



## LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB

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## A GUIDE FOR PARENTS NEW TO LMSC

Welcome to the Lower Merion Soccer Club. Each year, we provide a wide variety of soccer programs to over 2600 children ages 4-18. Given the size of our club, we strive to offer a diversity of programs. This document will hopefully explain to you the many different programs that we offer, as well as discuss the various paths that different players may follow as they progress through our club. For ALL of our programs, our primary objective always is:

**“To provide each and every child with a fun filled experience in a soccer environment.”**

The majority of our players play in the Intramural Program which offers soccer for children ages 4-14. Players in our Intramural Program play with and against other players in LMSC, on fields located within Lower Merion Township. LMSC offers intramural soccer in the fall season and the spring season. Our more competitive and athletic players ages 8-18 play in the Travel Team Program. LMSC has over 55 travel teams which play against teams from other local area clubs. Our top travel teams occasionally play against teams from other states. A few teams over the years have traveled to tournaments in places like Dallas, Phoenix and even Europe. However, most travel teams stay local, rarely traveling more than an hour away from Lower Merion Township.

While over 90% of players playing in Lower Merion Soccer Club live inside of Lower Merion Township, LMSC has no geographical boundaries and welcomes players from any zip code.

Below is a brief description of some of the programs that LMSC offers, along with a description of some of the paths that players choose to take during their years with LMSC.

### OUR 4 & 5 YEAR OLD PROGRAMS

Many of our players start playing as young as 4 years of age. Our 4 and 5 year old programs are run by very experienced soccer coaches who have a great understanding of the physical, mental and social attributes of 4 and 5 year olds. Our primary objective is to have the players fall in love with the game. We teach them the basic skills of the game and give them lots of time to play in small sided games with modified, age appropriate rules. It is our hope that all children leave the soccer field each week with giant smiles on their faces and a strong desire to play again soon.

The first 25-30 minutes of each session is devoted to basic skill development. Each child works with his / her own soccer ball (a size 3 ball, much smaller than what older players use). Children are led through a wide range of fun, skill oriented activities. With a 1:1 ball per player ratio, skill development takes place at a fast pace. The coaches all work under the direction of our very experienced LMSC Staff Coaches. The two people in charge of running these divisions have each been coaching young players in our club for over 15 years.

The remaining 30-35 minutes of each practice is devoted to small sided games. These games are modified to suit the needs of the youngest players. Games are either 3 vs. 3 or 4 vs. 4 on small fields with smaller goals and no goalies. These small sided games ensure that all players are always involved in the play and get plenty of touches on the ball throughout the game. This leads to greater skill development and more fun for the players. We do not keep score in these age groups. Players are not placed on set teams at these young ages. The players are divided into different teams each time that they are at the field. Each age group meets once a week during the season (fall season and spring season).

Some of the players in these age groups will be very apprehensive about playing at first. It is normal for some players to be afraid to go out on the field with the coaches and other players. For many of these players, it is simply a matter of time. Many of them get the hang of it after a few weeks and start to feel comfortable on a soccer field. In time, most of the players will develop a passion for the game. Please do not expect this to happen right from day 1. For some, it takes a little bit of time.

## **OUR 6-9 YEAR OLD INTRAMURAL PROGRAMS**

Players in these age groups are assigned to teams for the season. Players begin to get a feel for being a part of a team. Each team has one practice a week and one game a week.

- In the Fall Intramural Program, practices are on weeknights or Sunday afternoon. Games are played primarily on Saturdays.
- In the Spring Intramural Program, teams have a 30 minute practice, followed immediately by their game. This takes place on Sunday afternoons, though teams might have a Saturday game during the season.

We do our best to make the teams as even as possible. We do not keep standings during the season and do not place much emphasis on winning and losing. Each team has their own head coach who is in charge of the team at practices and games. The coaches at this level are volunteer parents of players on the team. LMSC provides a wide range of age appropriate coaching materials to the coaches, designed to help them become effective coaches. Players are asked to bring a soccer ball to each practice to ensure a 1:1 ball per player ratio, thus maximizing player development.

- Our 6 year old divisions play 4v4 games with no goalkeepers.
- Our 7 year old divisions play 5v5 games (4 field players and a goalie). This is the first age group where goalies are used. Our 8-9 year old divisions play 6v6 games (5 field players and a goalie).

In order to give each player the best experience, each team divides their players into two equal groups on game day. There are two games played simultaneously, on side by side fields, so that each player is on the field, in the middle of the action, for as much time as possible. Games are setup this way in order to a) maximize skill development, b) ensure that players are always involved in the action and c) help provide each player with a fun filled experience.

At these ages, the more competitive and athletic children will begin to dominate play in these games. One of our goals at LMSC is to encourage these players to move to the more competitive Travel Team Program. This is a great benefit to the many players in these age groups who remain in the Intramural Program because they can continue to play fun, competitive games which are not dominated by the top one or two players.

