

# SASH

## HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

---

Newsletter of the Society for American Soccer History. Number Three. Summer 1994.

---

*In the spring issue of the SASH Historical Quarterly, we printed the first installment of Len Oliver's paper on Philadelphia soccer a half-century ago. That installment covered street soccer and youth teams as he saw them as a player. In this second installment, he's a bit older, playing with other teenagers, but often against adult teams.*

### **AMERICAN SOCCER DIDN'T START WITH PELE: PHILADELPHIA SOCCER IN THE '40s AND '50s**

by Len Oliver

#### **Philadelphia Junior Soccer: Travel Teams of the '40s**

We didn't call them travel or select teams then, just Lighthouse Juniors playing in the 20-team, two-tiered Philadelphia Third Division, or Junior League. We played a full season, non-stop, from September to June, with few games called for inclement weather--a schedule that gave us close to 40 games a year, equivalent to any European youth program.

Since Philadelphia was a neighborhood city, populated by ethnic groups attracted by job opportunities, particularly in the textile mills, along with plentiful housing, organized soccer in the city reflected the city's ethnic/neighborhood mix. Teams came from Cardington in West Philadelphia, Nicetown in the North Philadelphia area, Germantown in the Northwest and numerous neighborhoods like Kensington and Harrowgate in the hotbed of soccer, Northeast Philadelphia, with its large concentration of immigrants. As the ethnics moved out of the city to the suburbs north of the city, teams like the Erzgebirge Club for the Germans and the Ukrainian Club grew up to serve their youngsters.

Unlike our modern youth soccer breakdown of U-19, U-18, U-17 and so on, the Philadelphia Third Division simply went up to 18 years old; anyone younger could play, whatever his age. The league was affiliated with the Philadelphia Soccer League, composed of three divisions--Juniors, Second Division, and the First Division--the top amateur grouping. No USYSA, no AYSO, no state youth soccer associations unlinked with the top-level amateur clubs. Once you started with the Juniors, you were expected to move up the ladder--there were always older teams to play for. The Eastern Pennsylvania District was affiliated with the United States Soccer Football Association (now the United States Soccer Federation), founded in 1913 to oversee soccer in the U.S. and the FIFA-sanctioned body for soccer in our country.

Our team was coached by my cousin, Tom Oliver, a star with the Philadelphia Nationals pro team. We received little instruction, no overlapping or diagonal off-the-ball runs, no "numbers down" games, no Coerver moves. We built these features into our game by instinct, without instruction. We had only one system of play--the old 2-3-5, with a great workload falling on the inside forwards and the halfbacks, especially the center half. Our practices were simply a continuation of street soccer--we played, practiced moves, and played some more. No drills, no warmups, no cones, no manuals, no pennies--just play, experiment, and always go for goal.

## SASH Historical Quarterly

We were rugged, urban kids who wanted to win and had the skills to back up our cockiness. We won two straight Philadelphia Junior League titles, going on to win two consecutive National Junior Cup titles in 1948 and 1949, running up a string of 36 straight victories.

In those days, the referees, all former players, let us play. No cards, just occasional verbal warnings to "Hold it down" to keep control or to ensure fairness. But you had to be tough. There was a lot of intimidation, occasional fights, lots of heckling from the sidelines. But the referees knew us and knew the dynamics of the game--we settled matters on the field with our feet. Some of the refs had colorful names, like "Offsides Smitty," known in his playing days as the forward who couldn't stay outside. Since we didn't have registration cards with photos, we would tell a ref new to us that the first scorer's name was "Bill Zook," who incidentally came in second in league scoring one year--and didn't exist!

The National Junior Cup competition pitted city against city in one-game knockout competitions. We hosted the Schumacher Club of St. Louis in 1948, winning 1-0 on a direct corner kick before 2,000 fans, and then defended our title the following year by defeating the Windsor S.C. 2-1 in a rainswept night game before 250 fans at St. Louis' Public Schools Stadium. This game stands out as a lasting soccer memory. Windsor scored with two minutes remaining. Somehow, we came back with two goals in one minute in the mud, forcing our way into the box to win our second title--a truly memorable soccer moment for a 14-year-old player.

After two years in the Junior Division, we were ready to move up to the next level of competition. That's the way it was done--when you were ready, you played up.

### Playing With the Big Guys: Amateur Soccer in the Early '50s

Club teams normally moved up to the Second and First Division amateur ranks in Philadelphia. Our Lighthouse Junior team took a different path. We left the Lighthouse Club to play under the banner of the professional Philadelphia Nationals. We played as the Fairhill S.C., kids playing against seasoned veterans, many who had learned soccer in their native lands. Whenever I am asked today by anxious parents if their kids should "play up," I give the Fairhill S.C. example. Some of us were only 16 years old, playing against 30-year-old men. We won the Second Division and then went on to win the citywide, prestigious Palmer Cup, symbolic of supremacy in amateur soccer in Philadelphia.

