

FAB FOUR

Mellis, Morelli, 2 others elected to ENY Hall

The Eastern New York Soccer Hall of Fame will induct eight new members -- four from the adult association -- in Franklin Square, L.I. Saturday night.

Rocco Morelli, George Mellis, John Palumbo and Syd Crossley are the adult inductees.

The Hall is a joint venture of the Eastern New York Youth Soccer Association and Eastern New York State Adult Soccer Association. Here are short profiles of the four new adult members (in alphabetical order):

Syd Crossley

Many soccer fans and supporters might be familiar with Crossley thanks to his involvement with the Lindenhurst Soccer League and Long Island Soccer Football League.

Born in Bolton, England, Crossley started playing club soccer at the age of nine before moving onto school football - as they call it over there -- amateur teams and the University of Nottingham. Only weeks after moving to the United States in 1977, Crossley joined the Hicksville Americans (LISFL) before moving onto Northport, helping the club getting promoted from the Third To Second To the First Division in successive seasons. During that time he became Northport coach and a first vice president of the LISFL.

Wanting to be involved with a club closer to his Massapequa, Crossley played for the Lindenhurst Sports Club for seven years. He went on to perform for the club's Over-30 side as well. before retiring in the 2005-2006 season. By his estimates, Crossley played in 600 LISFL games, 130 First Division matches and 500 times for Lindenhurst. With the club Crossley also served as secretary treasurer and president and was voted in as a life member as well.

He has served on the LISFL board for 25 years as league secretary, rules chairman, trustee and as an ENYSASA delegate for a dozen years. He also managed the Under-23 Select Team.

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George Mellis

Mellis and N.Y. Greek-American-Atlas are synonymous with each other, given the years and blood, sweat and tears he has given to the club. An emigrant from Greece to the United States at the age of 13 in 1965, Mellis began playing soccer in AstoriaPark along with other immigrant youths. He eventually played for the BryantHigh School team, where he was named an all-scholastic player, QueensboroughCommunity College and for the Greek-American soccer club junior side.

He went on to play for the Greek Americans adult side and New Hellas S.C., which changed its named to N.Y. Atlas S.C. He played as a right midfielder and left fullback until a knee injury forced his retirement in 1979. Mellis was a club official and administrator and a trustee for the Cosmopolitan Soccer League and eventually as an ENYSASA official.

After the historic merger of the Greek-Americans and Atlas in 1987, Mellis decided to devote himself to managing G-A Atlas on a full-time basis. He directed the club to too many titles to mention at the local, regional and national levels.

Mellis served as a liaison for the Greek National Team for the 1994 World Cup as he assisted in hotel arrangements and training sites during its stay.

He is a successful building contractor in New York.

Rocco Morelli

Whether it was a student, teacher, player or coach, Morelli has made a unique impact on the sport.

A native of Italy, Morelli emigrated to the United States when he was 15. Not surprisingly, he playing with a number of teams while attending New Utrecht High School -- he receive All-City, All-State and All-Regional honors -- and Staten Island Community College as an All-American before accepting a scholarship to play for the University of Maryland.

He continued his excellence at Maryland, earning All-America honors and leading the Terrapins to the NCAA championship in 1968. Morelli took only six shots during the tournament, scoring on each of them, which is still a record. In the national championship game against San JoseState, he connected for four goals.

Morelli's involvement in soccer didn't stop there. He played professionally and at the semi-pro level for several teams, including Fiorentina and Napoli of the Italian American Soccer League and for Inter Guiliana and the Brooklyn Italians of the Cosmopolitan Soccer League. He also performed for the KLM Royal Dutch Airline team, competing at various venues throughout the world.

He also is a staff instructor in the Long Island Junior Soccer League's coaching academy and has been an ENYSSA ODP coach.

Today, the Bellmore, L.I. resident teaches coaching courses in Long Island through U.S. Soccer and the National Soccer Coaches Association of America. A retired special agent for the U.S. Department of Justice, Morelli is the men's coach at SUNY-Maritime College after guiding Polytechnic University for five seasons. He was named conference coach of the year in 2005.

