

Regina soccer

Hello

My name is Ann Larew and I am the RHS girls head soccer coach. I was asked to take this position several years ago and I have the enormous honor and privilege to work with Regina student athletes and this will be my 8th season as head coach.

I have been a part of Regina since before some of you in this room were born - when we moved to Iowa City and my oldest son started at Regina in 1st grade in 1990. In those nearly 34 years I have seen a lot happen here at Regina. I have been a part of Regina soccer since it started, when the boys program began in 1999 and when the girls program started in 2004 (these coincided with the freshman year of my oldest son and my oldest daughter). I have been doing soccer camp for incoming K-8 graders for 24 years and ran the FFF 3v3 soccer tournament for many years.

Looking at the recent state classifications for spring 2023 for girls soccer programs in the state, of the 160 programs in the state, 152 of those programs are at schools larger than Regina and only 7 are smaller. Numbers for the boys programs are similar. Despite this David and Goliath situation, Regina soccer has always been competitive and in fact has done quite well. The boys have participated in the state tournament 14 times and have won 8 state championships. The girls have participated in the state tournament 7 times, finishing 3 times as semifinals and in 2016 losing by a single penalty kick in the state championship game.

Last year in 2022, for the first time in 15 years neither team qualified for the state tournament. There are undoubtedly multiple reasons for this. Certainly we as coaches look to ourselves as the first place to find ways to understand and to improve. The quality of the competition we face has certainly improved.

And this brings me to the Regina soccer program - which I will point out is not a "program" - this is a group of student-athletes, these are your kids, the children of your friends and of other Regina families. For a host of reasons, it has become increasingly more difficult to maintain a competitive program given the disadvantages that we find for our athletes. Why is this?

#1 We are a small school where students are given the opportunity to participate in many different athletic, academic, and fine arts experiences. This is one of the things we love about Regina and is a good thing. Also not a new problem - but one that does make it difficult to have consistency year to year.

#2 Our student athletes feel an increasing amount of pressure in all aspects of their lives, athletically, academically, socially. This comes from many sources and has led to a heightened sense of anxiety for these kids and the pressure to perform and succeed sometimes diminishes the joy they feel from participation and also interferes with their performance.

#3 The Regina soccer program has no "home". There is no dedicated space for Regina soccer athletes, not for off-season training, not for practice, not for competition. For off season training and for in-season days of poor weather, we must use the high school gym. As you can imagine, this space is less than ideal in terms of both productive practice and safety. Imagine more that 30 high school students in the high school gym all with soccer balls and I think you can appreciate that there are only limited drills and helpful practice that can happen. In addition, the hardwood floor makes everything more dangerous and changes the nature of the competition.

*Off-season: During the winter when in season sports have first priority for gym space, we are allotted from 7-9pm on Sunday nights to be split between the boys and girls soccer programs. Two Sundays ago, when we arrived just before 7pm, the bleachers were out and nothing had been picked up or cleaned. The high school girls (I will mention, without a single word of complaint), spent the next 15 minutes picking up candy wrappers, half full drink containers, half-eaten walking tacos and hot dogs, etc. - you get the picture. Thus, 25% of their one hour weekly open play time was spent doing cleanup.

*Practice space in-season Our practice space is used off season by the football team and is in one of the lowest spots on the campus. In the spring there are multiple days, the space is not safe to be used due to standing water and mud. The field is uneven and irregular. At other times, officials or personnel from other sports drive cars or trucks across the field leaving large

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dangerous ruts and on occasion, when they drive across the field DURING our practice, the safety of our kids is perilous.

* Match field Our space for matches is the football field which is more narrow than a regulation soccer field and is grass. In prior years, this has been the one bright spot. Even though it is in a low-lying area and we have had to cancel games due to standing water and unsafe conditions, the field was generally well maintained and a joy for the athletes to use. More than one coach from another school marveled at the beautiful field and we were lucky to use the space. I don't know what changed last year but the field was in poor condition the entire season. It was rutted and uneven and at times was questionable as to the safety of its use. For our post-season competition, the field was unusable and only because of the generosity of the wonderful AD at Liberty were we able to host our match using the turf field at Liberty.

So, Enough with the whining. We are dedicated to our kids and to making the best of our situation for this spring season. I want to thank the Booster Club for a change in direction and for your efforts to include soccer and all of the sports in your discussions and budgeting. This is something that has rarely happened over the years. I appreciate the support of our athletic director in listening to my concerns and for advocating for all student athletes at Regina. Last year the Booster Club paid for new goals on wheels for us to use for practice and I sincerely thank you for this. It has been such an improvement, saves valuable practice time, and is so much safer for the girls - they no longer have to tip over heavy goals and carry them to new locations. We also appreciate any help that we are given this spring to pay for equipment - this allows us to use the coaching dollars to pay coaches and not put so much burden on ourselves and soccer parents to purchase equipment.

But, why am I really here? I would ask you to consider where you see the soccer program in the next 5, 10, 20 years. If you would like to continue to offer a valuable opportunity to our student athletes and would like the soccer program to remain competitive, some changes will need to happen. Nearly all of the soccer programs in our area and more and more across the state have vastly better facilities than we do and the disparity is only going to increase. It will become more and more difficult for us to compete. When our kids show up for their first game, having never practiced outdoors and have never had anything close to a full field scrimmage they will be at a disadvantage to start the season and it will continue throughout the season. When other programs are offering year round opportunities and new turf facilities, our kids are going to lag behind. Not because they don't work hard or aren't as competitive or as athletic, but because they don't have the same opportunities.

Before money is invested in fields and buildings and equipment for other programs. I ask you to consider the needs of the soccer program which is open to participation from each and every Regina student. I ask you to think about the current and future layout for all of the buildings and fields and tracks on the campus and see where a facility dedicated to soccer could fit in. An indoor turf facility that could be used in the off-season and would be available during the season so that practice and match days are not lost would be a solution. A turf field dedicated to soccer would help to solve some of the weather related and safety problems in the spring season. An indoor facility and/or an outdoor turf field is a large investment, probably a cost of more than a million dollars. I do not expect that the Booster Club alone would be responsible for a project of this scope but I do believe that there are donors that would be excited to invest in the Regina soccer program and its future. I also know that the Booster Club is instrumental in terms of long term planning for grounds and facilities and I urge you to consider soccer as part of these discussions.

Thank you
Ann McCoy Larew