

Grill

Dream Job

Charlie Slagle, Executive Director of the Capital Area Soccer League, found his passion by trading an oblong football for a round one, charting a course for both his future and that of soccer in the Triangle. Players and fans are glad he did.

Charlie Slagle charted his course when he crossed over from football to soccer at Davidson College, more than 30 years ago. As a goalie for the Davidson Wildcats (Class of '75) for two seasons, he learned to love the game and earned All-Southern Conference honors. Slagle went on to coach his beloved Wildcats through 21 seasons, 1980 until 2000. He was named the Southern Conference Coach of the Year seven times and the National Soccer Coaches Association of America Southern Region Coach of the Year twice. The locker room at the Davidson College soccer stadium is named in his honor. Since August 1, 2001, Slagle has been chief executive officer of the Capital Area Soccer League (CASL), one of the largest and highly respected full-service soccer clubs in the country. In 2005 he was inducted into the North Carolina Soccer Hall of Fame.



Charlie Slagle does what he enjoys most: coaching soccer.

Photo by Teri Saylor.

VYPE: Describe your growing up years. Where were you born and raised? Where did you go to high school, and what sports did you play?

SLAGLE: I was born in Binghamton, N.Y., went to Chenango Valley High School where I played football, basketball, tennis and ran track.

VYPE: Who was your favorite coach in school?

SLAGLE: My high school football coach, Bob Costello. He understood

an athlete's drive and motivation.

VYPE: I have read that when you were in college at Davidson, you switched from football to soccer. Why the switch? How did you engineer that conversion athletically?

SLAGLE: I was a receiver and the coach wanted to

move me to interior line. I started working out with the soccer team in the spring as a goalkeeper and joined the team. I had played some soccer at sports camps growing up, but never on a team before college.

VYPE: You went on to become a successful, long-term head soccer coach at Davidson, racking up honors and accolades. Yet you were dismayed by the lack of fan enthusiasm for the sport. Talk a little bit about that, and your decision to host the 1992 NCAA

Division I Men's Soccer Championship, which was such a success, Davidson hosted the championships the following two years.

SLAGLE: Tampa had very small crowds and little media coverage. I felt that my sport deserved better than that. We bid, got it and had 8,000 fans in 1992; 10,000 in 1993; and 12,000 in 1994. The stadium facility seated 5,000 and was enhanced with portable bleachers. The whole town of 3,500 pitched in and it was great. Athletic Director Terry Holland let me follow my dream which was made a reality.

VYPE: You went on to direct more major collegiate soccer events. Most athletes who choose to play soccer, continue to love the sport, but you took love of sport to a whole different stratosphere and worked your heart out for it. Where did this great passion for soccer come from?

SLAGLE: College soccer was and IS a great sport and needed leaders. I helped fill one of those voids. I didn't feel that it should be treated as a second rate sport, and I was going to do my best to remedy that. I'm a passionate person and soccer became my passion!

VYPE: Why did you leave collegiate

soccer to run CASL?

SLAGLE: I wanted to do something administrative in the sports world. The Davidson AD's job was not going to open in the near future, so when the CASL job presented itself, I pursued it. I wouldn't have pursued without the uniqueness of the "full service" club. Kids can play from 4-18 years old at some level throughout the club and league. No one is excluded from the league. They may not make the level they want, but there is always a level to play for everyone. To my knowledge there are not any other clubs/leagues that can claim that.

VYPE: Soccer is not only your vocation, but your avocation and your life's work. What is it about the game that brings you so much pleasure?

SLAGLE: Developing players as soccer players and humans; developing the sport from playing to watching; and the fun of blazing trails for an under-appreciated entity in this country.

VYPE: What is your proudest accomplishment in the sport of soccer?

SLAGLE: Taking a non-scholarship team (Davidson 1992) to the NCAA Division I semi-finals in the first year of Davidson hosting the College Cup as a neutral site (sort of). Therefore, playing in front of 8,000 fans in your home stadium (more than two times the town's population and six times the school's population). Having a headline in *The New York Times*: "22 Educated Feet Take Davidson to the Quarterfinals" (against N.C. State, by the way!)

VYPE: Who has had the most influence on your career as a coach and a sports administrator?

SLAGLE: Former Davidson Athletics Director Ed Farrell. He became the AD as the football coach, but understood what all the coaches were trying to do and let them do their job to the best of their abilities. He provided resources to help the "go-getting" coaches improve their program within the limitations of the athletics budget. I modeled my drive for the program after Lefty Driesell's drive for the Davidson basketball program in the 1960s even though I was not there at the time. Davidson Athletic Directors Terry Holland and Thom Cartmill were big influences as one saw the bigger picture and one saw what I could

become as a young coach starting out.

VYPE: What have been your biggest challenges?

SLAGLE: The biggest challenge in youth soccer is the negativity of some to whatever a group is doing. Forums and the like propagate the notion that people can say what they think to be true anonymously with no repercussions if they are not correct. There are many good people working in this sport and other sports, and a small percentage can make it very difficult to enjoy the positive things that are happening. Otherwise, making soccer players into soccer watchers (fans).

VYPE: Look in your crystal ball and describe the future of soccer in the United States.

SLAGLE: Still a few generations away from making soccer the spectator and competitive sport that it can become. We need more of today's youth playing soccer to take their children out to games, college, high school, professional, etc. It will happen, but it isn't right around the corner.

VYPE: What is your ultimate goal?

SLAGLE: To continue the advancement of the game in this country through those that already love it rather than try to change the perception of those tunnel-visioned people that distrust the game and the people in it.

VYPE: What advice would you give to someone who has a strong passion for a sport, or other endeavor, and wants to act on that passion?

SLAGLE: Go for it! Stick your foot out. Stick your neck out. Stick your body out for what you believe in and go for it. Don't give up. Just keep moving forward no matter how fast or slow the progress is.

VYPE: Do you have any other hobbies or sports you enjoy?

SLAGLE: I'm an avid sports fan and play



Charlie Slagle teamed up with the Carolina RailHawks to challenge area soccer players to a road race competition in the recent Magnificent Mile race in downtown Raleigh on September 12. The Magnificent Mile raised money for research into Motor Neuron Diseases.

Photo by Jeff Witt.

golf and coach and teach for fun. I LOVE watching anything competitive.

VYPE: Tell us something about yourself that is not widely known.

SLAGLE: My true love for the sport of soccer began before my senior year in college on a three-week team trip to England, Wales and Scotland. I fell in love with the game, and it has become my occupation. Leading that trip was the Davidson soccer coach, Chip Stone, who is now the Leesville Road High School boys' coach.

VYPE: Is there anything else you would like people to know about CASL or soccer in general?

SLAGLE: Soccer is a great "starter" sport that includes fitness, teamwork and socialization, but does not have, at the younger ages, the "put on the spot" situations that many other sports have. I think that there is a time and a place for that, but it is delayed in soccer, allowing a love for the game to develop. The intricacies of the sport come at a later stage, and they keep this guy's interest. CASL is a "one of a kind" organization and the Triangle is lucky to have had it here for the last 35 years. I am happy and lucky that I got to hook up with an organization that has done so much good for so many adults that played the game as youth through the CASL system, whether they played at a high level of the sport or not. That is the goal now, to help kids become better adults whether it is in or out of soccer.