

Dear Emerald City Parents:

The document below was prepared by a group of over ten Emerald City parents who have been actively involved in the Seattle United process by serving on the various Seattle United Initiative committees. The intent of the document is to articulate the hopes we all have for our children playing in premier soccer, and to address the lingering fears some of us have articulated in recent days.

The June 3rd Emerald City Town Hall Meeting on Seattle United and the June 8th Emerald City Annual General Meeting revealed the need for quality, succinct information on the Seattle United Initiative from the unique perspective of Emerald City families.

Without clear information, misunderstandings have developed regarding Seattle United within the Emerald City membership. It was agreed by all attendees at these two events that further information was needed for membership education. This document attempts to address that need. This document is also available on the [SYSA web site](#).

Emerald City FC Parents

Introducing...SEATTLE UNITED

What's the Big Idea?

Seattle Youth Soccer Association (SYSA) is the organization that oversees youth soccer clubs in Seattle and Shoreline. To improve competitive soccer for its players, SYSA has undertaken a major project to streamline operations and unify all its premier (PDL and WSYS) and select (District) teams under one club's management within SYSA. **Seattle United (SU)** represents the working name of this unique new entity, designed to operate all of SYSA's premier and select teams under one administrative roof, in a more collaborative, efficient and professional manner than ever before.

How is select soccer managed today?

SYSA consists of 15 clubs serving over 13,000 kids. Each club chooses a Commissioner. These 15 Commissioners are the only people who vote on SYSA issues. Each Commissioner has one vote. Outside of SYSA, there are also a few for-profit select clubs.

ECFC was designated by SYSA to be the association's premier development club. The other 14 are primarily rec clubs. Many of these also sponsor select teams, while some are

organizations of select teams like Shoreline FC and Westside United. Nearly 1500 players participate in select soccer through SYSA, but only about 600 of these play for ECFC. **The majority of select soccer players in SYSA do not play for ECFC.**

What's wrong with that?

All the select teams compete for the same group of talented soccer players in Seattle. This fractured arrangement does not serve players well, because each different faction tries to hold onto its best players to maintain solvency and credibility (often for the benefit of the adults), rather than encouraging player development on the premier or select team that best matches the player's ability and commitment level.

This hurts ECFC because all the best players do not land in the premier club where they belong. This makes ECFC teams less competitive than their counterparts who have an integrated system, such as Crossfire and others. Less competitive teams detract from ECFC 's ability to be a top premier club in Puget Sound. This in turn diminishes ECFC's ability to attract and retain the greatest number of top quality coaches and players in our region.

The remaining top players often leave to play for stronger teams with better coaching, thus decreasing the caliber even further. This has led to the collapse of several ECFC teams, especially in the upper age groups. ECFC has been unable to provide enough solid coaching and team support to reverse this pattern of attrition.

At the same time, many talented and committed players do not find their way onto any team, because they may not be selected for one of the ECFC teams, but no select team is available in their age group and area.

Thus, soccer players at every competitive level who want and deserve to play find themselves without a team.

How did Seattle United come about?

The concept of unifying premier and select teams under one management has been discussed since 2002. SYSA began the planning stages in 2007, and the design phase in

January 2008. Towards this effort, innumerable hours have been spent by over 50 volunteers with combined expertise in business, finance, accounting, law, medicine, government and Seattle soccer. This has been a collaborative effort among people from all walks of life, whose commonality lies in their dedication to improving the landscape for competitive soccer in Seattle.

The vision underlying this effort involves all SYSA clubs joining together to create a stronger organization. By working together, all clubs benefit from increased flexibility on a number of issues from team management to resource sharing. By combining our collective strengths, players and families benefit from an organization whose stronger foundation and more integrated system is designed to support players throughout their development.

Emerald City members have been integral to this process, in that 43 of the nearly 75 committee slots (57%) have been filled by ECFC members including parents, Board members and the Coaching Director. This exceeds the percentage of SYSA select players in ECFC, ensuring that ECFC has been well-represented in this process.

