

U-11 Soccer Girls Gone Wild

by Con Chapman

As it finally hit me that the United States had defeated reigning World Cup champion Japan for the gold medal, I knew where I had to go; out into the streets of my neighborhood to celebrate with my girls—Courtney, Kirsten and Taylor—who I'd coached from Kinder Kick to Third Grade 3-on-3 until last year, when their parents had taken me aside and told me it was probably time for someone who actually knew something about soccer—like what it means to be “offsides”—to take the helm.



“Fine,” I said stoically, but I had a lump in my throat even though I'd known all along that in the high-pressure world of youth soccer there's nobody more expendable than the coach. Still, I'd followed my girls last spring and was pleased at the fundamentals they'd picked up under my supervision; don't touch the ball with your hands, don't crowd around the ball, don't drink out of somebody else's Evian bottle.



Evian: "naive" spelled backwards.

I was recalled from my reverie by the sounds of "We won coach!" It was little Courtney, always the first to a loose ball.

"I know it's great, isn't it!" I said. "We've got to celebrate!"

The girls looked at each other with confusion. "What should we do?" Kirsten asked.

I'd forgotten; they were so young, so innocent—they couldn't even remember the last time the American women won something big. They'd need some coaching.

"Kirsten," I said to the daughter of the statuesque blond divorcee who lives down the block, "is your mommy home?"

"Yes."

"Do you think she'd come out and take off her shirt, the way Brandi Chastain did the last time the U.S. women won the World's Cup?"



"I don't think so, she's making dinner."

"Okay. So we have to celebrate the way knuckle-headed men do when their teams win a major championship."

"How's that?" Taylor asked.

"By turning over cars and blowing things up!" I said with enthusiasm. That's how it is with coaching—you've got to get the kids *excited* about healthful outdoor activity.

"Cars are big," Courtney said. "We couldn't turn one over."

"Aren't you forgetting about your mom's MINI Cooper?" I asked. "That's pretty small—let's give it a try."



It would have been ironic justice to flip over the little holier-than-thou vehicle that Courtney's mom bought to show up everybody else in the neighborhood with our SUVs, the *bete noir* of environmental scolds. But we have the highest recycling rate of any town in the state, I like to tell them, while you crunchy granola types can't even

lug an empty crunchy granola box to the dump in your tiny tinny vehicles.

The girls grabbed the door handles while I pushed on the window until we got the little bugger rocking pretty good, but we couldn't get over the hump.

"It's too heavy," Taylor said.

I had to admit she was right; we were all winded, and we hadn't even jacked up the tires on the side we were pushing. "How about your little brother's Playskool Cozy Coupe?" I asked her.



"Yeah—let's get it!"

We made short work of the pathetic plastic product, rolling it over on its side with one good "heave-ho."

"Now what, Coach?" Courtney asked.

I looked at her for a second and thought—this is the problem with U.S. soccer. The kids don't learn the basics!

"Taylor, Kirsten—any suggestions?" I asked. That's how I operate—I like to teach the kids to make their *own* decisions.

Blank looks from both of them. Maybe, I thought, it's *my* fault; after all, they had cut their soccer teeth under my tutelage. "Okay, maybe this is a little advanced for you kids. What you do with the car once you flip it over is set it on fire!"



"But we're not allowed to play with matches," Taylor said.

"Sure you are—under proper adult supervision," I said as I pulled a box of matches from my pocket. It was from the fancy restaurant I'd gone to with my wife the weekend before—it said "No smoking" on the back cover.

Believe me, that hard plastic isn't easy to set ablaze, and I nearly used up every match I had before getting the assembly instructions in the little glove compartment going.

"Cool," Kirsten said. "Now what?"

"Now, we turn a simple athletic event into a jingoistic celebration of national pride with a mindless chant. Ready—U-S-A, U-S-A, U-S-A!"

The girls picked it up quickly enough except for little Courtney, who just stood there with a frown on her face, not joining in.

"What's wrong, sweetie?" I asked after a while.

"I wanted Japan to win," she said.

"Why?"

"Because they had that earthquake and tsunami."

"That's not what I taught you when I was your coach—remember?"

"Sorta," she said, rubbing her eyes.

"What I tried to instill in you girls," I said as I crouched down the way I used to on the soccer pitch, "is that no matter what your opponent has been through in the way of injuries, or bad luck, or

their goldfish died, or they didn't get a valentine from some boy they had a crush on, or a meltdown at a crappy nuclear reactor that was built in the 60's, you can never let up."

"But it was a natural disaster, coach—it wasn't their fault."

"It could have been much, much worse," I said, trying to put things in perspective.

"How?"



"It could have released a cheesy, prehistoric Japanese movie monster, like Mothra."

