

Making waves

Nick Vorberg plays for keeps

BY MARY RAEBEL

Intense, aggressive and yes, crazy. Milwaukee Wave goalkeeper Nick Vorberg admits goalies do have a bad reputation for being kind of crazy. (How else would you describe someone who purposely runs toward a hard, projectile object traveling at the velocity of a speeding car?)

But as father to 2-year-old Kinsey and 3-month-old Beckett, Nick describes himself in a different way: "Dad's very mellow." In fact, "book time" is a favorite part of this Pewaukee dad's day. Just before bedtime, Kinsey climbs into his dad's lap and listens as Nick reads from the toddler's favorite book: "I love you forever. I'll like you for always. As long as I'm living, my baby you'll be."

Mellow is not, however, how you'd describe this dad's schedule—especially now that the Wave's season is in high gear. Nick trains with the team in the morning. From there he heads to Marquette University to train the goalkeepers on the men's soccer team. Then it's straight to his club, SC Waukesha, where he's not only director of the soccer academy but a select coach, as well. Weekends are full traveling with either the Wave or the Marquette team.

"So any moments with my family, I'm really going to cherish," Nick says. "Put the work down, and enjoy the family when I can. It's a whirlwind. Everybody says you're going to look back and it's going to go by so quick. And it's true."

Toy tractors and trucks, the park, the zoo, wrestling on the floor—these are fun family times. And of course, there's soccer. Nick says Kinsey has seen his dad coach enough to want to try it at home. "He's learning how to kick the ball and I watch to see whether he's going to pick up the ball or kick it." He expects Kinsey might want to play on a soccer team someday.

"The club I work in has Youth 4, 5 and 6 programs," says Nick. "So we'll play a little bit for fun and let others coach him and see how he picks it up. We'll see how he likes it and go from there."

Nick says he and his wife, Lissie, want to expose the kids to a variety of activities so they can discover what they like, whether it's music, art or even ... baseball. Nick laughs and shakes his head. "I've asked a couple of my friends in baseball: 'How do you guys play it? You're just sitting in the outfield, not doing anything. You need to run around!'"

But if that's the sport his kids choose? "That's OK. I would learn, and I might even be that crazy parent in the stands," he jokes.

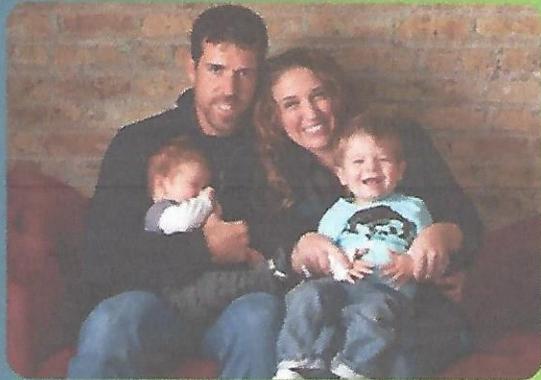
Colic, waking up at night, two kids in diapers—these are parts of Nick's life too. But like a true champion, when the going gets tough, Nick plows right on through—even with the dirty diapers.

"With any kind of odor, I have a bad gag reflex," says Nick. "I have to get everything prepared beforehand. I have to get my wipes, get everything laid out first, so I'm ready for any disaster." Nick says Lissie's family has been very sympathetic. They sent him a snorkel kit to help him breathe easier during diaper changes.

Nick takes on fatherhood with the same kind of passion and commitment he's devoted to his soccer career. His professional career began in 1997 with the Portland Pythons. He joined the Wave in 2003 as #0, winning three world championships with the team. He is also a member of the winning U.S. National Futsal team. He's a four-time Major Indoor Soccer League all-star. He won goalkeeper of the year award following the 2009-10 and 2012-13 seasons, and ranks second in wins on the Wave's all-time list.

A string of impressive stats and awards follows the name Nick Vorberg. How many kids

PHOTO BY
CHRISTINE
PLAMANN



Nick and Lissie Vorberg with Beckett (left) and Kinsey.
Photo by Christine Flammann.

can say their dad is immortalized as a bobblehead? But being a professional soccer player means a lot more to Nick than the accolades.

