



From:

Tim Merry (on behalf of boards, partners and participants)
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President of Mahone Bay Youth Soccer Association

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Attention:

South Shore District Soccer Association Board

The purpose of this letter is to request that Mahone Bay Youth Soccer Association be reinstated back to the South Shore District Soccer Association and permitted to enter teams into the Nova Scotia Soccer League (NSSL) for the summer 2024 competitive season. This letter is broken into the following sections:

- 1. Context of Mahone Bay United**
- 2. Why we are launching Competitive Soccer**
- 3. The impact of the SSDSA vote to not support our first application**
- 4. Request for a review of the conditions of application**
- 5. What Mahone Bay United would bring to the District Association**

In light of the content of this letter, and in the spirit of openness and transparency, we have copied some of the key people we believe need to be kept abreast of this application process. It is important, for all involved, that non-partisan members of the sport and recreation community witness and take note of the decisions and ramifications for how we might work together to grow soccer on the South Shore.

Mahone Bay United Soccer Association

www.mahonebaysoccer.com

#ForTheLoveOfTheGame

*An all inclusive club for anyone who loves soccer.
We want as many people as possible enjoying the benefits of the game.*

Context of Mahone Bay United

Mahone Bay United Soccer Association (MBU) is an all-inclusive, not-for-profit soccer club, run by a diverse group of volunteers committed to offering free-of-charge and accessible participation to anyone under 18 who wants to play. Our mission is to have as many people as possible enjoying the benefits of the game and we are building a solid foundation for a long-lasting soccer club that is part of the fabric of the community of Mahone Bay. MBU Executive recently reactivated the Mahone Bay Youth Soccer Association (MBYSA) to host our competitive teams. MBYSA has a rich history of providing soccer in the district and was founded by former Canada Soccer Vice-President and Canada Soccer Hall of Famer, Bob Sayer.

We started out in 2018 on a field that had become largely unused, without a secure future, with 15 players aged 4-14. Our 2022/23 winter soccer “MBU Play” program saw 225 players sign up, assisted by more than 30 coaches in two locations – costing \$0 to play. Our youth and adult co-ed weekly drop-in games (with a suggested donation of \$5 per session for players over the age of 18) regularly feature up to 15-25 players and have become the recruiting ground for our enthusiastic team of coaches.

Over the last 18 months we have raised over \$130,000+ and renovated the town soccer field, developing the space in the heart of Mahone Bay into a community sports field, open to all. Our next project will focus on adding a sports equipment library, so anybody can go to the field and have the equipment they need available to enjoy the facility, free of charge. Access to sporting activities fosters active, healthy living and furthers our mission to have as many people as possible enjoying the benefits of sport by ensuring that the equipment and facilities at the Mahone Bay Community Sports Field are accessible to all, regardless of gender, age, ability and financial status.

The club has almost doubled in size every year, thanks to the dedication and enthusiasm of our administrative and coaching teams. Our club is part of the thriving community of Mahone Bay. We are proud to be supported by many local businesses, organizations and individuals. The evaluation and feedback received from families tells us that our programming builds confidence, creates belonging and improves soccer ability - in that order of importance! Our focus since founding has been on access, development and building a love for the game.

“Meeting a need in the community ...”

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
REGISTERED PLAYERS	16	35	75	155	225	255
COACHES & VOLUNTEERS	2	6	11	21	30	45
OPERATIONS FUNdraISED	\$1700	\$7,500	\$9,000	\$14,500	\$22,712 (22 Organizations, 28 Individual)	\$25,000 TARGET
FACILITIES FUNdraISED	0	0	\$15,600 (\$3,600 B-ball Court \$10,000 New Goals \$2,000 for MB Pool)	\$78,700 (Field Upgrade BCS Equity Fund MB Food Bank)	\$57,650 (Field Upgrade Auto Mower)	\$28,000 (Field Maintenance & Equipment Loan)

The all-inclusive culture of the club and the free programming we offer make us the natural home for individuals and families that may otherwise be excluded from mainstream sports because of culture, cost and approach to the game. Our board and coaching team reflects the international and diverse nature of the game, bringing together folks from many nations and cultures, which encourages young people and families from various equity-seeking groups to join our programs. Our development represents a great opportunity to build on the all-inclusive ethos of our club, increasing inclusion and access to recreation for populations that otherwise face constraints to participation. Here are some of the responses we received in our evaluations when we asked about the culture of the club:

“Coming from the remote Arctic and then remote northern Ontario, we were not even used to paved roads, trees, grocery stores or numerous other services available in Mahone Bay. You have made our daughter feel so welcome and have introduced her to things that you probably take for granted, but that we are new to and greatly appreciate.”

