

Michael Winograd – American Outlaws Questionnaire (USSF)

Background

Name: Michael Winograd

Age: 47

Soccer Experience (player, coach, executive, etc.):

Soccer has always been a core part of my life. I played Division I college soccer at Lafayette College and three years professionally in Israel. In 2005, I was a member of the silver medal U.S. Maccabiah Masters soccer team. I served as an assistant Division I Men's Soccer coach at the University of Richmond under Jeff Gettler, who in 2013 wrote that I was "easily" one of the top people he had worked with in his 34 year head coaching career, adding that I was "an outstanding individual with a dynamic way with people," and praising my "ability to communicate" and "depth of knowledge." I later co-started up the Staten Island Vipers second division professional "A-League" franchise. As Director of Youth and Team Development, among other things I hired the head coach, drafted team policies, engaged the Staten Island Community in a public vote on the team name, and ran a grass roots community development program through which I organized local youth clinics and helped local youth clubs draft curricula. Since 2009, I have served on the Board of my town's soccer organization and, in 2008, I created, and continue to host, the annual Lafayette College Soccer Career Night in New York City. For several years, I also had the pleasure of coaching my two children, who are now USSDA and developmental players. I share the same love and passion for this game as you, and have lived it from multiple perspectives, at multiple levels.

Opening Statement to our membership:

I want to be your next President of US Soccer. And I am the best candidate to do this job. *First*, I have no hidden agenda, no sponsors to whom I am beholden, no special ties to any constituents — my only interest is in making the whole of US Soccer better, in giving back to the game for which we all share a common love and passion. *Second*, on the soccer side, I have played soccer at the youth, collegiate and professional levels, coached at the youth and collegiate levels, and managed at the youth and professional levels. *Third*, on the business side, in addition to successfully having co-started up a second division professional A-League franchise from scratch, for the last seventeen years, I have been a corporate attorney in New York City at some of the most prominent law firms in the world. I have represented some of the largest banks and companies, domestic and foreign — with annual revenues tens or hundreds times that of US Soccer — in their high stakes cases and negotiations. I have successfully advised and counseled CEOs and boards of directors, devised and implemented strategies, managed teams, drafted briefs, argued before state and federal judges, and negotiated settlements. I am in the unique position of having the experience, independence, and skillset necessary to bridge the soccer and business sides, bring parties together, and lead US Soccer into its critical next phase of growth.

Like many of you, I am concerned with the current state of US Soccer, particularly as it relates to the progress on the field and increasingly fractured nature of its constituency. US Soccer has made great strides, but the systemic problems that have been building over time are taking a serious toll. Like many of you, I have invested thousands of hours in the sport as an athlete, parent and member of my community out of a love for the game and desire to help soccer in this country grow and improve. Like many of you, I have also held down a full-time job while continuing to stay involved in soccer.

It is time that issues such as the process and transparency by which critical decisions are made, the clarity and effectiveness of our development path for young athletes, the disparate treatment of the US women's programs, and the prohibitive costs for player participation and coaching education are addressed and resolved through collaborative efforts.

I pledge to work with all of US Soccer's members, create merit-based committees, and ensure transparency in taking a fresh look at and resolving these and other issues. There is no magic talisman to effect these necessary changes. It will take intelligence, fairness and candor, as well as a deep understanding of the game from all perspectives. And it will not be easy. It will take preparedness, diligence, and perseverance, and the ability to bring parties together and articulate persuasively a common path forward. I am in the unique position of having the experience, independence, and skillset to achieve this. My soccer experiences, on and off the field, as well as my experience as a corporate lawyer and educator have prepared me to serve as President of our Federation. Like all of you, I pledge to put the good of the game first.

Questions

1. What leadership experience and leadership style makes you qualified to be USSF President?

I am in the unique position of having experience as a youth, collegiate and professional player, youth and collegiate coach, youth and professional front office manager, and corporate attorney at some of the most prominent law firms in the world. I have the experience, independence, and skillset to bridge the soccer and business sides, bring parties together, and lead US Soccer into its critical next phase of growth.

