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Sports

Rivas gets things rolling for CV

A fixture in the Crescenta Valley community, former Falcons girls' Coach Reggie Rivas has lead a soccer transformation

It all started, oddly enough, with the rolling of a soccer ball down an aisle of a Northridge warehouse in the early hours of the morning.

As Reggie Rivas, Director of Coaching and chief architect of the Crescenta Valley Soccer Club, tells it, getting back into soccer — particularly coaching the sport — was one of the farthest things from his mind in 1999.

That's when Costco co-worker Billy Curtis first began his attempts to guide Rivas toward what would become his calling.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do in life after playing [soccer] in college, I was a little lost," says the 31-year-old Rivas, who played in his hometown for Modesto Junior College and at Cal State Northridge before an injury ended his college career in the late 1990s. "Billy and I worked the graveyard shift at Costco and one night at 2 a.m., he rolled me a soccer ball and I juggled it.

"At the time, he had a 7-year-old daughter playing AYSO in Region 88 in Glendale , and he asked me to show her some moves."

Barely knowing Curtis at the time, Rivas was a bit skeptical of the idea, but after much prodding, eventually agreed to give Curtis' daughter some lessons on the field.

"Just to get him off my back, I trained her one day, and he called me after her next AYSO game to tell me she had scored three goals," Rivas recalls. "I trained her again and I started liking it. I enjoyed that connection of teaching a kid a skill."

So was born the coaching career of Rivas, who, since his introduction to the community as a Crescenta Valley High junior varsity soccer coach in 1999, has had unparalleled influence on its landscape of youth soccer.

Rivas began the Crescenta Valley Soccer Club in 2001 while coaching the Falcons girls' varsity team as a supplement to the already large presence of the American Youth Soccer Organization in the area.

A key objective of the co-ed club has always been to prepare its players for high school soccer, and to continue to develop them while in high school in preparation for a college career.

"There was no club soccer in our area [when the club started]," says Rivas, whose enterprise has steadily grown from its two original teams to the total of 14 squads it fields today. "There was AYSO, which is great, but there just wasn't that next level of competition to get our high schools better."

A prime example of CVSC's effectiveness in developing players is Emma Dearman, the senior goalkeeper for 2006-07 Pacific-League champion Crescenta Valley , who is bound for Sonoma State University in the fall.

A casual soccer player who was more interested in softball when she met Rivas six years ago while waiting for her younger sister's lesson to conclude, Dearman has been heavily involved with the club ever since.

"I was already playing goalie with my AYSO team so I decided to go out [for CVSC] and I became a part of the club the first year it started," says Dearman, who this past season shared Pacific League tri-MVP honors with CVSC teammate Catrina Flores of Hoover and Kristina Amela of Burbank. "It definitely got me more serious about soccer.

"The club provided me with a goalie coach to train with so I could just work on that. Reggie was supportive in everything we did — for me, he was like a father figure and he pushed me towards what I wanted to succeed in."

Dearman is part of a team - or rather a group of girls that remained teammates as they advanced to each age level of the club together - that holds a special place in Rivas' heart.

Its most recent roster also boasts an impressive assortment of athletes from the area.

In addition to Dearman and Flores, the 2006-07 Girls Under 17 team featured All-Pacific League first-team selection Elena Torres of Hoover and second-team defender Richelle Mascaro of Crescenta Valley. All-Rio Hondo League goalkeeper Anya Rosen of La Canada alternated starts in goal with Dearman. Also on that team were multi-sport varsity athletes Erin Hartwig of Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy and Heather Hansen of Providence .

"It's a very exciting time to see them grow, and now they're off to college," says Rivas, who typically coaches three girls' teams during a club season.

The core of that group, when they were members of the club's Girls Under 13 squad, won the 87-team State Cup Tournament in 2003. In 2005, they made it to the quarterfinals of the world's largest youth soccer tournament, Sweden 's Gothia Cup, as an Under 16 team.

As the tight-knit group nears the end of its time in the club, Rivas is already excited about the next generation of girls from his club ready for high school.

"This group of girls is loaded with talent," says Rivas of his Girls Under 15 squad, led by incoming Crescenta Valley freshmen Olivia Sierra, Sylvia Martinez and Jordan Royer, and Sacred Heart freshman Danielle Molina, to name a few. "Here is the future of the club, and the future of soccer in our community."

Last season, that team, assisted by former Crescenta Valley and UCLA standout Stephanie Rigamat, became the first from CVSC to win the prestigious San Diego Nomads College Showcase.

While the club's focus is on strengthening the high school talent pool, it was the success Rivas found as a high school coach in the early part of the decade that partly enabled the club's beginnings.

"My 2002 group of girls was a very special group, they were all heart," Rivas says of the Crescenta Valley girls' varsity team he guided to a runner-up finish in the CIF Southern Section Division II playoffs. "If it wasn't for them, this club probably wouldn't have gotten off the ground the way it did — they inspired a lot of kids.

"They are an inspiration to me and to the kids that have grown up playing in our club, because they still remember that group."

Jordan Stanley, a captain of that Falcons team, who now coaches for CVSC, deflects much of the credit for that run and its ensuing repercussions back to Rivas.

"I really liked the fact that he was very intense about the sport, but also really cared about us as people," Stanley says. "He wasn't just a coach concerned about winning, he was concerned about player development, the whole team aspect and us as kids."

For the success and happiness he has found in what he calls, "the greatest job in the world," Rivas eternally credits Curtis. The former La Crescenta resident, with whom Rivas has remained good friends, not only urged him to take up coaching but also recommended him to associates in the school's soccer program for his first coaching job at Crescenta Valley.

Rivas also credits that institution and the surrounding city that has become more of a second home than a workplace.

"Tommy Lasorda bleeds Dodger blue, but I bleed CV blue," he says with a laugh. "For the club and the community. I love it."