

**HEART OF  
THE CITY**



# **PARENT HANDBOOK**

**#PLAYWITHHEART**

**UPDATED: 08/16/2025**

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A full-page background image showing two female soccer players in action on a grass field. The player on the left is wearing a dark jersey with a red shield emblem and is reaching down to control a soccer ball with her foot. The player on the right is wearing a light-colored jersey with a circular logo and is also reaching towards the ball. The background shows spectators and parked cars, all under a red color overlay.

# ABOUT US

## **By the Numbers**

350+ Elite travel players  
1,050+ Recreational players  
40+ zip codes represented  
30+ college soccer placements since 2023  
10+ college bound students not playing soccer since 2023  
8+ coaches  
9+ youth coaches (coaches-in-training)  
13 full-time employees  
4,500+ social media followers  
25+ business and corporate sponsors each year

## **Mission and Vision**

**Mission:** Heart of the City empowers under-resourced youth in Lake County through transformative soccer programs and exposure to academic, career, and leadership experiences building skills for success on and off the field.

**Vision:** A thriving Lake County where youth are changemakers, creating lasting impact in their communities.

## **About Heart of the City**

Welcome to Heart of the City!

Heart of the City (HOTC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit sports-based youth development organization that serves the Lake County youth soccer community. It was founded in 2014 by a group of community members who wanted to ensure there was quality soccer programming that was affordable and accessible for all families in Waukegan and the surrounding areas.

Heart of the City grew from an afterschool recreational program to include an Elite travel program in 2018 so that youth could play at higher levels and eventually access college soccer opportunities. Today, we proudly serve over 1,500 youth, ages 5-19, and about half our graduates go on to play college soccer.

We believe that soccer is more than a game, it's a pathway to personal success. Our unique program incorporates high-quality soccer and athletic development with academic and career support, leadership opportunities, and social-emotional and physical wellbeing in safe, supportive environments. Our mission is simple: we want youth to be successful both on and off the field, while they are in our program and when they graduate high school and start their post-secondary lives.

As a nonprofit organization, we subsidize around 90% of the cost of the program through business and corporate donations, sponsorships, and events. The fees we collect are invested back into the club, to pay coaches and staff, rent fields, and provide our student athletes and families with the additional support they need.

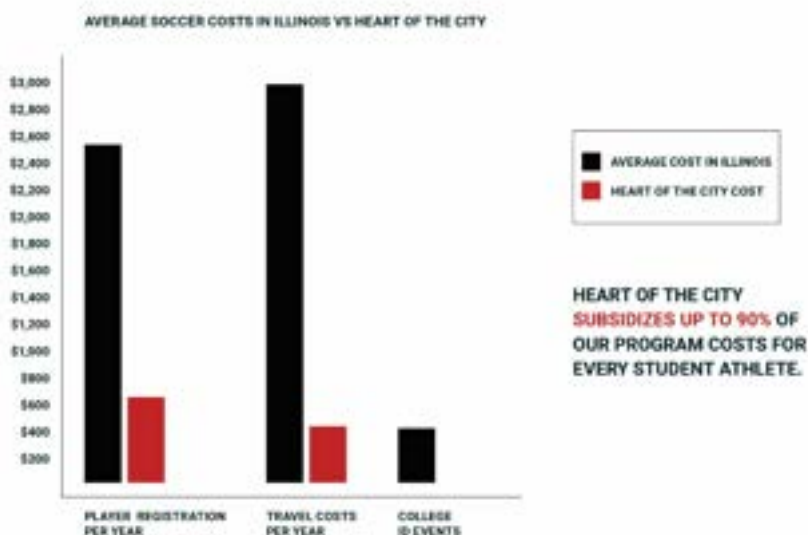
We are committed to developing the youth in our program to be high-level players as well as well-rounded individuals prepared for high school graduation, college or trade school, military service, or meaningful careers. We offer opportunities and support for student athletes to gain leadership skills and confidence, such as referee and coaching certification, volunteering, and mentorship. Our tailored player development plans include academic goal setting, GPA tracking, college visits, job-readiness, and building life skills.

Heart of the City is dedicated to positively developing your child and being a driving force in their life. We are delighted to have you as part of our Heart of the City family as we #PlayWithHeart and score #OneGoalAtATime.

### Subsidized Program Costs

We are committed to breaking down the "pay-to-play" system that often limits access to youth sports based on a family's financial resources. We know that talent and passion shouldn't be determined by income level, and our mission is to remove the financial barriers that prevent many children from participating.

Our reduced program fees are a result of corporate and business sponsorships, partnerships with donors and grant providers, and fundraising events. These combined resources reduce registration fees and equipment costs for all the youth in our program, ensuring that children from all backgrounds can participate regardless of financial circumstances.





