

# TOPSoccer special needs program gets financial boost



With more than \$1.7 million to be spread around from a Florida-based class-action lawsuit, the Soccer Association of Boca Raton's TOPSoccer program was one of 28 Florida Youth Soccer Association entities from around the state to receive a portion of that money.

Boca Raton's \$17,300 share – \$100 for each of its 173 participants – will go toward its special needs program, which gives youths with mental, physical and developmental disabilities the chance to play soccer in a fun and supportive environment.

“This money will directly affect the TOPSoccer programs throughout the state,” said Vic Nocera, director of the Soccer Association of Boca Raton's TOPSoccer program and the regional director of the FYSA program. The local program is the largest in the state, and in 2010 was recognized by the FYSA as the TOPSoccer Program of the Year.

Steve Lesser, a shareholder at the Florida law firm of Becker & Poliakoff, assisted as local counsel in the class-action lawsuit and requested that a portion of the unclaimed funds be directed to the TOPSoccer program.

“We strive to keep these programs free for the special needs community,” said Lesser, a division rep for the local TOPSoccer program. “These funds are a game-changer for TOPSoccer clubs throughout Florida. Families of special needs children struggle financially to participate in therapy programs and others that provide opportunities to develop social skills and promote physical exercise.”

The plaintiffs' attorneys, Cleveland-based Dworken & Bernstein Co., L.P.A., employed a doctrine known as cy pres to distribute the unclaimed funds to charity that are not claimed by the plaintiffs.

“Cy pres deters the wrongdoers from further wrongdoing,” said Patrick Perotti, senior partner at the Dworken &

Bernstein firm that presented the checks to 13 charities throughout the state.

One of the teams in the 2016 SABR league was named in honor of Dworken & Bernstein, and the players' jerseys are emblazoned with the firm's logo. Lesser, joined by Nocera and Robinson, presented Perotti a plaque honoring the firm.

TOPSoccer, which was created in 1991, came to Boca Raton in 2000 through the efforts of Dean Frost. On opening day in 2000, Frost had 13 players and a handful of buddies enrolled. Buddies are teenagers who act as guides to the players and help lead them through the activities.

Today, SABR's TOPSoccer program not only features 173 players but also includes more than 220 buddies and buddy captains. The club provides printed and electronic media to help new clubs get started, and communities that are considering TOPSoccer clubs often visit SABR to learn how a well run program operates.

"For the kids we serve, this is much more than a soccer program, it's a life program," said Bradenton resident David Robinson, who chairs the Florida Youth Soccer Association's TOPSoccer Committee and is the Region III chair of United States Youth Soccer Association TOPSoccer Committee.

"We appreciate what this means for our special-needs athletes throughout Florida," Lesser said.

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