

Olympiacos Soccer School Chicago

As the most popular soccer club in Greece, Olympiacos has dedicated fan clubs and synonymous soccer teams in the Hellenic diaspora all over world. Olympiacos currently has official youth academy affiliates in Greece, Australia, and Cyprus. Last September, avid Olympiacos fan John Kosmas brought the first academy to North America when he facilitated the establishment of the official Olympiacos Soccer School in Chicago.

In less than a year since opening, Olympiacos Soccer School has enrolled nearly 50 kids, receiving positive recognition from both the Greek and non-Greek communities alike. Kosmas, director of the year-round academy, acknowledged the tough competition he faces from many other soccer programs, but believes Olympiacos can offer something different.

"[We] truly emphasize player development and follow the skills, techniques, and everything that comes from the official Olympiacos training manual, which is not done by other soccer clubs," he said. "This means we have the ability to connect some of the promising young students to the official club in Greece."

As an official branch of the Olympiacos soccer team, young players in the Chicago

academy can enjoy a direct connection to the Olympiacos FC academy in Greece. This recognition allows the school to invite Olympiacos players and coaches to visit the young athletes in Chicago.

The majority of participants are between the ages of five and eight years old, but that gives the academy an advantage in properly training the students when they are younger, Kosmas said. Additionally, the school has enlisted former professional Greek soccer player

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- Angela Kosmas

Nikos Mirtsekis as the head coach. Mirtsekis has played professionally for AEK, Iraklis, and Aris, but has always been a fan of Olympiacos. Given the opportunity to coach young players under the association of Olympiacos, Mirtsekis gladly signed on, he said.

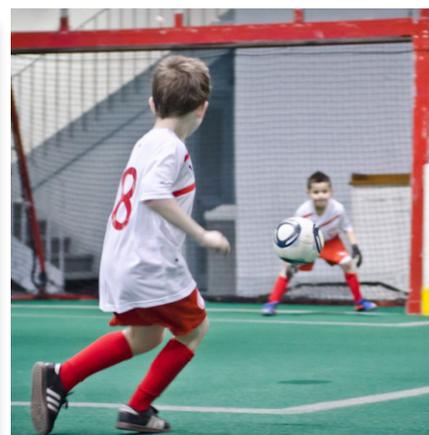
"When I grew up in Greece I was a big fan of Olympiacos but in my professional career I did not get to play for Olympiacos... so now this is an opportunity for me to work for the team I loved."

Aside from focusing on player development, Olympiacos Soccer School also hopes to foster social character and discipline through social events, said Angela Kosmas, director of communications. Members of the school have participated in several community activities, and the board was even invited to represent Greece in the 2012 NATO Athletic Crossroads prior to the NATO conference this spring. The goal of that program was to raise awareness of multiculturalism through friendly sports competitions.

"In the short time that we have started, we have made many positive strides," Kosmas said. "This is the first official academy in the U.S. We are very excited for the players to have such an opportunity to experience the professionalism and player development that we offer."

Aside from boosting the popularity of Olympiacos and increasing student participation, the directors of Olympiacos Soccer School hope to send young players to the Olympiacos summer camp in Athens Greece next year.

(Olympiacos Soccer School Chicago training facilities are located at The Odeum in Villa Park, Illinois, Maine East High School in Niles, Illinois, and Frontier Park in Naperville, Illinois. For more information visit: www.olympiacoschicago.com)



*Photos courtesy of Grace Trivino Photography.