Many different options have been discussed and evaluated for over two years by a large and diverse group of people. A professional consultant with expertise in building non-profit organizations has also participated to help guide this process. WSYSA has also retained him to enhance governance structures that support seamless player mobility throughout the State. Best practices from around the country have been studied. The Seattle United model is the culmination of all the interviews, research, discussions and ideas evaluated during this extended process. It is still a work in progress, which represents the ongoing collaboration, inclusivity, thoroughness, and player focus that are the hallmarks of this new organization.

Why Bother?

The integrated structure can provide many benefits to premier and select players of all levels, which the current system cannot.

Expected benefits of Seattle United	vs. Current system
<p>Larger pool of qualified players feeding into top level improves overall caliber of premier teams. With one club, top players won't be recruited by competing select teams and coaches</p>	<p>Only 42% of select SYSA players play for ECFC. Only three ECFC teams made it through semi-finals in the 2009 Championship Cup . ECFC fields about 39 teams.</p>
<p>Better retention of top players all the way through U-18 due to stronger teams, increased opportunities for competitive play, and consistent high quality coaching.</p>	<p>Many top level players leave for Crossfire and other clubs; the ECFC F'91 green team disbanded, as did the F '92 white team which played first division -- most went to other nearby clubs.</p>
<p>Better retention of top coaches due to more coaching opportunities, more good players, consistent high level standards, licensing, ongoing training/teaching opportunities, more objective evaluation system, and club integration. Coach employment decisions made by 3-person committee, consisting of the Coaching Director, a peer coach, and a volunteer parent rep from different team. Decisions based on performance, observation, and parent/player surveys.</p>	<p>Many high quality coaches have left ECFC or not been re-hired in recent years. Most continue to work as professional soccer coaches at other premier and select clubs in the area.</p> <p>Retention and dismissal of coaches decided by Coaching Director only, not clearly linked to performance and member surveys.</p>

Expected benefits of Seattle United	vs. Current system
<p>Player pass for player development, available to all SU players, subject to WSYSA approval, when more playing time or more competitive play would benefit player.</p>	<p>Player pass underutilized; limited to ECFC and PDL teams; often used to win games not develop players.</p>
<p>Seattle United Academy available for player development and more intensive training opportunities, including for recreational players and coaches before they get to the U-11 level when select and premier play begin.</p>	<p>No current academy system. Some players leave for other clubs that offer integrated player development & an academy. No significant training of recreational players, either before they reach U-11 or thereafter.</p>
<p>Sounders FC Academy is linked to SU, providing increased opportunities for elite players interested in competition at regional level and beyond.</p>	<p>No link between Sounders FC and ECFC</p>
<p>Economies of scale with integrated system: consolidated administrative costs and uniform/equipment ordering; efficient resource sharing for trainings, skills clinics, coaching oversight, etc.;</p>	<p>Lack of collaboration between ECFC and other select teams leads to duplication of administrative functions, decreased efficiency re uniform/equipment orders and costs, lack of resource sharing.</p>

Expected benefits of Seattle United	vs. Current system
<p>Better separation of Governance (Board of Directors, committees) from Operations (staff &volunteers who run day-to-day club activities) in accordance with good governance principles. Accountability, transparency, and built-in checks and balances. Adherence to regulations for non-profit organization such as regular audits.</p>	<p>Overlap of governance and management-decision-makers also handle bank account, order uniforms and run tryouts. Information not readily available on website regarding finances, elections, bylaws, meeting agendas, etc. In 30 year history, first ECFC audit now underway due to state intervention. WSYSA currently investigating ECFC re State's concerns over governance, finances and election process.</p>
<p>WSYSA approves and encourages formation of SU, which aligns with State directive to streamline organizations and reduce barriers to play.</p>	<p>Barriers prevent best match for players with teams based on interest and ability. This is in opposition to state directives.</p>
<p>Different mid-tier select play packages including full year regional option and seasonal (June-November) option. Ideal for players who wish to commute less, practice closer to home, or play multiple sports.</p>	<p>No regional or partial year play packages offered</p>

Where will this take place?

