

SOCCER STRUGGLES IN UTAH: 1941 - 1960

Some of the stars of the 1930s, those who weren't in the military or in the war industries, still played soccer during World War II, but league play for the Daynes Cup was suspended for the duration. The only soccer games in Utah during World War II of which any record exists were played in the German and Italian POW camps that were found in many parts of the



Italian POW soccer team, Ogden, 1944
[Weber State University photo]

state. Helmuth Fluehe, who had been a standout player on the Vikings and AC Germania in the 1930s, remembered playing against the German POWs at Fort Douglas during the war. Both German and Italian prisoners formed soccer leagues and organized

tournaments during their incarceration. As the "Victory News," a newsletter published by the Ogden POW camp noted, "Soccer ball is a sport dear to the heart of many European countries. Italy is included in this category, therefore it is not surprising to learn the Italian Prisoners interned at this Depot are playing the game competitively; teams being formed from two compounds. ...A trophy, purchased from donations contributed by the teams is the object of strong competition."

The same was true among the German POWs at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City: "Sports were very popular among the prisoners, with soccer the most favored. A shortage of soccer balls presented some difficulty at first, so



Aerial view of former POW camp, University of Utah. The present Lady Utes soccer field is at the center of the photo; the Annex is to the right. The Fort Douglas parade ground is just above the camp.

[University of Utah Special Collections photo]

prisoners were forced to be resourceful and make their own out of small pieces of leather.” Proper balls and other equipment were later provided and by war’s end, there were twenty-four Italian teams alone. Interestingly, the present Lady Utes soccer field on the University of Utah campus is on the site of the old Fort Douglas POW camp, where German prisoners played soccer a half century ago.

After the war, soccer did not immediately revive in Utah; in fact, it almost died out altogether. Given its popularity before the war, it’s hard to fathom why this was so. In *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*, Andrei Markovits notes why he feels soccer never caught on in the U.S, mainly because it was crowded out by baseball and American football, which were perceived as “American” sports and thus received more subsidies from local governments; soccer was still viewed as a “foreign” sport. Institutional problems and petty factions in American professional soccer also contributed to this scenario, although this wasn’t as much of a factor in Utah as it was in the east and Midwest.¹³ But the first reason is probably the one that caused soccer to all but die out in Utah after World War II. People were tired of Europe and “foreign” things in general, and soccer unfortunately fell within that description.



Hermann Neumann
(USHS photo)

That soccer in Utah survived the immediate post-war years is attributed to the efforts of one man, Hermann Neumann of AC Germania. Born in Berlin in 1902, Neumann grew up playing soccer in Germany. He came to the U.S. in 1929 and almost as soon as he reached Salt Lake City, joined AC Germania. He was a member of the teams that won the state championships in 1937-1939, and was also selected for a traveling all-star team that played in California. Neumann also served as the club’s president for most of that period. Even after he stopped playing, Neumann was a referee and team manager and coach for the Germania

¹³ *Offside: Soccer & American Exceptionalism*. Andrie S. Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman. Princeton University Press, 2001. p. 52-53

eleven. Neumann was described as soccer “fanatic” by many of those who knew him. Willard Hansen, who played for the Vikings practically from the day he arrived from his native Norway in 1949 until he finally stopped in the 1980s, remembered one spring time game in particular, played at Fairmont



Herman Neumann with trophies
(USHS photo)

Park. As team manager, Hansen was in charge of getting enough players to form a team for the regular Saturday game, this time against Neumann’s Germania team. He called around and got a team together, but the night before the game a snowstorm moved in and dumped almost a foot of snow on the Salt Lake valley. Many of the Vikings players assumed that the game would be cancelled and didn’t show up; only seven Vikings arrived at the snowy field. Neumann showed up with a full team, and despite the conditions, insisted that a game be played. He drew out the field lines in the deep snow with his foot, and play started, but whenever the ball rolled on the field it gathered snow until it was about three times its normal size. After just a few minutes the ref called the game, despite Neumann’s protests.

