

# Soccer in Coal

By Nicholas P. Ciotola, Curator

*"We would see guys come out of the coal mines with their dinner pails and their dirty faces, and [they'd] go in and change into soccer clothes and play."*

– Peter Merovich

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.

Pittsburgh Press  
Soccer league trophy,  
1917 season.



Gift of Paul Danilo

Morgan Strassers soccer team, 1940.



Gift of Peter Merovich

Pete Merovich (in white shirt) with Castle Shannon W.W. Riehl soccer team, c. 1940.

Forward Paul Danilo (kneeling; second from left) scored the winning goal for the Morgan Strassers in the 1940 U.S. Amateur Cup Championships. Danilo was inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame in 1997. The community of Morgan, adjacent to Bridgeville, was an important coal mining town in the mid-20th century. The name "Strassers" came from the jewelry store that sponsored the team.

The history of soccer in Castle Shannon is intertwined with the career of the borough's longtime player, Peter Merovich. A tenacious defender, Merovich began his career in 1935 with the Castle Shannon W.W. Riehl juvenile team, named for local attorney Walter W. Riehl. From 1935-1957, he appeared in seven West Penn senior championship games, was named to numerous all-star teams, and led Castle Shannon to the 1946 U.S. Amateur Cup finals. Merovich was inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame in 1971.



Courtesy of Castle Shannon Borough Council



# Country



Gift of Alex Pascarella

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



Gift of Danny Kohlmyer

Beadling soccer club, 1915.

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.



Photograph by Ivan Massar published in *Sports Illustrated*, 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 tippie to mark boundary lines on the snow-covered field.