

Jimmy Conway Lifetime Achievement Award Presentation for Dave Potter

Oregon Youth Soccer Association was established in 1974 with just 6 founding clubs and several hundred members. Over the last 46 years OYSA has grown to a total of 72 clubs and over 60 thousand members. This growth would have never been possible without countless hours from many dedicated individuals who generously donated their time and skills. In 2009 as a way to recognize extraordinary contributors to youth soccer in Oregon, OYSA established the Lifetime Achievement award and announced its first recipient Jim Lasher, a past State Association President and long-term club coach. In 2017 the name was changed to the "Jimmy Conway Lifetime Achievement Award" to commemorate Jimmy's exceptional contributions to the game. Here in Oregon, his real impact was made during his 28 years as the State Director of Coaching for OYSA where he shared his knowledge and love of the game to thousands of youth and adults. Since 2009 this award has only been presented 6 times.

It is with great honor to announce the 7th recipient of the Oregon Youth Soccer Association's "Jimmy Conway Lifetime Achievement Award" to Dave Potter.

A native of Wisconsin, Dave graduated from The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education with minors in English and Coaching. After graduation he entered the teaching field and spent 40 years in Elementary Education. Dave Potter, his wife Karen and their 3 boys moved to Medford, Oregon in 1984 when Dave accepted a teaching position at Lone Pine Elementary School. Like his passion for soccer his passion for teaching filled the halls of his schools. Laurie Staff, longtime Rogue Valley Timbers Registrar and Dave taught elementary education together for over 25 years and says,

"Dave taught my 2 boys when they were in the 5th grade. They loved him and learned so much from him. Dave's passion for coaching and teaching make him a friend and a mentor for all he comes in contact with."

When Dave moved to Rogue Valley, he had no idea of the influence and role soccer would play in his life, but soon after his arrival Dave found himself reluctantly raising his hand to volunteer coach for his son's recreational kindergarten team. Now proving to be one of the most influential decisions of Dave's life there is not a soccer player or coach in Southern Oregon that doesn't know Dave as a huge contributor to the growth and development of the game in their area. His first and longest affiliation has been with the Rogue Valley Timbers Soccer Club. While there, Dave has grown to being one of the biggest individual influences to date for the growth of the game in the OYSA southern district.

While with the RVTSC Dave has:

- Coached recreational, junior academy, and competitive players 1990-present
- The club Director of Coaching 1990-2002
- Been an integral part of the local ODP program and the Timbers RTC program in Southern Oregon 2010-2014
- Served on countless committees and advisory panels

Here are a just a few excerpts from the many letters of recommendation we received from Dave's friends, colleagues, and players at the RVTs:

"When speaking with Dave, whether I'm soliciting advice or if we're just talking about the state of the game of soccer in Oregon it is rare that those conversations don't include some reference to or story about Jimmy Conway. Jimmy had a profound impact on Dave Potter and Dave's admiration of Jimmy is always evident." The letter goes on to say, "Dave is always willing to help any player or coach. He is truly selfless. His motivation is to grow and improve the game of soccer in Southern Oregon while at the same time enriching the lives of the players, students and coaches that have the privilege to work with him, and he works tirelessly toward that goal."

Kevin Primerano, E.D. RVTSC

"Dave has a true character of joy, passion and caring for all who come in contact with him. He radiates hard work, laughter, teamwork, communication and being the best you can be, on any given day. Dave, you have earned this award with your selfless attitude to serve others, and for that we are forever grateful!"

Gary Osterage – Past President RVTs

Gabbi Castillo a player of Coach Potters told us about Dave and wrote:

“Never, have I had a coach that loves every player he coaches. He truly inspires greatness out of everyone he interacts with on and off the field. It was always my pleasure to work beside him, and I call him a true friend in life, and in the beautiful game we love.”

