

# Canadian champs reunite every year

## Soccer Yeomen won it all in 1977

By GARRY MARR

York was 17 years old and had 23,000 students when the soccer Yeomen won their first and only national championship.

It was 1977.

Eleven years later, players and coaches from that team still get together to solidify lifetime friendships that they made at university. The annual soccer alumni game is a good excuse to don the cleats for 90 minutes and remember the glory days of university.

Alumni.

Mention the word to York students and they can't associate themselves with it. But to the players and coaches who were part of the soccer Yeomen, the word conjures pride.

Peter Kovacs, a player on the championship team who is now an assistant coach with the Yeomen, decided six years ago to have a reunion. He contacted Eric Willis — who along with Norman Crandles has coached the team since 1977 — about the possibility of a match between



the alumni and the current Yeomen.

"We all became friends that year, and we stayed close afterwards," said Kovacs. "I decided to get the guys together and I asked Eric if they (the current Yeomen) wanted to play a pre-season exhibition match." The match has since developed into a yearly event that Kovacs and his teammates look forward to every year.

"I thoroughly enjoy coming here year after year," said Kovacs. "More than anything else I was proud to be on a championship team and I was proud to be a York student." Kovacs and his teammates' desire to keep that feeling alive is why the alumni game is successful.

Although alumni programmes are more prevalent in the US, Kovacs feels the potential is here in Canada.

"In the US, the alumni are part of the university programme; in Canada we lack that," he said. "I had an idea to bring that back. Everybody seems to enjoy himself every year." And the alumni Yeomen remain

competitive despite the fact that they compete against teams younger than themselves. In six years the alumni have only lost one game to the current Yeomen.

This year the game broke with tradition — not only did the alumni compete with the Yeomen, but also with a visiting team from the University of Southampton in England. The alumni remained competitive and managed a tie against a team ten years younger, from the country where the sport originated.

Beside Kovacs, five other players from the 1977 team returned for the day's competition: Aldo D'alphonso, Peter Randy, Mike Burke, Bob Cameron, and Nick Plessas all made the trip. Two weeks before, nine of the original sixteen players showed up to beat York 4-3. The few exceptions who couldn't make the game live outside Ontario.

But the trip to Toronto is something that Mike Burke looks forward to every year. The Buffalo resident says he considers the game a soccer homecoming.

"Soccer has been a secondary sport," said Burke. "The alumni game is our own homecoming. It's a chance to see how you've aged."

"I look forward to the alumni news when it comes in the mail," said Burke. "I like to see what's happened to friends since university. I made friendships at university that haven't faded away."

For Burke and the others, soccer was a way of getting involved in university.

"I would have gone to the library and to classes and then left. I would hate the thought of going through school without having played soccer," Burke explains that it wasn't just soccer that was important — it was getting involved beyond the classroom. And he believes that message should not be lost on today's students.

The winning year did not hurt comradeship either. The team played the entire season without one loss — no easy accomplishment, considering the schedule. The season lasted two months and consisted of two or three games per week.

Many players cited the dedication of Coaches Willis and Crandles as the determining factor behind the winning season. Both were in their first year of coaching and extremely enthusiastic.

That enthusiasm has not declined.



Crandles' booming voice can still be heard from Keele Campus to Glendon, and Willis occasionally chews out the referee for a bad offside call.

Willis explained that 1977 was a turning point for soccer at York.

**Crandles didn't hesitate — he picked up a crowbar and began "trashing" the Cutlass.**

There was a new dedication toward university soccer that saw many players drop local club status to devote all of their time to the York team.

"1977 broke the ice in commitment to university," said Willis. "Before, allegiance was to club teams — that's changed now."

Willis cited the family feeling as a positive factor.

"The team knew what had to be done to win," said Willis, who thinks

that this year's Yeomen have some of the same qualities as the championship team.

The sense of commitment was probably no stronger anywhere than with Crandles. He was "Stormin' Norman" in 1977, a title he can still claim today.

Crandles is best remembered by the players for an incident that happened before the championship match against Concordia.

"It was before the Concordia match," recalled Aldo D'alphonso. "Norman had locked all the equipment in the trunk of his car." Crandles didn't hesitate — he picked up a crowbar and began "trashing" the Cutlass to gain access to the trunk.

"The car wasn't a wreck either," said D'alphonso. "It set the momentum for the game and helped us win."