HEART OF THE CITY VALUES

# H.E.A.R.T.



**H**Health &  
Wellness



**E**mpowerment



**A**ccess



**R**esilience



**T**eamwork



At Heart of the City, our core values are the heartbeat of everything we do—they shape every step as we grow, play, and lead—as an organization, as student athletes, and as a community. They inspire us to dream big, overcome challenges, and reach our highest potential.

## **Board of Directors**

Our Board of Directors is made up of local business owners, corporate and nonprofit partners, and parents. As a group, they are responsible for overseeing the organization's mission, governance, and long-term strategy and play a critical role in guiding our direction, ensuring financial accountability, and supporting our staff and coaches. Our board members are ambassadors and advocates of our mission and youth and help to make Heart of the City successful.

For a current list of Heart of the City board members, please visit our website [www.heartofthecitysports.org/our-leadership/](http://www.heartofthecitysports.org/our-leadership/). If you are interested in learning more about Board involvement, please contact the Executive Director.

## **About the Handbook**

This handbook contains information about the policies and procedures of Heart of the City ("We" or "Our" or "HOTC"). We expect each parent and/or guardian to read the handbook carefully as it is a valuable resource to reference. The handbook is provided to you as a guide to HOTC's policies and procedures. It is not intended to create, and should not be construed as, a contract between HOTC and any one or all of its families. These handbook provisions supersede any existing policies and practices.

Our handbook describes many of your responsibilities as HOTC families, and outlines the programs developed by HOTC to benefit your player(s). The HOTC handbook cannot anticipate every circumstance or question about policy. As business continues to change, the need may arise and HOTC reserves the right to revise, supplement, or rescind any policies or portions of this handbook from time to time as it deems appropriate. Families will be notified of such changes as soon as reasonably practicable.

This handbook describes many of the current policies and procedures of HOTC. It does not describe all of your obligations to HOTC or all of HOTC's obligations to you. Upon registering your player(s) at Heart of the City, you and your player(s) agree to adhere to the HOTC Code of Conduct and Policies. Although the Code of Conduct does not cover all the policies of HOTC or address any potential issues, it addresses several matters that arise with regularity.

Heart of the City's staff, coaches, leadership, and Board of Directors have an open-door policy. If at any point in time you have concerns about this handbook, programming, policies, or are dissatisfied with your experience, we encourage you to speak to our leadership directly in lieu of posting complaints on social media. Please contact the Executive Director with any comments, concerns, or suggestions. If your concern is a soccer/program matter, please contact the Sporting Director.





# PLAYER & FAMILY COMMITMENTS



## **Full-Season Commitment**

- HOTC Elite players are expected to commit to the entire playing year: Fall, Winter, and Spring.
- Upon registration, families must sign the official league commitment form:
  - YSSL (Youth Soccer Select League) for boys
  - IWSL (Illinois Women's Soccer League) for girls
- This form obligates the player to remain with HOTC Elite for the full seasonal cycle.
- Mid-season release requests are rare and will only be considered under special circumstances.
- If a release is granted, all program fees must be paid in full before HOTC will process and approve the release with the league.
- Missing a full season (e.g., Winter) may impact team placement, playing time, or future eligibility.

## **Attendance Requirements**

- Players must maintain at least 90% attendance across all games and training sessions throughout the full season.
- This requirement applies unless the player is injured or has an excused absence (e.g., illness, family emergency, approved conflict).
- Unexcused absences may result in a suspension from the next game or competition at the coach's discretion.
- Families are expected to communicate planned absences to the coach at least 3 days in advance when possible.
- Attendance is tracked by coaches and is factored into decisions around playing time and participation.

## **Multi-Sport Participation Guidelines**

- HOTC Elite supports athletes who play multiple sports and encourages a healthy multi-sport balance, especially at younger ages.
- During the HOTC Elite season (Fall, Winter, Spring), soccer must remain the primary athletic commitment.
- Players are expected to manage their schedule, energy, and recovery, to meet training and game demands while avoiding burnout and injury.
- Conflicts with other sports that lead to unexcused absences from HOTC sessions or games may affect playing time and team standing.
- Families should share seasonal schedules in advance to help coaches plan and support the athlete's overall development.
- HOTC staff are willing to work with families to help players succeed across their activities.

## **Player Movement and Guest Playing**

- Players may be invited to “play up” an age group based on skill level, physical readiness, attitude, and team needs.
- All decisions about playing up are made by the Director of Coaching in collaboration with HOTC Elite staff.
- Players asked to play up must continue to meet expectations with their primary team.
- Guest playing for another club is not permitted for league games.
- For tournaments, guest playing with another club requires advance approval from the HOTC Director of Coaching.
- HOTC events always take priority over guest playing or participation in other club events.

