

PCSL History

One would never guess that the large, well organized, and very successful Prairie Cities Soccer League would have begun as an idea discussed over coffee at the Welcome Inn in Normal.

Jack Fowler, a native of Missouri, had moved to Bloomington after a short stop in Quincy. Joe Miller moved to the Bloomington area from Quincy, too. The two casually met over coffee to talk about Quincy and other things - soccer among them.

The feasibility of a youth soccer program in Bloomington/Normal became the point of discussion. This led to a preliminary meeting with others interested in soccer.

The first organizational meeting of a new youth soccer league was held in the offices of the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department. From that first meeting, Jack and Joe felt that there was enough support to give the idea a try. There was a series of informal discussions held at the Placement Office at ISU, where Joe was employed.

The names of some of those early people involved have been lost with time and confusion. However, among those early key people, the names of Dave Jecklin, Joe Bowles, Judy Markowitz, and of course, Jack Fowler and Joe Miller stand out.

From these humble beginnings, the league became a reality in 1978. The official name, Prairie Cities Soccer League, was the idea of the first elected president, Joe Miller.

youth soccer league when starting with no equipment, no uniforms, no coaches, no fields, and no players. For obvious reasons, many people doubted that the league would ever succeed.

But as in many endeavors, adults with some expertise and interest began to "creep out of the woodwork." Unfortunately, in those days the greatest concern was with everyday operations and not with preserving records. Consequently, many names have been lost, but even then, when a need arose, there was always someone there to handle the problem.

Getting the youth to participate was the easiest part of getting the league started. Notices in Bloomington and Normal Parks and Recreation brochures, as well as information distributed through school handouts, brought in registration forms from all over the Bloomington/Normal area. The first real problem was finding coaches for all of the teams. Without coaches, there would be no league.

Once again, many parents who had no prior knowledge of the game of soccer were willing to help out. They showed a willingness for on-the-job training, and overnight they became soccer coaches.

Fields and goal posts presented another problem. "Beg and borrow" was the solution for this problem. Unit #5 schools in Normal were a tremendous help. Principals from Oakdale and Parkside permitted the league to use their playgrounds for our soccer fields. Normal and Bloomington Parks and Recreation Departments also provided several locations, and suddenly our field problem was solved.

At the start of the first season, the league had 257 players. By the end of the first year, over 300 youngsters were involved with youth soccer in McLean County.

Those founding fathers were happy to welcome the change of pace that the end of the first season brought. From marking fields and putting up nets every Saturday to coaching and refereeing, they did it all. Then someone got the bright idea to have a spring season.

The second year was simply outstanding: more equipment, more volunteer help, more everything. That included players. With over 500 players now participating, the league was making a major impact on the youth sport scene in Bloomington/Normal.

Tony Bykowski was elected as the league's second president.

In February 1980, the league introduced its first formal large-scale registration procedure. That effort resulted in an increase to 1,100 players. Eighty teams were formed, the number of playing fields doubled, and there was a full spring schedule of five matches with six matches in the fall. That spring, the league also co-sponsored the first indoor soccer tournament at ISU.

For the 1981 season, the league expanded to 1,500 players and over 100 teams. A separate girls' division was introduced that year, and the players were divided by age levels. The spring and fall seasons were expanded to a total of 12 matches.

In October 1981, the league co-sponsored its first Soccer Day at Hancock Stadium in conjunction with Coach Fritzen and the ISU soccer team. Approximately 3,000 parents and players attended, viewing an ISU match, a coaches scrimmage, and an under-12 All-Star match.

Coach Fritzen put on several clinics with a couple of grad students. These clinics were well attended, emptied our treasury, and produced a group of parents that went on to coach and administer the league for years to come. It was probably the best "seed" money ever spent.

One of the greatest accomplishments of Tony's term was the work done with the area schools in starting them thinking about adding soccer as a sport. Even though they delayed their decision on high school soccer, they did agree to a junior high program for the Spring of 1983. Four schools fielded teams that year.

In the fall of 1981, Don Conant was elected president for a two-year term. PCSL continued to grow--especially among female players, coaches, and referees. The league worked hard with the Parks and Recreation Departments to expand their role in our still-volunteer organization.

By 1984, the size of the league began to level off at about 2,000 players. This made PCSL the largest recreational league run privately in the state.

The much needed McLean Soccer Referee's Association was established during Don's term. Gene Larson and Otis Rothenberger were instrumental in overcoming the problems to establish this organization. Their number include many players and parents that originally answered Joe Miller's call in 1978.

