

Unionville-Milliken Soccer Club
Girls U11 – Team 3
Coach – Yves Legault
Assistants – Eddie Erhiaganoma, Kurosh (Cyrus) Rowchan
Manager – Karin Klasios

Here we are in week 11 of the House League regular season and although we have seen many ups and downs, this team is really pulling together. It's obvious this year that the teams are so well balanced that a win is never guaranteed and at this point it takes a team spirit to drive the goals.

The girls from Team 3 are a mixed bag of new and veteran players with skills ranging from basic individual skills to advanced team skills. We have four players on this team who have never played before but who have shown themselves to be willing and very able to learn the skills needed to have unique roles in game play. They have learned some basic skills and are starting to push themselves beyond the limits I set for them at the beginning of season. We also have some returning players who may not have had the chance or the drive to improve. My expectations may be a little higher for these players but I know they can improve. In some cases, instead of pushing them to do things they physically cannot do, I offer them alternatives to game play that suits their current skills and strengths. On the team however, there is a core group of outstanding players. I call them outstanding not because of skills or knowledge of the game but because they aren't afraid to help out those who would normally not have the chance. I am often surprised and proud to see one of my better players hand off the ball to a much weaker player just to keep them in the game and to give them a sense of belonging in spite of the fact that it may cost us a goal or an advantage. Mistakes are often made during play but feeling like a part of the team and trying your best are paramount to the love of the game.

Now what about our players? First of all, the veteran of the group is **Heather** who has been playing soccer longer, more often and in more different teams than anyone in House League. She has played on FC-Select teams, Rep teams, House League teams and All-Star teams. What can I say, she's pretty good... at any position... More than this, in my knowledge and in the years that I've known her, I can't recall one time when she has missed a practice. I think she may have missed a game once, maybe. More on Heather's commitment below in the game report. Second, my own daughter **Kendra**, says that soccer is just a hobby... Yeah right... She started in FC-Select and stayed for two years, being coached by **Kevin Kerr** and then **Helen Nassar**, then House League and finally she joined All-Star last year and again this year. Her best position is defence but everyone on the team agrees that as a keeper, she shines and is indispensable. Her best play in defence is clearing the ball, her best plays in goals are trapping and booting the leather off the ball... Let me pick on **Olivia** next, Olivia is tall and has had a hard time bringing her skills up although never quitting. It's always difficult for someone who has grown fast to learn to coordinate what they want to do with what their body wants to do. Although lately she has shown herself developing into a power-house. She can boot the ball on a goal kick that immediately puts the ball in our favour. Her basic skills also have picked up. Watching Olivia the past few weeks has been a coach's dream. If she keeps it up,

she'll be helping to score goals in no time. Next up is **Melissa**. Melissa rarely lets down her team, from the beginning of the game you can count on her to support every team mate. She'll clear the ball as a defence and drive the ball up as a forward and pushes through to the end of the game. Her skills as a forward is best seen when she needs to make those crucial decisions to cross the ball or take a shot. While I usually have to tell players what to do once they get to the goal area, Melissa looks for opportunities, sees them and takes them. **Jennifer** never quits. Some times during the game I'm afraid she's going to explode... Her face is red and she's breathing hard and although she never wants to take a break, I have to sit her down. This is her character, she doesn't want to give up, she has a drive that I wish more players had. Next is **Jorlanie**... oh sorry, I meant Jordan and Melanie... Good friends at school and good partners on the field. Jordan and Melanie love to play midfield. **Jordan** is a very fast dribbler and also a great forward, she can steal the ball from practically anyone and is always looking for someone to pass up to. **Melanie**, on the other hand, can often boot the ball straight up the line and compliments the midfield with a good defensive attitude. Playing as a defence, she looks for opportunities to clear the ball any way she can. **Sydney's** first year in soccer? It's hard to believe. She obviously has an innate sense of the game, she is a strong athlete and has great skills for a beginner. As she continues, there's no reason she can't be at par with the better players on the team. She has done well in all the positions I've given her, even goal keeping. **Jemmy** is also new to soccer but it doesn't show. She can hustle the ball away from anyone, turn it , move it and then boot it. I'd love to see her continue next year but maybe try something more challenging. Probably one of her best assets is that she can outrun almost anyone. She can sprint down a field before anyone else has even left the starting line. **Sahara** has shown great improvement this season. Her best positions are defence and midfield but I have also tried her in goals with great results. Where most keepers will hug the goal line, Sahara is very comfortable sweeping the entire goal area and moving up on players. I also tried her as a forward and again I was surprised at her tenacity in the face of bigger and stronger opposition. Another surprise came from a new-comer, **Laura**. This is Laura's first year in soccer and although she has found practices long and hard, her coach being the mean guy that he is, pushed her to overcome her aches and pains and now you can see the improvement. Laura is one of the first to accept any position but usually requests goal keeping. Her skills have gone from non-existent to almost at-par with the other U10's on the team. Another new players is **Nadya** who is good at forward and midfield although she usually requests defence. Nadya can fight for the ball when she is needed most. Being a smaller build, she may not have the stamina of the other players but makes up for it by placing herself at the right place at the right time. Again when she's needed, she can push through and get the ball out and up the field. **Crystal** is another player who seems to be right for any position (except maybe goals?) Many players on the team love to have Crystal play with them because they know she has great skills. Once her team skills are perfected, she will be the power behind most attacking plays. We also need players like Crystal who are not afraid to take on an attacking line and try to intercept a play before it gets into the danger zone. Another integral part of the team is **Yasmin**. She has the strength and commitment to be a star player. Her drive as a forward is one of the reasons we have been winning lately. She orchestrates a play as a midfielder as well as a striker. As communication on the field increases, so will her part in every play. **Nicole** has not played with us lately because of

