

CHELTENHAM

★★★ **SPORTS** ★★★

Building Community Pride One Child at a Time

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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**CHELTENHAM
CHEERS!**

Cheltenham Sports Takeaways From 2024

Krysten Smith takes over as board president and we welcome two new programs.

If you are reading this, we need you. We need you if you can volunteer a few hours to help shepherd a Saturday morning intramural soccer practice.

We need you if you can spare a few bucks as a donation or sponsorship. We need you in more ways than we can count, truly.

Not that the club is in crisis, but as time goes by, it gets harder and harder to draft volunteers to run our programs.

Increasingly, we are relying on professional coaches to run some of our programs, which has a cost.

Despite the headwinds of fewer community volunteers, we boldly launched two new programs in 2024.

Former Cheltenham High School cheerleaders Lauren Friday and Krysten Smith are the proud coaches of our new sport, cheerleading. As of press time, 25 girls between the ages of seven and nine were cheering on Cheltenham travel basketball games. Their uniforms bear the name of Dottie Leeds, a former Cheltenham High School cheerleading coach who passed away in June of 2023.

Also new this year, a wrestling program headed by Joe Bentz, which saw astonishing enrollment figures. More than 40 young wrestlers were in the program as we went to press.

We can't let too much time pass without thanking two very special people. Elkins Park resident Andrew Kuhn stepped down after three years as president of the board but will be staying on as a vice president at large. Andrew's commitment to the development of young people is clear and genuine and we thank him for his service.

Also well worthy of mention is Elkins Park resident Nigel Blower, who put in fifteen years as a volunteer on the Cheltenham Sports Board of Directors, most recently as treasurer. You read that right, fifteen years!

Nigel's even hand and demeanor will be missed. He set a great example for anyone who is considering volunteering for a youth sports organization.

To get close to Cheltenham sports is to get a feel for the passion and commitment of many of our volunteers. It also serves as a sobering reminder that our young people are truly our future.

We believe in giving them the best start possible by learning vital skills and traits like teamwork, self-belief and persistence.

Please join us if you can. It's a great journey and you'll be glad you undertook it.

2024 ENROLLMENT FIGURES

The club operated a wide range of programs to keep participants engaged throughout the year. The following is a summary of the total enrolments, which is a consistent total number compared with prior year (2023).

Program	Enrollment
Ball Hockey, In-House & On-Site Clinics	27
Cheer!	30
Fall Intramural Soccer	200
Fall Travel Skill Builder	9
Free Clinic - 2024 Travel	61
Free Travel Soccer Tryout	20
Futbol Fun in the Sun!	42
IM Spring Basketball Workouts	51
Indoor Soccer	110
Intramural Basketball	95
Introduction to Wrestling	41
Little Feet - Winter	20
Little Feet Program	23
Open Pick-up Basketball	23
Pickup Futsal	23
Pre-Travel Soccer Clinic	5
ProBound - Travel Basketball Clinics	50
Soccer Evening Boot Camp	62
Soccer Summer Camp	21
Spring into Soccer	155
Spring Travel Training	10
Travel Basketball Tryouts	60
Travel Soccer 2024-25	163
Winter Futsal	13
Winter Futsal Training	26
Grand Total	1375

Winter's Cheer

In honor of Dollie Leeds..

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anuary 11, 2025 dawned chilly, with enough wind going to remind you to make sure your coat was buttoned.

In the gym at Cedarbrook Middle School, a squad of Cheltenham Sports hoopsters was doing their best to hang in there with a much taller group of lads from out of town. The room was pretty quiet as basketball games go, with the occasional shout of approval from a parent or an exhortation to do better from the locals.

Then, at the end of the first quarter, it happened.

The gym door opened and in trooped a long line of diminutive cheerleaders. This was it folks, the first wave of a cheerleading program that was launched this year by Cheltenham Sports. Coached by board president Krysten Smith and her longtime friend and cheerleading buddy Lauren Friday, the program is currently training 25 girls aged seven through nine in the sport of cheerleading.

Once seated in a far corner of the gym, the newby cheerleaders got to work. They drummed their feet when opposing players lined up at the foul line. They exhorted the crowd to get fired up.

During a break in the action, they took to the floor. They danced and flaunted blue and gold pom poms. In many cases they smiled, feeling the glow of being involved in something larger than themselves, and clearly enjoying it.

