

## **Youth Soccer Special Report:** ***Brief History of Youth Soccer***

Although youth soccer had been around since the beginning of the sport, the organization of the sport at the youth level administratively began to take off in 1960's and 70's with the advent of the American Youth Soccer Organization and United States Youth Soccer Association.

Founded in 1964, the AYSO quickly grew from nine teams in Los Angeles due to recreational playing policies and was at one point the largest youth soccer organization based on membership.

The USYSA began with 100,000 registered players and has since grown to over three million since its inception in 1974.

Although both the USYSA and AYSO both consist of competitive divisions in addition to recreational play, the USYSA is currently home to more competitive level members.

As the sport progressed, the United States Olympic Committee through U.S. Soccer established the Olympic Development Program. With USYSA as the leading governing body on a national level, the task of managing an ODP system naturally fell to its care despite being an organization that mostly catered to recreational soccer. Management on a regional level then naturally fell upon the state associations, which still manage the individual events on the USOC and USSF's behalf within their respective jurisdictions.

In 1997, United Soccer Leagues approached USYSA and US Soccer about forming a partnership with USYSA for the upcoming launch of the Super Y-League, creating a national elite league that would provide a higher level of competition and improved method of player development and identification operated by those in the professional ranks. Despite numerous meetings and discussions, USL held off on the launch of the Super Y-League in expectation of an agreement between the two parties.

In January of 1999, then USYSA Board of Directors Chairman Virgil Lewis and USL Commissioner Francisco Marcos penned letters of agreement to work together on behalf of their respective organizations pending the approval of the USYSA National Council.

"Affiliation of the Y-League program will enable our elite level players for the first time to compete on a national scale during the summer months. Offering our players the opportunity to work with the top coaches and other top players throughout the (USL) system is one more way that we offer the most complete soccer program in America," the letter by Lewis stated.

Despite the letter of agreement, the Super Y-League, USYSA and the various state associations never came to an understanding, creating a great deal of confusion regarding eligibility amongst coaches, players and parents. This created a space between USYSA and the Super Y-League.

The emergence of US Club Soccer in 2000 created even more dynamic relationships. Formed as a lobbying arm and sanctioning body for elite level youth clubs, US Club Soccer is currently in discussions with the Super Y-League to provide its members an elite national league in addition to sanctioned tournaments. Although an official agreement has not been signed yet, one is expected in the near future. USCS and the Super Y-League believe that the two organizations compliment each other well and that working together will prove extremely beneficial for elite level youth soccer. The partnership currently being discussed is equivalent to the agreement between the Super Y-League and USYSA in 1999.

In 2002, the Super Y-League became a National Affiliate member of U.S. Soccer due to its growth in membership beyond 26 states and other prerequisites.