as much as it is the friendships.



Rovers win in shootout to advance in the L.I. Cup finals



Players top left to right: Lauren, Bridget P, Bridget M, bottom: Violet

LIS: You mentioned you weren't going to shove soccer upon them but let them do other sports. Sounds like you're letting the Rovers take a back seat to High School sports. What is your reasoning behind this?

CF: Yes that's exactly right. My reasoning is simple. when I became a coach for this team really had a few goals. 1st I wanted to give these girls memories and hopefully create friendships they would cherish and never forget. 2nd I wanted to help them to become well rounded, responsible young adults who could flourish in society as they got older, and 3rd I wanted to prepare them so when the time came they could if they wanted to play JV or Varsity soccer for their high school.

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So that being said, I have to let them put their high school sports, especially soccer, ahead of the Rovers. But they know the Rovers will always be here for them.

LIS: Let's end with what you might expect in the future from this team and what this experience has meant for you.

CF: Oooh the future. That's tough. Knowing that so many of the girls will be trying out for JV and other sports will definitely take away from the Rovers. I really am hoping the girls stay together until they are too old to play and whatever I need to do to accomplish that I would. I know a fellow coach, who I have always taken advice from, kept his team together until they were seniors. All they did was play games on Sundays. The girls wanted to stay together and loved to play with each other. That's what I see for my group. They really love being around each other and if playing a game once a week keeps them doing that then that's my focus.

As for me, that is no secret. I have known these girls, most since kindergarten, as they are all my daughter's freinds from school. This experience has been and continues to be one of the best of my life. I consider myself fortunate to be in this position. I have watched these girls grow up and it has been an amazing ride. I also have to say that of all the decisions I have made or will make in regards to the team, and with all the success and good times this team has had, it has all been because of how great this group of girls are. It's all them. You can't build a house without a strong foundation and that's what we have. And anyone who knows the team will say the same.

- Interviewd and written by: CJ Lowry