



## Maryland State Soccer Association - Its History

The game of association football, known by most in the United States as soccer, started well before the turn of the 20th century in Maryland with teams competing as early as 1860. The American League of Professional Football Clubs was formed in 1894. The Baltimore team imported several professional players from Britain to complement its local players. The league included clubs from Boston, Brooklyn, New York, Newark and Philadelphia. It was part of the early attempt to create professional soccer in the U.S. but was short-lived, not even completing a full season

Soccer continued to thrive in the state as immigrants came to our shores. In 1904, two notable events occurred. The first was the formation of the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) as the international governing body of the sport. The second was the great Baltimore fire that destroyed most of the downtown area. Thousands of carpenters, masons, bricklayers and other craftsmen came to the city to rebuild it, many being immigrants. As they took roots in Maryland, they also brought with them their favorite game of football.

Two British groups were influential in Baltimore, England represented by the Lord Baltimore Lodge, Sons of St. George Football Club and Scotland through the Baltimore Thistles. Henry W. Rowland founded Sons of St. George in 1906. It included a clubhouse and pitch located at what is now Dundalk Marine Terminal. The Thistles were their fierce competitors along with other adversaries featuring immigrant sides. There was no formal league, instead teams would arrange a series of competitions among themselves. The team with the best overall record was unofficially declared the city if not state champion.

Henry Rowland died unexpectedly in 1912 due to complications from surgery. His widow, Julia A. Rowland, donated in his memory the H.C.W. Rowland Challenge Cup in the interest of Association Football. It was a competition that Henry had contemplated placing years earlier. Teams would qualify through elimination rounds following the structure of the English FA Cup. The winner of the Rowland Cup was declared state champion of Maryland. The first final was played in 1914 and aptly won by the Sons of St. George.

The individuals organizing the Rowland Cup put together a soccer league that also included clubs from Washington and Wilmington. Led by Henry's son Harry, who also managed the Sons of St. George, the league was known as the Intercity Association Football League. It folded after the second season and clubs went back to independent play. Other leagues came and went including the Park Athletic League in Baltimore.

In 1913 the United States Football Association came into existence, one of the first organizations to be affiliated with FIFA. Leagues grew throughout the United States in areas such as Baltimore, Washington, Wilmington, Philadelphia, New York, St. Louis, Chicago and San Francisco. In 1914, the Brooklyn Field Club won the inaugural



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National Challenge Cup (US Open Cup) with the trophy donated by Thomas Dewar for the promotion of American soccer.

The Greater Baltimore Soccer League and the Maryland Soccer League started in 1919 with numerous teams playing over over two decades. Industrial and Catholic leagues were developing along with many clubs. With more organized leagues, it became apparent for the need of a state governing body to provide structure and rules for the increased competition. The two main leagues, Greater Baltimore and Maryland Soccer, along with the Baltimore Referees' Association gathered in the fall of 1924 and formed the Maryland State & District of Columbia Soccer Association. Arthur A. Curley became the first president and the Association received official sanctioning from the United States Football Association.

Several clubs became powerhouses over the years starting with the Baltimore Soccer Club who were Maryland champions for five straight seasons. In 1923, Baltimore SC were declared Rowland Cup champions although there is no record of a proper tournament. Other uprising sides included St. Elizabeth's, St. Patrick's, Bethlehem Steel, Canton Soccer Club, Patapsco Rangers, Latrobe Soccer Club, Locust Point Rangers, Colonial Athletic Club, Alco/Hampden AC and Wingfoot SC.

In April of 1925, a final was held at Patterson Park featuring the Patapsco Rangers and Catonsville SC. Before a crowd of 7,000, the Rangers won 2:0 to take the title of Maryland State Champions by winning the Rowland Cup. The newly formed state association resurrected the competition. Along its route, Patapsco defeated Greater Baltimore Soccer League champion Wingfoot Soccer Club and former state champion Hampden AC (previously Alco SC). The Rowland Cup is still contested to this day.

The game expanded further in the 1930's. The Greater Baltimore Soccer League expanded to eighteen divisions and had one hundred forty-four teams playing at one point. The Maryland Soccer League saw equal expansion along with the Southeastern League, a semi-pro league. The American Soccer League reformed in 1933 that included teams from Baltimore, Washington, Wilmington, Philadelphia, New York and New Jersey.

