

CLUB SOCCER



PHOTOS BY HATTIE LOPER, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

The Flagstaff Soccer Club United 2009 girls team poses during a practice at the Thorpe Softball Complex on Tuesday. The team won the Arizona State Cup in April and will soon play in a regionals tournament.

Flagstaff United U16 girls win State Cup

Club team heads to Boise for Far West Regionals

BY BRENDEN MARTIN
Sun Sports Editor

The soccer season in Flagstaff has grown into a year-round affair. The Flagstaff United Soccer Club U16 girls team went on a magical run to win the Arizona Soccer Association State Cup in its age group.

This squad, largely composed of local high school talent,

earned a spot in the US Youth Soccer Far West Regional Championships set to take place in Boise June 20-25. The long club season saw the team win six straight matches over three weeks across the state to secure the title and a shot in regionals.

The team's head coach during the State Cup, Alan Berrios, noticed that his experience as a coach meant he would have to work these kids hard to reach their full potential, especially when it came to competing

against the strong clubs based in Phoenix.

"I've coached clubs at a high level for 20-plus years," Berrios said. "I've been fortunate to coach some really good teams at the club level as well. When I took this team over, I noticed that we had a lot of work to do to catch up."

The club team consisting of high school-age student-athletes is very familiar with each other and the coaching staff. The group has developed a system that works best for them and puts them in the best position to succeed.

Savannah Berry, who took over as the team's head coach going into regionals, sees the variety the roster has and sees it as an opportunity for players to lean on one another.

"This team specifically is super special because we have a range of three age groups," Berry said.

"We have some younger players born in 2010-11 as well as some 2009s. That's really cool, because across age groups, it's allowing them to prep heading into high school by playing with individuals at different skill levels."

The younger girls who have earned a spot on the older-age division team did so by proving they have what it takes to compete against bigger, stronger players. That hasn't deterred them from giving it their all and getting a preview of what this level will be like when they are older.

Berrios was excited about the challenge to build up this team to what it ended up becoming. He went ahead and asked the players and their parents if they truly wanted to be pushed as opposed to just going through the motions.

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Saylor Smith of the Flagstaff Soccer Club United 2009 team works through a drill during a practice at the Thorpe Softball Complex on Tuesday.

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Springers return to Sacred Mountain Prayer Run

BY ABE SPRINGER
Special to the Daily Sun

On June 7, Team Run Springer (TRS) toed the line of the NACA Sacred Mountain Prayer Run 10K starting at Thorpe Park. Along with the 10K, the event also featured a 2K and a 5K distance.

In case you are wondering, TRS has two members: the husband-and-wife team of Jean and myself. Membership is now closed.

Jean does not like entering events anymore, so it took some convincing by myself to get her to agree to hike it together. We both love to go up the mesa from our neighborhood — which made a good argument for convincing her to register.

The Sacred Mountain Prayer Run went up the other side of the mesa, so was on familiar turf.

It was a perfect weather day and proved to be a fun and laid-back event. The day started with two young children each performing a hoop dance. It was evident they put in a lot of practice. There was then a prayer before sending us off.

The organizers covered many details to make things go smooth-



Abe and Jean Springer pose for a photo at the Sacred Mountain Prayer Run.

ly. From registration to packet pickup to race day sign-in. There were many volunteers throughout the trail to make sure everyone stayed on course, make sure we were safe and account for every participant along the way. There were several checkpoints where our numbers were recorded. They made every participant feel important and cheered us all on as we crossed the finish line. They even humored Jean and me each time we asked if we were still first. The emcee kept the momentum going throughout the morning.

There was no entry fee, but rather a donation for participating. We received a beautiful long-sleeve shirt. Each finisher was greeted with a button and a sticker.

This was my 12th Sa-

cred Mountain Prayer Run, but the first time I have returned to it since the COVID-19 pandemic. I like that the run is a non-timed, non-competitive event. While Jean and I committed to hiking the course together, I'll never forget that, with a mile left, Jean's competitive spirit kicked in and she took off running. We were both glad to make it to the finish line without any trips, falls or injuries.

As I will become a grandmaster later this year, I have committed to participating in new and different events this year, and to hopefully get Jean to enter a few with me.

Thank you to the organizers and volunteers of Sacred Mountain Prayer Run for continuing to bring this event back

each year. If you have not participated in this event, I would highly encourage you to consider putting it on your calendar for next June. It is a lot of fun and supports a great organization.