medical reasons. We are anxiously waiting for her health to improve enough to at least come to a practice or two. She has shown great skills and a neverending need to play on in any circumstance. Her fortitude is what this team is about.

This week's game...

This week we played against Michael Liang's team. They have been a difficult team to beat. This is probably due to the fact that their players are so close in skills to ours. They also have some veteran players such as **Michelle** who played Academy, sisters **Zoya** and **Iman** who don't give up and **Sandra** who is a one-person power-house. Their strikers are fast and they have a great defensive line and they should be proud of their keepers who never give up.

Our team found the goals were very hard to make. This wasn't due to lack of trying, there were at least four attempts and shots on net during the first few periods. Most shots on goal came within a meter of the net with long shots from the attacking midfield. It finally took a beautiful lob by **Heather** from right field that came off the opposing post to secure a winning position. As you know, the first goal is often pivotal to a game. There is a psychological as well as strategic advantage at being the first to score a goal. On the one hand, it gives the winning team the extra drive to attempt other goals while negatively affecting the opposing team's effectiveness. Strategically, coaches often change their lineup to reduce the damage by beefing up their defence or by forcing their stronger players up to attacking positions hoping that the win has knocked the team's defence in a false sense of security. The play made for this first goal showed what our team has been struggling with, players holding their position, players passing across from wings to centre, players making quick decisions and lastly, taking shots when appropriate. The second goal came after a few attempts at goal, some stopped by the keeper and finally **Yasmin** moves in and kicks it past their defence. After the second goal another series of passes across the defence and finally to **Melissa** gave us our third goal. This was an almost perfectly executed play from **Olivia** at midfield to **Melissa** at centre forward, to **Jemmy** at left forward, trying to find a way in, then back to centre and finally closing in to **Heather** at right forward passed into the box to **Melissa** and a nice chip into the goal. *This is soccer.*

There were many shining stars during this game, players who put in more effort than usual, players trying their best and players who were simply "IN" the game. There was **Olivia's** persistence, **Laura's** great goalkeeping (staying on for two periods!!!!), **Kendra's** defence, **Sahara's** drive and the great team plays of our forwards. But most of all, **Heather's** dedication to the team. I wasn't expecting Heather to show up last night but that's the person she is... Heather embodies what team sports are all about, it's not about winning or scoring it's about being there for your friends who need you. It's about doing something you love and loving everything you do. It's about supporting the ones who lack the skills or experience or who just need your support. Soccer is a reflection of your life. Win or lose, all these girls should be proud of their team, proud of their accomplishments and proud to play a game where the path to winning is more important than winning itself.

Our condolences go out to Heather and her family for the loss of her Grandfather who passed away unexpectedly yesterday morning. I think he would have been proud of you Heather for giving your all, as you always do.

Coach Yves