



HISTORY

What gave you guys the idea for “make your own ball day?” Is it a social as well as a soccer lesson?

Our goal with MYOBD is to teach and promote not only the love of the game, the skills and, fundamentals needed to play it, but also bigger life lessons like character, leadership and service. This day was created to get us to slow down for a second and think about how lucky we are. It is our goal to get our young players to remember that soccer is just a game and that the world does not revolve around us.

The day has its roots in an invitation to go overseas and serve at some orphanages in Uganda through Mark Spiegel's church. While the trip for him eventually fell through, Coach Mark was impacted by the research, the discussions, and the videos. Then at while coaching at South Central Soccer Academy, Coach Mark witnessed an abundance of material to the point of excess. A boy showed up to training with a brand new soccer ball because he had lost his at practice the night before. Spiegel had found the ball left at the fields and had it waiting for the player at training. The player now had two soccer balls while others had none. The idea was born.

Two weeks later, the eight, nine and ten year old players at SCSA came to training with a homemade soccer ball. They had watched the same videos of kids homeless and playing on the street that Coach Mark did and they discussed them with their parents as they made their own ball. At training, the free play atmosphere was complete with the players playing barefoot with the misshapen soccer balls. Music accompanied the night to make it more fun and the night ended with a talk about gratitude, thankfulness, giving and perspective. The conversation had begun and the ball was our chosen language.

The first ever "Make Your Own Ball Day" was held in September of 2012.

What is the attitude of the kids when you ask them to do this? Excited, oh no, etc? What about the parents?

We have now done this event for multiple years at dozens of clubs and the excitement has picked up steam each year. The coaches call it "The Greatest Night of the Year" and the kids follow suit. The parents seem to understand the vision and have sent emails filled with videos, stories and pictures of them creating the balls with their players. This event has become a catalyst for the community and culture of the clubs that participate as young players play with old and girls play with boys. We have also witnessed friendships made between parents of kids on different teams within the same club.

(It should be noted that there is still some opposition to the event. Some parents think preparation for games is more important and that a practice spent barefoot running after a egg shaped handmade ball holds no credence in the development of the next Graham Zusi. But these voices are becoming the exception and are being overwhelmed by the laughter and screams of those of us loving this sport for what it is, the greatest GAME in the world.)

Do you think making a ball encourages kids to play more on their own? To get pickup game going? To take ownership of the game?

Yes and no. I want to say yes so that it paints this amazing event in an even more rosy color of red. But I am not sold on the ownership. For one night, a simple and complex truth is shared and action accompanies it. This day is huge for that. There are those who have and those who have not and for this event, there is giving and receiving. For the community and for the fabric of the club participating the event creates depth and a connection with the game on another level. But unfortunately, our clubs and country are still plagued by apathetic players who do not have a friendship with their soccer ball.

The making of a ball does make us think about the game and what goes into it. And I challenge you to make a ball and not play with it. It is impossible to resist the game.

There are lots of videos of kids playing with their homemade soccer balls at home against the dog or grandma or dad. And for me, as a coach, any interaction with the ball outside of training is huge. So we love this byproduct. This is just one step in getting our young players to invest in their skills outside of training but it is a step!

Any final thoughts on “Make Your Own Ball Night?”

The day is one of joy. Kids have the pressure of it all stripped away and as a coach, you are reminded that this is "just a game." We have learned a lot from this event. We have learned about the power of invitation. We have learned about the power of a ball and the language we have in common with those around the world when we have it at our feet. We learn to play. We learn to give back. We learn that without action following truth, lives are not changed. We have learned that it is alright to be a kid for the day. We have learned that challenging kids of any age to think about hard issues is possible and is beneficial. We have learned to give. We have learned to make a ball, make a friend and make an impact!