

There are two goals associated with this exercise. First, how can we improve attendance and get a true State Cup Championship back in Wyoming. Second, can we continue to support regional events and find a way to send more competitive teams to these competitions.

At the RIV October Workshop in Jackson Hole, I had the opportunity to sit down with the representatives from Alaska and Montana as well as Tom Mendoth (USYS Region IV Tournament Director and USYS National Cup Chairman) to visit in regards to the current National Championship Series (NCS) rules for participation. This was a very beneficial meeting and afforded some wiggle room in formation of teams and still comply with the NCS rules. The most problematic rules are as follows:

1. The roster for NCS play (State, Regional, National) is frozen within 14 days of the qualifying event (currently our State Cup). Thus, subsequent to playing the qualifying event, players from the 2nd or 3rd place teams cannot join the state champion and participate at FWR. Note: the roster is only frozen for NCS events.
2. For a team to qualify for participation in the qualifying event, they must participate in a state approved league consisting of at least 4 teams.
3. For NCS eligibility, teams must demonstrate continuity of their roster between the above. At least 9 players must be on both of the above rosters.
4. At the time a team names its National Championship Roster (#1 above), it may not have more than 5 previously rostered players.
5. The team may not be a select team.

One clarification that I got from the meeting involved player affiliation. I thought that a player had to drop affiliation with all other clubs and solely be a member of one club prior to participation on the NCS roster. This is not necessarily true.

One idea that was tossed around was to pull the Wyoming Regional Qualifier Tournament (WRQT) away from the Wyoming State Cup. Montana is trying this approach for the 2009/2010 year in the hopes of getting their State Cup representation back to normal. If Wyoming was to follow suit in some manner, it could have a very positive impact on our State Cup. Essentially, all clubs could compete for the State Cup Championship with no ties or obligations to send the State Cup Champion to FWR or President's Cup. We could then hold a WRQT at a different time (Labor Day, First Weekend of October, etc.)

I will demonstrate an **example** of how the above might work: Say we decide to hold such an event on Labor Day. Coaches could work with neighboring clubs to put together a roster of dedicated and committed soccer players who want to play at the next level. For example a Casper U14 Girls coach has 7 players that want this opportunity. The coach could then contact say Sheridan, Buffalo and Gillette and end up with a group of players as follows - 7 Casper, 2 Buffalo, 3 Sheridan and 4 Gillette. This would be the WRQT (NCS Roster) and would be frozen within 14 days of the Labor Day qualifier. No players could be added or dropped from this player base for future NCS events. A similar team could be formed with other clubs within the state or it could end up as often happens now as an uncontested team. Once the WRQT was over, the players could return to their home clubs for league play as long as 9 of them (say the 7 Casper and 2 Buffalo) remained with the core Casper group for league play. The season could then progress and come State Cup time, all players could participate with their home clubs for the WYS State Cup over Memorial Day. I should note that at anytime during the season, the players compiling the NCS roster could be put back together to train and/or attend tournaments to prepare for FWR. **This is only one scenario but wanted to illustrate the concept.**

I should also note that at the U15 and up ages, WYS is allowed to use High School play as the approved league. Thus as long as 9 core players played for one high school (JV or V), the league commitment portion would be satisfied.

On paper the above sounds fairly easy and straightforward however, the key would be getting the clubs to work together to determine which team would be the core, what club would the team play under and who would coach such teams.

If something like the above were to be implemented, WYS Policies and Procedures as well as the WYS State Cup Play Rules would have to be modified. In addition, the procedures would have to be submitted to RIV for verification and

approval. While neither is a huge obstacle, they do take time. Thus, it may be necessary to finish the 2009/2010 season under our current policies for State Cup/RIV play with implementation of new ideas for the following season.

Ultimately this will come down to a WYS Board decision. However, I appreciate the dialog and ideas being submitted and let's keep working the issue together for the good of the game.

On a side issue, one of you had asked what the President's Cup was. It is a new regional tournament (in its second year) that WY can send teams to for regional competition. States with less than 30,000 players can send their #2 team to the event and states with more than 30,000 can only send a team that did not participate in their NCS championship (i.e. a tier 2 or 3 team from California, Colorado, etc.).

