

## Former players honor first SSC soccer coach

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For many of those who participated in a weekend alumni soccer tournament at South Sioux City High School over the weekend, they owe their lives to the school's first soccer coach.

Marla Grier took the job at the last minute back in 1996 and went on to have a remarkable coaching career, leading South Sioux City to numerous state tournaments during her 19 years on the job and claiming the Class B state title in 2013.

Many of the players who she coached over the years came back over the Labor Day weekend to take part in an alumni soccer tournament, and she was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her work in helping to develop the sport in South Sioux City.

Soccer in South Sioux almost never happened.

Although the school decided to start a program, a coach for the team still had not been hired in the weeks leading up to the start of the 1996 spring season.

"Two weeks before the season started, nobody would coach it," Grier said in an interview with a local TV station. "I said, 'Oh no, we have to have soccer. I'll coach.' And we were off and kicking after that."

Grier worked hard to recruit high school students to go out for the fledgling program, and the development of the high school team and the city's youth program soon made South Sioux City soccer a force to be reckoned with.

It was more than building a sports program for Grier, how-

ever. For some kids, it was literally the only thing that kept them coming to class.

"We had a lot of at-risk kids that needed to be involved in school that really weren't involved," she said. "I was hoping that soccer would be the thing that would suck them into school and keep them involved in school, and it worked."

Several players talked about how Grier's involvement in their lives helped them achieve the success they have enjoyed today. Several former players are now coaches at youth and high school levels in the Siouxland region, and as they began making plans to take part in last weekend's tournament, the idea that she should be recognized was tossed around.

During the tournament, a group of former players gathered with Grier and presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing her work in not only starting the high school program, but with her involvement in the city's youth program.

Although retired as a teacher, Grier still is involved in coaching soccer with the local Special Olympics program and has been a longtime supporter of the city's youth soccer club. She also serves as a member of the South Sioux City Community Schools Board of Education.

Proceeds from last weekend's tournament will go toward scholarships for graduating SSC soccer players in the name of Grier and her husband, Brad.