

SOCCER TOWN

New England Soccer Journal profiles the soccer history and passion of towns around New England.

■ Fueled by talented players and experienced coaches, Daniel Hand programs prove town's success

By Phil Shore

There is an enclave fueled by soccer on the southern coast of Connecticut. Need proof? Just look at the trophies.

In 2018, the Daniel Hand High School boys soccer team won its third consecutive Class L state championship. In 2017, both the girls and boys soccer teams at Daniel Hand High School were conference champions.

Both programs, from Madison, Conn., have been successful over the years. The players are talented, and the coaches have impressive résumés.

What helps those players develop from an early age and what brings those experienced coaches to the community is simple: passion.

"I think the community has a passion for sports in general, especially soccer," said David Dikranian, the head coach of the girls team at Hand. "I think there are high standards. The parents and players are very committed to athletics, especially soccer."

Dikranian explained the community's passion for soccer brought him to Madison in the first place.

"I had been working on the Yale staff for 10 years. I was in a great situation with the Yale women's soccer program," he said. "I had the itch to be a head coach again. I didn't want to be a head coach at the college level. I wanted to stay local. I saw the Daniel Hand head coaching position was available. I'm aware of Madison and Hand. I'd been doing training in Madison for a number of years. I knew the community was passionate, and that was a big draw for me. It's a community that wants to excel in athletics, especially soccer. That was appealing to me, and that's why I applied for the job."

Greg Cumpstone, who played at Hofstra University and finished his first season as head coach of the boys program at Hand with a state championship, went through a similar thought process when taking on the job at the school.

"For anyone living in this area of the state and is interested in coaching at a high school, Hand is the pinnacle," he said. "So when that job opened up, I jumped to apply for it."

Cumpstone said part of the reason he



Madison, Conn.



was able to be so successful in his first year at Hand was because of the support he received from Dikranian, who he said helped him understand the "lay of the land" and helped him with scheduling.

Dikranian drew from his personal experience from the previous year. In 2017, longtime Hand boys head coach Stan Latkowski was suspended and eventually fired during the season for using "incredibly offensive and vulgar language" toward his team. In addition

to his duties as the girls soccer head coach, Dikranian acted as the assistant coach for the boys team. That season, both teams won their respective conference championships.

"That was special," Dikranian said. "It was a unique position, but it was special to be a part of both teams winning."

Prior to coaching at Hand, both Cumpstone and Dikranian had coached or trained with the Madison Youth Soccer Club. Getting to know the players

and parents in the community eventually helped them when some of those same players made their way to the high school, but both coaches said having such a strong youth organization is a huge advantage for the high school programs because of how early the development of young players occurs, increasing the talent in the community.

Dikranian has helped the Madison Youth Soccer Club coordinate trainers to come help teams in the club, while Cumpstone coached a few of his current Hand players since they were 12-year-olds.

"Obviously if you've got a strong base of your pyramid, that feeds into your high school program," Cumpstone said. "At the clubs, it's the best players from each of the high schools, so you get competitive training. It also exposes players to different levels of competition."

The youth program is just one of the many resources soccer players in Madison, particularly those who go to Hand, have at their disposal and advantage. Cumpstone and Dikranian both noted how supportive the staff and administration at Hand is for the soccer teams.

Additionally, the facilities are excellent, particularly the unique environment of the Surf Club, where the teams

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TRAIN LIKE A CHAMP

Embrace failure to reap rewards of success

Sometimes, the only house in the neighborhood that people talk about is the one that burns down. People care about the extremes: catastrophic failure and absolute success.

When you achieve your athletic goals and attain the success you've craved for years, prepare to be talked to about it. Murphy's Law says you will fail. How you handle that failure will define you. You will be scrutinized, every detail of your life and character put under a microscope as people try to derive the secret to your success.

The wealthiest athletes are the 1 percent who are willing to fail 99 percent of the time. Do not fear failure; embrace it. Those who waited for the house fire to burn will be consumed by one very important question: How did you do it?

1 Manage your athletic portfolio.

Who guides, mentors and challenges you to better yourself? Analyze the kind of people you follow and associate with. Do you surround yourself with friends that accept mediocrity or inspire greatness?

Friendships are like stocks: Invest in them. They are diversified and complicated, but they complement a specific set of goals you are trying to achieve. They can elevate your portfolio, but you should be willing and able to disconnect from their downward spirals if you feel it's in the best interest of your long-term objectives.

Your mentors are your financial advisers. Mentors help guide you through

tough decisions — cutting ties with old stocks, for example — that may not make sense to you but are ultimately necessary. You're willing to respect the path to wealth, not because you understand it, but because you trust your mentors.

Your friends, teammates and followers are the beneficiaries of your portfolio. The examples, wisdom and experience you set before them are of far greater value than the sum of your material wealth.