## **Cross-Team Training Opportunities**

- If a player will miss their regular team session, they may be offered the opportunity to train with another HOTC Elite team of similar age or level.
- This keeps players active in the training environment and maintains development and consistency.
- These sessions are optional but strongly encouraged when conflicts arise.

### **Process:**

1. Contact your team coach as soon as you’re aware of a conflict.
2. Request an option to train with another HOTC Elite team.
3. The team coach will coordinate with another coach to arrange a suitable alternate session.
4. Attend the assigned session in full HOTC training gear and bring focus, energy, and respect.

## **Uniform Kits & Mandatory Training Apparel**

- All HOTC Elite players are required to purchase and wear the official uniform kit and training apparel.
- The uniform & training apparel package includes: home/away jerseys, shorts, socks, training top, training shorts, track jacket, track pants and socks.
- Players must wear proper HOTC training gear to all practices and warm-ups.
- Uniform cycle: HOTC operates on a 2-year uniform cycle.
- Uniforms are ordered through the club’s approved vendor; ordering deadlines will be communicated by staff.
- Players may not participate in games if missing required uniform items.



# **PLAYER DEVELOPMENT & COACHING**



## **Coaching Staff**

- All HOTC Elite coaches are licensed through U.S. Soccer or hold equivalent certifications.
- Coaches are selected based on their experience, professionalism, motivation skills, and alignment with HOTC values.
- Substitute coaches are assigned when needed to ensure consistent sessions.
- All coaches are background checked and receive ongoing training in:
  - SafeSport certification
  - Certified Mental Health First Aid response
  - First Aid & AED use
  - Coach mentorship and leadership development
  - Age-appropriate player development

## **Coaching Opportunities**

HOTC Elite offers coaching pathways for individuals looking to grow within a structured, mission-driven soccer environment.

### **Coach-in-Training (CIT) Program:**

- Open to high school or college-aged players with strong character and an interest in coaching.
- CITs assist HOTC staff with practices and camps under direct supervision.
- Provides valuable experience in youth development and HOTC coaching standards.
- All CITs must be approved by the Academy Director and commit to a consistent training schedule.
- Interested CITs should contact the Director of Academy.

### **Professional Coaching Opportunities:**

- Experienced and motivated coaches may apply to join the HOTC Elite coaching staff.
- Candidates must:
  - Have prior coaching experience
  - Hold a valid USSF coaching license (or equivalent)
  - Complete an interview process
  - Pass a background check
  - Complete SafeSport training
- HOTC ensures that all coaches are suitable to work with youth athletes and aligned with HOTC's mission and values.
- Interested individuals should contact the Director of Coaching with a resume and statement of interest.

## Coaching Philosophy

At HOTC, our coaching philosophy goes beyond wins and losses — it's about shaping complete athletes and strong individuals:

- Development First – Every player is capable of growth. We focus on continuous improvement, providing the guidance and structure needed to help each athlete reach their potential.
- Whole Player Approach – Our coaching staff and youth development team support each player's physical, mental, and emotional well-being — not just their soccer performance.
- Positive Learning Environment – We promote a culture where athletes are encouraged to take risks, make mistakes, and grow with confidence and support.
- Lifelong Impact – We believe the values learned through our program — like teamwork, discipline, and perseverance — will benefit players far beyond the field.

## Private Training

HOTC offers a Private and Small Group Training Program for soccer players ages 10–22 looking to further develop their game outside of team training. Program highlights:

- Individualized focus – sessions are tailored to each player's strengths, growth areas, and goals.
- Training areas include:
  - Technical skills (dribbling, passing, shooting, first touch)
  - Tactical awareness and decision-making
  - Speed, agility, and conditioning
  - Position-specific development (including goalkeeper training)
  - Small-sided game situations (1v1, 2v2, etc.)
- Led by experienced coaches:
  - USSF-licensed coaches
  - Former collegiate players
  - Experts with a passion for helping athletes grow
- Benefits:
  - Personalized coaching plans and player evaluations
  - Supportive, small-group environment
  - Flexible training times and local locations

To learn more, contact the Director of Coaching.

## Playing Time

At HOTC, playing time is earned and guided by a combination of age group standards, commitment, and player performance.

Minimum playing time standards:

- U8–U12: Minimum 40% playing time per game
- U13 and older: Minimum 30% playing time per game

Playing time may be reduced for the following reasons:

- Unexcused absences from training or games
- Lack of effort, focus, or poor attitude during training or games
- Injury or fitness concerns that impact player safety or performance

Our goal is to develop every player — but playing time must be earned through consistent attendance, attitude, and effort.

## **Nutrition & Hydration Tips**

Fueling properly helps you train harder, play smarter, and recover faster.

