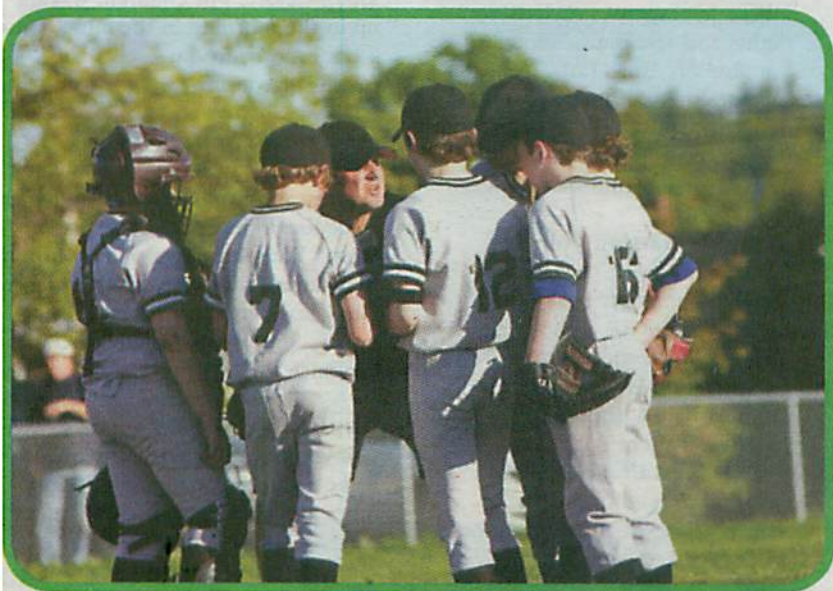


## Sports

# Are You Ready for a Travel Team?

By Jeri Dayle



Consult just about any dictionary and you'll find the definition of a Soccer Mom is close to this: "A parent whose life is consumed by the daily transport of her children from one athletic activity to another." It's no joke; the truth is that when families commit to youth sports teams, in particular to one in an organization that travels, the result can be anything but child's play.

"Just driving around is the biggest commitment for most parents," notes Lonny Unger, president of F.C. Westchester Soccer Club, one of the premier leagues in East Coast Youth Soccer. "You can count on three or four days of driving a week — two or three for practices and then a game every weekend."

Taking into account gas, the entry and equipment fees, and everything

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For Metro area families with children ages 9-16 who are joining for the first time, they will discover plenty of travel team experiences to choose from. One well-timed choice is baseball. Lacrosse, football, and tennis are a few other popular youth sports that can have you motoring all over New York and along the East Coast. There are even sports with playoffs and tournaments that can take you out of the country — such as to Canada for ice hockey and to Europe for soccer.

else involved, joining a team that travels can be quite an investment for families. Money is just the beginning of it, says administrative and coaching professional Eddie Albert. He is the commissioner of baseball for the 78th Precinct Youth Council in Brooklyn, which consists of 1,200 kids on 89 teams. About 10 percent of those teams, the ones in the Brooklyn Bulldogs league, are travel teams.

"First," says Albert, "parents need to be realistic about the time



involved. A spring season may start in late April, but it usually runs until after July 4, especially when you figure in playoff games." Many parents, he fears, don't realize that joining up might interfere with later camp or vacation plans.

As far as money is concerned, there are three things Albert mentions to consider. First, there is the basic team fee, which runs \$300-\$500 a season for his league. Uniforms are the second, and they can cost upwards of \$100. The third element is the travel costs, which extend to two or three tournament weekends at about \$450 a pop (to cover the cost of a hotel and meals in Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland, South Carolina, and other popular tournament sites).

Unger says that the cost for a soccer season will vary (between \$2,000 and \$4,000) depending on the level of the team. He stresses that kids travel more often as they age, and a 14- or 15-year-old could do quite a bit of touring.

Let's say you've got the funds. Now, how will you cope with all the other demands? Parents are advised to seek out to support — from spouses, siblings, other team parents, and everyone in their community. Carpooling is the most popular way

to share the load. Take a look at the sidebar to see other ways you can make life easier. And don't forget the coach, Albert and Unger say—parents can support their hard work, too. From fundraising, to running a concession, to being a linesperson for a game, there are many ways parents can pitch in.

If the family can manage the details and the money, though, there is greater reward in the travel experience than most recreational and intramural leagues. According to Albert, the chance to compete at a higher level, and perhaps win a national tournament, is an incomparable feeling for a child. Unger agrees. Both sports leaders also think a topnotch travel team experience better prepares young athletes for high school and college teams. Albert adds that truly professional coaching (like he ascribes to) builds character.

Wesley Malowitz agrees and speaks from his own experience as president of the Westport Soccer Association: "For the young soccer enthusiast with more than just a casual interest in the game, the travel soccer experience provides an opportunity for kids to develop their soccer skills in a fun, yet competitive environment." The father of three adds, "However, travel soccer is not just about developing technical soccer ability. It is also about teaching kids self-confidence, dedication, discipline, camaraderie and teamwork: All traits that will stay with these kids as they navigate their way through their adolescent and teenage years and into adulthood.

And travel teams also create friendships and community: "This sense of camaraderie and teamwork that travel soccer players enjoy spills over onto the sidelines and envelops their parents and siblings as well. In this way, travel soccer truly becomes a family event," says Malowitz.

There's one last bit of advice coaches can offer parents, and that's to think of your work in the same vein as your kids'. It's okay if you aren't always successful; nobody wins them all. Just be sure that you're prepared, that you've made the effort, and that you keep on learning. And don't forget the main idea — to have fun!

*For more information on Unger or Albert's sports organizations, visit [www.fewestchester.org](http://www.fewestchester.org) or [www.78pyc.org](http://www.78pyc.org).*

## Lightening the Load

This is how parents can help the team, the coach, and one another:

- Set up a carpool schedule among all the different team parents.
- Rotate responsibility for buying and bringing water, sports drinks and nutritious snacks.
- Compile a list of players' and parents' mobile phone numbers, and establish a call tree.
- Pre-pack gear and store it inside the trunk/vehicle if you can.
- Offer to provide administrative help for your coach, such as making copies or hotel reservations.
- Make to-do lists and post them alongside a visible copy of the team schedule.
- Help out at games and practice sessions.
- Take turns as "laundry monitor" to clean and transport everyone's uniforms for the week.