

THE NEW JERSEY SOCCER GROUP

Press Release



Millburn, NJ, July 27 2009

Future Bright for the Magic

With the 2009 season recently completed with a run to the East Conference Regional Final, the Millburn Magic can look back on a strong WPSL season. A run of six wins in seven games took the team from mid-table to the play-offs, then past Bay State and Lancaster Inferno to the East Final, where a depleted team lost 3-0 at the Long Island Fury, themselves National Champions in 2006. "The team came together really well as the season went on", commented Magic Head Coach Andy Sones. "The win over [last year's Regional Champions] New England gave us a lot of confidence, and we finished the season strongly". While there were several notable results over the course of the season, Sones identifies the semi-final win at Lancaster as the biggest. "We had a few players out that night", he noted, "but it gave other players a chance to come in and prove themselves, in a huge win that really put us on the map. Kelly Feeney had her best game for us, and young players like Katie McDonnell and Kerry Prime both stepped up and got a good amount of time at the highest level they have ever have played at in that game and then the final. It's great experience for them to take back to high school in the fall", he said of the Caldwell and Morristown standouts, who both play club soccer at STA, "and it has been good to watch them develop by working with players at a higher level".

With the affiliated STA youth club fielding 11 teams this fall, and an entire Magic summer youth program providing teams down to U8G, the development and progression of youth players remains key to the success of the Magic senior team. Biz Shenk trained with the team last season after graduating from Chatham HS, before returning from Holy Cross to become an integral part of Magic defense this time around, while Laura Kurash played for various Magic summer teams for several years before playing a huge part for the senior team in this campaign, including two goals in the season opener against CDSA Future from Delaware. MarlyAnn DeLargy started and played every minute of that game, while Katie Chapin saw time in the New England win, and Robin Chernow played in several games over the season, including the play-off quarter-final against Bay State. All three play within the STA club, and are still being recruited to play with and against the very same colleges that their Magic team-mates soon return to for their fall seasons. "They're playing for us in the summer around attending college camps", said Sones, "but some of those camps are staffed by their teammates, and run by coaches we're talking to every week about their players on the Magic. It's a great head-start for the younger players, in addition to college coaches knowing they can play at collegiate level, because they're doing it for us every week".

Sones was also quick to point out the positive impact of the team's senior players, who remain the backbone of the team. "We've got some wonderful players in the squad, but they are also good people and great role-models", he said, citing Magic co-captain Lia Fierro as an example. Fierro enters her junior year as the starting GK at Monmouth University, and earned MVP honors at the NEC Tournament her Freshman year. In June, Fierro garnered the WPSL player of the Week award after Millburn shutting out New England 1-0, while training with backup keeper Robin Chernow, who also saw time in several games over the season. "Robin was a great training partner", Fierro noted, "her attitude and willingness to work are tremendous, and she's technically very good, as well as being a quick learner. It was great to see her doing well in the games", Fierro continued, "and I know that she will do really well wherever she goes to college". Chernow returns to West Morris Mendham HS this fall, where she registered 13 shutouts as a sophomore in 2008, and will attend a slew of showcases when the STA Crush get back together. Sones identified the benefit of real development within the Magic system, stating "having younger players playing with and learning from established college players in national competition is real development, and being involved at that level brings them on in leaps and bounds." He also paid tribute to the Magic senior stars, saying "we've got one of the top WPSL scorers in the country [Katie Ryan, Villanova] up front for us, an incredible central defensive partnership at the back [Lina Staropoli, Loyola; Ashley Ventura, Towson) and a whole load of great midfielders (Tara Ricciardi, Providence; Shira Averbuch, Stanford). The players are all good and are all really friendly - how can younger not improve by playing with and against that caliber of players every week?"

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Over 200 female players - right down to seven year-olds – are currently in the Magic summer program, with several of their summer teams qualifying for the Youth Premier Soccer League (YPSL) finals, and younger teams having success in Pre-Y tournament competition. The YPSL provides top level regional competition exclusively for the youth programs of women's and men's teams across the north-east, with this weekend's finals held in conjunction with the WPSL National Finals at Long Island. Among the Magic successes this season have been their U17s, who will be hoping to repeat their 2008 win under coach Rob Alman. Last year's U16 team groomed STA Screamin' Eagles players DeLargy, Prime and Chapin for the Magic seniors this time around, and there are a new crop of girls coming through who will be looking to make that jump in 2010. This year they have faced YPSL competition coached by the Head Coaches of Chestnut Hill and Kutztown, among others. "The YPSL is a great place to recruit players", notes Chestnut Hill Head Coach Seamus O'Connor, who also coaches the AC Diablos U17G, "there's a lot of talent, and the teams are well coached and well organized". Six of O'Connor's Diablos team have played in the WPSL this year, in another example of development within that organization.

For the Magic, the 17s are an important step for the young players in their system. "Every player at every group is important", identifies Sones, "but ultimately it's about helping players get better, proving they can play at the highest level, then showing coaches what they can do. The young players have all come to the senior games", he added, "and they learn a lot from that, while making for a great atmosphere". With real development from strong youth players up to an established senior team, the outlook for the Magic and their players certainly looks bright.

The Millburn Magic is the Northern NJ member of the Women's Premier Soccer League, an independent national league representing the highest level of amateur soccer in the United States. The Magic are part of the New Jersey Soccer Group, a management company for a family of soccer based organizations offering a full range of soccer services in New Jersey."

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