

Hauppauge Middle School and William T. Rogers Middle School

Soccer Teams and Coaches

Ask any soon-to-be parents what they hope for, and they'll say "a healthy baby." When your child is born with "designer genes" - specifically, Down syndrome - you then additionally hope that he will one day be a valued, contributing member of his community.

Our son Matthew has Down syndrome. He is the second of our four sons. From day one we wanted him to have the same opportunities that his brothers would have. With that in mind, he has been included from day one: Matt has played soccer, baseball, and basketball with his typical friends in our community.

Fast forward to middle school: Matt is 13 and in seventh grade. He wanted to play on the middle school soccer team. We went to pick him up after the initial team meeting only to find out that it was not a walk-on- it would be a tryout. We figured he wouldn't make it - his soccer skills were not comparable to a typical middle school player. We spoke to the coach and explained the situation. We were looking for socialization, being a part of the team, experiencing a bus ride with the team to cheer them on. We never expected Matt to have play time.

Coach Greg Filaseta agreed with us; he wanted Matt to have the opportunity and he said Matt would be as much a part of the team as



everyone else. This was more than we could have hoped for.

The team was having a great season. We went to every game to cheer them on. Matt was loving it, being part of the team, just being on the sidelines with his typical peers.

Mid season during a game when we were up by more than a few goals, onto the field comes Matt... we were shocked. All the years of inclusive opportunities seemed to culminate at that moment...

“We were so proud of him and of our Hauppauge community. We could hear the boys on the field telling each other to “get the ball to Matt” – they wanted him to have his moment and score a goal.”

We were near tears at this group of peers showing such support- unprompted. You can't make this stuff up. Inclusion at its best from a group of 12 and 13-year-olds! The team showed amazing sportsmanship.

On November 5, the last game of the season: Hauppauge vs. Kings Park, something remarkable happened. During warm-ups, Coach Michael McDermott from Kings Park, noticed Matt, No. 21. Coach Mike went over to Hauppauge's side and asked if Matt had any goals this season. Coach Greg said "no", but he loves to be a part of the team, and that's all that matters.

Coach Michael overheard his players wanting to set up a goal for Matt. "We think it would be really nice if we let No. 21 out there get a goal." The team got a handball in the box and created an opportunity for Matt to take a penalty kick.

Matt took the kick and scored! Both teams and their parents cheered wildly. Matt went on to score a second goal during that same game. His team "dog piled" him and his smile at that moment as well as all the encouraging words from teammates and parents will forever remain in our minds.

We are so proud to be a part of such an amazing community that is so accepting of "different." These boys acted on their own; they were selfless and we will never forget their actions that day.

By Michael and Cathy Hoffman

