

***“THE  
FORWARDS  
DARTED LIKE  
FLASHES”***

**THE HISTORY OF  
SOCCER IN UTAH**



by

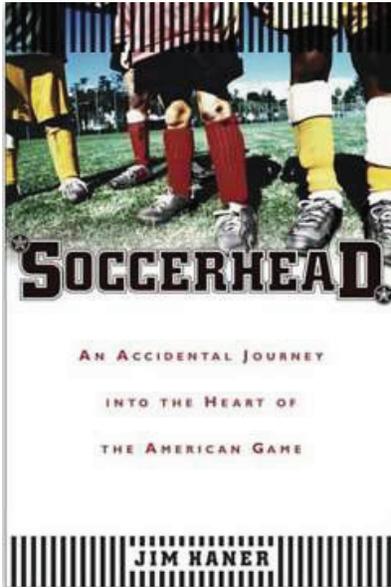
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# INTRODUCTION

Like most Americans, if I thought about soccer—which was very seldom—I thought that it was a “foreign” game, that had only come to this country in the 1970s with Pele’. Football, baseball, and basketball, those were American games. Upon reading the book *Soccerhead: An accidental journey into the heart of the American game*<sup>1</sup>, by



however, I realized how wrong I’d been. As he states, soccer is “...not a foreign game after all, ... it belongs to us by birthright, we owned it a long time ago, before we started forgetting everything we ever knew about our own history.” [p. 20] This collective amnesia about the history of soccer is as true in Utah as it is in the rest of the country, for I found a curious thing as I started to research this history: if you look at any history of Utah, even a history of sports, soccer seemingly does not exist. Noted Utah sports historian Dr. Larry Gerlach of the University of Utah claims little knowledge of Utah soccer history. Likewise, histories of

communities in Utah such as Eureka, in Juab County never even mention soccer, focusing instead on baseball teams. Yet as will be seen, Eureka was a powerhouse of soccer in the early 1900s and teams from there won the state championship on a number of occasions. Daily articles—sometimes more than one article a day—appeared in the Salt Lake and Ogden newspapers and in other newspapers around the state. The same is true for histories of counties and communities along the Wasatch front; they rarely mention soccer, even though games would draw thousands of fans throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and soccer writers such as William Service and H.O. Turville wrote detailed articles that appeared frequently in the *Salt Lake Telegram* and *Salt Lake Tribune*. Soccer is not mentioned in the *Utah History Encyclopedia* or any of the other general histories of the state. And it works both ways: the standard works on the history of soccer in America, Fould’s *America’s Soccer Heritage: A history of the game*<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> *Soccerhead: an accidental journey into the heart of the American game* by Jim Haner. New York : North Point Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *America’s soccer heritage: a history of the game* by Sam Foulds, Paul Harris. Manhattan Beach, California : Soccer for Americans, 1979

the *Encyclopedia of American Soccer History*<sup>3</sup> by Roger Allaway, do not mention Utah. The National Soccer Hall of Fame and Museum, in Oneonta, New York, had no files on Utah soccer history in their otherwise comprehensive soccer research library, save for one obscure article in the 1924 edition of the *Spalding Soccer Football Guide*. So most of the research for this history for the period of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the 1930s came from newspapers through the University of Utah's Utah Digital Newspapers Index. For the later years, oral histories with players and officials in Utah, as well as the list of championship teams and the Utah Soccer Hall of Fame, maintained by the Utah Soccer Association.

Soccer is an ancient game. A form of it was played in China, in ancient Greece, and on both sides of the Atlantic for hundreds, if not thousands of years. In England in the late Middle Ages, whole villages would get together for a wide ranging game of kicking a stuffed leather ball over hill and dale; the games would go on for hours and sometimes result in mayhem and even deaths. It got to the point that the Mayor of London banned football in 1314, and King Edward II followed suit a few years later. Football was officially suppressed but the passion for the game was so strong that it continued to be played, even on pain of imprisonment. When the Jamestown settlers came to this continent in 1609, they found the Native Americans playing something similar, in which villages would play on a field that was up to three miles long, using a ball made of stuffed deerskin, and wagering everything they owned on the outcome. These games would go on for several days. It was left to the Victorians in England to bring some dignity to soccer, as they tried to do to just about everything else, and the F.A., the Football Association, was formed in 1863. A similar governing body soon followed in this country, and within a decade college students and immigrants were playing soccer on the east coast of the US. With so many immigrants coming from England to Utah, soccer followed them, and the first team in Utah was formed in Salt Lake City in 1882 (by contrast, soccer was not introduced to Brazil until 1888.). From the 1890s to World War II, soccer was as big a sport in urban Utah as any other, and was played by people as diverse as roughneck miners in hardscrabble camps and school kids in small communities such as Monroe, Richfield, Vernal, and even Panguitch.

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<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopedia of American Soccer History* by Roger Allaway, Colin Jose, David Litterer. Lanham, Maryland : Scarecrow Press, 2001.

