

Origins Traced to Local Bar

Soccer Loop Kicking in Austin

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Raucous laughter punctuates and pierces the dense cigarette smoke — hanging as thick and persistent as an early morning hill country fog — in the small, crowded bar. Certainly no mere “lounge”, as it is euphemistically referred as in the Austin phone directory, the Tavern is an entity unto itself, more often than not defying classification of any sort.

Physically, it is a macho atmosphere bar (ever here hear of a macho lounge?). Rough hewn tables with rickety, mixed and never matching chairs, uneven concrete floors, a battered pay phone and awfully cold beer, the Tavern is a loose place.

The kind of place where wild and totally unlikely schemes are hatched after a fervent night of drinking. The kind of place where a soccer league could be founded over several pitchers following a Sunday afternoon in Zilker Park.

Soccer? Where you kick the ball? No hands?

Yes. Years from now, seekers of the truth will discover that the Austin Municipal Soccer Association can trace its royal and ancient lineage of two years to the Tavern.

November of 1972 (Where were you in '72) to be exact, Austin attorney Philip Friday and several friends were enjoying the

pleasures of the Tavern one Sunday afternoon after a game of soccer in Zilker and as the evening progressed into the late hours, the group determined a league was needed.

No more pickup games. No more calling friends to round up the necessary numbers. No sir, a league with a schedule.

“There has been organized soccer in Austin, for years,” Friday said. “Texas has an excellent varsity team and the intramural program is good but that’s where it stopped.”

Which the group found most lamentable. They knew in their hearts that somewhere out there were hundreds of people longing for a soccer league. Americans who had become hooked on the soccer habit in school, foreign students who had not become hooked on football and those who just wanted to do something different. They were precise in their thinking.

From Friday’s late night doodling on a yellow legal pad two years ago, the Austin Municipal Soccer Association ends its season Sunday with 14 teams and more than 200 participants.

Perhaps unique is that the majority of the players are not your standard troglodyte.

Indeed. Most clubs list college professors with PhD’s, lawyers, doctors and a great many students.

“I think the appeal has nothing to do with

the level of education,” Friday said. “Soccer is still taking hold in the United States but world-wide, soccer is head and shoulders the most popular sport.

“With the University here, Austin draws a lot of immigrants and foreign students who decide to stay here. They are your first group of players.”

But nevertheless, the Association does have a rather heady roster of academic and professional types.

“I think the appeal to most of us older guys is that you get to meet people from all over the world,” Friday said.

Backing up that fact is Friday’s team, Santos. Its roster puts the United Nations to shame. England, Scotland, Ireland, Hungary, France, Germany, Ecuador, Mexico, Cypress and America are all represented on Santos.

Culturally, Santos (named after a professional soccer team in Brazil) is quite a team. But for all of their seven PhD’s, Santos goes into the last week of play in third place. But, they have already won a playoff berth in the Texas State Soccer Association’s regional cup play.

The Association is divided into two zones, with Austin, San Antonio and Houston in the south and the Dallas area in the north. The top four teams from each of the two divisions in Austin will qualify for regional competition.

Juventus, which, incidentally, is Latin for youth and not so incidentally a pro team in Turin, Italy, leads the top division of the league, followed by the Armadillos, Santos and America. Juventus and the Armadillos are basically University of Texas student teams while America is primarily a Chicano team.

Two other student dominated teams (Athletics and Law School) and a faculty team from UT (Red Barons) round out the first division.

Another faculty team, Remote Sensing, is the second division leading team. Remote Sensing and the U.T. “B” team have playoff berths already won but Sunday’s play in Zilker Park will determine the other two positions.

Bergstrom, Air Force ROTC and the YMCA all still have a shot. St. Edward’s and the Aztecas round out the division.

The upshot of which is — soccer is popular and growing fast in Austin. The league expanded by two teams this season and plans to develop a junior program in the near future.

So the next time the smoke begins to water your vision and the beer fogs your brain and a good sounding idea comes up — something really kicky, you know — remember it for later use. You never know.