Not only leagues expanded throughout the country but also cup competitions. The United States Football Association introduced the National Amateur Cup in 1923 in response to the growing number of teams entering the open National Challenge Cup. The 1923 edition was not completed due to inclement weather. Fleisher Yarn of Philadelphia won the first title in 1924, crowned as amateur champion in the United States. In 1932, the State Association established the Harry A. Stewart Trophy, Maryland's Amateur Challenge Cup competition. Harry Stewart was a former great player with the Sons of St. George and the second president of the State Association. The first Stewart champions were Stonewall DC who later won several Rowland titles. Over the years, the Rowland and Stewart winners qualified as Maryland entries into the respective National Open and Amateur competition.



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With the growth of these leagues and competitions, many players made names for themselves. Among those inducted into the Maryland Soccer Hall of Fame include Charlie Klemmick, Rudy Behounek, Tommy Amrhein, Henry Hess, Mel Heimbach, Merle Law, Millard Lang (National Hall of Fame Member), Bill Kinling, Jim Cross and Max Weiner who played for these storied clubs.

Johnny Neun is known mostly as a professional baseball player and manager, playing with the Detroit Tigers and the Boston Braves. He also served as the manager for the New York Yankees and the Cincinnati Reds. Born in 1900 from a family of German heritage, residing in a row house on South Potomac Street in East Baltimore, Johnny participated in numerous sports around the Canton and Patterson Park areas. He was a founding member of the original Baltimore Soccer Club, serving as captain of the 1918-20 championship teams. An excellent story teller, Neun upon return to his hometown resumed his offseason avocation as sportswriter/soccer editor at the Baltimore Evening Sun. Much of the history of the game in Maryland were his contributions. Neun was inducted into the Maryland Soccer Hall of Fame in 1953.

In addition to leagues in Baltimore and Washington, the McFadden Soccer League covered the western part of the state, centered in Hagerstown. It consisted of eight teams, one which was from Brunswick that participated in the Stewart Cup.

The 1940's saw Maryland clubs finally making the national scene. The Baltimore Soccer Club was pitted against the Chicago Sparta in the finals of the National Challenge Cup in 1940. The two sides played a home and away series. After two draws, the teams were unable to agree on arrangements for a third match. For years, the 1940 winner was not declared but eventually US Soccer named both as co-winners and the title is shared. The only other Maryland side to reach the Open final was Baltimore Pompei who lost to the Los Angeles Kickers in 1958.

Santa Maria SC reached the final of the National Amateur Cup in 1943 losing to Morgan Strasser SC of Pittsburgh. The British Lions SC of Washington defeated St. Louis Kutis SC to take the 1969 title and become the first state association side to win the Amateur Cup. Other finalists include the Baltimore Colts (2002 & 2008), Allied SC (2005) and the Maryland Bays (2015). Christos FC won the 2016 edition away defeating the Milwaukee Bavarians SC at their home facility.

The Second World War saw sports in general slowdown, including soccer, as many went off to fight. The American Soccer League was still able to attract young talent including Nick Kropfelder, a graduate of Mt. St. Joseph's High School. Nick was with Santa Maria SC when it made its run to the semifinals of the 1942 National Amateur Cup. The next season, he signed as an amateur with the Baltimore Americans of the ASL. His career was interrupted in 1943 by military service and he returned 1946. Nick led the league in scoring with the Americans during the 1947-1948 season hitting 19 goals. From 1948 to 1953 he played with the Philadelphia Nationals, leading as league



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scorer for a second time with 17 goals in 1950-1951. Nick continued his passion in the game as a referee and later as president of the Old Timers Soccer Association of Maryland. He is inducted in both the National and Maryland Soccer Halls of Fame.

The women's game did not prosper as did the men. In 1920, female students at the Maryland State Normal School (now Towson State University) started a soccer program. By the following fall, Katheryn Gaffney took over as coach after working for several years for Baltimore's Playground Athletic League. The Evening Sun reported that the female students felt sports like field hockey and volleyball were "too mild." They pushed for more active recreations. Matches were scheduled against two high school squads: Towson and Sparrows Point. In the fall of 1922, two new women's soccer clubs had formed: the Women's Olympic Association of Maryland and the Maryland All-Stars.

One of the pioneers of the women's game was Vernon Reese, a player and coach who was inducted in both the National and Maryland Soccer Halls of Fames. In 1938 he opened a soccer clinic at Patterson Park that operated every Sunday morning teaching boys and girls the sport. Reese also started the Baltimore Catholic Youth Organization soccer league in 1958 where it grew from 8 teams to 160 over 25 years. The clinics ran until 1966 and many future soccer stars in Baltimore were products of this program.

Another double Hall of Famer was Alfreda Iglehart, a physical education teacher at Francis Scott Key Public School 76 in Locust Point. She taught boys and girls in many sports but most notably in soccer. Among her students were Hall of Famer Millard Lang and professional star players Bill Schwange and Johnny Sherry of the American Soccer League.

