(*Oregon Rush U12 Boys vs. Pumitas*)

We were given a stark reminder recently of what is most important when we come together for the young people of Central Oregon and their love for soccer. SAFETY and COMMUNITY.

On Sunday (October 24) morning, a caravan of cars (6-7) comprised of the WAFC (Woodburn) Pumitas taveling to Bend to play our 98 Nike Boys in a U12 Premier Gold match were involved in a serious accident just outside Sisters. One of the cars, carrying multiple players in the back as well as a male driver and a mother in the passenger front seat, lost control and overturned when the vehicles in front all came to an abrupt stop. Amazingly, and perhaps miraculously, only one person in any of the cars was injured. Sadly, those injuries were significant. The mother in the car that flipped severed her spine and broke her neck.

Within hours she underwent successful surgery, performed coincidentally by a surgeon with a daughter who plays on my 98 Nike Girls team, and while concerns linger about the mobility of one of her arms, any possibility of permanent or significant paralysis is low. She is on the mend.

By Sunday afternoon, the families that make up the 98 Nike Boys had reached out to the team involved, raised $500, made arrangements and paid for a Bend hotel and had visited the families and the injured mother in the hospital.

I immediately volunteered to reschedule our 'home' game at their convenience in Woodburn so the Pumitas wouldn't have to attempt to travel again. On this past Sunday (11/7) morning we played a spirited match and after the game both teams came together. The Pumitas thanked our boys, presented them each with a treat and handed myself and our manager tokens of their appreciation as well.

The son of the injured mother was then presented with a 'game ball' by the clearly moved center referee and the boy then spoke with amazing composure to the entire group about his thanks for all the support.

This reminds us of how SAFETY must be the top priority for our teams when they travel to any matches in any location in any conditions. Give yourself extra time and don't rush because you might not make it by the time your coach wants to start warming up. The mother injured was a part of the Oregon soccer COMMUNITY of which we all proudly belong.

It's about safety and community. And a lot of wonderful soccer, too.

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