



PENNSYLVANIA'S LEADING YOUTH SOCCER PUBLICATION

TOUCHLINE



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AT GLAVIN
PLAYGROUND**

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PROVIDING
PATHWAY
FOR FEMALE
PLAYERS**

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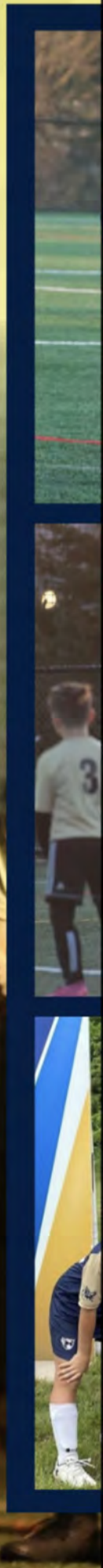
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HUNTINGDON VALLEY ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

PROVIDING COACHING PATHWAY FOR
CURRENT AND FORMER FEMALE PLAYERS





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IT'S NOT UNCOMMON TO SEE MOSTLY male coaches populating the sidelines at any level of soccer, but when you look around at a training session at Huntington Valley Athletic Association you'll notice a number of female coaches working with both girls and boys teams.

From high school girls helping with the youngest kids in the micro program and refereeing in the recreation program to professional coaches working with travel teams, HVAA has a strong representation of women in their ranks.

Several coaches, like Bridgette Alexander and Brianna Pudlo, play for the club's adult amateur team that is the defending champions in the women's major division of the United Soccer League of Pennsylvania.

For Alexander, who grew up playing for the club before playing Division 1 soccer at the University of Hartford, coaching at her youth club has been a way to give back while also pursuing her passion.

"Having a passion for coaching has always been my thing," Alexander said. "I knew even when I was playing in college that after my career ended I wanted to pursue coaching."

Alexander still holds the Lower Moreland High School record for goals with 113 and helps lead the line for the women's team, where she plays with Pudlo and several other young women involved in the club.

Pudlo grew up playing for Philadelphia Soccer Club and Danubia and graduated from St. Hubert before staying locally to play college ball at Holy Family University. She was drawn to the club as a player and saw coaching as another way to stay engaged in the game.

"They bring a lot of joy, the young kids," she said. "Even when they're running around like crazy, they're so fun. Always making me laugh, always making me smile."

Pudlo, who is a goalkeeper on the pitch, said playing in college honed her leadership skills and gave her the confidence to try out coaching. Growing up she didn't have any female coaches and mostly coaches against men now.

"It's nice that we have a lot of female coaches around," she said. "I can hear Bridgette's voice across the turf, Lena (Staropoli) coaches with me and there are several others and we can lean on each other for advice on dealing with parents coming from the boys and girls side, other coaches, referees and all of that."

Like Pudlo, Alexander didn't have any female coaches growing up. She sees herself in a lot of the young girls she works with and knows that she is more than just a coach to many of them. Alexander started playing at the club after a basketball coach saw her juggling a ball and encouraged her to look into the travel soccer program.

"I think there's special things about being able to connect with the girls in a little bit of a different way," said Alexander, who is a school counselor by day. "They can look up to me as someone who looks like them, played here and went on to play in college."

Female involvement in the soccer program extends to the organization, which also has programs for baseball, basketball, softball, taekwondo and chess.

"You see all the research about the positive impact sports can have on girls when it comes to self-awareness, positive body image and mental health," said Allie O'Neill, president of HVAA. "Having such great role models as female coaches only adds to that."

The club can count one of the top women's coaches in the country as one of their success stories. Erica Dambach, head coach of Penn State women's soccer, played for the soccer program her father, Calvin Walsh, introduced in 1978 and helped develop into what it has become.

"There's a history behind it and a legacy to leave," said Luciana Ammataro, HVAA's vice president of sports and director of communications. "I think we're still just at the beginning of that."