We often trained with the Philadelphia Nationals, observing and emulating the pros, and our skills and sense of the game grew apace. We never discussed tactics. By this time, we had adopted the stopper or "Third Back," known as the "W-M" system, a change introduced by Herbert Chapman, manager of the great Arsenal teams in England in the early '30s. The W-M was designed to counteract the new offside law, and lasted for three decades until the Brazilians introduced the world to the 4-2-4 in the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. As a young GI, I saw Brazil play in that World Cup in Goteborg, marvelling at their skills with the ball, their dexterity, and their unusual formation with only two halfbacks.

Without coaching schools, soccer newsletters, papers like *Soccer America* and the *NSCAA Soccer Journal*, and almost all volunteer coaches--ex-players who coached from intuition, innovations took a long time to become reality. Soccer traditions die slowly, as we see even today as FIFA tinkers with the laws to increase scoring.

Just as today, whole families involved themselves with soccer, but it was still a male-dominated sport. When the Fairhill S.C. met the First Division champion Kensington Bluebelles in the Palmer Cup final in 1950, we were the kids playing against the team of our fathers and uncles. The final, played at old Holmes Stadium, went into double overtime, and the younger legs prevailed 5-3. Our fathers and uncles talked about that game for years.

It eased the pain when some of us first-generation Scots-Americans played for the Bluebelles the following year. The Bluebelles discarded their veterans and filled the ranks with the kids. My brother and I were finally united with our father, the Bluebelles trainer. We had taken another step up the soccer ladder--all within the Philadelphia club structure.

With the Bluebelles in our first year, 1950-51, we were thrown into competition with seasoned players of Italian, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Armenian and German descent. Just a few years removed from the

## SASH Historical Quarterly

end of World War II, soccer in Philadelphia took on an even more ethnic flavor as European immigrants flowed into the city. Many of the players had played top-level competition in "the old country," and immediately raised the caliber of play in Philadelphia's amateur ranks. We now signed USSFA forms, but with no cards and no photos, registration showed a more casual approach to the game than found today.

The Philadelphia First Division clubs had their share of characters in those days, seemingly missing from our do-it-by-the-book soccer of today. We seem unable to tolerate strong individualism. Players like "Cocky" O'Kane, whose crossed eyes became disconcerting to defenders trying to predict the direction of his passes. But call him "Cocky" and you had an immediate brawl. There was "Chippy" McLaren, known for the deadly accuracy of his chipped passes, or "Sox" Flynn, whose socks never stayed up, and "Dutch" from Germany. Even the team names had a international flavor--Juventus, Pulaski, Inter, Celtics and the Polish Falcons.

This was a time in the late '40s and early '50s when the American Soccer League sponsored foreign touring teams, so we could see Liverpool F.C. with the great Billy Liddell in 1948 and his long, weaving runs down the wing. But our real heroes were Walter Bahr and Bennie McLaughlin, who led the Philadelphia Nationals to three titles in four years, Jack Hynes of the New York Americans, another Hall of Famer, and Ray McFaul and Gil Schuerholz of the old Baltimore Americans. Just a few years later, in the mid-'50s, we were playing with Bahr and McLaughlin, the best players of their day. We were playing against the likes of Johnny Carey, great right half of the touring Manchester United, and Max Morlock, German international with Nuremburg F.C. Nuremburg defeated the Philadelphia All-Stars in 1955 before 5,000 spectators by an 8-5 score, with Morlock scoring four goals against me. As youngsters, like the players on our U-23s and our U.S. national team today, playing against this level of competition gave us the confidence to take on anyone.

Some of us were selected to compete in the 1952 Olympic tryouts in New York and St. Louis for the team to go to Helsinki. National teams in those days were selected by a USSFA National Selection Committee, which conducted the tryouts. No ODP programs, no state or regional select teams, no U-17 or U-20 teams, no women's teams--just a Committee with all the major regions, the colleges, and the Armed Forces represented. The Committee members selected players for the tryouts from their knowledge of their talents and their awareness of the need for geographic representation. Politics also played a role--"You put my player on and we'll take care of yours."

In the '52 Olympic final tryouts in St. Louis, I played with Jack Dunn and Lefty Didriksen from our original Lighthouse team in a tough, two-game series representing the East squad. We played on the same team with Ed and Clarkie Souza, players I had watched in awe as a youngster when Ponta Delgada came to town. They impressed me with their willingness to share the ball, their soccer smarts with "the kids" in the tryouts.

Throughout my youth career in soccer, I had played only two systems, either the 2-3-5 or the W-M with the stopper back. The 4-2-4, the 4-4-2 and the 4-3-3 were still to be invented. Coaches were ex-players, and coaching meant putting the team on the field. We always knew what we had to do. We never discussed systems of play or tactical play. With the amateurs, we received spending money, and even with the pros, we never received more than \$15-20 a game. We were fit, technically adept, and competitive. We loved to play and most of us continued in long careers into our 30s. Club soccer honed our skills, but school and college soccer brought us glory, brought out spectators, and provided us with the education we needed to have a life beyond soccer.

