

## Walkerton FC 2022 Season Review

### Soccer in Brockton

Walkerton FC experienced a very successful 2022 summer season, experiencing club growth of nearly 150 additional players in comparison to pre-covid seasons. This growth required the purchasing of additional nets, sets of jerseys, creation of an additional mini field, and volunteer participation. An overview of our 2022 numbers are as follows:



U4 (Timbits)	50
U5 (Timbits)	43
U6 (Timbits)	52
U8	66
U10	44
U11 Rep	16
U12 (Mixed & Girls)	31
U15 (Mixed & Girls)	36
U18 (Rep & Girls)	39
Adult Programming (Pick-up and Women's)	46

Much of our programming growth can be seen in the younger age groups, for example a total for all Timbits (U4, U5, U6) in a pre-Covid year was 100, with a 45% increase in registration for the 2022 season. An additional rep team was added to the Walkerton FC team list, introducing our youngest rep program yet the under 11 age group. Our two rep programs were comprised of players from all over Bruce and Grey counties. Overall for the 2022 season Walkerton FC welcomed 423 registrants to programming this season, with a large geographical span of players and families (from Chesley, Mildmay, South Bruce, Brockton, Hanover, Neusdadt, etc.). With this many players, our volunteer base grew, as there were at least 2 coaches per team and a record turn out of volunteers for the spring field preparation. Recognizing the players, parents/guardians, community volunteers, referees, etc. there was a minimum of 1000 people in the Brockton area involved in Walkerton FC's 2022 summer season.

There was a total of 88 games played at the Bruce Power Regional Soccer Park, not including the Timbits and Adult programming, in the 2022 season. Almost every day of the season had a Walkerton FC booking, whether it be for practice, tournament, festival, or regular season game.

There was an increase in small-sided game officials with Walkerton FC for the 2022 season, allowing for more referee options for our U8 and U10 games. Bruce-Grey still struggles with the number of entry-level referees for the U12+ age groups (these individuals have to be 14 years of age minimum). Walkerton FC hosted a referee certification evening on June 2, where approximately 30 referees were certified, many for the Bruce-Grey area, but some travelled from as far as Windsor to become certified.

In addition to summer programming, Walkerton FC works collaboratively with the Bluewater District School Board and Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board to offer winter programming (Futsal) at their facilities. This season review does not include any winter programming.

## **Soccer in Bruce and Grey Counties**

Walkerton FC's U8 and U10 players participate in the Saugeen Mixed League circuit; U12, U15, U18 and adult all play within the Lakeshore Soccer League. Both of these leagues consist of many teams throughout Bruce and Grey and also experienced great growth in the 2022 season. Lakeshore Soccer League alone had 64 teams, nearly 20 more teams than a pre-Covid season. Due to the size and central location of the Bruce Power Regional Soccer Park, it has become a central hub for many of the season tournaments and festivals. This results in an increase of players and families accessing the fields and local businesses.

The growth of programming in Bruce and Grey Counties has resulted in this area holding a larger stake at the local soccer association tables – Elgin Middlesex Soccer Association (EMSA) and Southwest Regional Soccer Association (SWRSA). Traditionally the bigger cities within these two associations have held majority of the soccer registrations and teams, but with the exponential growth in Bruce and Grey Counties, we are quickly becoming a larger center. The increased pathways of higher play in soccer (rep programs) are at an all time high in Bruce and Grey.

## **2023 Season Outlook**

Walkerton FC is anticipating another season of growth for the 2023 summer season. Canada Soccer has seen a growth in the past couple years of soccer programs across the country, attributing this success to the men's and women's national team successes, the accessibility for all, and increased pathways for programming beyond house league. Walkerton FC has directly seen the positive impacts of each of these factors in our area. We continue to strive to keep price of programming low and accessible to all families, we have a handful of families accessing JumpStart funding in order to participate. Numerous rep programs are in full operation not just in Walkerton, but throughout Bruce and Grey, offering more opportunities for players to go beyond the house league circuit. In addition, Walkerton FC will be hosting their Buy & Swap event again in the 2023 season after great success in 2022; there is great need for families to have affordable equipment for their children to access the game.