Neumann was also a tireless advocate for soccer in high schools. Together with Arthur Zander, another member of AC Germania, he started the Utah High School Soccer Association, which at its outset included teams from West, South, East, and Highland High Schools in Salt Lake City. Within a few years he had fifteen high schools participating in a non-letter high school soccer league, and was able to organize games between high school all-star teams and teams from other states, such as Colorado. He was known for sometimes outrageous stunts to promote soccer, such as a parade



Neumann's soccer parade, 1961
(USHS photo)

he somehow got permission to hold before one of the all-star games. The parade started at West High School and continued down Main Street in Salt Lake City, all the way to Liberty Park, with soccer players from the high school teams waving signs and yelling at startled onlookers all the way. Neumann also made sure that scores from soccer games appeared in the newspapers, personally taking the score sheets on Monday and leaving them with cub sports reporter Mike Korologos.

In 1947, for the Utah centennial, Neumann organized another soccer extravaganza, when he arranged an exhibition game between a team of Utah all-stars, playing as AC Germania, and the San Francisco-based American Athletic Club Teutonia. The Utah team had a number of former stars on its roster, including Moroni Fox, Karre Engen, Helmuth Fluehe, Bass Van Dongen, and Oscar Andreason. There were actually two



Caledonians, 1950s
(Peter Hughes photo)

games: the main event, and a preliminary game between the Germania B team and a team from the Rotary Club-Y.M.C.A. from Salt Lake City. The first series was played at Derks Field in Salt Lake on July 25, and the teams met again in Ogden on July 27, 1947. By this time Teutonia was a champion team in California, while Germania was the Utah state champion for that year, so it was a well-attended contest, which the Utah team won by a score of 1-0. Just about anyone who played soccer in Utah from the period after World War II until the late 1960s has stories about Herman Neumann, universally known as “Herman the German.” In 1969, Neumann was honored by the *Deseret News* as “Mr. Soccer,” and after his death in 1971, an annual soccer tournament, the Herman Neumann Cup, was organized by the Utah Soccer Association.

By the start of the 1950s, interest soccer was beginning to revive in Utah. After the war, the state championship and the Daynes cup were separated, so winning one did not necessarily mean winning both. Utah

colleges also began to put together soccer teams for intramural and other games. In 1950, the Utah State University team traveled to Salt Lake to play the Vikings, and later played the Salt Lake SC, which consisted of players from many of the 1930s teams. The USU team was a multinational one with players from Palestine, Europe, and South America.

Alan Engen, Alf Engen's son--and a championship skier in his own right--was by this time a member of the University of Utah ski team, and later competed in the 1958 Winter Olympics. He remembers that along with University of Utah teammates Marvin Melville (also a member of the US Olympic team) and Jim Gaddis (an NCAA championship skier), soccer was the main form of training during the off-season. It was an incredible aerobic workout, and promoted flexibility in mind and body. Another Olympic skier who played intramural soccer at the University of Utah for training was Pete Karns, who later competed in the biathlon at the 1972 Olympic Winter Games. Another UofU Olympic skier, Bill Spencer, who was Karns' teammate on the 1972 Olympic biathlon team, remembered that the team was called the Explorers, which he noted was because they were the only non-immigrant team around. He also remembered that they never won a single game, but that it was great training.



Soccer on the quad at USU, 1950
(Utah State University photo)

By the time Daynes Cup play resumed in 1952—none of the other cups seemed to survive the war--some of the old teams had re-formed, such as the Vikings, Germania, and Hollandia, while some new ones had entered the contests, including Alemannia and Rapid SC, a Salt Lake team. The Caledonians were revived for a brief period in the 1950s, long



Intramural soccer, University of Utah, 1950s
[University of Utah Special Collections photo]

enough to win the Daynes Cup in 1953 and 1954, and a state championship in 1958, but the club was disbanded shortly after that. The Vikings, with an infusion of post-war immigrants from the Scandinavian countries such as Willard Hansen, Ole Gregerson, Olaf Johansson, and Jan Frederik Hansen—all members of the Utah Soccer Hall of Fame--resumed their former position on the top of the Utah soccer standings and won the state championship five times during the 1950s. They also won two Daynes Cup championships, 1955 and 1956, and retired the Van Dongen Cup after winning it five times. AC Germania won both a state championship in 1947 and the Daynes Cup in 1952, but after that dropped out of serious contention although they continued to play for years, and in fact are still in existence today. Hollandia was another familiar club name from the 1930s; they won the state title in 1950, 1953 and 1954, and continued in existence well into the 1970s. Rapid SC was a short-lived club that was formed in 1955 by players from Hollandia. They stayed together long enough to win a state championship in 1957 and a Daynes Cup in 1958, and then disbanded.

