

# jONESboro

Good Afternoon, Club.

I was brought on in the early part of January to help move the club forward in a few areas and ultimately help build a more healthy and thriving process for the youth in our community through soccer and to do it expeditiously. Areas of focus were to have prompt, organized communication, policies and procedures that could blanket the club and its participants, both young and old, and cultivate relationships to grow the bandwidth and support of the soccer community in a positive and meaningful way.

Here are the reasons I agreed to do that:

- *I love trying to help make things better for anyone that asks, but specifically youth and even more so in athletics, character development and leadership.*
- *Soccer in our community affects somewhere between 10-20% of our community, and that is a large number for a way to be impactful. Our community needs competitive soccer.*
- *Our community needs a positive economic impact in a large way, and I deeply believe a contribution to this can be achieved through competitive soccer.*
- *We wanted to build infrastructure and systems that were sustainable, regardless of who was in charge, volunteering, and other roles.*
- *I had the time and willingness to give to try and make a lasting impact, not only for now but for generations to come.*

In an effort to be transparent, I think it is important to lay-out both what we have and have not been able to accomplish with the help of the Board and our various relationships throughout the Southeast over the last three and a half months.

- **Facilities**

- I have traveled all over the country for events in multiple sports, and Joe Mack can be one of the premier soccer complexes in NEA, Southeast Missouri, maybe in the state and on into Tennessee. In order to get events to Jonesboro, it needs to be a boutique experience, and I think Joe Mack can provide that experience.
- However, as you know, our grass playing surfaces need some pretty great attention. Fortunately, we have had the turf in the meantime. However, I was informed by the City that if there was a conflict in certain circumstances with youth football (was the specific example) that they had priority over us and the

turf was built for football. For certain, I wasn't aware of that, but it was good information to learn.

- I have asked about getting the fields mowed down to more of a soccer surface, typically somewhere between .5" - 1". I was informed the City didn't own a mower that mowed lower than 1.5".
- So, here is what we did. We leveraged personal relationships and found out the best in our region was Ladd's out of Memphis. They have a performance grass turf division and have experts in the field that include professional sport backgrounds and so forth. We brought them up, walked the grass at Joe Mack and got a quote.
- The quote that included fixing every grass surface (stripping it down and starting over) would be a six week process start to finish. That quote was for just under \$400,000. This includes 2 new mowers for the club. They wanted to start early May and it would be ready in time for Fall practice and playing seasons.
- We went and secured the funding through another entity, all \$400,000. However, we didn't want to accept the money without feeling comfortable that it was going to be managed and maintained properly. Otherwise, you are just spending bad money, and we feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility to be good stewards of the money.
- During our initial meeting in January, we also offered to oversee the maintenance of the facility, much like baseball boosters and other soccer programs around the mid-south. The yearly financial report shows a line item that we rent the facility for \$27,500 per year. Again, I'm not certain how that works or who writes that check to where.
- We did offer to lease the facility outright and take over scheduling to accommodate the needs of all programs that involve the turf and grass fields, so that we could ensure it be properly maintained and scheduled so the city could focus on the parks side of things.
- Lastly, we had initial discussions and progress towards a New Indoor Facility that would house 2 fields much like the turf. We feel pretty confident this could happen, and that project would cost somewhere between \$5-6 Million.

- **Programming & Events**

- City Stars is the primary youth sports programmer for the City. Although it may not be run through the City, at minimum, the City is certainly its caretaker.
- Events are a big deal for our community, and our City needs to be all in on competitive soccer for the sheer fact of numbers. We did research on economic impact, and what we found was that for each tournament of roughly 50 teams would equate to somewhere around \$500,000 per weekend (safe estimate). This would also save local families dollars spent on travel, food, and lodging that is being spent outside of the Jonesboro area. So, we reached out to a premier tournament director for the Mid-South that ran tournaments for years in Memphis and agreed to terms and dates for the Fall Tournament, got a game plan for Friendlies and the same idea for the Spring. That is an economic impact of

somewhere around \$2 Million for the city, a much needed boost, as most of us know. However, no one knows this better than our City's stakeholders. Additionally, we got financial commitments to help us put on these events.

