

Coach has players' respect

"I'm just pleased to be part of it," is how Geoff Salmon sums up his thoughts on his job as soccer coach Gerry Redmond's assistant. After five years as the Bears' first choice centre-half or sweeper and captain of the team, Salmon, a thirty-year old Ph.D. student in German, is no longer eligible to play in the intercollegiate competition. Because of the great respect and admiration that all the players have for him, and because of his experience and capability as a defender, Redmond felt that he was the obvious choice to be the new assistant, and the response from the players has been wonderful. New captain John Devlin summed it up when he called this appointment "an excellent idea."

Salmon is a cockney, with the forthrightness and articulacy that go with such an origin. As an undergraduate, he studied at the University College of Wales at Swansea, where he played for the team that won the Universities Athletic Union soccer championship in 1968. He moved out here in the same year and played for the Bears' soccer team from its inception, always in the middle of the defence. During this time, he has also played for the Edmonton Eagles, Edmonton Scottish, and lately for the Victoria team that has just won the first division title after going through the season undefeated. He also plays for the Edmonton All-Stars.

Concerning the difference between inter-collegiate soccer here and in Britain, Salmon reckons that the Bears team of

1972, that won the National Championship, would have given any British team a run for their money, and that teams from UBC and Loyola would give a good account of themselves, but that the depth of British soccer is lacking over here. If anything, the standard of intercollegiate soccer in Canada has declined, although in the past five years the Bears have gone from strength to strength. He detects a similar fall in standards in local senior soccer. He thinks that the stronger teams that rely on immigrants from Europe for their strength are getting too old, and that the Canadian talent just isn't coached well enough in advanced soccer tactics to make up for this. The talent is there, he feels, but a real push is needed in the development of top class coaches.

We talked mostly about the current Bears team. In Salmon's opinion, the team isn't as strong as the 1972 team, but there is little to choose between it and last year's team. This he attributes to the lack of real punch up in the forward line. This is often the fatal flaw in many great teams, — Holland in the World Cup Final suffered from it, — and the Bears are still looking for a combination to replace the twin spearhead of Peter Gray and Steve Odumah. Shooting power will be decisive, he reckons, especially in games against UBC and Loyola, where any chances have to be seized upon. "You can't afford to chicken out on 50-50 balls," and Salmon emphasizes that this year's team will have to play

"hard and fast", more ruthlessly than in the past. He demands 100% effort from players, although he is not prepared to tolerate any attempt to intimidate opponents. On the question of whether a coach should drive his players, or adopt an easy-going attitude, he prefers to tailor his approach to each individual. He also believes that a coach should be accountable for the actions of his players.

The Bears won't be lacking in team spirit, and Salmon has a very high opinion of coach Redmond. He respects the new coach for his directness, fairness and obvious desire to win, and their partnership is noticeably off to a flying start. He enjoys this, his first experience of coaching, because he prizes his association with the Golden Bears soccer team very highly, and would have done anything to have maintained it in some capacity, although he never expected to be Redmond's assistant.

John Devlin described him as "one of the steadiest, toughest, most commanding defensive players I've ever played with," and when a Scotsman says that about an Englishman, then it really means something! Devlin dwelled on Salmon's "uncompromising, positive, tremendous desire to win," and said that he could always be relied upon to rise to the big occasion. He'll certainly be missed on the field, but his presence on the touchline will make up for this.

Rhys Davies



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