SYSA geographically encompasses the cities of Seattle and Shoreline. The premier teams will be from a citywide draw, and have year-round practices all around the city much as they do now on Emerald City.

The select teams will be more locally based in 4 regions of the city: North, NE, West and Central/South, with nearby practices and games. These teams will involve less travel, lower costs, and a choice of seasonal or full year commitment.

When will this take place?

A transition plan is in place to minimize disruption and maximize success of this new endeavor. The expected timeline is:

Club formation:

1. SYSA board will vote in July 2009 whether to approve this new entity. If approved, the Steering committee will appoint a temporary board to launch the organization, and then **an elected board** will take over by June 2011.
2. First Director of Coaching (DOC) will be hired in September 2009, the second in Dec. 2009, based on executive search to hire best candidates. Two DOCs plus an Executive Manager will help assure that decisions are made in the best interests of players. Many soccer clubs have encountered difficulty with single entity management.
3. February 2010 finalize slate of coaches
4. Spring 2010 hold try-outs and begin first play season.

Team formation:

There will be two premier teams at each age and gender, and as many mid-tier regional teams as there are interested players. SU anticipates at least one full-year and one part-year select team per region.

1. In May 2010, U-11 to U-14 players will try out and play for SU. Current teams are expected to remain largely intact just as they do now after tryouts, with changes to coaching staff and players similar to what typically occurs already.

2. Older U-15 to U-18 teams may "opt in" to join Seattle United, or may continue in ECFC. For teams wishing to join SU, team formation will proceed in much the same fashion as it does now with coach assignments by the DOC, tryouts, and team selection that usually includes many of the same returning players, depending on who comes to tryouts. The intention here is to accommodate the needs of older players during the transition to the new, unified structure. The transition period is expected to be from 0 - 3 years, depending on the team's interests. The U-15 to U-18 teams will be able to take advantage of the new SU governance and operational structures the sooner they opt in.

How will the teams work?

For premier players, the experience on the field is expected to be very similar to what they have now, since the goal during the transition is to create as little disruption to the teams, coaches and players as possible.

Coaches from both premier and select programs will be infused into this new club. All efforts will be marshaled to facilitate as smooth a transition as possible.

In addition, coaches will be given special guidance and mentoring to ensure they provide all players with the highest quality opportunities for development with age-appropriate techniques, while maintaining high standards of professionalism. The current lack of coaching oversight and mentoring has allowed some coaches to underperform and simply do what they want, with devastating effects on the players. By increasing accountability, oversight, communication and training opportunities at all levels, SU intends to provide coaches and players with a consistently high quality experience.

What about PDL?

SU fully expects to join PDL. Discussions are already under way, and the State supports SU's consolidation of soccer in Seattle. However, PDL may itself change in the next year. Moreover, ECFC is currently out of compliance with PDL admission standards by having only one team winning State Cup, and by not fielding teams in all age groups.

What about the money?

The costs for premier are expected to be about the same as they are now for ECFC. An SU committee is currently working on a detailed budget. The cost for select will be lower than premier, about the same as for the average select team today. In addition, there will be a fundraising committee to generate adequate start-up and scholarship funds, as well as an audit committee, to maintain necessary checks and balances in the new system.

For those older teams that choose to remain in ECFC, concern exists regarding ECFC's economic viability if the U-11 through U-14 teams transition to Seattle United. The option of staying in ECFC appears financially feasible, based on:

- ⌋ ECFC has a large reserve of cash last reported at \$250k.
- ⌋ At current fees, revenue streams from teams should be cash positive.
- ⌋ Clearly with the current financial obligations that ECFC has with staffing, there will either need to be an adjustment to those obligations or there must be a resource share. For instance, ECFC may use Goalkeeper or Specialized Trainer Resources from Seattle United as well as staffing resources (paying its pro-rated share of the cost).
- ⌋ There are ways to share resources and ensure ECFC older age teams are sufficiently supported if the spirit exists within SU and ECFC.