Dorvan Polson, President, Wyoming Youth Soccer

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS IN RESPONSE:

We need to organize, perhaps some committees, breaking it down in parts, and get some agreements or understandings between the clubs. I think what you explained can work.

Phil Willoughby, Casper Soccer Club

I feel the Wyoming Youth Soccer League should continue to have the opportunity to compete in the FWR, it is a fabulous opportunity for the players. However, the time and financial commitment is a deterrent and must be made not only by the coaches and players but also by the parents. As a parent of 3 children I know this is sometimes easier said than done. I coached the Sheridan boys team (last year's U-14) for 5 years and I'm now helping with the U-12 girl's team; in this time I never took the opportunity to send a team to FWR. The reason for which came from the number of very new players I acquired in the past few years and our small roster size.

I wished the state of Wyoming had the number of players to make a full pledge each year to send a team to FWR in each age bracket however we don't. I think it would be great if we had the option to combine players from various clubs to make a committed team. The downfall to this would of course be the distance the players would have to travel to practice as a unit. I don't know if there is a clear answer.

One thing that may help increase the number of teams interested would be to send the coaches information regarding general details and deadlines of the true State Cup and FWR. I don't have a complete understanding of the procedure in which to register a team nor have I ever heard of the President's Cup.

Is it a possible option to do away with the [open portion of the state cup] and only have a State Championship to increase the number of teams entered in the gold division at state?

In regards to having the State Championship in the fall, I don't think this is a possible solution. Sheridan does not have the numbers in the fall. While coaching the boy's team never once did we have a fall team due to the numbers involved in football. This season there is 1 Sheridan Storm high school boy's team 4 girl's teams.

Cameo Passini, Sheridan County Soccer Assoc.

Moving state cup to the fall it will kill communities like Buffalo. In the fall we have 5th and 6th grade boys who play football. By the time kids hit middle school students are doing middle school sports. Larger communities can probably handle having players choosing one sport or the other but not in Buffalo. We believe in having kids doing it all. I speak for my own kids in that I want them to play soccer but my son will play football when he hits 5th grade and my daughter will play volleyball next fall in 7th grade. So Buffalo will not have U12 or U14 teams without them being Coed which is what we have right now. Having been a coach of Coed teams this is not always the best situation.

Ron Glassock, Johnson County Soccer Assoc/ Buffalo Blast Soccer Coach

As the Director of Coaching for JHYS, I have sat down to discuss all the topics with our club president. Below are our joint opinions.

- **Far West Regionals**

- We agree that competitive teams should continue to go to Far West Regionals
- We did send a team to Lancaster California this past summer and believe it was a positive experience regardless of outcome

- Combining teams does work and should be implemented to send a competitive team to Far West Regionals
- Jackson Hole has combined players from Gillette, Laramie, and Casper in the past, which helped us to be successful.
- **State Cup**
 - We have no problem moving State Cup to the fall. We believe it would be beneficial to have State Cup later in the fall than Labor Day. That way teams will have more time to prepare.
 - Some states play their state cup during holidays and in the fall. For example Utah girls do play their state cup finals Memorial Day weekend. Utah boys play in the fall. In Colorado it is the opposite.
- **Wyoming League**
 - We feel it would be beneficial to have a league tournament weekend or two. All teams would play games Saturday and Sunday. This would cut down on travel and other issues (fields not prepared, referees not showing up etc.)
- **College Showcase Tournaments**
 - We need to take our elite athletes and give them the opportunity to play at the next level. This is something the state can help with and where we can combine teams to travel to specific showcase tournaments.
 - The majority if not all recruiting is done through college showcase events. Through my own personal experience it is very rare for colleges to attend high school soccer events. That is why we must provide an avenue for these players to showcase themselves.
 - This could complement ODP but it will not help us if the best players are not on the field. Right now I believe we do not have all of the best players participating in ODP.

Sincerely,

Joe Rice, Jackson Hole Youth Soccer, President

Carlos Elizondo, Jackson Hole Youth Soccer, Director of Coaching

For U-8 and U-10, we do a state wide Wyoming Youth Soccer Academy. Players are not Laramie Blizzard, Gillette Edge or whoever. The players register as a WYS player and instead of league weekends do centralized trainings where the first part would focus on skills, and the second part the players could be divided into groups for small sided games. Use this time to develop new coaches, referees, and maybe even educate the parents. If groups would like to play tournaments they still can. We would just have a better pool of players to work with and could make it more affordable and less stressful for everyone involved.