"One of the most rewarding parts of being with the Milwaukee Wave is being able to give back to the community," he says. "The community involvement is second to none with most soccer teams in the country. It is one of the reasons I came to Milwaukee."

Since 2003, Nick has been active in the soccer team's charitable program "Wave of Hope." He helps teammates and coaches conduct fun and active school assemblies that teach health education. They've visited over 200 schools in southeast Wisconsin.

Nick and his teammates coach the four "E's" environment, education, exercising daily and eating healthy. Also available to schools, the team has developed a "Wave on Wellness" curriculum, meeting the guidelines of the Department of Public Instruction.

Nick is also a site director and coach for the Waves' youth soccer camps. Many underprivileged children have been able to

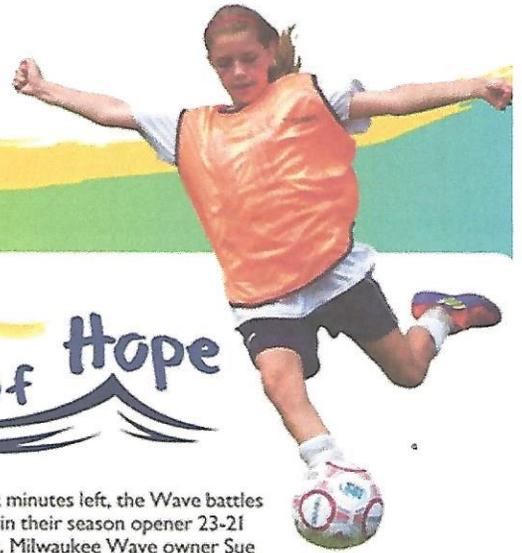
attend camp because of the scholarship money the Wave provides.

Coaching and mentoring youth have been a big part of Nick's life from the beginning of his career. Wave Coach Keith Tozer says Nick has used soccer to help so many young people develop and grow. "I just talked to a young man who goes to Marquette University and played for Nick," says Coach Tozer. "He talked about how Nick wanted him to respect the game, respect the opponent, respect the coaching staff and himself ... and how that transfers to other pieces of his life!"

Nick says he has always felt a responsibility to give back. "My parents, coaches and teachers were a huge influence in that and I hope this (responsibility) is conveyed to my boys through time."

There are a number of things Nick hopes his children will learn from him: "I hope they understand how to respect the person next to them. Know that it isn't about what you did, but what you will do. Dad Vorberg is nothing without Mom Vorberg. (I love my wife.) And that every day is a blessing!"

Wave of Hope



Down by six points with just minutes left, the Wave battles back to tie then ultimately win their season opener 23-21 against the Missouri Comets. Milwaukee Wave owner Sue Black calls the win exhilarating: "I'm so proud of the team and their tenacity to fight their way through to the win in overtime."

As proud as she is of her team on the field, Black is just as proud of their work off the field. "One thing about these guys is that they give back to the community. We go to over 200 schools with team players who step up and be role models for kids. The way they reach out to the kids in need at Children's Hospital, and all the different appearances they do, these guys really do care about the community."

THE WAVE OF HOPE's mission is to help children build a foundation of healthy habits and improve their overall quality of life. Black says Wave players are integral in accomplishing this mission and keeping it fun!

School visits. These visits allow kids to interact with the professional athletes and learn about wellness and positive lifestyles.

Game days. The Wave sets aside two game days for students. Ticket costs and transportation are subsidized and prorated depending on student needs.

Charity drives. The drives are regular features at games during the Wave season. Toy, book, hat and mitten drives have benefited needy families living in the area.

Youth soccer camps. Every summer, kids attend camps coached by Wave players. Many are able to attend due to the financial assistance provided by the Wave of Hope.

Charitable gifts. In the past three years, the Wave of Hope has donated more than half a million dollars to local charities.

Coach Keith Tozer says everywhere he goes, people tell him how Wave players have impacted their lives. "Almost to a fault, each person says meeting and talking to one of the guys has helped them become who they are today."

The Wave of Hope continues to find ways to contribute. Black says one goal is to build two outdoor futsal courts. "Futsal is the next big thing, already huge around the world, and it's gaining traction here in the United States."