“My family and I moved to NS in late summer 2020. The pandemic made it extremely hard to network and connect with other people. MBU was my first real pathway to connecting with the community. It started with the adult pick up games which had the added benefit of staying fit. As I got more involved with the club I have really felt a sense of community and belonging. I have made some great friends and truly feel like we are building something special, and something authentic and positive that will have an impact in our children's future.”

“Just thank you! It's the first time ##### has been involved in anything like this and he's now confident enough to join art lessons and music lessons. Something which he never did before.”

“This was all new to our daughter and she is really coming out of her shell. She had a blast at practices and always looked forward to them and she really enjoyed playing a game at the Bridgewater Sports Centre. Though soccer is new to her, it wasn't about her skills, it was about getting her out, meeting new people and becoming a part of something. Thank you so much for the opportunity. It means a great deal to me and my family.”

“All of the coaches were so positive and friendly. Thank you so much for a great team sport experience. We typically shy away from team sports as it can feel overwhelming and impersonal.”

Why we are launching competitive soccer

MBU Develop as a foundation

In Spring of 2023 we launched our “MBU Develop” program, a 10 week intensive soccer development program requiring players to commit to 1.5 hours for 3 evenings a week (two evenings on the field and one in the classroom). The focus of the program was on technical skills (with a strong emphasis on Futsal skills and close control), creativity / self expression and positive team relationships.

In addition, we did a lot of work to introduce the players and families to the world of football: players and clubs from all over the world, watching highlights from different leagues, stories told by our board members and partners from all over the world, legendary moments in the history of the game, etc. The program was a resounding success with players and families. When we asked families how they would describe the program to someone who asked, this is what they said:

“An incredible program that builds a players skills on the field through creative footwork drills and unique, progressive activities, while also focussing on the mental aspects of being both a leader and team player - using a holistic, whole player approach.”

“Free soccer program that focuses on development, with amazing core values and focus on not just kicking a ball but actually helping kids build a passion for the sport”

“It's the most comprehensive and best soccer skills training our son has ever had.”

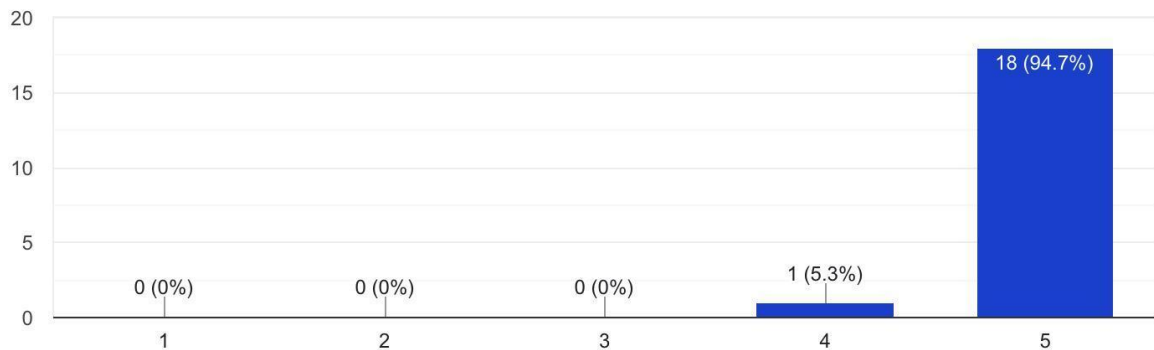
“MBU focuses on the love of the game and doesn't discriminate based on ability or socioeconomic class. My son would love to play on an MBU competitive team.”

The overall evaluation assessment was very positive:

How would you rank your overall experience of MBU Develop as players and families?



19 responses



After the completion of the program we went through our own internal reflection cycle with the board and coaching team. What became clear was that as a club we not only have a compelling community club culture but we have a style of play we want to develop and explore.