At its core, the job of the President is to take a leading role in collaborating with the Federation's Members and Board and others within the US Soccer landscape to determine and execute the vision, direction and processes that will best serve the mission of US Soccer and all of its constituents. To make US Soccer better will require strong and collaborative leadership capable of getting all entities, whether independent or not, rowing in the same direction. It will require the implementation of good corporate governance, the hallmark of any serious organization. To that end, I will implement a governance structure that is inclusive, merit-based and transparent. Critical US Soccer decisions will reflect meaningful input from all parts of the US Soccer landscape that they affect. And absolute transparency will be imposed to ensure integrity and engender confidence and trust.

I have successfully done these very things throughout my entire professional career at the highest levels, and I will bring those very same skills and experience to US Soccer. And I have no hidden agenda, no sponsors to whom I am beholden, no special ties to any constituents — my only interest is in making the whole of US Soccer better, in giving back to the game for which we all share a common love and passion. I have played, coached and managed soccer at the youth, collegiate and professional levels. On the business side, in addition to successfully having co-started up a second division professional A-League franchise from scratch, for the last seventeen years, I have been a corporate attorney in New York City at some of the nation's finest corporate law firms. I have represented some of the largest banks and companies, domestic and foreign — with annual revenues tens or hundreds times that of US Soccer — in their high stakes cases and negotiations. I have successfully advised and counseled CEO's and boards of directors, devised and implemented strategies, managed teams, drafted briefs, argued before state and federal judges, and negotiated settlements. In a recent press release, Jane Willis, Chair of Ropes & Gray's global litigation practice, remarked, "Mike is an outstanding individual. His leadership skills and ability to get things done in a smart, efficient and strategic manner make him a true asset." I have deep experience at the highest levels in all of the essential areas of this job, as well as the independence to ensure we consistently act in the best interests of US Soccer and its constituents.

2. What changes will you make to youth development in this country? Can you provide a timeline of the changes that you envision?

US Soccer must clearly define player development paths and implement minimum standards across all platforms. I will work with all constituents affected to take a fresh look at youth soccer's organizational structure on a state-by-state basis. As part of a collaborative process, we will work together to structure the youth landscape in any given state in a way that makes the most sense for that state, taking into account existing entities, geography, demographics and other key factors. And we will clearly define that structure and its individual components to the consumer. We will also implement uniform basic minimum standards and ensure fairness across youth soccer in all states. All of this begins with listening to and involving those with their boots on the ground. And it requires strong and collaborative leadership to get all entities, whether independent or not, rowing in the same direction in an integrated, clearly defined structure. I have successfully done just that throughout my entire professional career at the highest levels, and I will bring those very same skills and experience to US Soccer.

In addition, to help ensure that our National Teams are meeting on-field expectations, I will work openly and collaboratively to re-evaluate our system for developing elite young athletes. We must place objectively identified youth players in front of objectively identified coaches at young ages. To do that, we will implement a player development model that identifies talent in a more objective, thorough and comprehensive way, and trains those players as part of a clearly defined path to the National Team. Reducing cost barriers in youth soccer and coaching education, one of my key strategic initiatives, will play a significant role in achieving this. In addition, however, we need to clearly define the path to our National Teams. That path should run primarily through a US Soccer State Training Center that we will build in each state (more than one for larger states). It will house at least one to two fields and a full time US Soccer State Director responsible for scouting and training players and assisting in the professional development of our

coaches. Scouting will be objective and across all leagues, and we will add training windows to be hosted at the State Training Centers during pre-announced blackout days or weekends throughout the year. At the same time, the State Director will be charged with collaborating with the State Association, USS DA and other leagues to ensure that competition in that state is structured in an effective and integrated way that maximizes player development, including by giving due consideration to travel times, practice times and geographic and demographic realities within the state. The establishment of US Soccer State Training Centers and State Soccer Directors will help clearly define the path to the National Teams for elite athletes and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the player development process.

These player development initiatives are a major priority for my Presidency, and I plan to mobilize these efforts immediately upon taking office.