In 1952, soccer in Utah took another step toward revitalization when the Utah Soccer Association (U.S.A.) was formed by Clarence Linnert and others interested in advancing soccer in Utah. There had already been various soccer organizations in Utah that had come and gone, but the U.S.A. has survived to this day. Linnert served as the secretary of the group for a number of years. Bill Mead, who came to Salt Lake City from England in 1950, became president of the Utah Soccer Association in 1958, and made it what it is today. He found a small association with only ten teams and developed it into a league with two divisions. He was also instrumental in finding more fields for soccer teams, including the complex of three fields at Riverside Park. Mead changed the face of Utah soccer by adding teams comprised of Hispanic residents of Utah, and helped the Greek community establish two teams, Hellas and Apollo, although both of the latter were short-lived. Mead also worked with other state associations and established ties with the U.S. Soccer Federation, bringing Utah into the national soccer organization. Even with this renewal, however,

Utah All-Stars in San Francisco,
1953
(USHS photo)



soccer players still could not go down to the local sporting goods store and buy cleats, or “boots” as they were called then, shin guards, nets, and balls. Arthur Zander filled this need by ordering equipment from Europe and selling it out of the basement of his house across the street from Fairmont Park.

In 1953, an all-star team from Utah traveled to San Francisco to meet the American Athletic Club team Teutonia in a friendly match. The team traveled as AC Germania, but it was really a combination of players from all of the Utah teams. The reason there were other players was simple; some of them couldn't get time off to go, or couldn't afford to go, so the Utah team recruited other players to fill the roster. Peter Hughes, who by this time was playing for the Vikings, was one of the team members. He remembers driving all the way across Nevada and California in Stan Gill's car, with no air conditioning, on a two lane road, to play in the game. The team also included Stan Gill, Ed Weymann, Ole Gregersen, and Willard Hansen, all of whom would later be inducted into the Utah Soccer Hall of Fame. The preliminary game was played between Hakoah AC, a Jewish team from Israel, and a team from El Salvador. The Utah team won the contest 1-0, despite the fact that the California team had six Olympians on it. After the game, they got back in the car and drove all the way home, going back to work on Monday.



Program from 1953
All-Star game
(Peter Hughes photo)

Hughes's experiences during his tenure with the Caledonians and later the Vikings were typical of Utah soccer players of the time.¹⁴ He emigrated to the U.S. from England in 1953, arriving in Salt Lake City on a Tuesday. Asking around about opportunities to play soccer, he was directed to ZCMI, where he was told to speak to Clarence Linnert, a member of the Caledonians. Hughes stepped onto a soccer field the following Saturday, and played for several years with the Caledonians. Later, he went on an LDS Church mission, and while he was gone, the Caledonians collapsed and the club was disbanded. When he returned, he went to play for the Vikings, but it was a far cry from the glory days of the 1930s.

¹⁴ Oral interview with Peter Hughes, August 28, 2007

Gone were the days of extensive media coverage, crowds that numbered in the thousands, and multiple venues. The team consisted of about fifteen players, but no coach. They would meet at Liberty Park to train, with one of the players taking the lead in drills and calisthenics. He remembers that sometimes on twenty or so spectators would show up at games at Fairmont Park, the only place to play in those days. If any notice was taken of Utah soccer games by the media, it was a short article buried at the back of the sports pages, or an occasional photo when a team won a championship. Also, there were no substitutions allowed; you played the entire 90 minutes, unless you got hurt. The season lasted from August to March, because that was the way the game was played in



Vikings, 1951
(Willard Hansen photo)

Europe. Games were sometimes cancelled because of deep snow, but mud was rarely a reason not to play. They would drive to the field, change in the car, play the game in mud and snow, then drive to Snelgroves, where they celebrated with ice cream and milkshakes, this being Utah. Hughes even proposed to his wife in the car after one of these games. He also remembered that the style of play was different then; it was more offensive, with very little passing back to the defenders or the goalkeeper as there is in the modern game. Hughes moved to California in 1964, where he continued to play, not hanging up his boots until age 54. He, and so many others who played on Utah soccer teams in the 1950s, received no payment, no adulation from crowds, no mention in the newspapers or radio; they played because they loved the game.



