

Western United U12 boys win soccer tournament in Pennsylvania

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The Western United U12 boys team won the Yardley Makefield Soccer Columbus Cup Oct. 9-10 in Pennsylvania.

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Mike Rouette's **Western United** U12 boys soccer team is making a habit out of going to top-notch tournaments.

The team is making a habit out of winning those top-notch tournaments, too.

Playing against many of the top teams in the Northeast in what is regarded as one of the elite tournaments in the region, Western United won the **Yardley Makefield Soccer Columbus Cup** in Pennsylvania Oct. 9-10.

"We had a ball down there," Rouette said. "Between the parents and kids, I don't know who had more fun. At the end of the day, everyone had a good

time."

Since coming together at the U10 level, Rouette's team has played in the Nashua, N.H., World Cup Tournament, Nashua Columbus Day Tournament, the New England Soccer Classic at Cape Cod, and twice at the FC Stars of Massachusetts Tournament at Lancaster.

Throw in the fall and spring regular season for the Massachusetts Premier Soccer League (MAPLE), and playing for Rouette's team takes a lot of commitment. But the former Monson High School great has been getting that commitment in return.

"The parents are true soccer parents," said the 1985 Monson graduate, who played at Division I Old Dominion University on a full scholarship. "They understand the commitment not only to the game but also to the team and to the kids. What you try to do is make it a vacation. We end up having a family – a family of soccer parents who all travel down together; all stay at the same hotel together; if there are birthdays we'll all celebrate together. We have dinners together to ensure it's a true team effort.

"These kids are part of a family that will continue to grow year to year to year. You make up a team like this, and it's not just the players – it's the players, coaches and players. That's what makes it worth all the time."

The trip to Yardley was worth the time. Western United shut out Coventry, Pa., Cherry Hill, N.J., and the Ukrainian National Gunners of Pennsylvania before beating Warrington Soccer Club 1-0 in the final. Based on rankings by www.gotsoccer.com, Warrington was the top-ranked U12 team in Pennsylvania.

"Warrington was bigger than us, but we've got some really smart, fast kids who truly understand the game technically and tactically," Rouette said. "We were able to pass around this other team, put on a show, and showed off their skills.

"It was fun. At the end of the day I said to the kids, 'Let's go collect our hardware'. It took all four hours of the drive back to get the smiles off their face."

Soccer-wise, those smiles aren't straying too far. According to www.gotsoccer.com, Western United is now regarded as the top U12 boys team in New England, No. 3 in the northeast, and No. 16 in the country.

"It's a heck of an honor to be in there, but it doesn't happen over night," said Rouette, referring to the national ranking. "We've had this group for 2-2 ½ years and we've been to multiple tournaments. Luckily, of the six tournaments we've been to, we've won five, and the one we didn't win we lost on penalty kicks.

"The thing is, we want to keep bringing these kids to these tournaments and get them the best competition that's out there."

Western United will travel to Richmond, Va., in March to compete in the Jefferson Cup, which draws teams from throughout the country and beyond, including Europe.

"Our expectations are high," Rouette said. "We're not going to go down there with the idea of just kicking the ball around. Our expectations are they want to leave it on the field, bring our 'A' game, and play against the best of the best."

The team includes: Monson's Connor Hicks, Tyler Lefebvre, Trey Miller, Michael Murphy and Macauley Rouette, Wilbraham's Travis Van Brewer and Kasen Williams, Westfield's Ian Saltmarsh and Dante White, Longmeadow's Owen Smith and Luke Szostkiewicz, Ludlow's Michael Alexander, South Deerfield's Owen Downie, West Springfield's Christopher Kalil, Belchertown's Alec Morgado, Agawam's Jonathan LeClair, Amherst's Samson Heyer, and Southampton's Dillon Pooler. Keith Saltmarsh serves as the assistant coach.