- We offered to take over all soccer programming for the City, most importantly Junior High Soccer. This is not a AAA or School sponsored sport. This is also run by the City. Its schedule conflicts with the competitive soccer season, and we feel we could solve a riddle of cross programming by adjusting its schedule so that kids that want to play both, competitive and school soccer, don't have to make a choice.
- We also offered to oversee City Stars and help their current staff to help provide a more meaningful and developmental foundation for the City, different in format, but under the same pretenses of our Development Academy that had more than 120 kids this Spring and over 100 kids in the Fall after being in existence for less than one year. While we didn't necessarily need or want this inheritance, we were willing to help and be good partners with the City and its current staff to help lighten their load.
- We also met with outside entities about putting on summer/winter clinics and camps to match Phil's programming plan for what he wanted the Player and Coach Development curriculum to look like.
- That leads to budgets and funding.

- **Budget**

- While I have operated many athletic budgets over the years, I don't know exactly how this particular budget process works within the framework of how the Club is set up.
- I believe Revolution is under the City Stars umbrella, and I don't know the accounting practices or how things get earmarked or accounted for. I don't know the umbrella for certain, but I'm sure someone more qualified in accounting and the City officials have that figured out.
- I do know we are not in charge of our budgetary accounting or purchases.
- I do know our staff and coaches' checks come from the City Stars Account, and I do believe the budget is controlled by City employees.
- I did ask these questions in an early January meeting to people of highest positions to get an understanding to help the Club be healthy and also to show that we were taking a serious approach to being a partner with the City. After over three months of waiting, I haven't been able to get those answers, so I'm not sure where that stands.
- It is my understanding the Board has been asking the City for clarity on this for some years now.
- I did not want to have any sort of budget meeting of the financial status of the Club without the understanding of its practices from those in place to show the process transparently.

- **Funding**

- Aside from the \$400,000 we had secured for the fields and the money for the events, we don't know what we don't know. Given we don't know the true operating budget, we made a proposal to the City to help us figure out how to fund a program with the ask of \$500,000 (a large portion they were already committing to the facility, programming, and staffing.) We showed the research and the safe estimate for the City to show \$2 Million of economic impact, so a profit for the City of \$1.5 Million per year. Again, they were already spending a portion of that money, we just wanted to have budgetary control of it. On January 8, we were told by the city to give them a couple of weeks. As of April 23, we don't have that answer.
  - However, that didn't stop us from reaching out to other partners and securing funding to supplement, whatever the City would do, if anything. If we took over City Stars we needed a larger number, than if we didn't. It is all scalable. We relayed that our ask was rough, that we could need less or more, but without knowing the financial ins and outs, we weren't sure what the number needed to be.
  - We got a supplemental funding plan, but without knowing what the City was willing to work with us on, we felt we would be accepting bad money again, and without control, we weren't confident in how the money would be earmarked.
  - We also hired a Grant Writer and applied for \$20,000 to help provide scholarships and uniform supplements for underprivileged kids to be able to play soccer with the Club. I believe the findings of that grant will come in June.
  - We had started contract negotiations with uniform companies to provide a point gathering system so we could provide warm-ups, backpacks and other types of equipment for both players and coaches.
  - All of this was in an effort to not significantly raise dues and know where the money was going to be allocated and so forth.
- **Policies & Procedures**
    - As you are aware, we have been working on policies and procedures to ensure the safety of the Club, its coaches, and the players.
    - We were on a final draft type pathway when we learned of the USYS Roster Formation transition and started reaching out to coaches about what this could look like. We had only begun this process and hadn't reached out to everyone when this spiral of information ramped up.
- **USYS Roster Formation Plan**
    - It was my recommendation that we start a soft pivot to prepare for the 2026-27 "School Year" calendar. Phil and I would meet several times per week to digest and dissect the best path forward for this.
    - We found a process that would be a change that could provide a smoother transition for both the players and also being able to play in tournaments during the 2025-26 season, no matter if that tournament had gone to the new calendar or not. Along those same lines, it would align more players with similar

development paths, regardless of age, if that aligned with what the player wanted their journey to be.