Another large part of Dave’s coaching career was his 18 years of coaching high school soccer in the Rogue Valley. During these years he recorded 235 wins, 11 league championships, 7 state semifinal, 2 state final appearances, and 1 state championship. Dave retired from his high school coaching career after his 2018 season with St. Mary’s High School, but after just 1 year came out of retirement when South Medford High School was stuck without a girl’s couch due to travel restrictions during COVID-19. In an article by Jerry Ulmer, OSAA Today Dave was quoted as saying,

“Last year I missed high school soccer more than I ever would've thought. It was the longest high school soccer season I've ever spent because I wasn't involved in it and my heart wanted to be there.”

Jamie Young - Athletic Director St. Mary’s H.S reflected on Dave’s years at his school and wrote:

“His achievements on the pitch pale in comparison to the impact Coach Potter had on the growth and development of the young ladies he coached. The sportsmanship and character of his teams were always more important than the outcome of a game.”

A St. Mary’s player of Dave’s Lindsay Younger remembers:

“Something I will never forget is when we got second in state, and after receiving our medals my team, one by one, went and said thank you to each referee. Later the referees approached Dave and let him know that our team was the first ever-losing team ever to have thanked them for the game, and that it was a reflection on him as the coach. I couldn’t agree with that statement more. We are so blessed to have a man like Dave Potter leading the way in our soccer community. He lives a life outside of himself and brings passion of the game to all who have the privilege of knowing him.”

One of Dave's biggest contributions to his community is also one of his proudest and most fulfilling accomplishment. Just over 20 years ago Dave was introduced to US Youth Soccer's program called TOPSoccer. With a true love of children and the game of soccer Dave saw the TOPSoccer program as a gift to his community that could achieve his goal of making soccer available to all youth of the Rogue Valley regardless of their ability. When recently asked about his TOPSoccer program Dave said;

"I've come to believe that all children possess a gift of one kind or another. Coaching allows me to bring out those gifts. If that's my mission in life, I consider myself extremely fortunate and blessed by God to have been put in this position"

Over the last 20 years Dave has not only provided play for children that would have never had the opportunity to play, but he also reached out to the entire Rogue Valley soccer community and encouraged and provided them opportunities to volunteer their time and share their love of the game.

This is how the TOPSoccer program changed so many lives.

"Dave brought TOPSoccer to Medford where I watched as he valued every single person in a room. His true spirit of giving reminds me of Jimmy Conway's desire to bring the world of soccer to us here in Oregon. TOPSoccer is where I learned so much about how to treat others, include everyone, and focus on abilities."

Lindsay Younger

"In my time volunteering with TOPSoccer, I learned relatively quickly that Thursday night, between 5:30-6:30 pm, was easily everyone's favorite time of the week, whether it was the volunteers, the players, or the parents... encouraged by Potter, to give an hour of our time for something bigger and let our love for soccer guide us, hoping the TOPSoccer players have the opportunity to experience the positive imprint the game has left on us."

MaryBeth Barnum

"If you were to ask Dave what program he enjoys most, he would undoubtedly say without hesitation "The Outreach Program for Soccer" or TOPSoccer, which provides soccer activities to children with physical and mental disabilities. I have observed Dave work with children of all ages, levels and abilities. However, it is evident that Dave derives the most joy in working with the children in the TOPSoccer program."

Kevin Primerano

“One of the greatest gifts Dave gave me was through the Tops. Anyone who meets Dave will be welcomed with a bright smile and an energy that is undeniable and completely contagious. Dave has a passion for life and inspires everyone around him, both on and off the soccer field.”

McKenna Barnum

OYSA and the entire Rogue Valley community want to thank you for your continued dedication to the children who are part of this amazing program. This gift you have given through the TOPSoccer program has so clearly not just bettered the lives of the athletes but also the lives of their families and your young volunteers in ways that will be remembered forever. Know that your kindness will be paid forward in your honor for generations to come. You have shown how doing for others makes a community stronger and we thank you for allowing the game of soccer to be your vessel in making that happen.

In inclusion, Dave, you have and continue to be a positive and powerful force for the betterment of soccer in Southern Oregon. Here are few more excerpts from letters of recommendation and appreciation from your players, colleagues, and friends. Honestly if I could say it better I would but these words written by people that know you well say it best.

