

The History of Guelph Soccer

This is the history of the beginnings of the present Guelph Soccer Club Incorporated. The story begins in the early 1960s. There had been youth soccer organized in earlier years. These earlier attempts which were successful for a while did not last.

The seeds for Guelph Soccer were planted around 1960. The previous year, myself and a friend named Alex Barclay had been invited to join the executive of a team called Guelph City. The shortcomings of the Club soon became apparent. There were two other Guelph teams and all three were competing to sign up the limited number of players who were available. There was a need for more young players in order to keep the game alive.

One thing we noticed while traveling to away games was that other communities already had minor soccer programs. St. Catharine's in particular had 500 children organized into a league. Guelph City then attempted to start a youth team. Very little interest was shown and the idea was eventually dropped. We could see that what was needed was a new organization dedicated to minors.

Alex and myself left the Club in 1964. We expressed to the executive that if they ever wanted to become involved in a minor soccer program we would become a part of it.

Guelph City operated for another year and then folded. Two of the executives, Dave Friel and Bill Greenhorn, decided to pass what was left of the Club treasury to Alex Barclay, with the understanding that it was to be used to start a minor soccer program. Alex accepted the challenge, seeking help from several people including myself.

Alex must have had a good response because the next thing he did on his own was to arrange to meet with Guelph City Council. Ken Hammill, one of the City councilors, later told me how Alex made his presentation. Alex placed a large rolled up bundle of money (about a thousand dollars) which he had received from Dave and Bill on the table. He said to the Council members "I have all this money and want to organize a minor soccer program. Can you tell me how to go about about organizing it?". The Council was fully cooperative agreeing to provide as much help as possible including the supply of fields, goal posts, nets and they also maintained the markings.

Alex would be responsible for finding the players and volunteers. He placed an ad in the Guelph papers calling for registration for players between the ages of 10 and 14. The registration fee was \$1. Registrations were dropped into a box at the Delhi Recreation Centre. When the box was opened it contained forty registrations. Guelph Minor Soccer Association was formed.

The first meeting which I attended was very short. It was held inside the old Canadian General Electric plant during March of 1966 (we all stood in one of the changing rooms). In attendance were some of the people Alex had approached previously. They were Davie Friel, Bill Greenhorn, Andy Donachie and myself along with Alex. Alex explained briefly what he had done so far and arranged for another meeting. It was held in the ANAF club. We formed an executive and began to plan. A decision was made to organize the boys into four teams with ten players on each. The teams were to have Canadian names. Executive meetings were held weekly and plans steamed ahead.

The first team would be called Chippewa with Bill Greenhorn and Andy Donachie as coaches. The second team would be called Iroquois with coaches Dave Friel and Johnny Millar. The third team would be called Victory Vikings with Terry Flook as coach. Finally the fourth team would be called Speedvale Indians with coach John Bamber. John Ruddy would referee.

All the players were asked to meet at a soccer field on the corner of York Road and Lower Wyndham. Each coach met their ten players and started to play mini games each Saturday. Andie Donachie who also coached minor hockey had some jerseys that we made use of. Word must have soon spread around about the games because more boys started showing up each Saturday wanting to play.

After a month the program was reorganized into six teams with fifteen players on each team. The six teams formed a league playing games at Bristol Street. We found a source for small size soccer uniforms which were available for the start of the new league. Soccer shoes were unavailable in Guelph so the players wore running shoes. With the expansion rate we had seen that first month minor soccer was here to stay.

We didn't always get full cooperation, even from some of stores. They needed to be pushed. For example, the following year the executive decided to allow boys to wear soccer shoes. John Parry, who had joined the executive soon after its formation, contacted some Guelph sports stores and asked them to stock boys' soccer shoes.

The storekeepers told him the market was too small and it wouldn't be worth their while to put them in stock. John contacted a mobile shoe salesman who brought his truck to the registration and sold \$600 worth of shoes. Boys' soccer shoes were soon on display in store windows.

Soon after, it was proposed that a girls' league be formed. One or two girls had played the odd game on a team. Melody Flook in particular loved the game. She wanted to play. In later years she played on a team representing Canada. Some of the executive at the time didn't think it was a game for girls. The proposal was

defeated. A group got together outside the Club and organized a girls team that played interlocking games with Waterloo.

Within two years, there were enough girls to form a Guelph league. By that time new blood had joined the minor soccer executive. They voted for girls to become part of Guelph minor soccer. The name was soon changed to Guelph Youth Soccer. More volunteers joined the organization. A ladies auxiliary was formed. They were a great help. Each of the following years the organization grew and more volunteers joined. It is because of the work and dedication of all the individuals who have been part of the Club over the past 40 years that the youth of Guelph have been able to participate in the beautiful game. I understand there are now over 4400 players. It's awesome for me to think of that number. Alex Barclay was a beautiful person who was passionate for the beautiful game. The motto Alex chose for Guelph minor soccer still applies - Age Quod Agis. I've heard many explanations as to what it means, but I still go along with Alex's meaning which is keep your eye on the ball or concentrate on what you are doing. I sometimes get asked about the early years. This story explains how it happened.

Most of the people involved came from Europe mainly of British origin. When I think of the ten years I spent with minor soccer it didn't come to an end but to the end of the beginning. There must be many more stories to tell. Back in 1960 youth soccer did not exist in the golden triangle. Today it is flourishing. I am sure the early history of how it happened in Guelph was repeated in other communities throughout the triangle. I could ramble on for a while longer but I must end here and let the organizers continue on with the excellent job. I now watch my grandson play while I sit in my chair shouting him words of encouragement. My legs and body still want to gesticulate and show how its done. But the best part of all is to see all the young players try their best.

John Bamber, Founder and First President 1966