Both Friday and Smith cheered together at Cheltenham High School and later returned to coach cheer there. "It's been a whirlwind as we haven't coached for a while but we're getting our coaching legs back and getting better each practice/game," Friday said.

"We're also trying to make sure we're making good choices as this is the club's first cheer team," she added.

"When I decided to start a cheer program, it was only natural for me to ask Lauren to help me out," said Smith.

"We cheered and coached together before and we balance each other out. I could not do this with anyone else but Lauren," she added.

The team's uniforms are emblazoned with the name of Dollie Leeds, a cheerleading coach and Abington resident who exerted a positive influence on both Friday and Smith when they were younger. Leeds, a 30-year district employee, coached cheerleading at Cheltenham High for more than 20 years. She passed away in June, 2023.



▲
Coach Lauren Friday with two of her cheer students

"I want the girls to find the same thrills from cheer as I did when I began cheering. I really began to enjoy it in high school with our sponsor Dollie Leeds who not only took time to build a sisterhood through our squad but was also like a second mother to many of us," Friday said.

"Each summer at Cheltenham, we went to Pine Forest cheer camp and the memories we created there were life changing. Cheer isn't just about showing spirit for your team but also about creating friendships that last a lifetime," Friday added.

"Our cheerleaders will always know who Dollie Leeds is and the inspiration that she had on us to create this program," Smith said. "At every game, we huddle up and shout 'Do it for Dollie on 3: 1, 2, 3 DO IT FOR DOLLIE!!'"

The team is already doing what cheerleaders do, enlivening the atmosphere at the ballgame.

"I went to a game last season and it was so quiet with only the parents of players being involved in the game. This year with our girls, I can feel the difference in excitement as the players play. We've also had many parents and other fans come up to us and applaud the performance of the girls," Friday said.

Once this new wave of cheerleaders got going on that cold Saturday, they solicited whoops of appreciation and applause from the audience. Whether you were home or away, you couldn't help but be charmed by this newest addition to the Cheltenham Sports community.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MONEY

We have an elite soccer player in our midst as a volunteer, and she's just fine with that.

Glenside's Jillmarie Strumfels certainly earned her stripes in competitive soccer. In her college years she was the starting goalie on the women's team at Beaver College (now Arcadia University), winning two conference titles and earning a berth in the Division III NCAA playoffs.

She's been the goalie coach at Arcadia U. and for a longer spell at Penn Charter. In her youth soccer days, she played for the Simpson Athletic Club and the Tarkin Club, traveling to England, Ireland and Wales for two summers as part of that experience.

Strumfels is now a busy mother and a professional nurse. So how does she like jogging around Fire Field and Wall Park in Cheltenham these days as a volunteer, coaching travel teams for Cheltenham Sports?

"Obviously, it's not about the money," she said.

But Strumfels, who has coached Cheltenham's Hammers (girls) and the Havoc (guys), said she cherishes those moments when a developing child has a breakthrough, an achievement that makes them glow. This year, one of her players on the Havoc who had never scored a goal found inspiration and scored two in the team's final game of the season, a 4-1 win.

"He tries so hard. He was actually our captain this year because he is so supportive. Seeing he and his family react to him scoring,

not just one goal, but two, was so cool," she said.

Strumfels has coached her daughter at Cedarbrook Middle School and this year saw her make the girl's varsity team at Cheltenham High School as a ninth grader. Her twin boys played for Cedarbrook's 7th grade team this fall.

While we're at it, she also referees local matches.

Like many who volunteer for Cheltenham Sports, Strumfels focuses on the fact that the club is a place where young people can first get a taste for the sport. In time, perhaps, they can move on and play for an elite team, but that's not the club's focus.

"What I tell people is, 'Look, we're not big winners,'" she said.

"What I look for and love are those moments where the kids are so happy and excited about something."

"That's what I really enjoy, just those moments when you see them really enjoying soccer, not just because their parents made them go, it's just about forming those bonds."

Strumfels has coached her daughter and her twin sons. Sure, coaching your own child has a little bit of a different wrinkle to it. But Strumfels has no problem urging her own children to do better.

"I tell them, 'If you don't run, you're grounded for life,'" she says with a chuckle.

She's probably just kidding.