Before training or games (2–4 hours before):

- Eat carbs and lean protein to fuel energy and focus
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day—start hydrated
- Avoid greasy foods, soda, or energy drinks

During soccer activity:

- Sip water every 15–20 minutes
- Use electrolyte drinks during tournaments, hot days, or double-headers
- No sugary drinks, energy drinks, or soda

After training or games (within 30–60 minutes):

- Eat a snack with carbs and protein to recover muscles (e.g., chocolate milk, banana with peanut butter, yogurt with granola)
- Rehydrate with water and eat a full meal within 2 hours

Daily habits for soccer players:

- Drink at least half your body weight in ounces of water daily (e.g., 100 lbs = 50 oz. of water per day)
- Get at least 8 hours of sleep each night to recover and improve performance



A full-page photograph of a soccer game, overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter. In the foreground, a player in a dark jersey is captured mid-kick, with their right foot on the ball. A goalkeeper in a light-colored jersey is positioned in front of the goal, ready to defend. The background shows a grassy field and a line of trees. The word "OPERATIONS" is printed in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

# OPERATIONS

## **Communication Expectations & Sprocket App**

We want to ensure all team members stay informed and connected regarding attendance, questions, and important HOTC updates outside of the game and practice times.

### **Attendance**

- You must notify your coach at least 24-48 hours before if you will not attend a practice, game, or field trip.
- You must use the designated team communication platform Sprocket .

### **Questions**

- Questions can be asked via direct message (DM) to coaches or team captains, or on the team chat/group, depending on the nature of the question.
- You must use the designated team communication platform Sprocket .
- Be clear and respectful; include relevant details for quick responses.

### **Updates and announcements**

- All team news, schedule changes, and important announcements will be shared via Sprocket and/or email.
- Players and parents should check regularly (daily/weekly).
- Acknowledge receipt if required .

### **Confidentiality and respect**

- Respect privacy and avoid sharing team information outside official channels.
- Maintain a respectful tone in all off-field communication.

## **Inclement Weather Protocols**

To ensure the safety of players, coaches, officials, spectators, and staff during adverse weather conditions, staff shall monitor weather forecasts regularly prior to and during scheduled activities. Players and parents should check for updates on Sprocket and social media regularly (every 1-2 hours) leading up to the start time.

Suspension or cancellation may be considered if:

- Thunderstorms (lightning and thunder) are present or forecasted within a 30-minute window.
- Severe winds (e.g., gusts exceeding 40 mph) are reported or forecasted.
- Heavy rain causing water accumulation, flooding, or unsafe field conditions.
- Hail or other severe weather phenomena.

- Heat- *Based on Heat Index (also known as “Real Feel” temperature, which factors in both temperature and humidity)*
  - 85–89°F (Real Feel): Staff will monitor closely and provide frequent water breaks and shade, reducing training intensity.
  - 90–94°F (Real Feel): Staff will modify activities and provide water breaks every 15 minutes. Sessions will be light and no longer than 1 hour.
  - 95–99°F (Real Feel): Staff will cancel sessions for players under 14 and will limit older teams to light training—no scrimmages or conditioning.
  - 100°F+ (Real Feel): Staff will cancel all sessions and games.

## **Player Injury/Treatment**

If your child is injured during an HOTC event (game, training, or tournament), we follow a clear process to support their care and recovery:

Initial response & injury reporting :

- If there are immediate concerns, families should seek medical attention with a healthcare provider right away.
- The coach will report the injury to the Director of Sporting Operations within 24 hours.
- The Director of Sporting Operations will contact your family within 24 hours to follow up and assess the next steps.

Evaluation & medical support :

- For U13 and older players, HOTC may arrange an evaluation with a doctor to help determine the severity of the injury.
- Families may also choose to use their own medical provider.

Insurance & financial assistance options :

- Families are encouraged to use their personal insurance for medical treatment and rehabilitation.
- If your family does not have insurance or chooses not to use personal insurance, you may file a claim through HOTC’s participant accident coverage — as long as the injury occurred during an official HOTC session or game.
- These policies include a \$500 deductible, and families are responsible for any deductibles or co-pays unless financial hardship is demonstrated.
- In all cases, HOTC will only pay providers directly and only upon receiving proper documentation, including an Explanation of Benefits, if applicable.
- The player’s family should keep all payment receipts, injury/treatment reports, Explanation of Benefits, and other documents in case the family submits a reimbursement claim through insurance.
- For questions or to begin the claim process, contact the Director of Sporting Operations.



## **Lost & Found**

If you lose an item, contact your coach and provide detailed information about the item: description, location, and where it was lost. All found items will be collected and stored in the Waukegan Sports Park shed for the season. At the end of each season, staff will share images of unclaimed items. If they are not collected, all unclaimed items after each season will be donated.

