**MLSA for Girls**

**A Rebuild with Re-Imagined Programming & Philosophy**

The following updates in programming and philosophy have been put together over the course of about 18 months by a committee of experienced soccer coaches, MLSA board members and former players. We talked with coaches, parents and players, we looked at other successful girls sports programming and we incorporated the best practices of developmental soccer for girls to create a thoughtful and forward-looking MLSA for Girls with customized programming and philosophies for the unique needs of our girls .

**Meet the Team:**

**Development Directors:** Create and oversee curricula for all age groups
Seth Young, Mt. Lebanon High School Girls Varsity Coach
Kelly Mehalko, Mt. Lebanon Middle School Girls Coach
Shelly Saba, former Duquesne Women’s Coach and Mt. Lebanon Girls Assistant Varsity Coach

**Culture Directors:** Foster and steward girl-focused culture
Liz Peer, MLSA Coach and Board Member
Sarah Moore, former College Goalkeeper
Megan Tappe, MLSA Coach and Board Member

**Girls Travel Coordinator,** Chris Frenie: Former MLSA Board President, current MLSA Board Vice President, former Mt. Lebanon High School player, current travel coach

**High School Liaison/Club Opportunity Director:** Jodi McKeever, MLSA Board Member

**MLSA for Girls Coordinator,** Tracy Adams: MLSA Parent for eight years

**Brienne Sembrat:** MLSA Board Member, former Premier Club coach, former college player, former Mt. Lebanon high school coach and player, former Leo rec and travel coach

**Sam Smith:** MLSA Board Member and former college club player

**FAQs**

**Why is MLSA making changes to its girls’ programs?**

There are two principal drivers for these changes and they are closely connected. The first is that we have, for some time, been experiencing decreased enrollment in girls’ programs (travel, Lebo Cup, etc.).  The second is that we want to give our girls a better opportunity to play and improve at the right comfort level for them.  We think that if our players are put in positions to succeed while also being challenged, they will enjoy soccer more and be more likely to play longer.

Our changes are intended to impact girls starting much earlier than we have historically because we want their first experience with soccer — and many experiences after that — to include female coaches and trainers as well as their friends.  A more positive first experience with soccer — and Rec soccer is that for many players — can lead to a lifelong love of the game.  Unfortunately, we believe that for many girls a co-ed first experience isn’t as positive as it could be, and this discourages them from further participating in the beautiful game.

Additionally, grouping girls more broadly in a program Lebo Cup, for example, increases the likelihood that girls from the same school will be able to play together longer.  We also hope to encourage Lebo Cup players who have new, positive experiences to consider our other programs, both now and as they grow older.

**Why is girls travel registration for the fall season only?**

It all comes down to numbers.  We’ve heard more and more that a two season commitment is discouraging girls who love soccer from playing travel soccer. For girls who only want to play soccer, that structure is great, but for those who want to play softball, lacrosse or something else, a spring season creates challenges that we think can be addressed by offering fall and spring seasons separately. If a fall player wants to also play travel in the spring, they can! They just don’t have to.

**If it’s only one season, why does girls’ travel registration cost more than half of boys’ travel registration?**

We are very cognizant of making sure all of our programs meet the needs of the different players. One of the other changes to the girls travel program is that we plan to involve more trainers (including a keeper trainer) in the fall season.  The spring season will have less trainers and rely more upon coach-led practices, so the total cost for both seasons should be the same or very, very close to it.

**Why is my U-11 player trying out with U-12 players? OR Why is my U-13 player trying out with U-14 players?**

While it is true that we haven’t had the players try out like this in the past, we have — typically out of necessity — formed combined teams. The reason ties back to the comfort and skill level discussion above. We’ve seen it both ways where a younger player is so good that her teammates often watch or wait for her to do something; that player likely needs a greater challenge in order to grow. Similarly, there may be an older player whose team is playing at a higher level than she is comfortable with (e.g., tougher competition than perhaps she’s experienced before), and that player may benefit from playing in a more appropriate division and assuming more of a leadership role than she otherwise would have.

The idea is NOT to break up teams for the sake of change. We like to keep teams together whenever possible to foster continuity and comradery. Teams that are working may not look any different from the last season. The evaluation committee will build the teams based on the best competitive situation while also considering the social-emotional needs of the girls.

**Why isn’t MLSA making similar changes to its boys’ programs?**

It really comes back to the numbers.  We haven’t experienced the dip in participation or skill level on the boys’ side, so we don’t want to change what is working!  If something changes, then we will re-evaluate. We are consistently evaluating what our players need to thrive.

**Why can’t I register my daughter (2007) for travel soccer for next year?**

Since the 2007 birth year is made up of rising 8th and 9th graders, we lose many players to the middle school and high school fall programs. Therefore, we do not have enough U15s to roster a full team. In the past, we’ve grouped them with the U14s and U13s and that is not ideal for any of these groups. We are confident that the middle school and high school programs as well as RT19 soccer are quality options for these players. The middle school program was specifically created to address this specific issue and it is a wonderful option for the girls in this age group. We’re so excited to have this option now for the girls in this age group.

**Why can’t I register my daughter (2012) for travel soccer for next year?**

We are in a transitional year for the youngest travel players on the girls side, between our new and old structure. The program for all 3rd grade girls is truly the 3rd grade academy. All girls in 3rd grade start here, with this brand new developmental model that keeps our girls together while they learn the 7v7 game. The structure and training are identical to the travel program; however, they get to stay with their grade-level friends and develop in a smaller league to build the skill level they need to have a much more competitive and successful travel season in fourth grade. \*If your 2012 player is already playing travel soccer this spring, this small group will be able continue with travel in the fall. In the spring, the entire group will try out for the spring U9 2022 travel season.