

# SASH

## HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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### World Cup qualifying: A familiar story

*In a few weeks, the United States will play Guatemala in Washington to begin what it hopes will be a long journey, 16 games long, through the qualifying rounds of the 1998 World Cup. The United States has drawn a tough group of opponents for the round that will be played this fall. Guatemala, Costa Rica and Trinidad all were in the final CONCACAF qualifying group that the United States struggled through in 1989.*

*The last World Cup qualifying game that the United States played was nearly seven years ago, the dramatic victory over Trinidad on Nov. 19, 1989 that boosted the Americans into the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy.*

*But while it has been a long time since 1989, the United States is no stranger to World Cup qualifying. This will be the 13th time that the United States has played in the qualifying rounds of the World Cup. And with the sometimes agonizing process about to begin again, this seems an appropriate time to review the history of those previous journeys.*

*But there isn't room here for all 12 of those. So, we'll just give you the first six in this issue of the SASH newsletter. And if the United States gets through its group this fall into the final CONCACAF group next year, we'll give you the other six in a few more months.*

#### 1934

Many people think that the United States' game against Mexico in Rome in 1934 was part of the World Cup finals. But actually, it was a qualifier. The United States' entry was received late by FIFA, which ruled that the Americans could enter, but that they would have to travel to Italy to play their a qualifying game against Mexico, which had eliminated Cuba a few months before. So the Americans and Mexicans went to Rome knowing that one of them would be turning right around for home after the game.

This was not really all that strange. That year, the World Cup was a single-elimination competition, so even the winner of the United States-Mexico game was guaranteed only one more game after that one.

The United States had an easier time in that game, on May 24, 1934, than it ever has in World Cup qualifying since, thanks to Buff Donelli, who was a late addition to the American lineup. The Western Pennsylvanian put in all four of the United States' goals in the 4-2 victory that earned the Americans the dubious honor of facing Italy in the first round of the World Cup itself. Donelli got the first goal of the game in the 15th minute, and then made the score 2-1 in the 30th minute, 3-1 in the 73rd minute and 4-2 in the 87th minute.

Three days later, the Americans were eliminated from the World Cup by Italy, 7-1, with Donelli getting the only American goal. Both the United States-Mexico game and the United States-Italy game were played at the PNF Stadium in Rome, named for the then-ruling National Fascist Party.

#### 1949

The Americans just barely escaped this time. The North American Championships, held in September 1949, served as a World Cup qualifying tournament (CONCACAF had not yet been formed). Mexico, the United States and Cuba were the only participants, and two of the three were to qualify for the World Cup. The tournament was a double round-robin, with each of the three teams playing each of the others twice. All of the

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games were played at Mexico City's Olympic Stadium, which had that name despite the fact that it didn't host the Olympics for another 19 years.

The United States got off to a poor start, losing to Mexico by 6-0 on Sept. 4. On Sept. 14, it recovered a bit, gaining a 1-1 tie with Cuba on a goal by Frank Wallace. However, the Americans still were in third place, tied with Cuba on points but trailing the Cubans on goal difference.

The Americans' position became even more risky on Sept. 18 when they suffered a 6-2 defeat to Mexico, which clinched first place in the tournament for the Mexicans. John Souza and Ben Watman scored the American goals.

However, the United States team came through in fine style in its final game on Sept. 21, scoring a 5-2 victory over Cuba to move past the Cubans into second place. Cuba could have regained second place in the final standings by upsetting Mexico in the final game of the tournament four days later, but Mexico won that game, 3-0, and the Americans were on their way to the World Cup in Brazil (and soccer history in Belo Horizonte).

The American goals in the 5-2 victory over Cuba came from Walter Bahr in the 15th minute, John Souza in the 23rd, Peter Matevich in the 25th and 35th (to give the United States a 4-0 lead), and Frank Wallace in the 49th.

### 1954

The Americans' bid to qualify for their second consecutive World Cup finals was over almost before it began, particularly because only one team would advance this time from a group that included the United States, Mexico and Haiti.

And after the United States' lost its opening game to Mexico, 4-0, on Jan. 10, 1954 in Mexico City, the Americans were left with only the slimmest of mathematical chances of qualifying, largely because Mexico had already played its two games against Haiti, and won both of them. The win over the United States on Jan. 10 gave Mexico six points in the standings, while the Americans still had none.

Four days later, again in Mexico City, the Mexicans made it official that they would be the team going to the World Cup in Switzerland when they beat the United States again, 5-1. The only American goal was scored by Bill Looby.

The United States' two games against Haiti were academic, since both teams had been eliminated, but the Americans won them both, 3-2 on April 3 and 3-0 in April 4, both in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Of the six American goals, three were scored by Looby, and one each by Chico Chacurian, Cornelius Casey and Ruben Mendoza.