2 You would rather be tired than broke.

Because you fear being average, fatigue will forever accompany you. While most athletes are content to float through a workout, aimless and average, you seek a far more challenging road.

Greatness will take effort, pain, sacrifice and immeasurable failure along the way. You will experience both the limitless highs of conquering your next set, and nearly suffocate in the disappointments that follow when you don't. Your commitment to greatness will carry you through the low points and the pain.

You know it will be far more painful to accept defeat than to push forward beyond the world of mediocrity. There are two types of pain: the temporary pain of discipline and the permanent pain of regret. Choose the former and you will be tired, but successful.

3 You're not the same athlete you were a year ago, a month ago or yesterday.

You must break the cycle of insanity. Finally understand that you are repeatedly doing the same thing — over and over and over — and expecting a different result.

Every summer, hanging out with the same people, hitting the same parties and doing the same poor workout. Shake things up. Jump out of bed every morning with a purpose and get ahead. Start eating healthier. Accept that training with a purpose can be painful and sometimes miserable. Embrace it.

Don't ever let yourself get comfortable, because while you plateau, somebody else is improving. Each day do a little more to get better. Eventually greatness will become a habit, and your wealth will become an addictive necessity.

4 Where are your followers from?

Realize that athletic success is built through leadership rather than through common opinion. Common opinion adds clutter to your life; don't concern yourself with it.

Find the 1 percent differential in every set, rep and practice that sets you apart from the group. Be 1 percent faster, stronger, harder working or more committed than the athlete next to you, and

soon you will separate yourself from the group and emerge as its leader.

Every second of training session is an opportunity for you to improve and learn something new — to improve your strength, your fitness, your mindset and your character.

Training outside your comfort zone will lead to a collegiate career overflowing with wealth. Your wealth will define you.

5 You are willing to sacrifice who you are for who you will become.

By combining your portfolio, attitude, intent and 1 percent stature in sports, your true wealth will not be defined by the size of your bank account, rather by the number of lives you changed.

Wealth in sports comes from surrounding yourself with the right people, possessing a healthy fear of being average, pushing yourself to get better every day, and escaping your comfort zone as often as possible.

Through immeasurable leadership, attitude, humility and success, you will be the wealthiest 1 percent in this world obsessed with avoiding mediocrity. Some athletes are so poor, that all they have is money. Don't let it be you. **L**

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play their home games.

"(It's) right along the Long Island Sound. It's a beautiful turf football field. It's a stadium," Cumpstone said. "Having the access to turf allows you to train whenever. We didn't have to worry about messing the field up. The atmosphere at games, you have people filling the stands up. You've got the sound of the Long Island Sound. It's a good field, good pitch and good for us to train on."

"The student section is vocal," he added. "They come out in good numbers. We have community members, parents, members of the youth program. There are games where we can have over 1,000 people at the games, which is nice."

The Surf Club has seen a lot of Daniel Hand victories over the past few seasons. The boys program has won three

consecutive state championships, while the girls team made consecutive trips to the state championship semifinals.

Regardless of the championships, Dikranian said he is proud of how both teams have competed and represented the community in recent years.

"It's been a great run. We've been one of the best teams in the state," he said. "We've been very successful on and off the field. We've produced players that were All-Division, All-Conference, and All-State. We've excelled in academics. We've been highly successful. I'm sure one of these years we'll win a state championship, but the goal was to put Hand soccer back on the map and be one of the best teams in the state, and I think we're there." **S**

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AT A GLANCE

Location

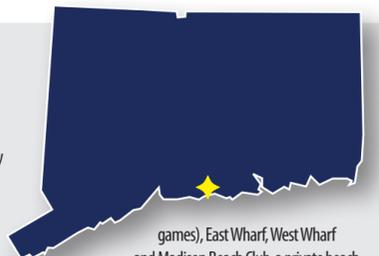
Madison is a town located in New Haven County along the Long Island Sound shore. It is in the central part of the state. It is about 20 miles east of New Haven, about 38 miles south of Hartford, and about 100 miles northeast of New York City.

Population

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, Madison had a population of 18,269 people.

Summer living

Madison is known for its beaches. Hammonasset Beach State Park is the state's longest public beach. Other popular destinations include Surf Club Beach (where the Daniel Hand High School soccer teams play home



games), East Wharf, West Wharf and Madison Beach Club, a private beach located near the Madison Country Club.

Athletic residents

Robert Moroso, the 1989 NASCAR Busch Series champion, was born in Madison, as was 2015 World Cup champion skier Kiley McKinnon. Figure skater Zachary Donohue was home schooled but grew up in Madison, while former UConn men's basketball coach and three-time NCAA champion Jim Calhoun recently bought a house on the shore in Madison. — PHIL SHORE