The Springers reside in Flagstaff. Abe has been here over 30 years. When not running the trails or studying springs, you will find him hiking with Jean. He teaches water and rocks at NAU. Jean is a retired high school math teacher and moved here two years ago from Erie, Pennsylvania. When she is not running, walking, hiking or crawling on the trails, she enjoys weaving and walking her 15-year-old pup.

Rachel Smith is a professional runner and amateur mother. She is also the coordinating editor for this column and encourages people to send their stories to her at rachschnid18@gmail.com.

Berry takes U16 girls to Boise for regionals

BY BRENDEN MARTIN
Sun Sports Editor

Flagstaff United Soccer Club's U16 girls team made a unique move in leadership after winning the Arizona Soccer Association State Cup last month.

The team's head coach, Alan Berrios, led the team on a six-match winning streak to take the title. Work conflicts with his regular job as the head coach for the Northern Arizona University women's soccer team, however, forced him to make a tough decision.

Immediately after winning the championship, he informed the team he would be stepping down as head coach. He turned over the role to Flagstaff High School head girls soccer coach Savannah Berry, who will take them to Boise for the US Youth Soccer Far West Regional Championships this weekend. It was a decision he didn't envision having to make in the past.

"For years I was asked to help out, even when I was an assistant at NAU," Berrios said. "I just couldn't do it."

Berrios said a conversation with Flagstaff United director of coaching Holly Jones led him to become the coach for this iteration

of the '09 girls team in May 2024.

Those exploratory discussions came with a lot of commitment for the full-time Division I soccer coach. Taking this role took up a lot of time, and Berrios had to make sure he could give the girls the undivided attention they deserved.

"For me, it was always a trial basis," Berrios said. "I didn't know if it was going to work or not for me, personally. If I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it right."

Jones cited Berrios' success at NAU in player development as a big reason why she thought his hiring made sense.

"Alan brought a lot of tactical awareness," Jones said. "He came in really pushing the girls to think at a higher level. Him being at NAU, his tactical awareness, really challenged our players and increased their soccer IQ."

Jones said she thinks Berry has brought something similar since she took over the team and has organized practices and training sessions.

"I don't see it being a huge difference," Jones said. "We don't want to necessarily see any significant changes. They're having great success, and

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Durant wanting Heat might not mean much

BY IRA WINDERMAN
South Florida Sun-Sentinel
(TNS)

MIAMI — You start here: It didn't matter what Damian Lillard wanted.

But you also start here: It did matter what Jimmy Butler wanted.

Because here the Pat Riley and the Miami Heat stand again, at a crossroads of desire and destination, this time with Kevin Durant.

Once again, a player who wants out, but also wants out to a preferred destination.

Once again, a Heat franchise caught in the middle.

In the wake of reports that Durant's desire of an escape from the turmoil that has been the Phoenix Suns, ESPN is listing the Heat among the three destinations preferred by the 15-time All-Star, along with the Houston Rockets and San Antonio Spurs.

"Those across the NBA have been made aware in recent days that those are the three teams that Durant would commit to long-term," ESPN reported.

With Lillard, that didn't matter in the 2023 offseason, when he hatched his plan to depart the Portland Trail Blazers, because of the extension he previously had signed that had him under contract for four more seasons.

He wanted to come to the Heat; he wound up being dealt to the Milwaukee Bucks. There was no risk of the acquiring team shortly thereafter being left emptyhanded.

With Butler, and the Heat's nightmare in the middle of this past season, it was different. He not only wanted out, but wanted out to a preferred destination.

And he held the hammer, an opt-out clause this offseason that allowed him to dictate terms. The preference was the Suns, the fallback option was the Golden State Warriors. He got the Warriors; the Heat got a return that hardly maximized the traded asset.

And now Durant. With a hammer — his contract to expire after paying out \$54.7 million this coming season, but also eligible to sign a two-year, \$112 million extension upon being dealt or a two-year, \$124 million extension six months after being dealt.

The Heat are willing to pay that price, as well as the price it would take to acquire a player, at 36, who remains elite offensively, sixth in the league this past season with his 26.6 scoring average. (Tyler Herro led the Heat at 23.9).

But the Heat also are well aware that it requires two (or more) to tango on the trade market, it requires a willing dance partner.

The Trail Blazers refused to engage with Riley. So Lillard went to a rival.

Butler made clear he had no desire to re-up with the Memphis Grizzlies. So Riley lost that option at February's NBA trading deadline.

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