He is a father of four, including two sons who became standout goalkeepers.

John Palumbo

Palumbo has been involved in many levels of the game. His early commitment to the game was established when Palumbo, with permission from his college in southern Italy, built a soccer field for the school using a pick and shovel.

After emigrating to the United States, Palumbo's participation in soccer only increased. He started by playing soccer during his lunch break from a factory in Battery Park in Manhattan.

He eventually played with the Peekskill Soccer Club in the Mid-Hudson Valley League and became involved in the Over-30 Hudson Valley Adult Soccer League. In 1983, Palumbo founded the Yorktown Soccer Club, where he was a player and a coach.

Palumbo kept the Hudson Valley Soccer League alive for more than 25 years. In 1995, Palumbo and the 14-team O-30 league joined the Eastern District Soccer League and ENYSASA. Barbara Smith and Palumbo still are running the O-30 division.

In 1998, Palumbo's construction company fulfilled a long-running dream of he and his brother Joe. An abandoned, 15-acre horse farm was turned into a grass field in the upper Westchester County, Putnam County area. J. Palumbo's Soccer Academy today is home to more than 2,000 children every year.

Chris Armas

Considered to be MLS's top defensive midfielder over its first 12 years, Armas is the first professional player to be elected into the Hall of Fame. In fact, the Hall could not have timed its selection better for Armas, who recently announced his retirement as a professional player after the Chicago Fire was eliminated from the MLS playoffs.

Growing up in Brentwood, L.I., Armas quickly stood out as a player. He performed for Brentwood in the Long Island Junior Soccer League, starred for St. John the Baptist in high school, played for ENYSSA ODP and was a standout at Adelphi University.

He went on to play two seasons for the Long Island Rough Riders (U.S. Interregional Soccer League), becoming a vital member of its national championship team in 1995. He took his game to an even higher level, joining the Los Angeles Galaxy for MLS's inaugural season in 1996. Armas helped the Galaxy reach the first MLS Cup, scoring a goal before L.A. lost to D.C. United in extratime.

After a trade to the Fire in 1998, Armas really blossomed as a player, turning in a virtuoso performance that season as Chicago won the league crown. The Fire went to the final two more times in what turned into losing causes, although it did capture four Lamar Hunt/U.S. Open Cup championships.

After a short stint with the Puerto Rican National Team, Armas took full advantage of an opportunity to perform with the U.S. national side. He wound up making 66 appearances -- the most by an Eastern New York born player -- and scoring twice from 1998-2006. He helped the U.S. reach the 2002 and 2006 World Cups, but a pair of knee injuries forced him to remain behind.

As a player who performed with his heart and soul, Armas left the league as one of its top players, having earned Best XI honors five times.

Ian McDougall

Born in Hamilton, Scotland in 1930, McDougall learned to play the sport using a tennis ball because nobody in the coal-mining community could afford a soccer ball. He wound up playing for Hamilton Academy after winning a scholarship to the school at the age of 12. He also performed the amateur Clydesdale Amateurs. He also turned down a tryout offer at 16 due to his family's emigration to the United States.

It didn't take McDougall long to become involved in the states. He was signed by Jim McGuire (later president of the U.S. Soccer Federation) to play with the Brooklyn Wanderers of the American Soccer League. McDougall also played with the Brooklyn Hispano, Kearny Scots, Hakoah, the latter merging with the New York Americans.

He joined the German-American Soccer League, captaining Eintracht for four years, performing for the Swedish Club (winning team MVP) and the Lindenhurst Soccer Club before finishing his career with Oceanside United. McDougall represented the ASL against Young Boys of Berne, Switzerland and played against Sunderland of England at Ebbets Field.

In his latter years, McDougall made his mark at the youth level. He was a co-founder of Oceanside United and directed youth teams for 35

years and remains a lifetime director of the LIJSL club. McDougall was honored for his contributions to the youth game as he was inducted into the LIJSL Hall of Fame in 2003.

While not playing soccer, the Lynbrook, L.I. resident found time for a family -- he and his wife Janet have three children and six grandchildren. He started and finished his working career with Inco Limited, a premium mining and metals company. Beginning as a messenger, McDougall retired as director, chief financial officer and vice chairman of the board.