In 1982-83, PCSL became computerized. Considering the size of the organization, this was a big step forward in making the league more efficient and easier to administer.

In the fall of 1981, the first traveling teams were developed. Two area teams were formed--the Strikers and the Prairie Crusaders. The Strikers were the Fall '82 CIYSL champs, and the Crusaders were second. Seventy-five percent of the boys on these teams were among the boys who answered Joe Miller's call in 1978.

Holly Mair was elected president of PCSL in the fall of 1983, and in November of that year, she was elected to the Bloomington School Board. Holly served both boards until early in 1984 when she resigned her PCSL position. Holly had been with PCSL almost from the beginning. She served as an officer for all of Tony's and Don's terms, and has served more times on the PCSL Boards than any other person.

Dave Ananias became president in February of 1984. During his term of office, the board endeavored to establish the guidelines under which the league would be administered.

In January 1992, PCSL increased to 172 teams and 2,176 players. Approximately 90 boys and girls play in the traveling league. The board increased to 25 members to handle field maintenance, referee training, uniform organization and sales, and all the other aspects of this organization.

Thanks to the devotion and dedication of past boards, the league, now well established, runs smoothly. The main function of the board today is to fine-tune the PCSL into the finest organization possible.

Volunteers have been, and always will be, an important part of PCSL. The league would not exist without them. However, many services are now contracted.

The board administers a large budget and has many responsibilities. These responsibilities and many other league expectations are spelled out in this PCSL Handbook.

The PCSL Handbook is an attempt to put into writing the philosophy and policies of present and past boards.

The arrival of Tim Carter as the ISU Soccer Coach has brought with it a renewed and stronger relationship between PCSL and ISU. Both institutions prosper because of it.

Coaches certification clinics, player clinics, and even the use of ISU soccer players as practice coaches have helped cement this relationship.

The removal of the Junior High Soccer Program is a setback of soccer in this community. However, soccer has been added to the high school program. A renewed effort, we hope, will see the return of junior high soccer.

This brief history tells the story of the humble beginnings and the enjoyable struggle to get to the fine organization that we all enjoy today. Boys and girls will enjoy the fame of soccer for years to come as soccer continues to grow and prosper in Bloomington/Normal.

Current Board Members:

The PCSL leadership is made up of the Board of Directors, including at-large board members and elected officers of President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary. The Board of Directors is seeking to add members to reach a board consistency of 9-12 members. PCSL is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, and board members volunteer their time for the betterment of the community. The current PCSL board members are as follows:

Officers:

President: Frank Schuler

Vice-President: Brad Todden

Treasurer: Rich Berlin

Secretary: Kirt McReynolds

At-large Members:

Board Member: Luis Cornejo

Complex History and Current Status

PCSL has provided the Bloomington, Normal and McLean County communities with recreational soccer program for the area since 1975. PCSL has served thousands upon thousands of families and currently has over 1,700 children playing from ages 5 to 17. PCSL is a member of the national American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) and PCSL's philosophy has been guided by AYSO's 6 principles that promote access to all youth. AYSO's philosophies are living tenets that separate it from other sports organizations. They are: Everyone Plays®, Balanced Teams, Open Registration, Positive Coaching, Good Sportsmanship and Player Development. Soccer develops youth in many areas and can be played by all levels across our communities.

In 1992, PCSL entered into a land lease agreement with the BNAA to build and operate our current 20-field soccer complex. Prior to that time, and during the development of the complex, PCSL games were played at parks, schools and private business property throughout the communities. Many of those open lands are now developed.

BNAA recently advised that because of federal policy changes within the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), non-aeronautical uses of aeronautical property are not allowed. Our soccer complex is a non-aeronautical use. BNAA has been working with the FAA to allow PCSL to continue using the 60 acres of BNAA property as a soccer complex until December 31, 2017. The lease amendment would then sunset at this time and PCSL will be required to relocate our games to new fields.

PCSL has no intentions of stopping operations after the sunset of Community Fields, regardless of the search outcome for a new site. We will be working with the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal for alternative playing sites if a public soccer complex is not developed.

The PCSL Board is communicating with the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal and County of McLean seeking support and ideas for developing a public soccer complex. Alternatives are being considered and will take time to find a solution, in addition to time to develop the new land. In the past year, there has been continued meetings with a group called the CAAY (Citizens Advocating for Area Youth) that is organizing an effort to establish a new community center as well as a new soccer complex. Your support is critical to plans that move forward to have a new community soccer home that will serve generations to come. We encourage you to contact your City or Town Council persons about the importance of having a soccer facility in the community.