U12 and above, I have witnessed the decline in competitive teams at State Cup as well. Knowing it's not totally in-line with USYS guidelines, we need to take regionals qualifying out of our State Championships. We are trying to do two divisions (State Cup and not) which totally depletes the available teams. If we take the regional aspect out of it, we could keep it over Memorial Day and crown a true State Champion. We could, in the fall, develop a "Regional Qualifying League". Basically, invite any players that would like to compete at a regional level and use the "League" to train and unite the players and parents. I think each club would need to agree, and coaches would need to apply (through Anne) then she and a selection committee would make the decisions on who coaches. If there is a full team from one club, we could certainly incorporate that into the league on the rare occasion we would need to. We would just have to have ground rules in place before hand.

A few more things to consider:

Have only one season of Wyoming league play. Fall for older age divisions, (high-school), spring for younger divisions (U-14 and U-12), and Academy's for the younger players every season. This would eliminate some of the scheduling nightmares we face. Encourage tournament play during the non league seasons. And maybe develop more tournaments.

Set up referee evaluations and development during the academy weekends.

Promote all of this as raising the level of play in Wyoming. If we don't think outside the box, we will continue to see a decline throughout the state.

Don Barnes, Laramie Blizzard

I have some concerns about moving the State Cup to the fall season. Though it would be all right for the girls, I here in Green River we have trouble making U11-14 boys teams because of football. This may leave out a lot of really good players in the state. I do like the idea of making a traveling state team "Wyoming United" and going to out of state tournaments. But who makes the team, who coaches the team, do the players still play for their home teams in state, and would this team be able to qualify for the FWR? Would this also interfere with the players that are traveling with the ODP team? As a state, whether it is boys or girls I think we need to have some kind of combined state team to compete out of state.

As for Wyo league I do feel it needs to be changed. I know with a state this big it's hard to schedule and make everyone happy. But to have to travel 3 or more hours one way, to play to 2 games on Sunday is becoming a hard sell for many parents. Especially when you are not getting any "home" games for neither the Spring nor Fall season. Maybe we could make it where each team plays one weekend at home, one weekend on the road, and then one weekend where everybody doing Wyo league plays a two day type of tournament where you play the rest of the teams you haven't played. And possibly, just do Wyo league in the fall due to the fact there are many more in state and out of state tournaments teams can attend in the spring.

Randy Stoeger, Green River Spurs

I believe that we should continue to support these events as long as we can be competitive. Regional events are very costly and I know that parents are not happy watching their kids lose games 10-0, so we need to find a way to produce more competitive teams from the state of Wyoming. We are at a distinct disadvantage given our population size and the numbers of registered clubs and players eligible to compete at a Regional Tournament. I believe that it is in our best interest to put together the players who are interested and capable of playing at a regional event for a particular age-group, roster them with a club and coach who is able to prepare the team, and then send that group to regionals. The U-14 boys team Dorvan spoke of was comprised of a core group from Laramie, but had players rostered from other parts of the state to add strength to the team. I know I have personally taken teams with players from Lander, Casper, Cheyenne, and Laramie to tournaments in Colorado and have had success, but I don't think we would have been as successful using just our players from Laramie. The challenge will be finding a way to put these teams together based on coach input for each age-group and deciding who will be in charge of the training and planning. I know that we aren't allowed to have "all-star" teams for regionals, but we can find a better way to represent our state by using players from a variety of clubs. When I was playing in Virginia, we had players from various parts of the state and even had a player from Philadelphia rostered with our club team for State Cup. Putting a competitive team together can be done with cooperation.

If the rostering of players from multiple clubs does not sit well with coaches, then I would suggest moving State Cup to the fall so that we at least know who will be representing our state at regionals, and teams will have more than a few weeks to prepare for the event. Parents will also be able to arrange travel early enough to get more reasonable prices than when planning 3 weeks out. The Memorial Day event is comprised of mostly teams who have no interest in advancing to regionals, so State Cup should be moved to better serve the teams with higher aspirations. Colorado begins their state cup with a tournament over Labor Day weekend, and then the teams who advance, play every Sunday until a champion has been decided. The state champions have all winter and spring to train, prepare, and get organized for the Regional tournament. Colorado has quite a few more teams than we do, but we could select a weekend strictly for State Cup play (Labor Day would be a good choice) and organize the games for the age-groups that are contested. Uncontested teams would have time to finalize their rosters during the fall, adding players as needed, so that we can pay the bond in February with a solid, committed group of players.

