At the turn of the 20th century, thousands of European immigrants came to the bituminous coal mining communities of southwestern Pennsylvania in search of work. They brought with them the languages, religions, and cultural traditions of the Old World, as well as a fervent passion for the sport of soccer. In 1898, one of the oldest amateur soccer clubs in the country was formed in the coal mining town of Beadling near Mt. Lebanon, thereby beginning the process by which the Pittsburgh region emerged as a national center for the sport. For the working classes, participation on amateur soccer teams afforded a temporary respite from the day-to-day toil of mining work. Played largely by Polish, Lithuanian, German, English, and Italian immigrants and their children, soccer also functioned as a means of assimilation as it brought together people of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Their strong interest in the sport, in turn, led to numerous national championships for the region. In fact, five coal mining communities located within 30 miles of Pittsburgh—Castle Shannon, Morgan, Beadling, Gallatin, and Harmarville—produced championship soccer teams in the 1940s and 1950s.
Country

A strong offense headed by forward Alex Pascarella helped the Monongahela River town of Gallatin win the 1942 U.S. National Open Soccer Championships. As teammates two decades later, Pascarella and his son Nicholas led the team to victory in the 1962 West Penn League championships. Consisting largely of Italian American miners, the team from Gallatin earned a national reputation for their hard-nosed, physical play.

Gallatin versus Pawtucket, Rhode Island, 1942 National Open Championship Game.

Whereas most amateur soccer clubs disappeared by the 1970s, Beadling continued to shape the development of the sport into the 21st century. Since its founding in 1898, Beadling adult, boys, and girls teams have amassed an array of championships. The club’s proudest moment was its victory in the 1954 National Amateur Cup Championships led by prolific scorer Jim Kohlmyer. Four generations of the Kohlmyer family have played soccer for Beadling.

Beadling soccer club, 1915.

Photograph by Tom House, published in “Sports Section,” February 27, 1956.

“Soccer by the Colliery,” Harmarville, 1956.

Winning national titles in 1952 and 1956, Harmarville was one of the most successful soccer clubs spawned in the coal mining towns of Western Pennsylvania. In this image, Harmarville defeats local rival Cecil by a score of 4-3 to advance into the quarterfinals of National Open Cup tournament. During winter months, referees used coal dust collected from the nearby mine tipple to mark boundary lines on the snow-covered field.