\*\*\*\*\*

*The third and final installment of Len Oliver's paper will appear in the fall issue of the SASH Historical Quarterly.*

## **SASH Historical Quarterly**

### **American Soccer History Symposium**

The second American Soccer History Symposium, held in Oneonta on June 10, was intended to study the history of past attempts to begin pro soccer leagues in the United States, and perhaps to draw some conclusions that might be of benefit to the newest attempt to start such a league, scheduled to begin next year.

The principal conclusion that the Symposium came up with, however, is one that might not be welcomed by Major League Soccer, which announced a partial lineup of franchises just five days later.

The leaders of the Symposium came to the nearly unanimous conclusion that the key to success for a pro soccer venture in the United States is a division into regional leagues, with national play only coming at the post-season playoff stage. The participants agreed that this is a formula that MLS doesn't seem inclined to follow.

At the end of the three one-hour sessions of group discussions on various leagues, the group leaders took to the podium one by one to present to the group as a whole points made in their discussions that seemed pertinent to the matter of the MLS effort. One after another brought up the same matter, regionalization, in particular to hold down runaway travel budgets and to promote regional rivalries that are a key to sparking fan interest.

Two comments were particularly telling: Jack Huckel noted how the financial health of the American Professional Soccer League (and the East Coast and West Coast leagues that joined to form it) has seemed to nosedive following the APSL's move in recent seasons from a regional to a national regular-season schedule. Colin Jose cited the way that the Toronto team in the North American Soccer League regularly drew larger, more rabid crowds for games against its heated regional rival Rochester, an average team, than for visits by more famous teams and players from distant cities.

The participants agreed that the 12-team set-up that MLS was on the brink of announcing did not seem likely to lend itself to the sort of regionalization that they felt carried the greatest chances of success for an American pro soccer league. Not surprisingly, given the interested in regionalization, a great deal of admiration was expressed for the way that the United States Interregional Soccer League is operating.

The group leaders at the symposium were Gordon Bradley, Wayne Rasmussen, Steve Flamhaft and Doug Verb on the NASL; Jose on the original ASL of the 1920s, Mario Machado on the later ASL of 1933-84, Huckel on the APSL, Mike Burnham on the American League of 1894 and Ron Griffith on the USISL.

*- Roger Allaway*

### **SASH Membership Meeting**

The first general membership meeting of SASH was held on June 9, 1994, the night before the Symposium, and quite a bit of business was conducted.

Much of the meeting was taken up with procedural matters. The proposed constitution and by-laws were adopted unanimously. The slate of officers proposed by the organizing committee was elected without opposition. Those officers are: President, Roger Allaway; Vice-president, Ric Fonseca; Secretary, Jack Huckel; Treasurer, John Biggs; and Directors, Walter Bahr, Raymond Bernabei, Colin Jose and Shawn Ladda.

Other procedural matters included a report from Executive Director Albert Colone on SASH's activities since the original organizational meeting in June 1993, a report from Colone on SASH's finances and the setting of the dues rate for 1995 at \$10.

Two items concerned the founder of SASH, Sam T.N. Foulds, who died in January. The membership passed a resolution of tribute to Sam, copies of which are to be sent to his family, and began discussions concerning a scholarship program in his memory to support research projects on American soccer history.

The meeting also made some decisions concerning future research projects.

### **SASH Historical Quarterly**

It was decided that the 1995 American Soccer History Symposium should be devoted to the subject of the contributions of immigrant groups to the growth of soccer in the United States and the role of ethnic soccer in that growth. Volunteering to serve on a committee concerning the symposium were Ric Fonseca, Geoff Coombes, Roger Allaway, Gordon Preston, Al Colone and Ed Borg.

It was decided that the society's first effort at putting together any sort of published material should be a booklet for sale by the Hall of Fame giving capsule biographies of the Hall of Famers. SASH members Colin Jose and Roger Allaway have begun compiling the material for such a booklet, with help from the Hall of Fame.

It was decided that the early groundwork should be begun for the eventual publication of a comprehensive history of the sport in the United States. SASH member Mark Salisbury is looking into compilation of materials aimed at eventually leading to such a book.

It was decided that SASH might serve as a research arm in the Hall of Fame selection process, if it were asked to research the qualification of possible candidates, but that it should wait to be asked rather than insinuate itself into the process.

It was decided that SASH might eventually begin collecting an archive of master's degree and doctorage theses on subjects related to American soccer history, and that a first step in doing this might be to begin compiling a bibliography of such writings.

It was decided that SASH should begin looking into ways to let the American soccer community know of its existence, in the hope of attracting additional membership.

The meeting proceeded in good order, despite a large agenda. The meeting was called to order at 7:50 p.m. and adjourned at 10:08 p.m.

*- Roger Allaway*

### **Correction**

In the last issue of the newsletter, the Hall of Fame inductees from the National Soccer Coaches Association of America were incorrectly given. The correct inductees were John Eiler and Jack Squires.