

## ADULTS IN ATHLETICS

# Woody Woolery: A New Jersey perspective on area soccer

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When Bridgman High School soccer coach Woody Woolery moved to Southwest Michigan, youth soccer was hard to find. Now, 30 years later, youth clubs and soccer camps make it possible for all local kids to learn and play the game of soccer.

Woolery has been involved in local soccer since. His two sons, Jeremy and

Jason, played professionally after attending Lakeshore High School and are following in their father's footsteps as co-head coaches for the inaugural soccer season at Lake Michigan College.

**When did you first develop a love for soccer?**

"Believe it or not, I graduated high school in 1968 and my school didn't have a soccer team. I wasn't introduced to the game until 1981-1982 when we were

living in south New Jersey and my oldest son got involved in club soccer. My wife was actually the one who inspired him to play and I became fascinated with the game."

**When did you realize you wanted to become a soccer coach?**

"The people who taught me about soccer were so good at teaching me the subtleties of the game that

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Joe Rondone / HP staff

Bridgman soccer coach Woody Woolery speaks to his team during halftime of a game against Lakeshore on Monday.

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## WOOLERY

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I wanted to teach someone else. Most of the guys in that recreational league were from other countries but we all had the same love for the game and those who were more experienced than others were eager to share their knowledge. I appreciated it so much that I wanted to be part of that."

**What do you enjoy most about working with kids at this level?**

"Youth kids are great to work with because you can see them grow and develop before your own eyes. I think the job of a coach is to get his players prepared for the next level and get

them to develop enough to continue to playing the game. Coaching high school is a bit different because you need to really work to prepare them to be able to play at the next level.

**How has soccer in Southwest Michigan changed since you first got into it?**

"When we moved here from New Jersey, in 1984, Lakeshore youth soccer league was the only soccer around. There wasn't any club soccer so a bunch of dads got together and physically put together the area's club soccer leagues. Now, it is good to see that soccer is very much alive in this region and has produced some great talent."

**Your sons are coaching the first ever teams at Lake**

**Michigan College. How do you feel about that?**

"I'm so proud with what they've been able to do with getting this area recognized in soccer. They have professional experience which gives them extensive contact lists to help with recruiting and also with getting their players to the next level. LMC has a brand new program, so they have their hands full this season, but I think they'll improve as time goes on. Having a program over there gives kids in the area the chance to be able to play collegiate soccer who might not necessarily be ready to play at the collegiate level. It gives them more opportunity, a second chance, and that's always a good thing."

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