

History of Monroe Township Youth Soccer

In 1974 soccer began in Monroe Township. It was the idea of Mike Votta who was a police dispatcher with the Monroe Township Police Department. Ed Berwick was a patrolman with the police department and was involved with the departments Police Athletic League. Between the two of us we put the program together which began with two teams consisting of approximately 32 players. That first year they played pick up games against other towns and played on a makeshift soccer field at the old Williamstown High School on Clayton Road.

Our first Award Night was held in 1974 at the Pfiefer Community Center. It consisted of cookies that were donated by a cookie company in Hammonton and McDonalds donated juice for the players to drink. Each player received an award for their participation. Winning wasn't important at that time. It was nice but not a priority of M.T.Y.S.

In 1975 the name of the organization was changed to the Monroe Township Youth Soccer League. And we joined The Central Gloucester County Soccer League. All our teams were co-ed and all teams traveled. This league consisted of a few towns in Gloucester County such as Mantua, Glassboro, Westville, Pennsville and Washington Township. We played our home games on a soccer field we built behind Holly Glenn School on North Main Street. Our first refreshment stand was introduced there. It was a table under a tarp up against the baseball field's backstop. That was the real beginning of volunteerism within the organization. People like Don Amey, Bill Herrmann, Nancy Gillum, Evelyn Amey, Joe Vezza and Bob Farley were just a few of the parents and friends who came out every week to help in any way they could.

In 1976 the organization continued to grow with more players which meant more teams. It also meant a need for more people to be involved in the decision making process so a Board of Directors was formed. The first Board members were, Ed Berwick, President, Mike Votta, Vice President, Walt Dus, Carol Del Conte, Evelyn Amey, George Carini and Sheila Wilder, Secretary. Our refreshment stand also grew to a portable stand that I built in my yard. It would fold up and fit in the back of a truck and it would unfold into a refreshment stand. We still used a borrowed generator to heat up water for hot chocolate.

In 1976 Monroe Township Youth Soccer also applied to the state for a Certificate of Incorporation. That certificate was approved and Monroe Township Youth Soccer was officially incorporated on February 24, 1977.

As M.T.Y.S. grew so did our Award nights. The second or third year we did a covered dish Award Night where each parent brought something to eat. It was great. I eventually met Joe Masso of Masso's Catering and we began holding our award nights at the Knights Of Colubus Hall where they are still held today. We would have entertainment such as magic shows and guest speakers like professional soccer players or our friend Dan Gilmore who is head soccer coach at Rowan University.

At some point not too many years later we joined the newly formed and much larger Gloucester County Soccer League. We continued with our Town League because the Gloucester County League didn't begin until the age of 10. We also built a tow along refreshment stand on a mobile home axle that was donated by Nationwide Trailer Park. We built it at Bills Auto Body (formerly owned by Bill Marlow) on Tuckahoe road. The walls were painted in my driveway and my car was the proof of what colors it was painted.

They were the days when our games were played under the high tension wires down on the Black Horse Pike and behind Whitehall School. They were also the days of Roy and Anita Andersch, Ed Brown, Al Mancini, Ray and Risti Popdan, Bob Diccico, Ekel DelConte and so many others.

Around 1980 – 1981 M.T.Y.S. had over 300 players. I wrote an article in the newspaper about the organization and requested any landowner within the township who had land not in use, we could sure use it for our soccer program. Mr. Frank (Butch) Sylvester who owned Geets Diner at the time volunteered a piece of his property at the corner of Radix Road and Green Avenue. We used that property for some 13 or 14 years. Many thanks have to go out to Butch and his wife Ann Sylvester who really gave M.T.Y.S. to opportunity to become one of the premier soccer organizations in south jersey.

Williamstown High School had a Building and Trades Program where they would build a small rancher style home at the high school and then sell it each year upon it's completion. We approached the high school and ran a contest for them to design a building for us. The details were then worked out for insurance, transportation and a construction trailer and each day the students would travel to our new complex and they constructed out new building which included bathrooms, refreshment stand and storage for our mowers and equipment. The interior was completed and finished off by our volunteers such as Kenny Stiles, George Farracchio, Bruce Card Sr. and his son Bruce and once again several others joined in. Roy Andersch played a big part in this project.

