

The “Golden Age” of Utah Soccer: The 1930s

The 1930s was the Golden Age of Utah soccer, but just like the previous decade, it was also dominated by immigrants. The Ogden Blue Pines won the Daynes Cup in 1930, and Utah Copper came back to win it in 1931, but after that the series was dominated by three teams that were mostly composed of immigrants from Europe: the Caledonians, the Vikings, and a new entry, AC Germania. The Caledonians, composed of immigrants from the United Kingdom, was the oldest, being formed from the Caledonian Social Club, which was started in 1892. The first mention of the Caledonians soccer team was in 1913. The Vikings came next, in 1922. Finally AC (Athletic Club) Germania, which consisted almost solely of Germans and whose official language was German, was formed in 1927. Like the Vikings, it is still in existence today.

The Caledonian club has already been described in the period between 1900 and the end of the 1920s as a superior team, due to its many experienced players. They won the Daynes Cup four times from its inception in 1906 until 1927. The same held true during the 1930s. Their stars included a family of four, led by William E. “Billy” Fox. Along with his sons Harold, Moroni, and Ernest, Billy Fox formed the core of the award-winning Caledonian team through the early 1930s.



Billy and Ernest Fox

Billy, who had learned the sport in his native England and played for almost 30 years, was a defensive back, while Harold played outside left forward. Both Moroni and Ernest were versatile, all-around field players. Ernest and Moroni also played for the Oregon Short Line team for a short time, and by 1932 Moroni had joined the Vikings, becoming one of the few players on that team who were not of Scandinavian descent. Fox and the others, virtually all of whom were either natives of the United

Kingdom or descended from UK families, won the Daynes Cup and State Championships in 1935 and 1936.

The Vikings soccer club was started by Norwegian Victor Johansen in 1922, and played through the 1920s without much notable success. By the 1930s, however, Johansen had built up a club of excellent players and it showed in their wins of the state championship for three years straight, from 1932-1933. By

soccer club Utah's best known slopes such as Engen; Einar Hvalstad, and the world of jumping, all of household names, championships all Engen is often of Utah skiing, for



1932, the Vikings boasted some of skiers, stars on the Alf, Karre, and Sverre Fredbo; Halvar Oskar Andreason. In competitive ski these men were vying for national through the 1930s. Alf thought of as the father starting the popular

Deseret News Vikings vs. Caledonians, 1930s ski school, and for helping choose the site for Sun Valley and Snow Basin ski areas. Today the Alf Engen Ski History Museum in Park City honors his accomplishments in winter sports. But according to his son Alan, those who knew him well

thought that Alf was actually a better soccer player than a skier. He was already a celebrity in his native Norway as a soccer star when he came to the U.S. in the 1920s, and quickly came to stand out as the most versatile player on the Vikings team as a center midfielder. He could score from thirty yards out with either foot, and was known for his ability to head the ball into the net. His brothers, Sverre and Karre, were also part of this powerhouse team.



Alf Engen (4th from left) on Norwegian team, 1927

AC Germania was established in 1927 as a social club for German immigrants. The official language was German, and the soccer club was formed in 1928. One of its standout stars was Helmuth Fluehe, from

Einbeck, Germany. His parents told him that he was born with soccer shoes on his feet, so he was already an experienced player by the time he immigrated to Salt Lake City in 1929. Fluehe was playing for AC Germania in a game against the Caledonians within one hour of his arrival in Salt Lake City. He scored the only goal in a 1-0 win over the Callies that day, but soon switched teams to play for the Vikings, where he became close friends with Alf Engen. After four years with the Vikings, he went back to AC Germania, and played for them for the next seven years, leading them to Daynes Cup and State Championships in 1937, 1938, and 1939. Helmuth was one of the few people to keep playing soccer in Utah during World War II, and occasionally played against the German POWs at Fort Douglas. Fluehe was later inducted into the Utah Soccer Hall of Fame.



Helmuth Fluehe (left) in his prime as a soccer player. Helmuth Fluehe photo

AC Germania also had a reputation for contentiousness, however, sometimes protesting games and otherwise questioning the decisions of referees, which is uncommon in soccer. In 1932, for instance, they filed an official protest with the Utah Soccer Football Union over a game against the Callies held on May 1st, claiming that two Callie goals were illegal. No record exists of how that particular tempest in a teapot was resolved, but other examples exist in the



record of AC Germania causing ripples in the Utah soccer pond. Even though these three teams were the powers in state championship play, they were not the only teams playing soccer in Utah. Nor were the Daynes and Schubach Cups the only trophies



to be won on the soccer fields. Germania vs. Caledonians, 1930s. Moroni Fox behind the player with the ball.