In the end, the players need to have a positive experience and represent our state with pride. The only way this can be accomplished is by finding a way to solve the population barriers we face so that we can send quality teams who will be competitive at the regional level.

Anne Moore, Laramie Blizzard Boys U-12 and Wyoming Youth Soccer Technical Director

I took a different angle after reading coach Moore's email. Everyone is talking about moving the tournament to the fall (which I agree with as a back-up option), but not really seeing the big picture of being competitive at the highest

level. Having coached and played at the regional level, I know that you can't compete with some of these teams without 13-14 "experienced" players. My teams have been somewhat successful at FWR in the past, winning games as both a player and a coach, and in all of those experiences we have had a mix of players from around the state. I believe that it is necessary to build a "Wyoming United" team, that trains somewhat regularly with experienced coaching. I also think that we need to start this at a young age (U10) and play in some Colorado, SD, Montana, Utah tournaments.

Brian Longbottom, Cheyenne Soccer club

I also agree with Coach Moore and Coach Sherman, I believe that if the State Cup was held in the Fall, and a true state champion was crowned, they would then have time to plan and prepare for a much larger challenge at FWR, as well as maybe go down to Colorado a time or two to compete in tournaments down there that would help the kids prepare.

I have not taken a team to the FWR tournament like many of these coaches have, but the prospect of it is nerve racking, only because we don't see this competition level all the time like the kids that are at this tournament, and to take a team to this tournament that is untested and hasn't practiced as a full unit (because many players would have to be picked up at the last minute) is tough. By making the State Cup in the Fall, maybe you get a half a dozen teams that would play in a "championship" division. Then the team that comes out on top, would also be able to draw from this group, and practice together for a while, and then maybe go to a few bigger tournaments in Colorado or wherever, and prepare for this tournament. Then we would be placing more importance on the State Cup, and we would be sending a team that deserved to go, and not just "could afford to go." I think that the level of competition coming out of Wyoming would be better. The costs to go to the FWR are very high, but if the team had a chance to raise the money within the community, or the parents had a chance to plan a trip like this, it would be easier to commit. I like the idea of a Labor Day State Cup, the weather would still be good, and that would be a good weekend to organize a wonderful tournament. The overall goal should always be to provide a positive learning experience for the kids, and I think that we currently aren't putting them in position to succeed or enjoy themselves. Maybe this opens a path that allows them a chance to compete against teams and kids like they should.

As far as state league goes, this is an entirely different animal. I believe that we either need to play all games in a central location, or it should be broken into regions or something, because the travel and schedule is sometimes hard to cope with. Maybe we need to look at playing the games on Saturdays, so if you have to travel, you can get home and recover before the next school day. Maybe we have regional league games in one location each year, or maybe we play all league games in one location (that changes each year) that can handle all the games. I'm not sure, but we didn't even travel this distance for a tournament, let alone these league games. With the state of Wyoming being as large as it is, it opens up problems if we are going to try and play teams from different areas. If we stay regional and then play the teams we haven't seen in State Cup, then it keeps the travel down a little. Also starting league games earlier would help with the Fall tournament schedule as well as the weather.

Dave Rearick, Gillette Edge U12

I agree with coach Moore's email in that we should have State Cup in the Fall. I would add that having the tournament in the Fall could increase the participation of the high school players. Also, we should allow every team to compete without having them commit before hand to FWR. This would only be practical in the Fall. We could use the Fall season as one tournament. Points awarded for each game with the top 4 playing each other in a semi-final/finals in mid October. After winning, the parents and players can then really sit down and have the time to decide whether or not to go to FWR. They would also have 6 months to prepare, save, and recruit additional players. My experience last year was, parents committed in January. Then some backed out in May and I had just a week and a half to add guest players. If a team wins State in the Fall, they have plenty of time to truly commit and sort out their options and/or build the team.

J.R. Sherman, Cheyenne Sting U-11 Boys Gold and Black teams