

# Scotland comes to Indian River: Scots weigh in on American 'football'

By Jon Shecket  
Staff Writer

FRANKFORD — Travel is all about making new friends and there is no exception in the case of River Soccer Club.

About a month and a half after RSC's U-16 and U-13 teams toured England and Scotland and participated in the Loch Lomond Soccer Festival, representatives from the company that helped organize the tour made a return visit.

Eric McAleer, the U.S.-based founder and president of Excel International Sports and his Scottish representatives Gerry Gilroy and Graham Mackenzie were on hand for Indian River's 4-1 win over Milford on Tuesday Sept. 19.

McAleer played professional soccer in Scotland for eight seasons before arriving in Maryland in 1997. He founded the company shortly thereafter and it did not take long before it became his full-time business.

McAleer said that the trips are not just about playing soccer but gaining new life skills and experiencing different cultures.

"River Soccer Club has been a great group to work with," he

said. "It's refreshing when you have parents and administrators who understand the big picture."

McAleer says that youth soccer in America has improved "by leaps and bounds" since he returned to the states in the late 90s.

"I've seen that with the teams we take across," he said. "Some of the best coaches I've seen in the world are American. They are very open and receptive to learning. In Scotland and England so many of the coaches say 'it's our game, we invented it, we're better' so they're very old school in their approach to coaching."

What makes American soccer unique, said McAleer, is there is no true "American style" of



Jon Shecket photo

Eric McAleer (center), the U.S. based founder and president of Excel International Sports that took River Soccer Club to Europe last month, holds up his hands as he is introduced to the crowd at Indian River High's home soccer game against Milford last week. He is flanked by Scottish representatives Gerry Gilroy (left) and Graham Mackenzie.

playing soccer.

"I don't think there's a black and white answer to that. If you asked me what the Dutch style was or the Italian style, I could

tell you what all of those were," he said. "America's such a cosmopolitan country that when you look at who the national coaches have been over the last

20 years they've all come from different countries and they've all come from different backgrounds and they've tried to impose their own style to the national team. One of the great things is Americans in general are very athletic and very fit."

And while he calls most American soccer facilities "a work in progress," McAleer made a point of taking his Scottish counterparts to Roxana to see the River Soccer Club's Gum Road complex.

"It's such a breath of fresh air when you see a club that has their own identity with a clubhouse, a field and a sign outside," he said.

In addition to being the Scottish representatives of Excel International, Gilroy and Mackenzie are the chairman and secretary, respectively, of the amateur club Kilpatrick F.C.

Gilroy said he was impressed by the turnout and parental involvement at Indian River.

"Back home in Scotland at the equivalent of this you get just the coaches of each team and a couple of spectators," he said. "School football is organized,

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there's an official league and you play other schools in your area, but there's no interest as such from parents. You don't get any of that."

Gilroy has spent over 30 years coaching at Kilpatrick and he oversees 13 teams from U-8 through U-21 and the club's flagship team that plays in the

Scottish Amateur Football League's premier division.

In his role hosting the Loch Lomond soccer festival, he too has seen an improvement in the play of Americans.

"They've competed well and over the last six years have been very successful," he said.

Mackenzie says that Scottish boys would learn just as much if they were to make the trip to

America.

"We see American teams coming over and I think in terms of technical ability, it's second to none," he said. "The attitude and commitment of these players is fantastic."

"The American boys work hard for their game."

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