



“Leading the Change”

February 6, 2012

Dear Kentwood players, coaches, and managers:

We have some big changes to announce. This last week the boards of Kentwood Falcons and Grand Rapids Crew Juniors (GRCJ) both unanimously voted to pursue merging the two clubs together. Exactly what final form the ‘joining’ will be has yet to be determined. It was important to the Kentwood Falcons board to have an MLS affiliation and we talked to the Columbus Crew and the Chicago Fire. In an effort to take advantage of the name recognition that Crew has built in West Michigan over the last several years, we decided that affiliating with The Crew was a better option. Therefore, for the upcoming 2012 – 2013 season both clubs will be fielding teams under the common name – the **Grand Rapids Crew Juniors (GRCJ)**.

The reason for the merging of the two clubs is to provide a comprehensive soccer organization dedicated to the development of its individual athletes and teams in our respective communities.

By aligning with GRCJ, Kentwood Falcon’s will benefit from this relationship as well. Playing under the Crew Juniors colors will mean more than merely having their name on our players’ shirts.

So why join together? There are many reasons:

- Foremost is that GRCJ has a long history of cooperation as Grand Rapids’ oldest premier and select club (GVP and GRASA).
- Both clubs were already looking to partner together for developing ‘Academy’ players (ages 6-8).
- Both Kentwood Falcon and Grand Rapids Crew Juniors have a similar opinion on what a fun and comprehensive soccer season should be and that it should be provided at a very reasonable price.
- Frankly, since our league, GVSA, is now allowing sponsorship of any club’s teams into the premier level (provided they’ve shown the on-field results), the premier talent has been diluted and we are, in general, not able to compete with the bigger clubs on the East side of the State. With this merger we can provide different levels of premier play that fits the need of more local Kentwood players and provide an overall better coaching platform.
- As of late, Kentwood has been consistently developing solid cores of teams that are ready to play at the premier level once they reach U13 and this merger will allow us to give them

the best opportunity for coaching and year round play based on their skill and commitment level.

- The joining will allow us to focus on young player development and also smooth the formation of premier teams as they move from the U11/U12 to the U13 age group.

How does all of this affect you?

- On the Select level, not much will change except for our club colors (2013/14 season) and an increase in our coaching staff (more faces). We will still stay close to our local Kentwood community and play our games at Brewer park.
- For young players this structure allows for more thorough identification of premier-level players throughout the U9-U12 years instead of relying exclusively on your player's performance at tryouts to determine their abilities.
- Formation of premier teams should be an overall smoother process
- Players that tire of premier level or just do not desire the premier level of play can more easily transition back to the select level if they so desire.
- The combined coaching staff means Crew Juniors players will be coached by those connected to most West-Michigan area colleges that are fielding excellent teams
- We will all be switching to Columbus Crew colors (black/yellow) and logo– after fulfilling our commitment to Peppinos for the 2012/2013 season. Some select players will remain “Kentwood Crew” next year and wear the same jerseys as this year. Some GR Crew players will most likely come over to Kentwood Crew for next season.
- Crew Juniors also has secured a relationship with **MVP Field House**, one of the best facilities in West Michigan, located just behind the Meijer's at 28<sup>th</sup> St and Kraft Ave SE for both its practice fields and home games. This will be a 3-field all-turf facility.

How we will proceed from here?

- Both clubs have emphatically stated that each level (premier and select) must be self-sustaining financially. This means that select fees won't be going to the premier program unless something of value is given in return (for example, training).
- Kentwood and GRCJ are both retaining their own boards. They are immediately forming an Executive Committee with equal representation from each club that can help coordinate the clubs in a common direction and welcome any additional community involvement.

Regarding tryouts, we are working to finalize the dates, so keep checking our website for the details.

Thanks for bearing with us through this **long** announcement. We trust it answers your questions about our combined future plans. Should you still have questions / comments after reading this, please feel free to contact us or go to our website where we have posted an FAQ.

Thanks,

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