William E. "Doc" Blanford, a high school physical education teacher, took a group of young women in the early 1970's from the Camp Springs Boys and Girls Club in Prince Georges County and formed a team that became a powerhouse in the youth side. As adults, Camp Springs dominated the state's Hagen Cup, winning the competition 5 times. Although Doc is no longer with us, his players continue playing taking part every summer in the US Adult Soccer Association Soccer Fest as the Camp Springs Women's Club.

During the 1960's, the Baltimore Unlimited League, under the direction of the Bureau of Recreation, organized most of soccer in the city despite not affiliating with the State Association. Amateur clubs tired of the city program and wanting to play in the cup competitions formed the Maryland Major Soccer League. Through the efforts of Gene Ringsdorf, George Mavronis and Paul Demarco, the league hit the ground running and still plays today. At one point, its boasted 5 divisions with clubs such as Dnipro, Casa Bianco, Italia-Pompei, Hellenic, St. Elizabeth's and the Baltimore Kickers.



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Other leagues throughout the State Association included the National Soccer League located in the District of Columbia and the PEN-DEL-MAR Soccer League. In later years these groups developed: the Mid-Maryland Soccer Association had teams competing in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, the Takoma Park Soccer Association, Howard County Soccer League, the Cosmopolitan International Soccer League of Maryland, Mason-Dixon Soccer League in Frederick County, the Eastern Shore Soccer League, Washington Premier League, Super Soccer League, DC Premier League and the Eastern Premier Soccer League.

In June 1961 the Maryland State & District of Columbia Soccer Association took the national stage as the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the United States Soccer Football Association (former United States Football Association) took place at the Emerson Hotel in Baltimore. John Nagle was President of the State Association and the Secretary, J. Eugene Ringsdorf, also served as First Vice-President of USSFA. Gene served several terms as the State Association President and one term as President of the national association, elected during that meeting until 1963. Gene was recognized as a Life Member of the United States Soccer Federation along with induction in the US Soccer, USASA National Hall of Fames and that of Maryland.

In February 2001, the State Association hosted the United States Amateur Soccer Association's annual Mid-Year Meeting and Workshop at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel in Baltimore. Around 300 delegates from across the country were present for the first ever meeting and workshop to be held in the east coast. Present along with the officers and board members of USASA and the various state associations were United States Soccer Federation President, Dr. Bob Contigulia, and its Secretary General, Dan Flynn, and local members of the Soccer National Hall of Fame: Eugene Ringsdorf, Nick Kropfelder and Len Oliver.

The US Adult Soccer Championship of Regions were hosted by the State Association in 2019. Teams from Regions I, II & III competed for national titles for several cup competitions at Troy Park in Elkridge. The Maryland Bays lifted the Gerhard Mengel Cup as the national Over-30 champion.

Paul Stiehl of the Bronx, New York, came to the state to attend the University of Maryland where he was for three years a starter for the ACC champions and NCAA co-champions Terrapins. Paul would go on to form the Maryland Sports Friends in Beltsville serving as player/coach. He was one of the founding members of the Mid-Maryland Soccer Association, with Sports Friends winning several league titles. President of the State Association from 1978 to 1981, Paul served as a member of the U.S. Soccer Federation (nee U.S. Soccer Football Association) Finance Committee in 1984. The following year he was appointed as the Budget Director, helping the Federation avoid insolvency. In 1986, Paul was elected Treasurer of the Federation and was instrumental in obtaining the 1994 World Cup bid from FIFA. In 2021, Paul was inducted as a Life Member of the Maryland State Soccer Association.



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Maryland has also provided two Region I Directors to US Adult Soccer over the decades. First was F. Patrick Healey, State Association President from 1978 to 1980. Pat served as Region I Director from 1983 to 1985. Pat was a key figure in Baltimore soccer, running several clubs along with the Maryland Major Soccer League.

Current President Anthony Falcone is serving as Region I Director, previously working as Treasurer and Deputy Director for many years. Tony is the longest serving President of MSSA. Through his efforts, the cups program was expanded and Maryland was one of the first to launch a website in 1997. Tony started his administrative calling with the Mid-Maryland Soccer Association while still a student at the University of Maryland as a player of the New Carrollton SC.

US Adult Soccer has recognized several individuals from Maryland for their contribution to the amateur game. Inducted in the US Adult Soccer Hall of Fame are Eugene Ringsdorf, John Ellinger, Anna Steffen, Anthony Falcone, Patrick Healey and Kevin Anderson.