A photograph of four soccer players on a grass field, overlaid with a solid yellow color. On the left, a man in a black long-sleeved shirt with a 'FOOT ELITE' logo and black shorts stands with his hands at his sides. In the center, a player in a grey training bib and black shorts is in a low, ready stance. To the right, a player in a white training bib and black shorts is also in a ready stance. In the foreground, another player in a grey bib is crouched low to the ground. The background shows a fence and some trees under a bright sky.

# **COLLEGE & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT**

## Youth Development & Support (YDS) Program

Youth Development and Support (YDS) is what makes Heart of the City more than just a soccer club. YDS hosts unique, optional, age-tailored programs and experiences that support our players both on and off the field, helping them grow as people, students, athletes, and future professionals. All YDS programs are free and integrated into the Elite travel soccer program.

Our Five Pillars of Support:

### 1. Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

- SEL helps individuals—both children and adults—develop the skills needed to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- What it looks like at HOTC: short lessons, fun challenges, and regular check-ins during practice that build confidence, teamwork, and emotional resilience.

### 2. Health & Wellness

- Health and wellness includes physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of a person's life, and helps individuals make choices that lead to a fulfilling and balanced life.
- What it looks like at HOTC: fitness sessions, nutrition education, mental health talks, and monthly Wellness Wednesdays during practice with community partners.

### 3. Post-Secondary Readiness

- Refers to a player's preparedness to succeed in education, training, or employment after high school. This includes college, vocational programs, military service, or entering the workforce. It's not just about academic skills—it also involves critical thinking, time management, communication, and other life skills necessary for adult success.
- What it looks like at HOTC: readiness workshops, college visits (middle & high school only), career exploration trips to local businesses, and ongoing guidance to plan life after high school.

### 4. Family Engagement

- Meaningful involvement of our HOTC families in programs and support services, building strong family and team units to support shared goals.
- What it looks like at HOTC: fun, community-building events open to the whole family throughout the year, such as our Trunk or Treat, End-of Season Celebration, Beach Days, Santa Day, Valentine's Party, yoga and Zumba sessions, and more.

### 5. College Soccer Recruitment

- The process by which college coaches identify, evaluate, and select high school athletes to join their soccer programs at the collegiate level, by scouting players at games or tournaments, reviewing highlight videos and academic performance, and communicating with both the player and their family.
- What it looks like at HOTC: overnight college visits with a recruiting focus, player profile-building, highlight videos, and one-on-one coaching.

#### Youth Development and Support by age group

- Elementary School : SEL, wellness sessions, enrichment outings (museums), and family events. Elementary-aged players do not participate in college or career visits.
- Middle School: Advanced SEL, nutrition & strength training, high school shadow visits, summer career explorations, and regular support check-ins.
- High School: Monthly college and career visits (overnight for recruiting), senior seminars, internship/job support, and tailored recruiting help for any player aiming to play in college.

#### Why your child should get involved

- Real world skills: SEL and wellness build lifelong habits.
- College success: Students who tour college campuses/enjoy career visits are far more likely to enroll and graduate.
- Proven results: 53% of our seniors play college soccer—and nearly all graduates move on to college or career paths.

Youth Development programming is 100% optional, but families who participate love the extra support, connections, and confidence it brings.

If you are interested in learning more about YDS or have questions, please contact the Director of Youth Development.

### **College Soccer Recruitment Program**

Our free College Soccer Recruitment program is designed for players who aspire to play at the collegiate level. A dedicated team, including our College Soccer Recruitment Specialist, who has experience in all sides of the college game, works closely with each player to find colleges that are the right fit both athletically and academically for a smooth transition to college life.

- Application and Requirements – Players can apply as early as the spring of freshman year or any time after once requirements are met; minimum 2.5 GPA required.
- Team Support – Guided by a team of staff, including a specialist with extensive experience across all aspects of college soccer.
- Proven Success – Over 50% of high school seniors in the program have gone on to play college soccer at all levels, in multiple states.



- Exposure Opportunities – Includes college showcase events, ID events, and access to a vast network of college coaches.
- Holistic Fit – Focuses on matching players with colleges that align with both their soccer skills and academic strengths.

If you are interested in learning more about the College Soccer Recruitment Program or have questions, please contact the Director of Youth Development.

### **Overnight College Visits & YDS Travel Expectations**

Players participating in any travel experiences, including college visits, career exploration trips, and other day or overnight events are expected to uphold the highest standards of behavior. These opportunities are a privilege and represent both personal growth and the values of HOTC.