To keep kids in the game, Walkerton FC is doing their part to help with the official shortage in the province, we will be hosting another Referee Certification clinic, with officials coming from the London area to make this possible. We are hoping for another year of positive turnout and interest in community members becoming referees.

## **Challenges for Walkerton FC**

Walkerton FC is already predicting some challenges for the 2023 season and beyond:

1. Elgin Middlesex Soccer Association (EMSA), which Walkerton FC belongs to, has implemented a fee increase of 3.5% for the 2023 season, and by 2024 it will be up 7.5%.
2. New Age Guidelines: Canada Soccer is creating new age group guidelines that will need to be abided by in order to continue offering accredited programming in Walkerton, which will result in more teams requiring more field access and use.
3. Keeping programming affordable: with the increase in association fees, field usage fees, equipment purchases and maintenance, we are forced to increase program prices for the 2023 season.
4. Equipment Shortages: There is a shortage of soccer equipment and field maintenance equipment due to the pandemic. At this time Walkerton FC is in need of new liners but cannot source any for the upcoming season due to shortages.
5. Field Lining: we struggle to find a reliable member of our community to line the fields on a weekly basis to allow for season play. Since Walkerton FC only lines the fields for their own use, this limits the ability for field rentals unless during the active Walkerton FC season.
6. Entry Level Referees: Walkerton FC had numerous games this season where we had to pay mileage for out-of-town referees to cover local games. Luckily, we had very few games where officials were not possible, keeping more kids playing.

## **Bruce Power Regional Soccer Park Maintenance**

The 2022 season at the Bruce Power Regional Soccer Park had a rough start with maintenance issues and trying to clean-up from lack of maintenance over the pandemic. As we become a larger hub for soccer in the area, there are maintenance aspects that need to be addressed in order to ensure the facility is state of the art.

1. Crest of the Fields: The crest on the fields directly impacts the motion of the ball and the ability to complete corner kicks and throw-ins safely. With the higher level of programming being offered, the crest needs to be tended to. It is of particular concern on the north fields.
2. Irrigation System: The saturation and mud issues on the northwest field was of particular concern during the 2022 season. The irrigation system leaks and raised heads are a safety issue, which was negatively commented on by many referees and visiting teams. There were points during the season where Walkerton FC couldn't even use this field.
3. Maintenance Plan: Walkerton FC executive are under the impression that there is now an established maintenance plan for the facility, we look forward to seeing this plan and it being acted upon.
4. The large dirt heap: There is a large pile of dirt covered in weeds near where the new entrance to the park is planned for, this pile is a configuration concern as we need to establish an additional mini-field.
5. Parking: parking was a concern throughout the 2022 season as the lot did not offer enough space for all the patrons on many weeknights.
6. Ball Netting: this is on Walkerton FC's radar with the continued construction surrounding the complex, as ball retrieval is becoming an issue.

7. Lighting: this is also on Walkerton FC's radar, as with an increase in teams, the scheduling has to become creative to accommodate all for practices and games. We are currently limited to double-header games to only early in the season when the sunlight allows.

As much as Walkerton FC looks forward to the new building, we feel that there are a lot of foundational pieces of this complex needing attention in order to have a proper facility. Ultimately, the creation of this facility can be greatly attributed to our community donors, we owe it to them to ensure the best possible care of this facility.

### **Working Together**

Walkerton FC received much support from Brockton's Parks and Recreation Department throughout the 2022 season. Brad Thompson came to the rescue of Walkerton FC's executive team a few times as we encountered liner machine difficulties, last minute paint orders, and various field maintenance issues. Moving forward, we understand the need for continued effective communication between Walkerton FC and the Parks and Recreation Department, in order to provide the best experience for our Walkerton FC families and all the ones who visit the Bruce Power Regional Soccer Park.

The Walkerton FC executive looks forward to the growth of soccer in Brockton and the ongoing support from the Parks and Recreation department and Town Council.

If you have any additional questions surrounding Walkerton FC programming, success, or goals, please do not hesitate to contact us by email at [walkertonfc@gmail.com](mailto:walkertonfc@gmail.com).

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