There were two significant organizational changes to the State Association in the 1970's. The first was in 1976 when Thomas Bailey headed off the effort to create the Maryland State Youth Soccer Association whose focus was on youth soccer. Then in 1977 the leagues located in the District of Columbia separated to form the Metropolitan DC/Virginia Soccer Association. Thus, the organization became the Maryland State Soccer Association with jurisdiction throughout the state.

Tom was also instrumental in the revitalization of the Old Timers Soccer Association of Maryland. Originally formed in 1950 to preserve the history of the game in Maryland and to recognize individuals whose contributions deserved merit in the Maryland Soccer Hall of Fame. The organization functioned from 1952 to 1957 and then inexplicably stopped. Bailey along with Ray "Granny" Kraft and Nick Kropfelder got the Old Timers operating again in 1982. Annually a banquet is held (the organization is now known as the Maryland Soccer Legends) where new members are inducted into the Hall of Fame and other awards recognized.

The nature of the amateur game means that clubs come and go. Some have a good run and then those who organize them are unable to find successors. Three clubs in Maryland have had a long spell and continue to play today. The Baltimore Kickers were founded in 1953 by Eddie Thau and Werner Juergensen. For many years, Fritz and Anna Steffen ran the soccer program with the team winning several state titles. Anna provided thirty-one years of distinct service as Secretary of MSSA. She was the first Life Member inducted in the organization and is a member of the USASA and Maryland Soccer Hall of Fames. The Kickers play in the Super Soccer League and just won their Second Division in the Maryland Division.



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The Jamaican American Raiders Club came into existence in 1974 as a recreation sports program for the Jamaican community. George Kennedy joined the club in 1977 and started the soccer program affectionately known as JA Raiders. The team started in the 4<sup>th</sup> division of Maryland Major. George managed the team for 35 years and the team continues to play today in Maryland Major. This past spring, George was recognized at the Maryland Soccer Legends gala receiving the Dr. John A. Schmid Service Award.

In 1997, Christos FC was founded by brothers James, Jody and Jesse Haislip. As a dominant side in the state, Christos has taken national and regional titles in open and master competitions. In 2017, after defeating second-division Richmond Kickers in the Lamar Hunt US Open Cup, the club received national attention in their fourth-round tie against Major League Soccer's DC United scoring the opening goal before an overflow crowd at the Maryland SoccerPlex. They just missed their David/Goliath moment but the match was the excitement of the Cup that summer.

Competitions have expanded beyond the Rowland and Stewart Cups. In 1980, the Hagen Cup was introduced to crown a women's champion. From 1985 to 1991 the Maryland State Games took place with MSSA as the organizer of the soccer competition under the guidance of JC Cummings. Teams were formed from selected players of member leagues with the Takoma Park Soccer Association dominating the gold medal event for years. With expansion of national cups in the master's divisions, teams now compete for the state titles in Over-30, Over-40 and Over-50. In 2023, The Morton Cup was created in honor of Darwin "Lefty" Morton, former Vice President of the Maryland State Soccer Association. Lefty coached for many years and was also an administrator for MSSA with the Cups program & registration. Lefty could be seen every Sunday at a pitch somewhere in the state checking the local scene. The Morton Cup is a state only competition. This past year in celebration of the state centennial, the Maryland-District-Virginia Cup was played. Affiliated USASA sides from the other side of the Potomac took part with a tournament of 18 teams and was won by Ristozi FC of the Super Soccer League. The state also had teams compete in various Under-23 programs over the years. The past few decades has prospered under the leadership of cup director Fran McGrath.

The quality of the game in Maryland has always been outstanding and that reflects in the national champions over the century. The first was Baltimore SC in 1940 in the National Challenge Cup (US Open Cup). After the introduction of professional sides in the mid-90's that saw those clubs dominate the Open Cup, an amateur open championship was created named the Werner Fricker Cup. The Baltimore Colts lifted the trophy in 2005 followed by the Maryland Bays in 2014 and Christos FC twice in 2016 & 2018. The British Lions SC won the National Amateur Cup as did Christos in 2016, who achieved a cup double that summer (Werner Fricker). The Gerhard Mengel Cup, the National Over-30 Championship has made Maryland its home three times with Christos (2012 - 2013 - 2014) and in 2019 with the Maryland Bays. In 2002, the Baltimore Bays lifted the US Under-23 Cup. Among youth champions, winners of the



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National Junior Challenge Cup, known as the James P. McGuire Cup, included Pompei SC in 1945 and St. Elizabeth SC in 1973.

It has been one heck of a century and as the Italians like to say, *un'altri cent'anni* (another one hundred years). We hope we have done our founders proud for future success.

Composed by Francis McGrath and Anthony Falcone

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