The following expectations are non-negotiable:

- Players must act respectfully and responsibly at all times.
- Profanity, racial slurs, or disrespectful language of any kind will not be tolerated.
- Physical horseplay, fighting, or aggressive behavior is strictly prohibited.
- The use or possession of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, or vapes is not allowed under any circumstances.
- Curfews, check-in times, and group expectations must be followed.

Failure to follow these expectations may result in the player being removed from the trip and not allowed to participate in future YDS travel events. If removal is necessary, a parent or guardian will be required to pick up the student from the travel location, regardless of distance or time of day.

All of the above expectations apply to overnight trips, especially those tied to college soccer recruitment. Players are expected to respect hotel or dorm, campus, and basic university/college rules, and to stay in designated rooms unless given permission by a HOTC staff member.

A young boy with a joyful expression is running towards the camera on what appears to be a grassy field. He is wearing a dark-colored soccer jersey. On the left side of his chest, there is a shield-shaped logo with the letters 'HOTC' at the top, the word 'EAST' in the middle, and a soccer ball icon at the bottom. The entire image has a yellowish-green color overlay.

# **GETTING INVOLVED & FUNDRAISING**

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

There are many ways for you to get involved as a volunteer. Whether you're interested in helping with fundraising event planning, joining a Board committee, assisting at tournaments, or supporting our office staff, your time and energy make a big impact. We also encourage parents to consider taking the referee certification course or help coach our afterschool program—no prior experience is necessary, just a willingness to learn and support youth.

## **Fundraising**

Fundraising is an important part of what we do all year. It is necessary to find sponsors for our program, engage corporations and businesses, and plan fundraising events. Fundraising ensures that we can sustain the organization and continue providing quality programming for your child.


Whether it's joining our event committee, participating in fundraising events, reaching out to local businesses for sponsorships, selling raffle tickets, or simply spreading the word about our programs and mission, every effort makes a difference. We also welcome ideas for creative fundraising and encourage families to get involved in any way that is comfortable. Your support helps us keep our programs affordable, accessible, and impactful for every child in our community.

Annual fundraising events:

- Swish Bags Tournament
- Soccer to Success Gala
- Dia de los Muertos Paint & Sip
- Suits vs. Cleats scrimmage to engage local businesses and corporations
- End-of-year appeal and Giving Tuesday

If you are interested in helping fundraise or would like to learn more, please contact the Executive Director.





# **POLICIES & PROCEDURES**



## **Feedback & Concerns: How to Share & Resolve Issues**

Your voice matters. At Heart of the City, we value open communication and believe that constructive feedback strengthens our programs and community. If you have questions or concerns—especially related to your child’s soccer development or overall experience—please follow the steps below so we can address them respectfully and efficiently.

Soccer-related concerns (field play, coaching decisions, playing time, etc.)

- Start with your child’s coach. Most questions or concerns can be resolved best through direct and respectful conversation with your team’s coach.
- Please do not approach the coach directly after a game.
- We follow a “24 hour rule” to help maintain a positive and constructive environment. If you have a concern after a game:
  - Wait at least 24 hours before initiating contact.
  - After this time, reach out to the coach privately through the Sprocket communication app or via email.
  - You may also request a time to speak by phone or schedule an in-person meeting if needed.
  - This approach allows everyone time to reflect and ensures the conversation is thoughtful and productive.
  - Still concerned? Contact the Director of Coaching.
  - Unresolved or serious? Contact the Sporting Director.

Non-soccer concerns (logistics, scheduling, injuries, payment, etc.)

- Contact the Director of Sporting Operations, who can assist with most administrative or non-soccer issues.
- If still unresolved or if the matter is serious, contact the Sporting Director.

We are committed to growth and continuous improvement—so please don’t hesitate to share your concerns, questions, or positive feedback at any time.

## **Parent/Player Code of Conduct & Zero Tolerance Policy**

As a player of HOTC, I agree to: \*

- Attend all games and practices and arrive on time .
- High School players: notify my coach at least 24 hours in advance if I must miss a practice, game, or team function .
- Abide by all team rules set forth by my coach, HOTC, and the leagues in which my team plays .
- Demonstrate a positive attitude and focused effort to my own development .

- Be respectful of coaches, teammates, parents, referees, and opposing players.
- Control my temper and maintain control over my emotions .
- Exhibit good sportsmanship at all times.
- Adhere to the HOTC social media policy.
- Always wear appropriate HOTC attire to training and games.
- I will **NOT** wear other club apparel during HOTC training, games, and events.