## **OUR 10-14 YEAR OLD INTRAMURAL PROGRAMS**

The majority of our players do not play in the highly competitive Travel Team Program. Our Fall Intramural Program has divisions for players up to 14 years of age. Our Spring Intramural Program has divisions for players up to 12 years of age.

- In the Fall Intramural Program, practices are on weeknights or Sunday afternoon. Games are played primarily on Saturdays.
- In the Spring Intramural Program, teams have a 30 minute practice, followed immediately by their game. This takes place on Sunday afternoons, though teams might have a Saturday game during the season.

Our oldest divisions in the fall season, for players ages 12-14, play full sided 11v11 soccer (similar to adults) on regulation size fields. Playoffs are held at the end of the season. They also play one or two games against intramural teams from other local area soccer clubs, giving them a bit of exposure to playing against players from outside of LMSC.

## **SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAM**

LMSC has been offering a Special Needs Program for over 25 years. This program is geared towards players who have physical, mental or emotional differences that would make playing soccer in our other divisions very difficult. The program caters to players with a wide variety of differences and integrates them into a very "all inclusive" environment. This program is offered in the fall season to children ages 6-16. This is NOT a Special Olympics program. Our Special Needs Program offers soccer to children with a wide range of differences.

## **UNDER 8 DEVELOPMENTAL ACADEMY**

This program is geared towards our most talented 7 year old players. The program offers these players a full year of training with some of our most experienced coaches and prepares them to play in the much more competitive Travel Team Program, starting the following year. Most of our more competitive and athletic players choose to play in this program instead of the Intramural Program. The commitment is much greater than the Intramural Program. Teams practice twice a week in the fall and have one game a week. During the winter months, players train once a week and play in local area indoor leagues. The Under 8 Academy trains once or twice a week during the spring season, in preparation for travel team tryouts, which take place in late April and early May.

Unlike the Intramural Program, the coaches are NOT parents of players. Instead, they are very experienced soccer people who played at high levels of play and who have been coaching for a long time. These coaches are not volunteers. In order to attract a high level coaching staff, LMSC pays their staff coaches at very competitive rates, making the cost of playing in the Under 8 Academy, as well as in the Travel Team Program, much more expensive than playing in the less competitive Intramural Program where coaches are volunteer parents of the players.

Almost all of the players in this program progress to the Travel Team Program the following year.

## **THE LMSC TRAVEL TEAM PROGRAM**

The LMSC Travel Team Program is geared for our more competitive and athletic players. LMSC fields up to four teams in every age group for both boys and girls from Under 8 up through Under 18. The commitment is much greater than that of the Intramural Program. Playing on a travel team is a 10 month commitment (mid-August through mid-June). Players are encouraged to also play other sports during the year. The season starts in the fall. During the fall season, teams have two practices a week and a game every weekend. In the winter, most teams have one practice a week and play in a local area indoor league. In the spring, our top teams play in the state cups, a tournament designed to crown a state champion in every age group.

Players who hope to play at the high school level when they are older should be playing in the Travel Team Program, not the Intramural Program. Most players who play high school have experience at either the A or B travel team level. A few C and D level travel team players also make it to the high school level. Some travel team players continue on to play at the college level. In the fall of 2017, there were over 50 LMSC alums playing college soccer. LMSC has had several players go on to play at the professional level. Matthew Real is playing for the Philadelphia Union and is a member of the USA Men's Under 20 National Team. Daniel Lovitz is playing for the Montreal Impact. Jimmy McLaughlin played for the Philadelphia Union for several years while Greg Cochrane played for the LA Galaxy and Chicago Heat. Two other former LMSC players from many years ago retired after playing over 12 years in the MLS (Major League Soccer). One former MLS player played for the USA in the 2000 Olympics and in the 2006 World Cup. Over the years, a few players have represented the USA on our country's national youth teams.

One of the biggest differences between our Travel Team Program and our Intramural Program is that the coaches in the Travel Team Program are all experienced soccer people who have a strong background as players and / or coaches. We do NOT let parents of players serve as head travel team coaches. Several of our travel team coaches also coach at the high school level or college level. Many of our coaches played at the college level, some played professionally. It is our philosophy that travel team players need experienced coaches who have a solid understanding of the game in order to develop.

In order for us to be able to hire high level coaches, we need to offer them competitive salaries. As a result, playing in the Travel Team Program is much more expensive than playing in the Intramural Program. Travel teams enter several tournaments each year and play in indoor leagues during the winter.

Tryouts are held each year in late April and May. Tryouts give veteran players a chance to move up to a higher level within the LMSC Travel Team Program. Having tryouts on an annual basis also gives players not currently in the Travel Team Program a chance to earn a spot on a travel team. Over the years, we have had a few players move up from the D team to the C team to the B team to the A team in their age group.

