

## ***History of the Blue Mountain Youth Soccer League***

By the late 1970's, soccer had taken root in the Lehigh Valley. The larger cities of Bethlehem and Allentown had established youth soccer programs and the adult soccer circuit was anchored by the professional soccer team, The Pennsylvania Stoners, who participated in the American Soccer League (ASL).

Locally, small youth organizations began offering soccer as a fall sport in their towns. The Bath Soccer Club was mentioned in a 1979 article in the Morning Call. Because of the newspaper article, other local startup clubs in the northern part of the county contacted the Bath Soccer Club. These interested organizations decided to work towards playing organized soccer against each other by forming a league.

The first meeting was hosted by Ken Smith of Bath and included Charlie Garcia (Bath), Glenn Borger (Wind Gap), Rob Silfies (Lehigh Township) and a representative from Moore Township. Soon after it was decided that they would all join to form the Blue Mountain Youth Soccer League and the first games would start in the Fall of 1981. Known as "Outlaws" to the established programs of the cities, these rural organizations hosted the first season of games at the "12 and under" and "14 and under" age divisions. The first fall BMYSL tournament was held at Bath's George Wolf Elementary School in 1982.

As a respected leader in the BMYSL, Charlie Garcia began hosting the BMYSL monthly meetings. Charlie's passion for the sport and children was evident. A staple to the BMYSL monthly meetings for many years, Charlie was also known for his homemade salsa direct from his garden. For many years, even after he finished coordinating, Charlie opened his doors of his home to host the meetings. Up until his passing, Charlie attended all BMYSL Tournament weekends.

Today, Glenn Borger, a recognized Founding Member and BMYSL Hall of Fame Inductee is also still seen attending the BMYSL

tournaments, watching his grandchildren participate in the Wind Gap program he helped found.

Enhanced by the success of the Pennsylvania Stoners, the Allentown affiliate of the ASL and 1981 National Champions, the BMYSL began gaining popularity across the Valley.

By 1984, teams from Williams Township, Northwestern Lehigh and Forks Township began competing in the BMYSL. As the league grew, the BMYSL Tournament gained popularity and was expanded to a two-day event as you see it today.

The momentum built. In the late 80's, many of the small schools of the northern tier of the county began organizing club soccer programs. By the beginning of the '90s, nearly every school had begun a varsity soccer program.

In 1997, the league totaled twelve organizations, competing in age groups from U9 to U15. Besides the "founding four", teams from Nazareth, Bethlehem Township, Palmer, Forks, Northern Lehigh, Slate Belt, St. Janes, and Wilson competed every fall. An abbreviated spring exhibition season also had sprung up, held each Sunday at Moore Township Recreation Facility. By 2010, OLPH had joined and then in 2013 Easton and Catasauqua entered the BMYSL bringing upwards of 14 organizations at one point.

The BMYSL has provided a competitive playing field for thousands of Lehigh Valley Soccer athletes through the years. A starting point for many who have gone on to play at various levels at High School, College and beyond.

In its inception, the BMYSL was an opportunity to give children a chance to participate in a fall sport. The "Founding Four" never imagined the league would grow to such a success with such an impact on the level of youth participation in the Lehigh Valley.