MBU Compete is born

At the same time we were going through this internal conversation, players and families who experienced MBU Play and MBU Develop programs were participating with community clubs in the region and in Halifax. Many of these families approached us noticing that different clubs have different styles of play and approaches to development. We were asked if we would consider putting out competitive teams in 2024 to provide a consistent experience for players and families of our club culture, playing style and development approach.

This led to the idea of “MBU Compete” programming being developed by our board, to complement the existing MBU Play and MBU Develop programming. The first step in this direction is a local free access competitive Futsal League in the winter of 2023/24, offering options for kids interested in building skills and playing competitively locally. It also furthers our vision of a style of football rooted in technical ability, creative expression and positive team relationships.

MBU has always grown in direct response to needs identified by our participants through post program evaluations and in conversations with coaches and board members. Our next desired step, based on our participant feedback and board aspiration, is to be able to register teams in the summer leagues, hence this letter requesting our acceptance into the South Shore District Soccer Association (SSDSA).

MBYSA is brought back to life

To facilitate our ability to launch competitive teams we reinstated the Mahone Bay Youth Soccer Association (MBYSA) with the Registry of Joint Stocks Nova Scotia. MBYSA was the

organizational home of the Mahone Bay Mariners, the previous competitive club in Mahone Bay that last participated in the local soccer scene in 2013.

The launching of an additional association under the MBU umbrella was essential to protecting the free access of the MBU Play and MBU Develop programs. MBU Compete will operate through the MBYSA and have its own budget and fundraising strategy to enable the participation of all subscribing players in SSDSA and Soccer NS leagues and activities.

MBU already has coaches secured for 4 competitive youth teams and 1 adult team in the summer of 2024. Our coaches are excited to lead MBU competitive teams and continue to develop their skills through Soccer NS and Soccer Canada development opportunities.

The board of MBU had also believed that launching our competitive soccer through MBYSA (rather than starting a new association) would expedite and facilitate our ability to be reinstated as a competitive club with SSDSA, rather than have to apply as a new club.

The impact of the SSDSA vote to not support our first application

The MBU board deliberately wanted to make the pathway to competitive soccer as simple as possible for us, and to make the decision to support competitive soccer in Mahone Bay as easy as possible for the Directors of SSDSA. Our careful research into the SSDSA policies, procedures and bylaws showed there was no documented statutory reason why our application would be refused.

Much to our disappointment, our first application to be reinstated as a competitive club was refused by the SSDSA board, which has led to this formal letter.

The reason given for not reinstating the MBYSA was:

“The Board decided that the process requires an application as a new club. This decision was based on lack of involvement of Mahone Bay Youth Soccer Association in the SSDSA over the past 10+ years and the default of MBYSA’s registry with Joint Stocks shows this inactivity as well.”

This decision has been interpreted by our club leadership as blocking our ability to launch competitive teams with a technicality that has no reference point in SSDSA policies, procedures and bylaws. In essence, MBU has understood this as a subjective decision that highlights a reluctance by the existing SSDSA leadership to accept new clubs and ideas on how we can collectively foster the growth of soccer in the region. Perhaps naively, we had hoped that our application would be met with an enthusiastic welcome. We had imagined that SSDSA would be excited by the opportunity to expand the competitive game back into Mahone Bay, revitalize an old club and capitalize on our growth by integrating MBU into the formal soccer system. It is possible to see how our interpretation of these events would undermine our trust in the process.

This is not an attempt to make a further case for MBYSA reinstatement. The intention of including this in the letter is to enable SSDSA board members to understand the impact of their decision on a club like MBU and the people who are represented within it. None of us believe that SSDSA's intention was to harm the development of MBU but that was the felt impact.

Request for a review of the conditions of application

There are stipulated conditions for the application as a new club to join SSDSA. One of these conditions is:

“Teams do not consist of a team(s) or a majority of players which were previously registered with an existing club.”

We read this as an inequitable and unfair requirement for participation in SSDSA for a new club and in direct contradiction to Soccer Nova Scotia policy 6.1.10 :

“A player’s obligation as a registered player for any season with a club shall cease when the season has ended.”