- The last known obstacle to overcome could be the uniforms. We didn't want the Club parents to have to pay for just one year of uniforms and then have to have an additional cost the following year.
  - If we pivoted to the new format now, I committed to the Board that I would go find the money for a smaller scale of duplicate numbers the following year, no matter the cost of \$1,000-\$30,000 so those parents were out no additional cost. As you can tell, people are willing to help and the money can be found.
  - As I have relayed, we are certain there would be kinks and blind spots to address in this transition, but ultimately would put each team at a competitive advantage and be proactive towards that advantage moving forward.
  - Everyone is aware of our try-out dates and that we need to ensure coaches are in place for possible roster and age changes.
  - While not official, I believe the Board was in support of this transition timing.
- **Player Pathway & College Recruiting Exposure**
    - With player pathway and recruiting, we had begun discussions with larger clubs about a pathway to ECNL or ECNL-RL guest play opportunities for those players that wanted to pursue college soccer at a level that we don't currently have.
    - Finally, I started reaching out all over the country to some college contacts about what it would look like to have an ID/Showcase Camp for kids, where it was run by some college coaches right here in Jonesboro.

So, there you have it. We were able to raise just under \$1 Million in agreements (\$400,000 roughly as a one time), the balance on a yearly basis, and arranged for events to come to Jonesboro that will have both impact and reduce cost for area families and so forth. However, no contracts have been signed, no paperwork, just handshakes and ideas of what can make a lasting impact. We could not get comfortable with accepting money without knowing it would be well managed, facilities maintained and programmed properly for our community.

That's what we have been working on since January and making some significant progress, but we have reached a stalemate. I was hired to be a catalyst, a spark that comes from friction, and I know there have been some changes that have caused that, but our heart has been in the right place.

By no means do I speak for the Board and their conversations or interactions, but I can say I have become uncomfortable with the mixed message responses or the lack thereof from those in positions of authority, and it just doesn't fit with things that I personally would like to align with philosophically. After agreeing to their timeline, there has been more than enough grace period for me.

Maybe this will be the nudge that helps or maybe not. However, with no contracts signed, it

gives the City the ability to pursue their investment at the highest level both financially and in infrastructure. My hope is it is even higher than the numbers and commitments listed above.

The City has had this under their umbrella (or at least the caretaker) for a long time now, and I trust our City's elected officials and leaders have a plan to significantly increase their level of investment for competitive soccer. What is clear is that the City's level of commitment has the greatest impact for our youth and economically for the community, especially when this thing is on the verge of exploding into something on a much larger scale.

That being said, we have run out of time on my watch, and I am stepping aside and getting out of the way of the City's vision and their prolonged timeline. Hopefully, the next person up can get the deal across the goaline.

I would like to thank the Board for letting me help to this point, specifically Laura Heuck for handling the registration and paperwork logistics. I would like to thank Phil Woods for his expertise in multiple meetings per week that we didn't necessarily understand how much was needed when we accepted our positions. Finally, a huge tip of the hat to Matt Modelevsky, spending hour upon hour, day after day, over every single detail we needed to address.

In the interim, the Board has agreed that any technical soccer related questions should be directed to Phil, who will continue with the Club at least until the end of the Spring Season. Hopefully, the City's plan for soccer moving forward comes soon. All other questions should be directed to the Board.

I keep thinking of one of my favorite acronyms as I write this email and I think it speaks volumes to all parties involved...

#### **PRIDE & GUTS**

*Personal Responsibility In Daily Effort & Genuine Urge To Succeed*

I will return to the sidelines, as a supporter and dad, cheering, encouraging, and trying to empower your kids just as much as I do for mine if we are ever on the same field.

Continue to #RevUp.

# AGAIN, j**ONE**sboro

**ENJOY YOUR DASH.**

Matt