3. In what ways will coaching in the United States change under your leadership?

Coaching will change in several ways when I am President. As a threshold matter, coaching education will become more affordable. Like “pay to play,” the high expense to obtain coaching licenses and education is an impediment to the development of talent in this country. The reduction of these cost barriers must be addressed creatively, thoughtfully, and with a sense of urgency. I will work with business leaders to incentivize professional leagues and other private sector businesses to help finance youth and coaching development, in addition to tapping into US Soccer’s own surplus and available public grant funds. I will also ensure that youth clubs that get it right share in the successes of its players through “solidarity” payments to help incentivize and reward up-front investments. Access to development must hinge on desire and merit, not personal finances.

I also plan to work with a technical committee to continue to steer our coaching toward the highest possible levels, globally. I will ensure that we work with constituents to devise basic minimum coaching standards addressing conduct on the sideline, basic priorities in technical development, health and nutrition, and other factors that are key to helping cultivate and develop our children for soccer and life. For our elite players, we will ensure our coaching promotes the development of technical, nuanced, competitive players who are set up to successfully compete globally in the modern game.

4. The current pricing structure for many U.S. Soccer games makes it difficult for the emerging fan, the diehard fan, and families to access National Team games regularly. What will you do to address affordability and access to games?

The high price of US Soccer games undermines our ability to maximize the home field advantage that our fans, with the American Outlaws leading the way, provide. The cost of major sporting events in the United States has skyrocketed over the past several decades, and US National Team games are no exception. It has become prohibitively expensive for the average fans or families to attend, while favoring corporate ticket sales. This is problematic for several reasons. It is the fans that provide the energy, atmosphere, and advantage that our National Teams depend on when playing at home. By limiting accessibility to average fans and families, that energy, atmosphere, and advantage are diminished, diehard fans are deprived of the ability

to cheer for our National teams, and new fans are discouraged from taking root. US Soccer is a non-profit organization with a mission statement that differs from a typical for profit business. Ticket *revenue* should not take priority over ticket *sales* to the US Soccer community.

5. Describe what you will prioritize when choosing cities/venues to host matches for our national teams.

Home field advantage means our players and fans should feel a united energy in the stadium behind our National Teams. Decisions as to host cities/venues must be made through an inclusive process. Weight must be given to team, fan, business, logistical and other perspectives, taking into account the circumstances of the game. As one example, setting aside the argument as to the merits of playing the US-Costa Rica game at Red Bull Arena, to hear after the fact from Bruce Arena, the head coach of a team playing a critical World Cup qualifier game, during a critical stretch of World Cup qualifying, that he was not even consulted as to the location of the game, was stunning and reprehensible. These types of critical decisions must be made as part of an inclusive, merit-based and transparent process.

6. How do you envision the ideal gameday experience for fans attending a U.S. Soccer game?

A US Soccer game should be a celebration with the 90 minute game as the finale. There should be a host of family and fan oriented events pre-game, with tailgating, activities and former National Team player appearances. All that should lead up to the centerpiece, 90 minutes of the beautiful game. The atmosphere should be electric, with players competing and feeding of the energy of the fans. Each US Soccer gameday should be a special experience that the players, coaches, referees and fans will always remember and yearn to have again.

7. How will your presidency incorporate the views of fans and include them in the governance of U.S. Soccer?

From the start, the very first key strategic initiative of my platform has been to ensure that all critical decisions are made in an inclusive, merit-based and transparent way. I will ensure that critical US Soccer decisions reflect input from all parts of the US Soccer landscape they affect. And that obviously includes the fans, who are an essential component of US Soccer at several levels. Engaging the fans is exactly what I did in building the Staten Island Vipers, from putting the team name to a fan vote in the Staten Island Advance newspaper, to taking fan questions and comments on radio shows, to meetings with local club boards. LAFC is currently taking a similar approach to engaging the fans. We can learn from that and we should be committed to opening these channels of communication and collaboration.

8. Why should fans unite behind your candidacy for U.S. Soccer president?

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