In the 1890s and early 1900s, mining communities dominated soccer in Utah. Teams from Eureka and Carbon County battled it out for the Daynes Challenge Cup, first awarded in 1906, with teams from Salt Lake, Ogden, and Provo. Eureka was a powerhouse of soccer for many years before World War I, and won both the Daynes Challenge Cup and the inaugural Schubach Cup. World War I stopped play, but after the war, soccer revived and the center of the action shifted to the Wasatch Front. All through the 1920s, competition intensified for the state championship, between teams of immigrants from Europe. The first was the Caledonians, a Salt Lake based club made up of immigrants from Great Britain: Welsh, Scots, and British. Next came the Vikings, formed by Norwegians Marthinus Strand and Pete Ecker in 1922, that contained most of Utah's famous skiers, such as Alf, Karre, and Sverre Engen; Einar Fredbo, Halvar Hvalstad, and Axel Andresen. AC Germania, a German-speaking social club, formed a *fussbalmannschaft* in 1927, followed quickly by Hollandia. These clubs fought against teams sponsored by the railroads and smelters, along with squads from Ogden and Park City.

By the 1930s, the "golden age" of Utah soccer, the immigrant teams had come to dominate soccer in Utah. The Caledonians were the first to rise to stardom, followed by the Vikings in the middle years of the decade, and then AC Germania took over during the later 1930s. These three squads controlled the league all through the years of the Great Depression and the first months of World War II. Now they also had new cups to play for, with the introduction of the Strand Cup and the *Salt Lake Telegram* trophy. Even though they were the powers in soccer, they were not the only teams fighting for the prizes. Hollandia was still a contender, as were the Ogden Blue Pines, the Park City team, and a new entry, a powerful, fast team from Bingham. Other teams at the time were sponsored by Barr Chevrolet, a local dealership, Singer Sewing Machines, and the Oregon Short Line Railroad. Games were played at Ogden's Lorin Farr Park, at Cummings Field and later Rice Stadium on the University of Utah campus, and at Fairmont Park in Salt Lake City, and drew crowds that numbered in the thousands.<sup>4</sup>

World War II again interrupted soccer's development in the state, with the only people playing the sport being German and Italian POWs in their camps. A few of the players from the champion teams of the 1930s still

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<sup>4</sup> In the course of research for this history, I compiled a list of over fifty teams in Utah, and that only covers up to World War II.

played, those that were not in the military or working in war industries. But the war almost killed off soccer in Utah altogether. The sport stayed alive in Utah largely through the efforts of one man, Hermann Neumann, a member of AC Germania. Neumann was a tireless advocate for soccer, even a “fanatic” about the sport. He made himself a pest at school board and county commission meetings, always badgering local officials to create soccer programs for Utah’s youth and set aside soccer fields. He started a high school program at West High School, and with the help of Arthur Zander, another AC Germania member, was successful in creating a Utah high school soccer league by the 1950s that included teams from South, East, West, Highland, Olympus, and East high schools. He also organized all-star teams to play against squads from neighboring states in exhibition games.

In the 1960s, soccer underwent a revival in Utah. It was still played by immigrants and sons of immigrants, but a new element had been added: Hispanic and other ethnic teams. The Incas, a team composed mostly of immigrants from South America, became a favored team in the 1960s, joined by two teams of Greek immigrants that made for some hard-fought contests. The Vikings and AC Germania were still active, and indeed are the only two clubs formed in the 1920s that are still in existence today. Dedicated players would meet every Saturday at Fairmont or Sunnyside Park for regular games. It was in the 1970s, though, that soccer suddenly took off and became what one journalist called “the sport that ate suburbia.” There were three reasons for this: a new wave of Hispanic immigrants, from Central America and Mexico who brought their national game with them; the rise of the youth soccer movement; and the passage of Title IX of the US Code, which brought girls and women into the game. The Latinos who came to Utah in increasing numbers were just as passionate about soccer as the Europeans, and today comprise a significant percentage of people playing soccer in Utah. Youth soccer, which had simmered from early beginnings in the 1920s, exploded in the 1970s as baby boomer parents found a game that their children could play without fear of injury or rejection. Today there are over 47,000 young people enrolled in youth soccer programs, and that doesn’t even count the junior high and high school programs. Finally, Title IX—even though it was fought by Utah school systems—meant that girls who wanted to play sports finally had one to call their own, which led to not only junior high and high school girls soccer teams, but the highly successful college teams fielded by BYU, the University of Utah, and other Utah colleges. It was also in the 1970s that efforts began to bring a professional soccer team to Utah. The first teams,

the Golden Spikers, was quickly followed by the Utah Pioneers in the 1970s. They were both short-lived, as was the Salt Lake Sting of the 1990s. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Utah Blitz showed real promise of bringing professional soccer to Utah, but despite winning national championships in 2001 and 2004, was ultimately caught up in world events and sadly, only lasted a few years. It wasn't until Major League Soccer granted an expansion franchise to Real Salt Lake in 2004 that professional soccer finally took root in the Beehive State. From those early days to the present, soccer has always had a home in Utah.