Hollandia was still in existence, and occasionally became a threat to the big three, especially in the fall league play. And not all teams were based solely on nationality. The mining companies were still sponsoring teams, such as the Bingham team, which later became Utah Copper, and a new entry sponsored by U.S. Mines. They contended for Schubach Cup honors on several occasions in the 1930s. Others were sponsored by business, such



Salt Lake Telegram Trophy

as Singer Sewing Machines and a local car dealership, Barr Chevrolet. The latter team especially had some success in Strand Cup and Schubach Cup games, and featured a star player, Bass Van Dongen from Holland, who later had a trophy named for him. Ogden's Blue Pines competed, but despite their success in winning state championships in the late 1920s, they were not able to repeat those wins. They remained at the bottom of the standings in all leagues and never again won a state championship or other league title. After a few years, they changed their name to the Ogden Blue Stars. It didn't seem to do them much good. In a 1933 game against the champion Vikings, the Ogden team was beaten by a humiliating score of 16-2, almost unheard of for a soccer game. Park City was another club that never could muster any wins and had a hard time even playing games. Finally, even the Utah State Prison had a team composed of inmates, called the Benders.

They played only exhibition games at the Utah State Prison in Sugarhouse, and were not involved in any league play; the joke was that they only played home games.

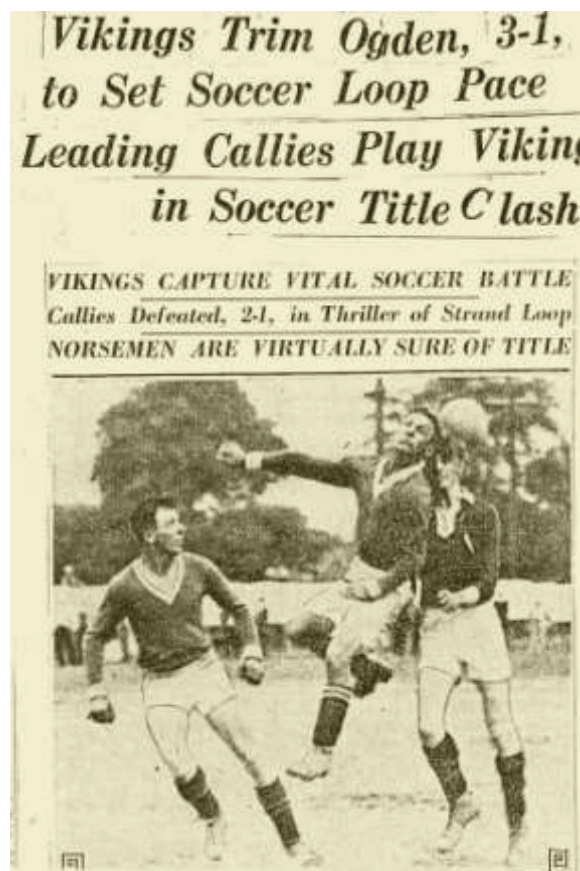
All through the 1930s these teams contended in front of large crowds for the springtime Daynes Schubach Cup. These by two others, the Strand and the *Salt Lake Telegram* which was also for spring famous Utah sportsman another Norwegian, and Club. Strand later Utah Soccer Union. The other fall league cup, and though the big three were these other trophies, they they were for the state won the Telegram Cup in Hollandia and the Oregon Short Line team both won the Strand trophy.



Strand Trophy

Cup and the autumn two series were soon joined Cup, started in 1928, and Cup. The Strand Cup, time play, was named for Marthinus "Mark" Strand, founder of the Utah Ski became the head of the Telegram Cup was the was started in 1931. Even usually contenders for were not so dominating as championship. Utah Copper 1931, for instance, and

These years Utah soccer fans; soccer appeared *Tribune* and *Salt* almost a daily on games, teams' chances profiles of the attention to players reached a be equaled until Salt Lake in 2004. played at the Fairgrounds, in at Ogden's where a soccer the first in the specifically for there were as games played on



were big ones for articles about in the *Salt Lake Telegram* on basis, with reports analysis of the for the season, and players. Media soccer teams and level that would not the advent of Real Games were Utah State Fairmont Park, and Monroe Park, stadium was built, state built soccer. At times many as three a single weekend—

with occasional double header games on Sundays--and as many as two or three thousand spectators turned out for these games, despite the often adverse weather. While these numbers are not large compared to the hordes that would attend an American football game, they are still indicative of soccer's popularity during this period.