Patricia Louise Masotto

In a life and an all too brief career that was caught short by a tragic traffic accident, Masotto distinguished herself as a player at the youth, high school and college levels.

She starred in the LIJSL from 1972 through 1986, leading her Massapequa team to the ENYSSA State Cup and Region I championships in 1979. She repeated that feat again in 1981 as Massapequa finished third at the nationals. Masotto's team also captured state titles in 1982 and 1983, taking second at the regionals both years. Playing for a rival club team, Masotto's team defeated her father Peter's Massapequa side for a state championship one year.

Masotto was a member of the ENYSSA's first Girls ODP team, where she played through 1984. She also excelled in high school, connecting for a record 120 goals in only two seasons. That success continued through college. She led after team to a national title, collecting 28 goals and 18 assists in one season. Masotto also received All-American honors at Nassau Community College before going on to score both goals against North Carolina in a 4-2 tournament loss.

Masotto died in a car accident in Farmingdale, L.I., which also took the life of her best friend, Brenda Driscoll. An ENYSSA college scholarship was named after both players. In the late 1980s, the Girls Under-16 national trophy of the U.S. Youth Soccer Association was named after Masotto.

Her father is a former ENYSSA president.

Ray Ward

Ward's involvement with the beautiful game began as an assistant coach with an Under-6 recreation team in the Catskill Soccer Club. He soccer career certainly took off from there, eventually serving as the club president from 1994-2003.

During his presidency, the club grew from 100 recreational player and two travel teams to 340 rec players and nine travel sides. He also formed an indoor program, enlarged the club's summer camp programs and formulated an agreement with a local parish school to revitalize a soccer field for the club's exclusive use and created the organization's first website.

He also served as the Capital District Youth Soccer League's vice president from 1995-1998 and as the ENYSSA district commissioner during that same span. Ward also was instrumental in starting the CYDSL office and in increasing the number of players and volunteers in the league as head of the membership committee.

With ENYSSA, Ward became a member of the Premier League committee and was selected as an association trustee in 2000. He was appointed co-chair of the State Cup in 2002 and chair of the same committee in 2003. He was selected first vice president in 2003, a post he still holds today.

A lifelong resident of Catskill, Ward has been married to JoAnn. They have three children. When he isn't pursuing his many soccer activities, Ward is a tax map supervisor/geographic information systems coordinator for Greene County.

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Dec. 21, 2008

FANTASTIC FOUR

Grecco, Rodriguez, Friedman, Turchi are inducted into ENY Soccer Hall of Fame

Franklin Square, L.I. -- A pillar of the Eastern New York Youth Soccer Association's State Cup competition, a woman who took the time to help players find their way to college, someone who has worked at the youth and amateur game and a soccer pioneer were given their just desserts at the Sand Castle before the dessert was served on Dec. 13.

Pat Grecco, Barbara Rodriguez, Bruce Friedman and Nicola Turchi were inducted into the Eastern New York Soccer Hall of Fame during Eastern New York's annual Christmas party.

The Hall is a joint venture of the Eastern New York Youth Soccer Association and Eastern New York State Amateur Soccer Association.

All four inductees were humbled by the honor.

During her induction speech, Rodriguez, the State Cup administrator for the past 15 years, ask "any former or present commissioner, please stand up and take a bow. Don't be shy. I'm just honored by this whole thing and flabbergasted."

Ray Ward, ENY's youth first president is also State Cup commissioner, so he has gotten to know Rodriguez quite well over the years. He recalled many a phone call between him and Rodriguez and how Barbara's husband, Julie, had to make sacrifices for the sport.

"Barbara, it's Ray," he would say to her on the phone.

"Dinner will wait," she said. "Let's go."

Rodriguez has worked tireless for the State Cup, mostly as the administrator.

"Without Barbara Rodriguez, the success of the State Cup would not be possible," Ward said.

Ward added that Rodriguez "has been there and done it all."

Indeed.