As a parent of a player of HOTC, I agree to:\*

- Support all players unconditionally and set a positive example on the sideline.
- Refrain from instructing, coaching, or criticizing my child and all other players.
- Respect the decisions of officials and teach my child to do the same.
- Berating referees will not be tolerated.
- Respect opposing coaches, players, and parents.
- Abide by all rules and standards set forth by my child's coach, HOTC, and leagues in which we play.
- Abide by the 24 hour rule to address complaints/concerns through the appropriate channels.
- Ensure my child is available for all games/practices and arrives on time.
- Notify the coach at least 24 hours in advance if my child is unable to make a game or practice.
- Report all injuries and special medical conditions (such as asthma) to the coach.
- Show appreciation for all HOTC players, coaches, parent volunteers, and administrators.
- Represent HOTC in a positive light at all soccer functions- no foul language or harassing players, coaches, or officials.
- Condemn the use of violence whether it's by spectators, parents, coaches, players, or officials.
- Abstain from using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco at all soccer events.
- Remember that players participate in soccer for their enjoyment and development, not mine.
- If asked to not use a noisemaker, I will abide.
- Adhere to the HOTC social media policy.

\*If any of these rules are violated, HOTC reserves the right to suspend, remove, or ban a player or parent as per the HOTC zero tolerance policy.

## **Social Media & Public Conduct**

Heart of the City uses social media to connect and engage with our players, families, supporters, and our community. We invite you to join us online through social media, and we welcome your comments on our social media posts. In addition, we welcome you to use your social media networks to highlight your accomplishments and show your support for the organization. Please join our online community at:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/heartofthecitysports/>
- Instagram: @heartofthecitysports
- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYzEltQtHl7IgFsdsrQW5iA>

- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/heart-of-the-city-sports/>
- TikTok: @Heartofthecitysports

Please note that posts and comments are subject to associated public records laws and the individuals, groups, and organizations posting are responsible for the content of their comments. To ensure best social media practices, we monitor our accounts daily. While we do not discriminate against views expressed by the public, we reserve the right to delete posts and remove people when:

- Comments are of a violent, threatening, obscene, profane, or defamatory nature against any person or organization for any reason (dishonorable and disrespectful content such as racial, ethnic, sexual, religious, and physical disability slurs are not tolerated) .
- Comments contain advertising, spam or are irrelevant to source material posted by our organization.
- Users post repetitive messages that are, or appear to be, copied and pasted.
- Comments contain language that causes aggressive conflict or disrespect to others.

Social media can be used to commit abuse and misconduct (i.e. emotional, sexual, bullying, harassment, and hazing). Such communications by coaches, employees, volunteers, adult participants, parents, or players will not be tolerated and are strictly prohibited by Heart of the City.

Anyone who violates Heart of the City's Social Media Policy is subject to appropriate disciplinary action including but not limited to suspension, expulsion, and/or referral to law enforcement authorities.

## **Communication Guidelines**

HOTC prioritizes the safety, privacy, and transparency of all players, families, coaches, and staff. To ensure a safe environment, we've established clear guidelines for digital communication.

- No private messaging: HOTC staff and coaches must not engage in private messaging with players on social media or via text.
- Use approved channels: Communication must occur only through official platforms (e.g., HOTC email or Sprocket) and always include at least one other staff member or coach.
- Transparency and Safety: These measures ensure professional boundaries, prevent inappropriate interactions, and promote a safe environment for everyone.

### **For Players**

- Keep communication public: Avoid private messages, texts, or social media interactions (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat) with coaches or staff.
- Protect personal information: Do not share personal details like your phone number, address, or passwords without parental permission.
- Report uncomfortable situations: Tell a parent or trusted adult immediately if you receive a message or content that feels inappropriate or makes you uncomfortable.

#### For Parents

- Monitor communication: Regularly review your child's online and electronic interactions with HOTC staff or coaches.
- Stay informed: Discuss online safety with your child and ensure they understand these guidelines.
- Report concerns: Immediately notify HOTC leadership or authorities if you notice any suspicious or inappropriate activity.

#### **Payment Plans, Fees, Payments, & Refund Policy**

Payments on payment plans are due the 1st of every month for 5 months.

Payment plan dates:

- U8-U14 Boys and Girls: Deposit is due at registration, and then 5 month payments from August – December
- High School Girls: Deposit is due at registration, and then 5 month payments from August – December
- High School Boys- Deposit is due at registration, and then 5 month payments from November - March

You must contact Heart of the City's Director of Sporting Operations if you're unable to make your payment for any reason.

There is a 2% credit card fee for credit card transactions. If you pay via ACH and a payment is returned due to insufficient funds, you will be charged \$30.

We do not offer refunds for any of our programs. NO EXCEPTIONS. We are obligated to pay all expenses that our programs occur whether your child plays or not.

#### **Credit/Refund for Illness, Injury, or Relocation**

We do not offer refunds for any of our programs. NO EXCEPTIONS. We are obligated to pay all expenses that our programs incur whether your child plays or not. Credit toward a future program or prorated refunds will only be considered on a case-by-case basis for long-term injury, illness, or relocation.