### 1958

The American drought continued, with the second of what was eventually to become nine consecutive eliminations. In the first round of qualifying, played in 1957, the Americans were grouped with Mexico and Canada, and they got no farther than that.

Defeats to Mexico of 6-0 in Mexico City on April 7 and 7-2 in Long Beach, Calif., on April 28 put the United States on the ropes. Ed Murphy scored both American goals in the 7-2 game.

However, the United States still had a tiny mathematical chance, and for the two games against Canada, the USSFA took the unusual tactic of fielding a single club as the national team, rather than an all-star selection. The club was Kutis of St. Louis, which that year won both the U.S. Open and U.S. Amateur Cups. The tactic didn't work. Canada won by 5-1 in Toronto on June 22 and 3-2 in St. Louis on July 6. The American goals came from Harry Keough, Ruben Mendoza and Jimmy Murphy. The fact that the June 22 game was Canada's first full international since 1926 didn't help the Americans' spirits any.

### 1962

The results of the United States' qualifying competition, held in November 1960, were no different from the previous two, but at least this one was mercifully quick: two games, both against Mexico, and out.

The Americans did pull a bit of a surprise in the first game, held in Los Angeles on Nov. 6. They rallied from a 3-0 deficit to gain a 3-3 tie. Helmut Bicek cut the Mexicans' lead to 3-1 with a goal just before halftime. Carl Fister scored in the 76th minute on a header from a corner kick. And Al Zerhusen tied the score in the 85th minute when he outraced the Mexican goalkeeper to a loose ball and slipped it past him.

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The United States' second-half comeback may have been helped by Mexican overconfidence after they took their early 3-0 lead, but the Mexicans allowed no repeat performance in the second leg, played on Nov. 13 in Mexico City. Again they were up by 3-0 after 40 minutes of play, but this time that was the end of the scoring, and the end of the road for the United States in this World Cup.

### 1966

This time, the United States began with a three-team round robin, the opponents to be Mexico and Honduras, and there was no doubt that Mexico was the favorite to advance to the next round. By the time the United States played the first of its four games, against Mexico in Los Angeles on March 7, 1965, Mexico had played and won both of its games against Honduras, and already had a substantial lead in the standings.

The Americans gave Mexico a fight, actually taking a 2-1 lead on two goals early in the second half, by Walter Shmotolocha in the 49th minute and Helmut Bicek in the 61st. But Mexico came back to gain a 2-2 tie and push the United States to the brink of elimination.

The Mexicans pushed the Americans over that brink on March 12 in Mexico City, when they won by 2-0 to clinch the group and leave the United States' two games against Honduras as an academic exercise. Both of those two games were played in Honduras, on March 17 and 21. The United States won the first, 1-0, on a goal by Ed Murphy, but had to settle for a 1-1 tie in the second, with Murphy again scoring the American goal. So the United States finished with an actually fairly respectable 4 points in the final standings, to 7 points for Mexico and 1 point for Honduras.

## Membership Notes

The last page of this newsletter is a form that you can use to renew your SASH membership for 1997. The deadline for renewing your membership is April 1. All 1996 members will be sent the Winter 1997 issue of the newsletter regardless of whether they have yet renewed for 1997.

The SASH membership rate for 1996 remains at \$10. Please return the membership form, along with your payment, to SASH, c/o Albert Colone, 11 Ford Ave., Oneonta, N.Y. 13820.

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The SASH meeting that was held in Oneonta on Sept. 28 was not a well attended one, to say the least, and confirmed that despite the schedule problems of the last two years, Hall of Fame Week is still the way to go for our annual meeting, rather than having it at a different time. And Al Colone confirms that the Hall of Fame has already set the dates for next year's Hall of Fame Week (Thursday, June 12 to Sunday, June 15) and will insist on staying with them this time.

However, we still plan to have a SASH gathering during the convention of the National Soccer Coaches Association of American convention in January in Nashville, Tenn. In each of the past two years, the SASH meeting has been given an assigned place on the NSCAA convention schedule, and we expect that it will be the same again in Nashville. Officially, these have been listed for the past two years as SASH executive board meetings, but plenty of SASH members who were not members of the executive board have attended and participated, and we hope that many will do so again.

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Three positions will be up for election in next year's SASH election. They are president (currently held by Roger Allaway), treasurer (currently held by John Biggs) and one of the four director positions (currently held by Ray Bernabei). Executive director Al Colone has agreed to again serve as a one-man Nominating Committee to conduct the election, which will be held next spring. If you are interested in running for one of the three positions named above, please contact him at the National Soccer Hall of Fame, 11 Ford Ave., Oneonta, N.Y. 13820 or (607) 432-3351 to let him know that you want to be on the ballot. The election will be held by mail.

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Please enter me as a member of the Society for American Soccer History for the year 1997. My check for \$10, payable to SASH, is enclosed.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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Please return this form to SASH, c/o Albert Colone, 11 Ford Ave., Oneonta, N.Y. 13820.