Rodriguez began coaching her daughter, Judy in the early 1980s when she was the coach of the Northport Rainbows. Her son, Jim, also played in the Long Island Junior Soccer League. Soon after starting her coaching career, Rodriguez was elected to the board of directors of the Northport/Cow Harbor Soccer Club and eventually became president. During her two years as president Rodriguez could boast that three of their club teams went all the way to the U.S. Youth Soccer national championships in the same year (1997). Those teams were the Piranha, Elite and Celtics. The Piranha won the national championship that year at the Girls Under-16 finals in Arizona. No other LIJSL club had three teams reach the nationals in the same year. Rodriguez also served as supervisor for the LIJSL games committee, tournament director of the LIJSL Girls Select tournament in the 1980s and Girls Coordinator of the Liberty Cup during the 1990s. After a few years of experience with the Liberty Cup, Rodriguez decided to take on the challenge of forming the Northport/Cow Harbor Columbus Day Tournament. For eight years during the mid- and late-1990s, she led a group of volunteers as tournament chairperson.

Grecco took a different path to the Hall.

"Pat Grecco has personally helped more players get to college than anyone on this planet," LIJSL executive director Joan Czach said. "Mrs. Grecco has volunteered thousands of hours of her time to our organization and always finds time to help a disadvantaged family with a difficult problem."

Grecco sees the coach's world from the coach's point of view. For the past 15 years, she has worked with hundreds of college coaches in soccer. She has acquired sensitivity for their coaching style, their program's traditions, the school's culture and its valuation of athletics and student/athletes. Her College Showcase for the LIJSL has earned the respect of coaches and created hundreds of valuable personal relationships. She has organized college workshops for local players and their parents in English and Spanish. She also has worked the last 10 years as the chairperson of the league's scholarship Program. Grecco also was director of the Exceptional Senior Games throughout the 1990s.

All three Grecco kids played in the LIJSL. Beth is a graduate of the University of Connecticut, a full scholarship recipient and three-time All-American. Ellen played at Northport High School, graduated from Fordham University where women's soccer began after she graduated. Son Frank Jr., a recruited soccer player, was four-year varsity player at the U.S. Naval Academy and is a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps. Her husband, Frank Sr., has served as a LIJSL referee.

"If I were to tell you all the accomplishments of Pat Grecco, it would take me three hours," LIJSL president Addie Mattei-Iaia said at the induction. "Pat is part of an exemplary soccer family. She has volunteered with every aspect of the LIJSL. Pat believes there is a college for everybody, no matter athletic or academic standing."

Grecco? She was as modest and humble as Rodriguez.

"I'm here to help anybody who needs it," she said. "My children benefited from soccer volunteers so this is my way to give back. There is a college for everybody, whether you're the best player or not or the smartest student or not.

"Nobody gets anywhere in life without the help of another person," she added.

Like Grecco, Friedman got hooked on the game when his son played youth soccer.

"It was the beginning of a life-long love for the game," he said.

Friedman, currently the president of the Long Island Soccer Football League, said his wife has heard the same story from him for years.

"I'll be home in 20 minutes and it took four hours," he said.

No one had to remind Friedman the audience who he was speaking to. "I am coming home to people who share our love for the game," he said. "We're not doing it for anything else but love."

Friedman rose up through the youth ranks as Sachem Soccer Club intramural Girls coordinator, as a member of the Lake Grove S.C. board of directors and eventually as club president. He joined the LISFL in 1994 and became Under-23 game chairman and league president in 2005.

Sal Rapaglia, president of the Eastern New York amateurs, remembered Nicola Turchi's dedication to the sport and his club. Turchi had eight sons and Rapaglia played soccer against some of them.

"Every Sunday, rain or shine, he was there, fighting for his club . . . His heart was always there."

Rapaglia later said, "The Turchi family has been an asset for the game."

Turchi said he told his father two weeks ago about his election to the Hall. Nicola, who is 94, had planned to attend the ceremonies, but recently came down with bronchitis.

"I want to come, but your mother says she's going to leave me," Sal told the audience. "We forced him not to come."

Earlier that day Nicola called his son. "He apologized and wanted to thank the committee," Turchi said