Vikings, 1956. Willard Hansen, 3rd from left, front row

[Willard Hansen photo]

Willard Hansen was another who played in this era because he loved the game so much. After learning how to play in his native Norway, Hansen

endured the harsh years of German occupation during World War II.¹⁵ In 1949, he immigrated to the US, and was playing soccer in Salt Lake City for the Vikings almost as soon as he stepped off the train. Besides teammates, Hansen found a ready-made group of friends among the players in the Vikings. All of them loved soccer, and all of them loved the skiing in the Wasatch Mountains. Hansen remembered that a typical Saturday in the fall and winter would involve getting up before dawn to be up in the mountains when the sun came up, so they could hit the slopes at first light; then head back down to Fairmont Park around 1PM, for the soccer game; then, after a quick cleanup, drive to the Saratoga Resort and dance until the next dawn. Hansen also became the Vikings team manager over time, and noted that soccer was much less formal than it is now. The Utah Soccer Association set the schedules for the league games, so Hansen would call all of the Vikings players to let them know when the game was scheduled. They would show up at the appointed time, make sure the field was marked, and take up a collection from the players to pay



the referees. Players would contribute what they had, a dollar or fifty cents, and Hansen would take the money to the referee and ask if it was enough. The refs always said yes, and sometimes worked without payment. Hansen, along with Peter Hughes, traveled to Ely, Nevada, on a brutally hot Fourth of July one year to play an exhibition game. The townspeople had never heard of soccer, much less knew how to mark the

Vikings game, 1950s
(Willard Hansen photo)

field, so the players marked off the grass and dirt field on the edge of town, played in the hot sun, and then had a barbeque with the residents.

Hansen also remembered that occasionally they would play the Utah State prison team, the Benders, at the old Sugarhouse prison. The Vikings would enter the prison through the front gate, change into their uniforms,

¹⁵ Oral interview with Willard Hansen, September 6, 2007

and play the game on the prison yard. A standard joke was for the prisoners to kick the ball over the wall, and then all of them would raise their hands and say "I'll go get it!" Anything to play soccer. Occasionally, too, the games became passionate contests. During one title game with one of the Greek teams, Hansen tackled a Greek player in a way that the partisan crowd objected to, and the referee, a Swede, didn't call a foul. As Hansen was picking up the ball, he was punched in the eye, giving him a black eye. Then one of the Viking players went down on the sidelines, and the Greek fans jumped him, kicking and beating him to the point that he had to be taken to the hospital. Hansen got another black eye in the melee and played the rest of the game with his eyes swollen almost shut. The Greek team was suspended from the league for a whole year as a result. But such occurrences were very rare; usually good sportsmanship prevailed and everyone played by the rules. Under Hansen's management, the Vikings became a top team, winning the Daynes Cup in 1951, 1952, 1955 and 1956; the state championship from 1955 to 1957; and the Van Dongen Cup (named for Bass Van Dongen, a star player in the 1930s) five times-- 1953, 1954, 1958, 1959, 1961--thus retiring the cup, which Hansen still proudly displays in his home.



Vikings with Van Dongen Cup. Peter Hughes, center. Willard Hansen, right [Willard Hansen photo]

A number of other players still remember the free-wheeling games of the 1950s. Stanley De Waal, who came to the US from Holland right after World War II, remembered that he was scheduled to play for the Rapids SC in one Daynes Cup championship, but it turned out that his wife was in labor, giving birth to their first child. Fretting at the hospital, he was relieved to hear the cry that signaled a successful delivery. Grabbing his cleats, he told his wife that he was headed for the game, which they won. Dick Gregersen, from Copenhagen, was another Scandinavian immigrant in the immediate post-war years. He had grown up playing soccer, even during the German occupation, and remembers training using a tennis ball. He arrived in Salt Lake City in November 1948, on his 17th birthday, and was almost immediately recruited by the Vikings. His first game was against the Benders in the Utah State Prison, and he played for both the Vikings and Germania for many years. A goalkeeper, Gregersen finally gave up the position when he became a dentist, because he was afraid his hands would get injured—no one wore gloves in those days--and ruin his livelihood. Not all soccer players in those days were from the Scandinavian countries, though; Ronnie Almond started playing in England during World War II, when he was 10 years old. He soon became a star player and captain of his local team, and at 15 years old was offered a chance to play for Manchester United, one of the best Premier League teams. His family chose that time to move to Salt Lake City, however, and Ronnie came with them. So even though there were not the cheering crowds of the 1930s, soccer was still alive and well in Utah, and poised for great things to come.¹⁶

¹⁶ Group interview at the Utah Soccer Association offices, November 27, 2007.