

Alexander Safaei's Beyond the Tryout Builds Inclusive Soccer Team and Leads Players to Undefeated Championship Season

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EINPresswire.com/ -- For Alexander Safaei, soccer had always been more than a game. It gave him confidence, discipline, friendships, competition, and a sense of belonging. But as Safaei continued playing competitively, he began noticing how quickly young athletes could be left out before they had a real chance to develop. Some players are cut early, some lack access to private training, travel teams, or expensive programs, and others need a different kind of coaching, more support, or simply more time to grow. For Safaei, it became difficult to ignore how often organized sports could feel out of reach for young athletes before they had been given a real chance to play.

Safaei's perspective continued to grow through his volunteer work with children with physical and intellectual disabilities, students at a local cottage school, and young people facing additional barriers. In those settings, he learned how much could change when coaching became more adaptive. Sometimes that meant breaking a drill into smaller steps, explaining a skill in a different way, or using different



Alexander Safaei



Safaei and his team, Elite United FC

equipment, such as a smaller soccer ball, to help a child participate successfully. Those experiences showed Safaei that a player doesn't always need to be excluded, but sometimes, it's the coaching that needs to change.

That understanding inspired Safaei to create Beyond the Tryout: Building Community Through Soccer, an inclusive soccer initiative designed to give young athletes ages 14 to 16 the chance to practice, compete, improve, and belong without a traditional tryout process deciding whether they deserved the opportunity first. He wanted the team to challenge the idea that a child's early ability should determine whether they receive the chance to develop. "I don't think a child's first experience with a sport should be someone telling them they aren't good enough to play it," Safaei shared. "They should have the chance to find out how good they can become."

Safaei began building his Beyond the Tryout team, Elite United FC, unofficially in 2023, taking on every part of the process himself. He started by recruiting players through school, friends, word of mouth, and direct outreach to young athletes who might be interested in joining. He then created the team's [Instagram account](#) to help share the opportunity and connect with potential players.

Eventually, Safaei built a roster of 18 athletes with kids who weren't currently playing for another organized soccer team when joining. For Safaei, that confirmed there were young athletes who wanted to compete, improve, and be part of something, but needed someone to create a welcoming opportunity without the pressure of a traditional tryout.



Safaei and Elite United FC With the Championship Trophy



Safaei and Elite United FC Celebrating Their Championship Win

Once the roster came together, Safaei turned his focus to creating the structure Elite United FC needed to compete. He secured practice space on his high school's turf fields, coordinated schedules and communication with players, and made sure the team had the equipment and jerseys needed to train and represent themselves on the field. He also organized Elite United FC's participation in tournaments before registering them for a six-team league, all while continuing to coach the players himself.

One of Safaei's biggest challenges was building a competitive team made up of players with varying levels of experience. Safaei knew that holding traditional tryouts and cutting less experienced players would have made Elite United FC stronger on paper, but also would have gone against the purpose of what he was trying to build. Instead, he focused on meeting players at their individual levels, focused on learning each player's strengths, identifying where they needed support, and finding ways for teammates to balance and learn from one another while still coming together as one team.

After months of planning, practice, and coaching, Elite United FC entered its first official league season and quickly proved that inclusion, competitiveness, and results could coexist. The team won its first three games, tied its final match, finished undefeated with a 3-0-1 record, and won the league championship in its first official season.

For Safaei, winning the championship was exciting, but the deeper impact came from watching the players and their families become increasingly invested in Elite United FC. Some players had little to no previous experience on organized athletic teams, and now they had entire support systems cheering them on from the sidelines. Frank Diodati, one of the players' fathers, saw that impact firsthand. "What impressed me most was watching a group of kids who largely didn't have another team become completely invested in this one," Diodati shared. "What stood out was the way the players grew in confidence and how quickly their families began showing up to support them."

Beyond the Tryout changed the way Safaei understood leadership. He began the project because he loved soccer and wanted others to experience what being part of a team could provide, but



Elite United FC Logo

he soon learned that leadership isn't always about being number one. Elite United FC showed him that giving more athletes a chance doesn't mean lowering expectations. It means creating a stronger community where players are encouraged to grow, compete, and rise to the occasion in front of them. "I learned leadership isn't always about personally scoring the goal, making the tackle, or being the best player on the field," Safaei shared. "Sometimes it is about building something that gives another person the opportunity to experience those moments. Soccer has given me so much throughout my life. One of the best things I can do with that experience is use it to create opportunities for someone else."

Moving forward, Safaei hopes to expand his reach by using soccer as an avenue to connect young athletes who might otherwise be excluded from organized sports. He hopes to grow Beyond the Tryout with additional teams, clinics, mentorship opportunities, and partnerships with youth organizations, continuing the idea that meaningful community work can be as simple as showing up to a soccer field with a willingness to bring people together.

To support Alexander Safaei, learn more about Beyond the Tryout, or connect as a potential partner, email alexander.safaei@gmail.com and follow Elite United FC's Instagram account for more information.

About Alexander Safaei

Alexander Safaei is a student at Byram Hills High School in Armonk, New York. He's an All-Section and All-League varsity soccer player and has earned six varsity letters across soccer, wrestling, and lacrosse. Safaei has also completed his OSHA 10-Hour certification and is currently in the process of earning his ACI Concrete Field Testing Technician, Grade I certification.

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