An addition was eventually put on and a separate snowball stand was built next to the original building. Originally three soccer fields were built on the site along with plenty of parking.

Our Opening Day ceremonies always had a carnival atmosphere to them We would have clowns, games, dunk tank, (I got wet a lot) ping pong ball tosses for gold fish and we even had the Phillie Phanatic join us one year.

In 1983, George Carini who was the Williamstown High School Soccer Coach passed away suddenly. He was very knowledgeable when it came to the game of soccer and we relied on him heavily for his expertise. He was very important in the formation of our program. It was voted on by the Board of Directors that the winner of the Town League Championship would receive the Carini Cup. Mike Votta also passed away.

In 1984 I saw the need to give all the little children who were running around the complex while their brothers and sisters played a chance for them to play and the Micro Mini Program began for the 5 and 6 year olds. They now had their own uniforms and another smaller field was added for them to play on.

As President of M.T.Y.S. I continued to pursue my goal of making sure our kids always had a place to play soccer and eventually have a place of their own.

Monroe Township Youth Soccer has never received any funding from Monroe Township. Monroe Township Youth Soccer was always self Sufficient. Each year money was put into a separate account with the goal of someday owning our own land and building a permanent home for the program.

In 1992 I received a call from a friend of mine Ed Addis who was in Real Estate and he told me about the property on Corkery Lane that was just listed for sale.

On November 30, 1992 we made settlement and Monroe Township Youth Soccer became the sole owners of 44 plus acres of land where the existing complex stands. When the land was purchased you could not see the ground where the last goal post is before the tree line. The ground dropped off halfway back. Peirson Construction was called in with their heavy earth movers and leveled off the ground.

It took 2 years to receive all the permits and approvals and the ground was leveled, the septic and well were put in and the building was constructed. This was only possible through the generosity of a large group of volunteers and businesses that donated both time and money. Our local Rotary donated \$2000.00, F.O.P. Lodge 125 gave us \$10,000.00 to help complete the kitchen area and interior, some people just gave us a check to help out. Some people didn't even have children in the program but they came forward and volunteered. Mr. Leon Rennebaum came to the complex one day just to see the kids play and he gave me a \$1000.00 towards the program. People would just show up to help.

Mike Gabbianelli became the General Contractor and Mike McGrath and Stan Jezek took control of building the building. Steve Matkowski and his sons John and Scott did the block work on the building. There were so many others like Ray and Risti Popdan, Sue McGrath, Jack Makin, Bob Bailey, Jerry Wright, Rich Lecone, Bob DeYoung Dan Pontano, Mike Gabbianelli Jr, Karen Heckler, All Mancini, Claire Sooy, Dot Heckers, Dave Scales, Frank and Delia Scales, John and John Jr. who did all of the block work on the building, Ouey Prus, Marion Berwick and my long time friend and vice president Bud Heckler. There were many more people who helped also.

In 1994 Monroe Township Youth Soccer opened their season on the new soccer complex.

I retired after that and Bud Heckler took over as President. I served for 22 years and my wife Marion Berwick continues to be a part of the Board Of Directors and run the Booster Club.

Monroe Township continued to participate in the Gloucester County Soccer League until 2002 when our boys became members of The South Jersey Soccer League and our girls joined the South Jersey Girls soccer League.

A LITTLE KNOWN FACT:

One of our soccer players went on to become a professional soccer player. Billy Andracki who played goalie for Charlies Auto Repair in Monroe Township went on to play goalie at the college level and then played goalie for professional soccer teams in Tampa Bay, Rochester and an indoor team who's name I can't recall.

It would be impossible to name everyone who throughout the years have played an important part in the history of M.T.Y.S. and I apologize for not listing their names. They know who they are and know that they were appreciated.

Many thanks have to go out to all the many people who over the years have dedicated their time and efforts to make sure that M.T.Y.S. constantly strived to improve and be self sufficient. It is because of them that M.T.Y.S. is the envy of a lot of other youth organizations. Without these "Friends of M.T.Y.S." soccer as it's now known would not be in existence here in our township. There could be a Wall of Fame consisting of their names, but it would have to be a very long wall.

Ed Berwick 7/7/09