But if you look back at the drive that pushed her to become an elite player in youth soccer and at the college level, she might not be.



JILLMARIE STRUMFELS

"What I tell people is, 'Look, we're not big winners.' What I look for and love are those moments where the kids are so happy and excited about something."



▶ **The Cheltenham Wolves learned a lot about character this year and won a championship to boot.**

a group of young people gain confidence and learn to play as a team over the course of the season.

“As the season progressed, the players began making decisions for themselves on the pitch and talking about problems together,” Epps said.

“There was one game midway through the season when the players, without coaching instructions, corrected a mistake during the build-out. Each player touched the ball during a second-half possession as they worked from our box to a goal,” Epps said.

Epps said coaching young people is just one way he can contribute to his community.

“Coaching youth sports is a community service, as many of the lessons learned on a team, from confidence to collaboration and discipline, are applied in other areas of life. This is an opportunity to contribute to providing spaces for fun, belonging, connections and growth. One of my core values is service, and this role allows me to live my values,” Epps said.

“The fun challenge for me is motivating them to become better and distracting them from getting down on themselves when they may not do something or perform a drill as expected,” Coach Ince added.

“Zachary and I have found a balance around this where we want them to improve, but use positive reinforcement to accomplish this,” Ince said.

Responding well to adversity is a trait anyone who has lived a little values.

During this fall’s highly competitive Jack Walsh Tournament, the Wolves, “to put it frankly, got thrashed,” Ince said.

But then the good thing happened.

“The response after the tournament was reflected in practice where we saw the boys cut out some of the wasting time antics and focus on getting better as a team,” Ince added.

Through it all, the Wolves, led by Coach Epps and Coach Ince, learned something about community this year and ended up winning a championship, perhaps as a secondary byproduct.

Well done and thank you coaches for your contribution to the Cheltenham community!

Hungry Wolves

The Cheltenham birth-year 2015 boys’ team rolls to a division championship.

We know this much to be true. Watching some parental behavior during youth sports matches can border on the horrifying. That’s why members of the Cheltenham Sports community pride themselves on maintaining a sense of dignity and decency, regardless of the outcome of a youth sporting match.

“The understanding that they are kids first and athletes second sets us apart from other communities,” said Mike Ince, co-coach of this year’s Cheltenham Wolves, a travel soccer team for boys with a birth year in 2015.

“We have run into situations where coaches and sometimes parents are inappropriately communicating a child’s mistake or berating referees,” Ince said.

Ince, who along with Zachary Epps, coached the Wolves to an ICSL Division 5 championship this year, said he and Epps try to communicate and model good behavior for their impressionable charges.

“As a team, we maintain respect for everyone on and off the pitch,” Ince said.

Ince’s co-coach, Epps said that one of the joys he experienced this year in coaching the Wolves was to watch

A Letter From Our President



Cheltenham Sports
President
KRYSTEN SMITH

Serving as President of Cheltenham Sports is a tremendous privilege and personal joy. I am deeply honored to work alongside a dedicated group of volunteers who share my passion for fostering athletic opportunities and building a sense of community through sports. Our programs not only develop skills and sportsmanship but also create lasting memories and friendships for our young athletes and their families.

As the newly appointed President of the Cheltenham Sports board of directors, it is an honor to share with you the accomplishments and highlights of our organization



Growing the Game **BALL HOCKEY**

In late 2024, Cheltenham Sports announced that it was teaming up with the NHL's Philadelphia Flyers to bring the Flyers' Learn to Play Ball Hockey Program to Cheltenham in the spring of 2025.

Cheltenham Sports is honored to be part of the Flyers' efforts to introduce young players in the Philadelphia area to the sport of hockey and make the sport more accessible, convenient, and affordable for parents and young athletes throughout the region.

over the past year. Our 2024 Annual Report reflects the dedication, teamwork, and passion that make Cheltenham Sports a cornerstone of our community.

This year, we have continued to uphold our mission of providing athletic opportunities that foster growth, teamwork, and sportsmanship for the youth of Cheltenham. From soccer to basketball, ball hockey, and our new programs in wrestling and cheerleading, each has flourished thanks to the commitment of our volunteers, coaches, families, and participants.

In 2024, we were proud to see our travel basketball teams make it to the playoffs, with one team advancing to the championship game. We also celebrated three travel soccer teams that won their division championships. It's a privilege to see our young athletes develop not only their skills but also their character, perseverance, and love for sports.

