

**You Never Know:
What the Upper Arlington Soccer Program Means to Me
(Or Why I Helped Create the Carl D Smallwood Inclusion Scholarship)**

Hi soccer athletes. My name is Clay Mayhood. I lettered on the first UAHS soccer team 50 years ago. I had a rewarding college career and have enjoyed playing and watching the game all my life. I'm proud to have been a leader in creating the Carl D Smallwood Inclusion Scholarship for UAHS players.

I write to you today to encourage your continued involvement in our sport and --more importantly--to urge you to treasure and maintain the friendships that you have made representing Upper Arlington. I hope that my story below will help you appreciate and nourish those friendships. They will enrich your life for years to come and may one day even help save your life.

It was the last nine weeks of 8th grade when my family moved to Upper Arlington. We'd moved less than two years earlier, so I was in the hermit range in terms of sociability – a result of being very shy. The UA soccer program — in its infancy then — held promise. It was a place where I might make new friends, be accepted, and work with my teammates to try and be the best team in the state.

For UA, before Kiwanis and select teams, we were a pretty diverse group of kids. We took advantage of that by encouraging everyone to do their best to improve individually and help the team succeed. That meant meshing a wide range of experience, skill levels, talents, capabilities, and backgrounds. We became a close-knit group and most of what I did in and out of school included players from the team.

The summer following graduation, a lot of us remained tight — challenging ourselves and each other on the field at Jones in small-sided games before we headed to college where we competed against each other at the collegiate level.

I started four years at Miami University — midfield for two years and then sweeper for my last two. Yet, I remained close with over a dozen of my UA teammates and we made a point of getting together and keeping up with each other — we talked about school, sports, grades, and recounted adventures. We were all terrific friends and those friendships were to change my adult life in the best ways possible.

After college, this core group of 12 players that spanned four UA graduating classes ('74-77) made staying connected a priority. From coast to coast, we'd have group

get-togethers all over the country, celebrating milestones like birthdays, weddings, and especially World Cups – both the men's and the women's.

When Covid hit in 2020, we transitioned to weekly Zoom calls. They continue today. We supported each other during happy times AND challenging times—through job promotions and job losses, the death of a parent, the birth of children, divorces, and medical issues of all shapes and sizes. My life has been profoundly enriched through these lifelong friendships that all started on the UA soccer field. It goes far beyond what I could have ever imagined.

I'd like to share with you a recent experience that only serves to demonstrate that fact.

Four years ago I was training to hike Mt. Whitney (a 14,000+ ft peak in California's Sierra Nevada region) with my former teammate and one of the 12 soccer guys —Glen Gerhard, a Californian if ever there was one. I was working out of state — in rural Tennessee — when Covid was starting to ramp up and just as the world came to a screeching halt.

I contracted a mysterious virus, which eventually triggered an avalanche of autoimmune responses. I landed in a Memphis ICU for nearly a month, leaving me unable to see, speak, walk, or move. The only system it didn't impact was my ability to breathe.

My wife Madeline and my daughter Carly came quickly. One of the group of the UA 12, Dr. Larry Smith, a physician in Maine, was a constant presence by phone, quarterbacking long-distance, helping the two of them navigate a nearly impossible crisis. Larry participated in meetings with the medical team—often several times a day — as they searched desperately for a diagnosis and effective treatment. He was available 24/7 for Madeline to rely on—for moral support, medical advice, and a virtual shoulder to cry on.

Once I stabilized, Carly rode in the ambulance with me from Memphis to Richmond, Virginia, our home—a 15 hour drive. Flying was off the table, as my optic nerve was affected. I landed in a cardiac care unit at an acute care hospital for two weeks before being transferred to Sheltering Arms Institute, which had just opened a new inpatient physical rehab hospital in Richmond. Among other things, I still couldn't walk or sit up without support and had lost 35 pounds of mostly muscle, had no feeling or muscle movement below my knees, and had very limited, gross motor skills with my hands.

It was time to try and recover as best I could. In addition to family and local friends, the 11 others in our group became a constant source of support and inspiration for me. I'd

been admitted to Sheltering Arms on a stretcher and was discharged on a walker. I'd come a long way, but my rehab journey had just started.

Long story short, after four years of intense rehabilitation and training — and a lot of really hard work and patience — I just recently completed the goal that eluded me in 2020: I was able to summit Mt. Whitney with Glen. He laid out a 10-day program that allowed me to acclimate to the high altitude, find a comfortable pace, and enjoy some of the world's most spectacular scenery along the way.

We made it to the peak of Mt. Whitney on September 8, 2024 (and safely down the following day!)

It was one of the sweetest victories of my life.

So my moral for this story is this : *look* around you, *see* each of your teammates, *include* them in your life because, years later, there just may be that special friend in Maine who helps save your life and another over there in the corner who is now from California who just might help you climb that highest mountain that lets you know your life is back on track. At the very least, it's almost guaranteed that they'll enrich your life beyond measure for as long as you live.



Glen Gerhard '74 & Clay Mayhood '75