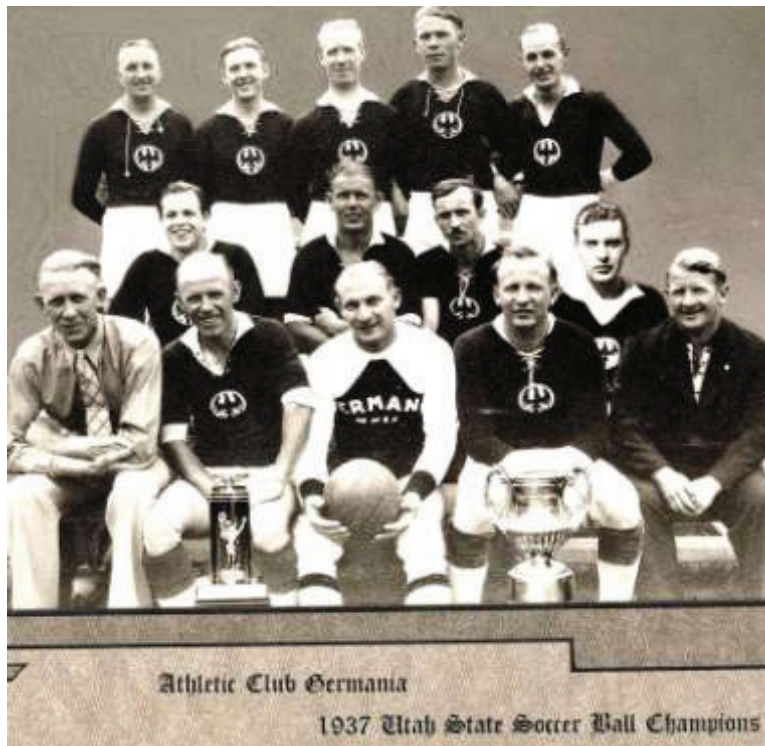
Semi-professional league play was not the only soccer game in Utah, either. Murray, Cottonwood, and Holladay, small towns in the Salt Lake valley, also formed soccer teams for both boys and girls. A junior high league played games in the Salt Lake valley all through the 1920s, with tournaments between the various schools. In eastern Utah, in the town of Vernal, school groups like the Uinta Girls Athletic Association formed intramural soccer teams that participated in tournaments in the latter part of the decade. Soccer was also being played in other small towns outside the Wasatch front, such as Richfield and Monroe in Sevier County, as well as in remote Garfield County. Park City was another town where girl's soccer teams competed in intramural soccer tournaments. "The purpose behind these competitive games," noted an article in the *Park Record* "is to promote sportsmanship and physical efficiency." The Park City intramural teams boasted names such as the Amazons, the Victorians, the Dynamite Red Streaks, the Dames, and the Fleet Footers. Another soccer venue was in the CCC camps that sprang up all over Utah during the Depression. Tackle football was prohibited, so the men in the camps often played soccer games between camps. Sometimes the players got their games confused, as was noted in the Garfield County newspaper in 1936: In a baseball game between the Duck Creek CCC camp and Panguitch High School, "Neil Wilcox, a sturdy soccer player of the old school, headed a ball beautifully in the outfield, and we may safely assert that had he been wearing the right kind of hat, it would have proved the most sensational catch of the day."



Butte, Montana Hard Rock Miners, 1930

In the early 1930s, teams of Utah all-stars sometimes played interstate friendly games with similar teams from other states. In 1930, for instance, one such all-star team took on all-star teams from Sacramento, California; Butte, Montana, and even a team from Blazon, Wyoming, and beat them all.

As a September 1930 article noted, “Taking cold figures as a criterion, the brand of soccer played in Utah is at least slightly better than that played anywhere in the west, and one would have to go into the eastern part of the country to find a team capable of defeating the Utah all-star eleven.” Occasionally a Utah team would travel out of state, such as when an all-star team traveled to California to play the Los Angeles Vikings at Loyola Stadium in 1934. On such occasions, the Utah team would play in the colors of one of the local teams, such as AC Germania, but would fill out the roster with players from other Utah teams, which accounts for the presence of Alf and Karre Engen, as well as Moroni Fox, in some photos of the German club of the period.



Germania all-star team, 1937.

(Alf Engen, center, middle row; Moroni Fox, middle row, 2nd from right; Karre Engen, top row right.)