As we reflect on our achievements, we also look ahead with optimism and determination. In 2025, we aim to:

- Increase enrollment in as many programs as possible
- Increase community engagement, including adding more volunteers
- Raise at least \$8,000 to help fund our programs through donations and sponsorships

These goals are only possible because of the incredible support we receive from our volunteers, donors, and partners. To each of you, I extend my heartfelt gratitude. Your contributions fuel our mission and inspire us to do more.

I am grateful to work with an extraordinary team of volunteers who give tirelessly to create meaningful experiences for our youth. Together, we will continue to build a vibrant and supportive environment where sports bring us together and empower our children to succeed both on and off the field.

Thank you for being an integral part of Cheltenham Sports. Here's to another year of teamwork, growth, and success.

With gratitude,

Krysten Smith
President, Cheltenham Sports

Thank You Nigel!

After 15 years on the Cheltenham Sports Board, most recently as Treasurer, Elkins Park's **NIGEL BLOWER** is stepping down. We thank him for his very long and valuable tenure of service to the community. Here are a few comments from Nigel as he moves on.



Cheltenham Sports: How did you first get involved with Cheltenham Sports?

Nigel Blower: Having grown up in England playing soccer (albeit not at a high level) I wanted my son to be able to experience the game too. When he was four, we looked around for options and found Cheltenham Sports. At that time registration was all in person, and during the registration process was able to get to meet the people who ran the club — after some friendly arm twisting I volunteered to be a coach for the U5 program. Then after coaching for a while I got involved in the adult soccer group which is a casual pickup program made up mostly of the parents and coaches.

CS: Fifteen years is no small commitment. What is it about volunteering for the club that led you to commit so much time?

NB: While my son was in the program it was easy to be committed — he played in the intramural program and a couple of years in travel. During that time I joined the board and helped run the club. I think it's an important community resource; we are lucky in this township to have a lot of options but having a low-cost, low-stress option for children to play sports is important. I have also made a lot of good friends and learned a lot too.

CS: What are the key changes/improvements you have seen in the club over time?

NB: Couple of big trends — we used to be very dominated by the soccer program, which in itself was primarily a fall activity (with some spring games for travel teams). Now we have thriving basketball and roller hockey programs and have recently started cheer and wrestling programs. Additionally there are activities year round now to keep skills fresh.

The primary challenge for the club is that it's harder to rely on parent volunteers to fulfil coaching roles. Historically we have been able to keep registration fees very low because we are an all-volunteer organization, but recent-

ly we have had to rely more on outside coaching support. That can increase the quality of our programs but also increases the price point.

The change to online registration has made a lot of the administration easier for parents and club volunteers, but it also has some challenges — it removes some of the face to face discussions we used to have at registration and also encourages people to wait until the last minute to register. So we need to be very flexible now.

CS: As the club looks to the future, what do you think should be the club's priorities?

NB: I'd like to see us continue to be a community resource, providing as many sporting options for local children as possible. There is always a discussion to be had on how competitive our travel teams should be — but realistically, if you are looking for a path to college scholarships or professional sports, there are elite programs available elsewhere (albeit at much higher costs).

I'd like us to continue to focus on providing sports options for girls at all ages, trying to field girls travel teams and ensuring that our approach is welcoming for girls.

I'd like us to continue to encourage children to try multiple sports and not specialize too early.

CS: Any last thoughts, fond memories you would like to share?

NB: Some of my best memories are from coaching the younger teams and then celebrating with them at the end of the season. I really enjoyed playing pickup soccer with other coaches — at least until my knees rebelled!

Some of my best learnings are from people who have given a huge amount of time to the club over the years and have kept it going through all the changes. I'd especially call out Bruce Rangnow for this — Bruce's children played years ago, but he has continued to give back and is the unsung hero of our operation. Everyone who has been involved in the club owes a debt of gratitude to Bruce!

**DONATE
NOW!**

Please donate what you can by going to cheltenhamsports.org/donations. Or by mailing a contribution to Cheltenham Sports, Attn: Sponsorship P.O. Box 211 Cheltenham, PA 19012. And thank you for supporting this vital community effort that has benefitted the young people of Cheltenham Township for generations.