

Interview by Mike Woitalla

Tom Howe helped found St. Louis' Scott Gallagher SC in 1976 and coached future stars such as **Tim Ream, Brad Davis** and **Pat Noonan**. One of his alums, Cal coach **Kevin Grimes**, calls Howe "a legend, one of the best youth coaches ever." Last year, after Scott Gallagher merged with Busch SC and Metro United, Howe left and started a new club, Woodson City Rangers. Howe, a St. Louis product himself who starred at SIU-Edwardsville and played in the old NASL, spoke to us for the Youth Soccer Insider's ongoing interview series with leaders of U.S. youth clubs.

SOCCER AMERICA: If you had a magic wand, how would you use it to improve youth soccer in America?

TOM HOWE: I wish everybody would try and play like Barcelona. If all the clubs across the country did that you'd have some pretty smart players when they hit the ages of 18, 19, 20.

And there'd be more people wanting to watch soccer in this country. Barcelona's the best team I've ever seen. They're just fun to watch. Another thing about Barcelona -- they don't have a lot of these gigantic athletes who everybody wants to get these days.

SA: What's the key to playing like Barcelona?

TOM HOWE: The ability to play in tight spaces. You spend tons of time playing in small, tight areas, and then when you get on the big field it's not a big deal.

I think more teams need work on the possession game. All the best teams in the world over the years have been great technical teams -- like Spain, Barcelona. Teams like that play the best soccer. At the youth level, too many people play more to win. My point is, if you teach your kids to play like Barcelona you're eventually going to win.

SA: But while you're learning to play like that you might not win ...

TOM HOWE: That's exactly right. Learning to play like that takes a long time, but once you get it, you're going to be good. The problem is a lot of people don't have the patience.

You tell your young players don't boot it no matter how much pressure you're under. We want you to get good at this. And at a certain age, you know what, they learn how to deal with it. Look at how many players we have in this country. At this stage we should be a lot better than we are.

Woitalla, M. (2011, March 25).

Tom Howe: Coaching good soccer takes patience. Published in Soccer America

SA: Over the years, have you seen American youth teams playing better soccer?

TOM HOWE: At the youth level, I still see a lot of long balls -- not from all teams. There are more and more better teams each year, but I wish more would try to play good soccer.

We play against teams that boot the ball a lot, and they might beat you. But they won't beat you five years from now. You're going to lose until you get to a certain age. Then you get to a certain level you're going to be really good. You're going to play the game the right way -- and it's a beautiful game when it's played right. I don't think it's such a beautiful game when it's played in a different way.

I can hardly watch college soccer except for a couple teams. Akron -- I like watching them play. They play well and they won the national championship playing like that. Why do a couple of teams play like that and nobody else does?

SA: Tim Ream is a remarkably good young American defender in that he relies more on smarts than brawn and keeps possession for his team after he wins the ball. He said you were his biggest influence as a coach in his youth days ...

TOM HOWE: He was on one of our last really good [Scott Gallagher] teams. He said that because he learned that at Gallagher, where we made our defenders pass it out of the back. We'd get criticized for passing too much.

I think when you play like that you get good at it. I think that's the proper way to approach it. Timmy's just a very good passer out of the back. I think that's why Timmy's so calm on the ball. He's been doing that since he was little.

SA: Why did you leave Scott Gallagher to form a new club?

TOM HOWE: A few other guys and I were with Gallagher from the beginning and it was a real close-knit club. Everybody was really good friends. In the last seven or eight years it just became a business. To me, it's just not Scott Gallagher anymore.

SA: The trend does seem to be creating big, "all-service" clubs that are clubs-slash-leagues -- but you're going with the small club model ...

TOM HOWE: And we're going to keep it small.

SA: What about the economies-of-scale rationale that by putting as many players under the same umbrella as possible you can cut costs?

TOM HOWE: I'll tell you this, when you have the kids on the 10th and 11th team, and they're all paying the same, something's wrong because they're not getting the same training.

I just don't like it. All those guys running the big clubs, they can say what they want, but they're all making a lot of money. And the more players they bring in, the more money they make.

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SA: How is your new club, Woodson City Rangers, dealing with the challenge of youth soccer's high costs?

TOM HOWE: We're about \$300, \$400 a year – and that's real low. We're just trying to keep it as low as we can. That's what we want to stay with.

SA: One of the reasons youth soccer costs so much is the tournament industry. What's your opinion on that issue?

TOM HOWE: I'm not a tournament guy at all. To me it's a waste of time. I'd rather stay home.

I couldn't care less about going to tournaments. After the first day you're watching your team and it's no longer your team because they're too tired to do anything.

We used to restrict the tournament play because some coaches wanted to go to tournaments all the time and hardly ever practice. They go to tournaments to improve their record and be able to say, "We're 32 and 2." That's too many games.

By the time kids are in eighth grade they don't even care about going to tournaments. They're just burned out with them.

SA: What's the right approach to tournament play?

TOM HOWE: You've got to practice, practice, practice – and maybe go to a couple tournaments.

We put a lot more emphasis on practice sessions and league games. Practice is when you learn to play. Games are like the test. And you don't want to have three or four tests in two days.

If you go to a special tournament and play a couple of games, that's OK. But they're so expensive and if you're playing three or four games in two days, especially at the older ages, physically I don't know how that can be good.

(Tom Howe is the Executive Director of Player Development of the [Woodson City Rangers](#). He was was a founding member of the [Scott Gallagher SC](#), which won seven national championships and 14 regional titles under his direction. A collegiate All-American at SIU-Edwardsville, Howe played professionally for the St. Louis Stars, Denver Dynamos and Minnesota Kicks. He also coached at SIU-Edwardsville, Western Illinois, Florissant Valley Community College, Southwest Missouri State University and Saint Louis University.)

(Mike Voitalla, the executive editor of Soccer America, coaches youth soccer for [East Bay United](#) in Oakland, Calif. His youth soccer articles are archived at [YouthSoccerFun.com](#).