## **Missed Payment Protocol**

After a missed payment, your account will be held for 5 business days before your player is marked ineligible for further travel play. Once payment is received and the account is in good standing, your player will be eligible to play.

## **Player Release Policy**

All HOTC Elite players commit to a full-year season: Fall, Winter, and Spring, unless you are a high school student playing for your school team during one of those seasons.

We understand that circumstances may change, and release requests are sometimes necessary. Please note the following guidelines:

- Release requests are considered—but not guaranteed.
- Approval depends on individual circumstances and must follow both HOTC and league policies.
- All program fees must be paid in full before a release request will be processed.
- No releases will be granted after February 15, even if fees are paid in full.
- High school players participating in their school soccer season do not need a release for that period. This is already built into the program schedule.

## **Child Safeguarding & One on One Policy**

HOTC prioritizes the safety and well-being of all participants, especially minors. Our safeguarding policy complies with the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-126), IYSA rules, and the U.S. Center for Safe Sport Abuse Prevention Policies.

HOTC prohibits all forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse. This policy applies to all participants, including staff, volunteers, parents, contractors, and officers. All reported incidents are thoroughly investigated, with the personnel involved placed on administrative leave during investigations.

Background Checks and Training:

- All staff, coaches, and volunteers in contact with minors must pass comprehensive background checks.
- Annual SafeSport training is required for all staff, coaches, and volunteers before engaging with minors.
- Free SafeSport training is available annually for parents and players.

Mandatory Reporting

Participants, members, parents, volunteers, administrators, staff members, contractors, and officers must immediately report suspected child abuse or sexual misconduct to both law enforcement authorities, the U.S. Center for SafeSport, and HOTC. Children will be educated on the importance of reporting incidents, whether it happens to them or someone else.

#### Prohibited Activities and Sexual Misconduct:

- HOTC prohibits any sexual activity with a child.
- HOTC prohibits any sexual interaction between an athlete and any individual with evaluative, direct, or indirect authority.
- HOTC prohibits nudity and any indecent exposure by a participant at all sanctioned programs, events, activities, and competitions. Texting of nude, semi-nude, or undergarment pictures, or sexually charged comments is also prohibited.
- HOTC prohibits a participant, member, parent, volunteer administrator, staff member, contractor, and officer from engaging in sexually oriented conversations at all sanctioned programs, events, activities, and competitions. This includes sharing information about one's own personal relationships, dating, or sexual activities.
- HOTC prohibits participants, members, parents, volunteers, administrators, staff members, contractors, and officers from having possession of any sexually oriented materials including magazines, videos, and materials depicting children in sexually oriented ways while present at a sanctioned program, event, activity, and competition.

#### Physical Contact

Physical contact with athletes must take place in public, have no potential for actual physical or sexual contact during the physical contact, must be for the benefit of the athlete and must not meet an emotional or other need of an adult. HOTC prohibits a participant from engaging in any other form of physical contact with and or between athletes.

#### Harassment

HOTC prohibits participants, members, parents, volunteers, administrators, staff members, contractors, officers, and anyone in attendance at sanctioned events, programs, or activities from engaging in unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical or visual, that is based on a person's protected status at any sanctioned HOTC program, event, activity of competition.

#### Bullying

HOTC prohibits participants, members, parents, volunteers, administrators, staff members, contractors, and officers from engaging in any activity designed to cause fear, humiliation, or physical harm in an attempt to socially exclude, diminish, or isolate the targeted person as a condition of membership.

#### Hazing

HOTC prohibits participants, members, parents, volunteers, administrators, staff members, contractors, and officers from engaging in any activity that could be defined as hazing at any HOTC sanctioned or non-sanctioned programs, events, activities, or competitions.

#### Internal Reporting

Reports on child safeguarding can be made to HOTC through the following methods:

- Safeguarding officer: Contact the Sporting Director.
- Staff Members: Reports can also be shared confidentially with any HOTC staff member.

#### External Reporting

For immediate concerns or when preferred, reports can also be made directly to:

- Local law enforcement: Dial 911 for emergencies or contact your local police department.
- U.S. Center for SafeSport: 24/7 Helpline: (866) 200-0796 or <https://uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern/> .

Confidentiality: All reports, internal or external, are treated with the utmost confidentiality. There are no fees or costs associated with filing a report.

#### Follow-Up

- Case Logging: All reported incidents are securely logged and monitored.
- Regular Updates: Relevant parties will receive updates as appropriate throughout the resolution process.
- Policy Review: Each case is reviewed post-resolution to identify opportunities for policy improvements.



# STAFF CONTACTS



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**#OneGoalAtATime**

**#PlayWithHeart**