Player Sara Klott wrote:

“It is only appropriate that a nominee for the Jimmy Conway Lifetime Achievement award embody the same passion and commitment to the sport of soccer that its namesake did. I believe, wholeheartedly, that Dave Potter does, and that he is incredibly deserving of this honor. If there is a network of grassroots members of the greater Oregon soccer community, Dave is an important part of this system, much like Jimmy was. I know Dave looked up to Jimmy, as he talked about him at least once to every team he coached which made me, as a young player and even now, know that my love of the game was shared by a huge community, and that it was the sport of the world. If anyone is deserving of the Jimmy Conway Lifetime Achievement award, it is Dave Potter. A man who I consider to be a sort of second dad, and one of the best coaches anyone could ever meet and be lucky enough have.”

Player of Dave's MaryBeth Barnum:

“Coach Potter's consistency and dedication has created a community surrounding the sport of

soccer within Oregon for many years and I cannot think of another individual more worthy of this award. His knowledge of the game, impact on our community, and willingness to help develop the players and the OYSA organization as a whole, are a few of the many reasons I believe Coach Potter is deserving of the Oregon Youth Soccer Jimmy Conway Lifetime achievement award.”

Noeleen Conway sent a letter in support of Dave and in it she wrote:

“Dave Potter is a humble man of integrity with a love and passion for the game that is infectious. Jimmy and Dave shared a long friendship, a passion for developing soccer and a love for teaching the young players in Oregon. (They also shared a lot of time talking about soccer on the golf course) I cannot think of anyone Jimmy would think more deserving of the Jimmy Conway Lifetime Achievement Award.”

Kevin Murphy a longtime colleague and friend ended his letter by saying:

“When you think of soccer in the Rogue Valley, you immediately think of Dave Potter. He has been the true beacon for soccer in this area for many years... When you talk about game changers, you have to mention Dave Potter. What he has done in the world of soccer for so many players, coaches, and parents is truly remarkable. When wanting to recognize individuals who have accomplished a lifetime of achievement, as this award does, no one stands out brighter in my eyes than Dave Potter. He makes people better!”

...and finally, I will end with these last few words written by Rogue Valley Timbers Executive Director Kevin Primerano.

“As a coach, Dave’s enthusiasm is infectious. He brings an energy and passion to each and every training session that motivates the players to respond. But rarely does Dave refer to himself as a coach, rather he prefers to be called a teacher. And an incredible teacher of the game he is! He exhibits a compassion and empathy for his players all while demanding a commitment to excellence. He sees the big picture at all times and understands that the players he works with are students first and athletes second. He is not driven by wins and losses, rather lifetime lessons that he can impart along the way. And yet, through his career he has experienced many more victories than defeats! Dave serves as a mentor, not just to me but to countless other coaches in Southern Oregon and surrounding areas. He is truly selfless. His motivation is to grow and improve the game of soccer while at the same time enriching the lives of the players, students and coaches that have the privilege to work with him. He works tirelessly toward that goal. Dave’s passion and zest for life, his compassion in dealing with youth athletes of all ages and backgrounds, his commitment

to being a teacher and role model to many and his overwhelming sense of humility are all attributes that I believe make Dave who he is.

Dave Potter is a rare individual. His humility, selflessness, energy and enthusiasm are tremendous assets to our valley. As coaches, teachers or anyone that works with kids, we all wish to make an impact. Without a doubt, Dave has made and continues to make an impact each and every day”

Thank you Dave for your lifetime of commitment to your community and the game of soccer. As part of the award OYSA would like to donate 1,000.00 dollars to a charity of your choice on your behalf. You can let us know where you would like that check sent. We would also like to present you with this small-engraved soccer ball as a reminder of your achievements and finally this custom Jimmy Conway Lifetime Achievement Award Jacket to keep you warm and dry on the pitch for many years to come. May you wear it with pride!