ECFC still faces significant financial challenges unrelated to SU:

- ⌋ ECFC has not reported or distributed financial performance information to the membership for many years.
- ⌋ The governing body Washington Youth Soccer is conducting an investigation into financial and governance issues at ECFC.
- ⌋ Last year ECFC suffered an operating loss that has not been verified. Estimated loss to be \$52k - \$180k
- ⌋ ECFC revealed that their financial records are severely disorganized and \$28k has been allocated for additional accounting services and an audit.

Financial viability is an issue ECFC faces with or without Seattle United.

What about the name?

The SU BOD will determine the name after the organization has been formed. They will actively communicate with college soccer programs around the country to enhance visibility and awareness of the new organization.

Unfortunately, ECFC is not considered one of the strongest premier clubs in the region based on performance. ECFC is also incapable of consolidating Seattle select soccer, as its failure to collaborate over the years with other select teams has harmed its leadership potential.

A new name befits a new organization that all can rally around. Many other clubs have become stronger after streamlining their structure and changing their name. For example, does anyone remember Washington Premier as the Royals?

What are some highlights of the plan?

The Seattle United BOD is already working to add new dimensions of soccer development for Seattle's youth. Here are a couple of highlights:

Seattle Sounders FC Training Centers

Seattle United may be landing one of the proposed Seattle Sounders FC Training Centers. This exciting development will benefit our elite players and the club as a whole.

The Sounders FC is partnering with Washington Youth Soccer to offer a statewide player development system beginning in 2010. The partnership will operate an elite talent program in addition to allowing utilization by local grassroots community youth soccer club programs. The program is designed to develop the most talented youngsters which will enable them to reach their full potential as a soccer player. Specifically, this Sounders FC youth development system will develop players at the high end of the developmental pyramid, yet will also provide training for coaches and players from other levels of play.

Players eligible for the academy-style program include boys and girls ages 13-17..

The centerpiece of this program is the operation of approximately six Regional Training Centers (RTCs) across the state. The RTCs will be located in diverse areas to keep travel time under 1.5 hours each way for players and families. RTCs will be licensed by the Sounders FC on a two-year basis. Each RTC will each have a Regional Director responsible for its technical operations, who reports to the Sounders FC Youth Director. In addition, each RTC will have assistant regional director(s) and a regional coaching staff. **Seattle United will be coordinating closely with both the Sounders FC and Washington Youth Soccer to host the Seattle Regional Training Center.**

Development Academy

A Development Academy will be created to provide younger rec players at U-9 and U-10 as well as U11 and U12 players with additional opportunities to get quality, developmentally appropriate coaching. This will help SU by having younger SYSA players already familiar with the Club prior to U11 tryouts. Every large club in the area other than ECFC is already doing something similar to this. By fielding strong U11 teams right from the beginning it keeps our top players from leaving for Crossfire, NW Nationals, Eastside, etc.

How will SU benefit my child?

The goal of SU is to incorporate the current premier club (ECFC) and the myriad select teams into one integrated, collaborative organization that will better serve all the players, as well as provide more competitive opportunities for the top players in Seattle. SU intends to retain the successful elements of the premier and select clubs-notably the team structure, high quality coaches, and players' positive experiences on the field-- while streamlining and improving areas that have not yet been optimized-notably issues of governance, accounting, retention of top coaches and players, and competitive level of play.

For those who are satisfied with ECFC, SU will help ensure that your child's soccer experience continues to remain positive all the way through U-18. For those that see the need for improvements, the cultural changes based on integration, inclusivity and collaboration, plus the structural changes based on transparency and good governance

principles, are paving the way for a stronger, more competitive, more responsive soccer club to serve Seattle's most talented players better than ever before.