## **PLAYING AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL AND COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS**

As stated, each fall, LMSC has a lot of alums playing at the college level. In the fall of 2017, there were over 50 former LMSC players playing in college. Parents often ask us about players getting athletic scholarships to play in college. The reality is that there are very few college scholarships available in soccer since it is not a big revenue sport like college football or college basketball. Division 1 men's teams may offer a maximum of 9.9 scholarships while division 1 women's team may offer a maximum of 14 scholarships. Most division 1 college programs, however, offer significantly less scholarships because of budget limitations. Extremely high level players who are fortunate enough to be able to play at a division one school often are only offered a fraction of a scholarship. Full scholarships are very rare. NCAA division 3 programs may not offer athletic scholarships in any sport.

On a MUCH brighter note, college coaches do have some influence with their school's admissions department. Coaches are often able to help get a player accepted to their school if the student is a little bit below the academic levels of the school. The student-athlete however MUST be very close to the minimum academic standards in order for the coach to be able to get the student accepted into the school. The coach will only be able to do this if the coach is confident that the student-athlete will be able to strongly contribute to the school's team. Soccer is NOT like football or basketball where the coach will be able to get an athlete into the school as long as he / she meets minimum NCAA Academic requirements. Students need to maintain a solid academic level in high school in order for the college coach to have a chance at getting a player admitted to the school.

Because many of our travel team players aspire to play at the college level, LMSC has a College Advisory Program to help players understand the college recruitment process, how to choose colleges that play at an appropriate level for the player, how to initiate contact with college coaches, etc. The College Advisory Program is run by LMSC travel team coaches who coach at the college level. At the present time, the LMSC travel team coaching staff includes coaches who coach at Villanova University, Haverford College, the University Of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia University, among other schools. The college selection process can be very difficult. Because of this, LMSC offers a lot of help for travel team players so that they can choose colleges that suit their academic needs and soccer needs.

The majority of our travel team coaches played in college so many of them also have connections in the college soccer world. Our coaches are always available to help initiate contact between travel team players and college coaches who they have played for or who they have worked with in the past.

## **WINTER TRAINING PROGRAMS OFFERED BY LMSC**

LMSC offers indoor training programs for soccer players during the winter months. These programs are run by many of our most experienced coaches. The programs focus on player development. Many of these programs are geared towards intramural players who hope to get into the Travel Team Program in future seasons. Programs are available for children as young as four year olds. Advanced training programs for travel teams are also offered, including goalkeeper training, 1v1 training and goalscoring programs. LMSC runs various training programs in the spring, summer, fall, winter 1 and winter 2. The winter training programs are our most popular programs. During the winter months, players from many other clubs also sign up to work with our very experienced LMSC staff coaches.

## **WORKING AS AN INTRAMURAL REFEREE**

Some of the players in our club, ages 11 and older, work as referees in our Intramural Program. This is an excellent “first job” for many kids and gives them a chance to give back to the sport that they have been playing for many years. Our youngest referees work in our 4 and 5 year old programs. Older referees work in older age group divisions. The pay for the referees is based on the level that they work. Referees ages 14 and older may sign up to take the 18 hour course run by our state referee association. This course leads to certification to be a referee at the travel team level.

Some LMSC players also work for LMSC as field crew members. These workers are responsible for setting up fields each week so they are ready to have games played on them. Field crew workers are also responsible for cleaning up the fields at the end of each weekend, including removing trash and collecting items which will go on our lost and found list.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY**

The club first started in 1968 under the name of Gladwyne Soccer Club. In the late 1980s, Gladwyne Soccer Club merged with Penn Valley Soccer Club, Wynnewood Soccer Club and Narberth Soccer to become the Lower Merion Soccer Club.

LMSC is an independent, private organization which has been granted 501(c)(3) not-for-profit status by the Internal Revenue Service. While we share the “Lower Merion” name, LMSC is NOT affiliated with the Lower Merion Township or the Lower Merion School District. Both the LM Township and the LM School District however allow us to use many of their athletic fields during the fall season and spring season.

The President of LMSC, Biff Sturla, played for many years in the Gladwyne Soccer Club. He is currently in his 37th year of coaching in the organization. Several of our travel team coaches played in the club in their younger days. Several parents of players in our club played in the club when they were young.

## **THE VARIOUS DIRECTIONS TAKEN BY LMSC PLAYERS**

This document hopefully gives new parents an overview of the various programs that we offer. Many players start in our 4 and 5 year old divisions where we try to instill a love of the game in every player. The emphasis in the youngest divisions is on fun and basic skills development.

As players get older, some choose to pursue playing in the more competitive Travel Team Program. We offer A and B teams for top level players as well as C and D teams for players with less experience or skill. Travel team players tend to enjoy the more competitive environment and higher level of play. Many travel team players eventually play at the high school level. Some make it to the college level and a select few make it to the professional level.

Other LMSC players choose to stay in the Intramural Program where the emphasis is on providing each player with a fun experience, working in a team environment, making new friends and enjoying competition at a less hectic level.

We strive to offer a wide range of options for the many players in our club. But, whatever level a player is playing at, we always try to keep in mind our primary objective, which is ...

**“To provide each and every child with a fun filled experience in a soccer environment.”**