

BLAIR SOCCER

September 2026 Newsletter

Dear Friends of Blair Boys' Soccer,

I hope this message finds each of you well. After a long summer, we are now two weeks into our 2026 campaign. I am writing to recap our summer preparations, preseason and first two matches, as well as to preview what is to come in the next few weeks.

SUMMER

Over the summer, we stayed connected across the world through our email chain. It probably comes as no surprise that much of the discussion revolved around the World Cup. Many of our players attended matches and were eager to share their experiences. The clear winner for best moment of the tournament was Sidney Lopes Cabral's extra time equalizer for Cabo Verde against Argentina.

In addition to being swept up in the World Cup craze, many of our players spent their summers working jobs, interning at companies, attending pre-college programs, traveling and competing in summer leagues for soccer, lacrosse, golf and tennis.

Some highlights from the group include an internship with the production team of Adult Swim's new hit show, *President Curtis*, an appearance in the U.S. Junior Amateur Golf Championship and an internship at a microfinance bank in Nigeria.

Many of our local guys got together to play pickup games and hang out, and some of our international students, including Jin Yip '28 and Jaden Lau '29 in Hong Kong, did the same.

PRESEASON

In advance of player arrivals, we revamped the locker room, installing name placards on each locker and posters with our "Win the Day" motto, the Blair logo and pictures of goal celebrations from last year. At the front of the room, we have a section dedicated to Championship Friday, with pictures of our previous winners and a running scoreboard for this year.

During preseason, we sought to build our 2026 culture, learn our style of play and improve our match readiness. We talked as a group about defining culture as "how we do things around here." This framing helped us continue to establish professional habits and expectations as a group. It has been awesome to see our players hold one another accountable and to see our leaders consistently model what we're looking for.

To learn our style of play, each player was given a printed copy of our game model and a notebook. We structured our days around learning our style, phase by phase. For us, learning always starts in the classroom with slides, videos of us from last year and professional teams where helpful, tactics board demonstrations and quizzes. Then comes the field, where we bring the ideas to life with focused activities.



BLAIR
ATHLETICS

This year, our one-word identity statements in the four active phases of the game are “pragmatic” in attack, “aggressive” in transition to defense, “compact” in defense and “aggressive” in transition to attack.

Last year, we got very good at playing for first and second balls in attack but often panicked on the ball and cheaply gave it away. This year, while we are still comfortable bypassing pressure, we have focused much more on a new principle added to the game model called “love the ball.” It has the subprinciples of “three touches max” and “connect simple passes” to encourage our guys to play bravely, quickly and simply.

In transition moments, like last year, we are looking to win the ball back as quickly as possible when we lose it and to go forward or break the quad as soon as we win it back.

Defensively, we are more conservative than last year, focusing first on squeezing the space that the opponent has to play between and behind us and then selectively picking the best moments to press.

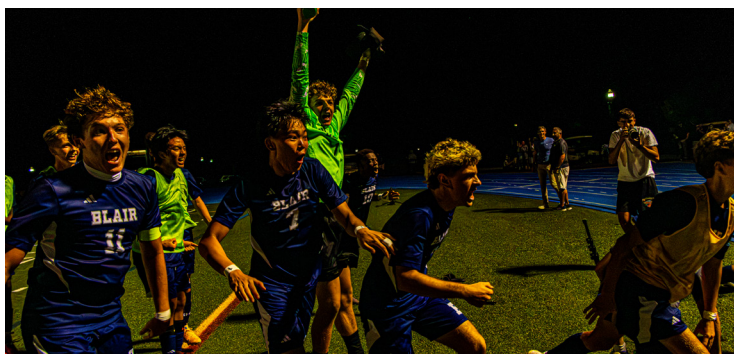
To wrap up preseason, we tested the players with paper and pencil on all that they had learned and played an intrasquad blue versus white scrimmage on Underwood Field.

Off the field, we spent lots of time together, sharing team meals, competing against one another in *Jeopardy*, playing board games with Coach Parauda and attending sports psychology, leadership and nutrition lectures with outside speakers.

NEWTON AND BRIDGEWATER-RARITAN

We opened our season on the turf, under the lights with a packed crowd covered in blue for Soccerfest against a strong Newton side, which was undefeated through five games. It is hard to imagine a better atmosphere for high school soccer, as those of you who were there can attest.

We came out firing and put in a top performance, but could not break through on the score sheet until late in the second half, when Fitz Kling '27 slipped Chase McCrimmon '29 into the right side of the box. Chase threw a fake with his right foot to drop his



defender and slotted the ball home on the near post side of the keeper with his left, unleashing a massive celebration.

Unfortunately, as can be expected in the first game of the year, we were not yet in peak game shape. Fatigue caught up with us late, resulting in some lapses in focus and the concession of an equalizer right before the final whistle and a golden goal in double overtime. This unfortunate ending made for a great teaching moment in the classroom on Monday, where we broke the game down phase by phase and identified areas for improvement.

On Wednesday, we hosted Bridgewater-Raritan, which is one of the best teams in the state. This was another great test for us and we delivered another strong performance. From the kickoff, we found success playing to our midfielders' feet in buildup and creating third- and fourth-man combinations. We also defended Bridgewater's quick and crafty wingers with poise and intensity. While the result did not go the way we wanted it to, we saw clear



growth from the first game and are right on schedule for where I want us to be as we inch closer to the MAPL schedule in October.

LOOKING AHEAD

The team looks forward to a busy stretch of competition, including four home games before opening MAPL play on the road against Pennington. See schedule below.

IN CLOSING

I will be back in touch in this format in a few weeks. In the meantime, I hope to see many of you on game days and otherwise. If you are interested in supporting the program, please be in touch.

Best,
Eamon Gara Grady
Head Coach, Blair Boys' Soccer

Date	Time	Opponent	Location
Saturday, September 19	2 p.m.	Warren Hills	Hampshire Field (home)
Wednesday, September 23	4 p.m.	The Franklin School	Underwood Field (home)
Saturday, September 26	2 p.m.	Seton Hall Prep	Dugout Field (home)
Thursday, October 1	4:30 p.m.	Life Center Academy	Underwood Field (home)
Saturday, October 3	5 p.m.	Pennington (MAPL opener)	Away

