

Gayl Wilson

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If you read anything about soccer in Oklahoma during the early years of OSA's existence. Gayl Wilson probably wrote it. From her home in Tulsa, she started and edited the Green Country newsletter, OSA's Smoke Signals and the US Youth Soccer newspaper while playing soccer and raising a family.

Gayl grew up in Tulsa riding horses on the family farm. She graduated from McLain High School and went to Oklahoma Baptist University where she majored in journalism. Writing is but one of her passions, another is soccer. Drawn to the game when her husband Mike was asked to coach a boys' team in the early 1970's. Gayl quickly joined the many parents of Green Country in locating books on the new sport in town. "Mike and his friends learned the game by reading and going to nearby Boulder Park to play." says Gayl. Soon Mike joined a men's team. Not to be left out, Gayl and her friends formed a women's team. "We called ourselves the Pacers because we had to pace ourselves to survive to the end of the match." she says. Gayl's husband Mike coached both boys and girls for 20 years. His team won several state championships, and he was honored as USYS regional boys coach of the year. As if she did not have enough to do. Gayl took on the task of organizing and coaching the first men's team at Claremore Junior College (now Rogers State) During this time. her two daughters. Leesa and Rachel were quickly becoming soccer players of note. Both advanced to positions on the State Select squads (now ODP) and played high school soccer.

The United States Soccer Federation recognized Gayl's writing ability and asked her to create a program for the US Men's National team. "It was an amazing experience to travel with the youth regional teams and the US Men's National team to various sites around the country and abroad. I learned a great deal from watching our team compete in countries like Russia, Denmark, Germany, and Holland. From a reporter's viewpoint, covering the World Cup in Italy was most remarkable. I had never seen media coverage of that magnitude." she says.

Gayl produced the GCSA newsletter on a typewriter. While working on Smoke Signals she graduated to the most modern computer available in the publishing business - a 1 mg Macintosh computer with a 6-inch screen. "It was a glorious day for me when USYSA provided me with a screen large enough to see most of a tabloid sized page." she said. Gayl remembers those early days with fondness "It was a special time. Simply wonderful. Everyone worked hard to have soccer in the state. The parents loved to learn with the kids. We were excited to be starting something no one in Oklahoma had ever done before."

Writing continues to be a big part of Gayl's life, but family is still her main focus. Leesa and her husband llans Shrader live in Indonesia and have two children: Hanna and Cole. Rachel and her husband Ted Vogle live in Tulsa and have three children: Michael, Alixandria, and Kathryn.

Gayl Wilson's words of wisdom are based on her experiences as player, coach, administrator, editor, and mother: "Those of us who work with children need to remember to keep our priorities straight. Few players will play in college or become professionals. Let them be who they will be and most importantly, care for them. They will become people of kindness and good character if we have people who are kind and decent working with them.