[photo courtesy Alan Engen]

The Engens and Fox were such talented players that they were paid to join another team for an all-star game, and during the Great Depression, any such income was welcomed. Such interstate play largely ended as the Great Depression deepened, but soccer in Utah went on throughout the 1930s. It was not always easy, though. Sometimes it was the weather that interfered, with either mud or snow causing games to be postponed, and at other times the Great Depression left potential players and clubs too strapped financially to participate. Occasionally players got involved in fights on the fields, resulting in suspensions and restrictions. Sunday play was always a contentious issue in Utah. Most teams, especially the immigrant teams, were largely made up of members of the LDS Church, and they did not want to play on Sundays. Although the Utah Soccer Union tried to resolve the issue, a solution to the problem was never found. Soccer also took a toll on its players, despite the claims by its advocates that soccer was a sport with very few injuries. You cannot have 22 men running full tilt on a muddy field and crashing into each other without bruises and cuts and occasional serious injury. Grass fields, such as those enjoyed by today's players, were a rarity; they were commonly dirt, cinders, or even blacktop. Ogden's



Alf Engen heads the ball

1927 team lost its star goalkeeper, Red Parsons, to hand and other injuries for much of the season, and one Kelly, who played for the Blue Pines, severely dislocated his shoulder in a defeat by Bingham in April of that year. They also played in heavy, ankle length boots imported from Europe that featured a hard toe with hobnails for traction. Shin guards, when they were used at all, were made of thin strips of bamboo inside a sleeve that was laced onto the calf. In *Soccerhead: An accidental journey into the heart of the American Game*, one player on a team in New Jersey described conditions in the 1930s that were essentially the same in Utah: "You never left a game...without a souvenir. A knot on your head or a few stitches. You didn't have these fancy plastic cleats back then. You played with nails in the soles of your shoes. Like upholstery tacks, right? And sometimes

they came out [and stuck in your leg]. So there was a fair bit of that on the field.” In the same book, the author comments on the balls used. “The ball back then was made of cowhide, and on the frozen tundra of a of a cinder oval in November it took on the force of a nine-pound cannonball. Even minor miscalculations could lead to major injury. Broken noses, broken legs, broken fingers, compound fractures, concussions, and back injuries were all common.”¹⁰ Peter Hughes, who played in Salt Lake City for the Caledonians in the 1950s, remembered that the leather ball would get so heavy when it was wet it took great force to pass it, and that if you headed the ball the wrong way, you were left with the marks made by the stitches for several days.



By the end of the 1930s, the tensions in Europe were beginning to be felt even on the far-off soccer fields of Utah. At a 1938 game between Germania and the Caledonians, played just after the Munich Crisis¹¹, the old antagonisms spilled over into the stands. A collision between two players on the field led to a fight between the players, and then “An old English lady and an old German lady...got so upset about the fight that they started to fight. They started to hit each other with the purses, to tear hair, and call each other names.”¹² Such displays were not the norm, however, and right up until the U.S. entered the war soccer was popular in Utah. After Pearl Harbor, however, soccer and other sports were largely set aside as Utahans joined in the war effort. For the duration, soccer became only a memory in most Utah communities. Daynes Cup and other league play

¹⁰ *Soccerhead: An accidental journey into the heart of the American game*. Pg. 90; 156-157

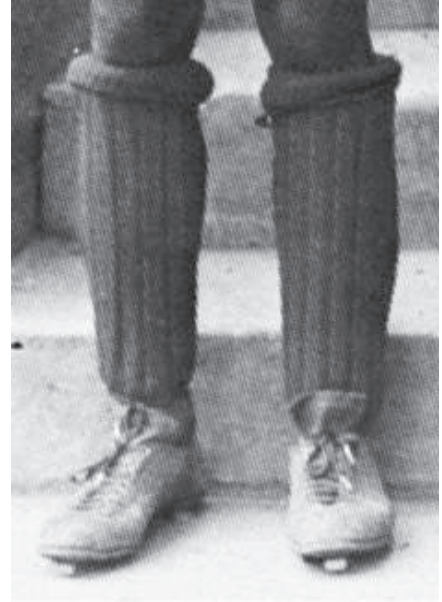
¹¹ Neville Chamberlin, Prime Minister of Great Britain, signed an agreement in Munich giving Adolf Hitler control of Czechoslovakia; known for the phrase “Peace in our time.”

¹² (“Helmut Rimmasch and Salt Lake’s German Community,” by Alan Kent Powell, *Beehive History* 11, 1985. p 21

was suspended, and the stadiums and fields that had seen such great soccer play all through the 1930s fell silent.



soccer boot,
1920s



shin guards,
ca. 1925