"He did anything for the team," agreed Kovacs. "We're very close knit."

However, the team was not as homogeneous as one might expect. It was representative of the ethnic backgrounds that dominate York.

Peter Landy described the multiculturalism as an important element of the team.

"We had Scots, Italians, an Hungarian, a Saudi Arabian; it was as multicultural as you can get," said Landy, who was ten years older than most players on the team. Landy was returning to school for a second degree when Willis approached him about helping out with coaching. The coaching turned into playing and Landy never regretted it.

"Soccer is such a team sport that to not become a cohesive unit is impossible," said Landy.

Tony Oliver, a standout with the present Yeomen, feels that type of cohesiveness is present on this year's squad.

"I think it's (the alumni gathering) a reflection of how well they did as a team," said Oliver. "I think we can do the same. I would look forward to something like this in five years."

And who knows? Oliver and his teammates just might bring a second soccer banner home from UBC this year. Nevertheless — win or lose — they'll be able to look back on university and think of more than books and classes.

As Kovacs puts it: "It's great that after 11 years we can still get together and have a beer and a hamburger after a soccer game."

# A 2-1 victory over Concordia gave York the title

The York Yeomen soccer team emerged from last weekend's playoff action as Canadian champions.

They proved themselves to be the finest university soccer club in the nation by defeating Dalhousie University from Halifax 4-3, in the open round on Friday, then the University of Manitoba Bisons 2-1, in the semi-finals on Saturday, and finally the Concordia Stingers from Montreal 2-1, in the final on Sunday.

The opening game against Dalhousie was played on a greasy pitch in a snow storm. Despite the conditions both teams performed impressively and the scant crowd was treated to a wide-open, hard fought game, which after the regular 90 minutes of play when into a 30 minute overtime, after which there was still no score.

The outcome was decided by each team taking 54 penalty shots of which York converted 4 and Dalhousie only 3, the last York shot not being necessary.

In the semi-final game on Saturday against the University of Mani-



TAKING A BREATH

oba Bisons, the York team once again at half time a goal down as Pasquali E'Tolo had put the Stingers one up on a shot from close range, one minute from the end of the first half.

However, the Yeomen are used to coming back from such situations and in the measure of true champions had gone two goals ahead within minutes of the opening of the second half.

First, Peter Kovacs, who was a

standout throughout the tournament, placed a perfect corner to the foot of Captain Nick Plessis who climaxed the superb season by rocketing a fierce drive into the back of the Concordia net.

Seconds later with a small but enthusiastic crowd of York Phys Ed women and friends and family of the players chanting, "magic, magic, magic," Peter Kovacs again placed a perfect high cross from a corner kick to which 'Magic' Mac Dusaby

again allowed the opposition to score first and as usual this galvanized the Yeomen into equalizing. Mike Burke, who had an outstanding series, scored with a thundering header from Peter Landy's corner kick.

This put the game into overtime for the second day in a row, and once again Burke came to the rescue, and in the manner which has made him a Canadian national contender, drilled a scorcher in from the edge of the box.

By that time the Yeomen had played almost 3 complete games of soccer in 2 days, and were the next day to face Concordia who won their single game against Waterloo in regular time.

The final game was a classic between two talented, hard playing and well-coached teams, and Concordia Stingers from Montreal, last year's national champs, were in no mood to relinquish the title lightly. In a game reminiscent of many of the Yeomen's earlier tussles this year, the York squad, despite outplaying the opposition, went into the dress-

soared and nodded in the winning goal, which could be the only thing left for him to do at the end of a remarkable University soccer career.

A committee of independent judges from CIAU selected him as most Valuable Player in the series, a selection incidentally, which was endorsed by every one of his team mates.

Coach Willis had moved Peter Landy from his customary full back position to outside right and filled the gap with Vic Mandatori. This ploy gave more width to his offense, a very necessary tactic, as the centre field was a veritable quagmire.

John Debenedictus, who played all three championship games, was truly outstanding and often his raw courage and agility prevented Concordia scores. The mid-field excellence displayed by Plessis, Musaby, and Kovacs was the key to the York victory, in concert with the resolute "they shall not pass" attitude of the back-field of Cameron, Buckley, and Mandatori, all under the direction of Paul D'Agostino, who is easily the finest centre midfielder in the league.