MBU understands that the intention behind this condition of application by SSDSA is to protect existing clubs from a drain of players and to not dilute the scope of regional soccer opportunities for young people. However, the actual impact of this rule is that it excludes and discriminates by preventing the emergence of any new soccer club in the region for the following reasons:

- 1) For clubs serving equity deserving populations like MBYSA that want to join the association this is a real barrier. This stipulation clearly highlights the challenges the region has with equity, diversity and inclusion. If we are to be a welcoming community such discriminatory policies should not exist in our public institutions
- 2) The majority of families seeking to play soccer on the South Shore will have already signed up to the available clubs over the summer season, based on location, cost, relationships and interest.
- 3) Therefore, a new club which has not been available for sign ups, is very unlikely to be able to field players in teams that are a majority “not previously registered”. The participants would have to be immediately new to the region or having previously never played soccer.
- 4) The demand is quite simply unrealistic. Other than Minis who have not played the game before, it is simply not possible for a club to have three teams worth of players suddenly move into the area, or to discover a new source for an entirely new player base.
- 5) Furthermore, we have built an incredibly strong player base and an enthusiastic club following, which we have been feeding into the other clubs in the region. It is not unreasonable for us now to want to engage those players and families in our own competitive teams.
- 6) Our region is growing in its numbers of young families and children. Mahone Bay United offers another option to meet this growing demand. Many kids currently miss out on competitive soccer because clubs have full rosters and wait lists.

In light of this, we would like to ask the board of SSDSA to review this condition and either remove it as stipulated or provide us with a clear pathway through which we can achieve it.

What Mahone Bay United would bring to the District Association

MBU offers high quality, well-organized, cost-free development opportunities for young players in the South Shore region of Nova Scotia. Our focus on enjoyment, technical skills, creativity and positive team relationships within a fee-free environment have created a unique club culture. We believe this club culture would be a wonderful addition to the tapestry of clubs already within the SSDSA.

We have been able to build a groundswell of participation from players and families through our activities and promotions. Our use of social media, email lists, match watch events, community events and promotions has increased the visibility and attraction of soccer in our community to players and families. The increase in the accessibility and visibility of soccer in our community helps build the player base that is so essential for the success of all soccer clubs across the region.

The recent partnerships we have forged with Halifax Wanderers of the Canadian Premier League and Suburban FC have served to amplify the credibility of the sport. These partnerships have also opened up exciting opportunities for involvement in local events, player participation in professional games in the city, Technical Direction support and coach development sessions. We are excited to continue to facilitate these events on the South Shore, including:

- Halifax Wanderers Summer Camps on the Mahone Bay Community Field
- Halifax Wanderers Winter Futsal Camp
- Coach Development opportunities with Halifax Wanderers coaches and staff
- Opportunities to meet professional players
- Local options for leagues and tournaments

Above all we believe we bring a style and brand of soccer that contributes to the success of the sport in the region. We are excited to play formal competitive games on our upgraded field and get the community further involved. Mahone Bay United brings positive momentum and a compelling story about the sport that we believe will amplify and accelerate the growing popularity of soccer on the South Shore.

Yours Sincerely,



Tim Merry
(signed on behalf of those listed below)

MBU Executive (*alphabetical based on first name*)

- Brian Limoyo - Communications
- Juliette Haughn - Vice President
- John van Laer - Secretary
- Francis Kangata - Treasurer
- Tim Merry - President

MBU Board Members (*alphabetical based on first name*)

- Ashley den Hollander
- Chris Tilley
- Dylan Wells
- Dan McDonald
- Kira Curtis
- Max Sheehan
- Wes Johnstone

MBU Advisory (*alphabetical based on first name*)

- Britt Vegsund
- Chris Jordan
- Dan Clark
- Jon Whitaker
- Jen McSween
- Jaime McDonald
- Stephen Paterson

Copied (*alphabetical based on first name*):

- Janessa MacPherson, Sport Nova Scotia, Manager of Regional & Community Sport Development; jmacpherson@sportnovascotia.ca
- Jason Hansford-Smith, Manager of Sport and Recreation at Government of Nova Scotia; Jason.Hansford-Smith@novascotia.ca
- Lindsay MacAskil, Soccer Nova Scotia Executive Director; executivedirector@soccerns.ca
- Marisa Colzie, Soccer Nova Scotia, Manager - Club Licensing; marisa@soccerns.ca
- Rachel Bedingfield, Recreation Nova Scotia, President; president@recreationns.ns.ca