

Joe Speltz, Ward Johnson, and young Tom Rocheford who later was captain of the 1976 team and coach of the 1977 aggregation.

The inexperience made itself evident in the first nine games of the season, during which the team won only one game, lost six and tied one. The spirit of the team was good, however. Coach Sikich had won the confidence of his players, and in the next five games won two, lost one and tied two others. The record of the season, therefore, was three wins, six losses, and three ties for fourth place in the conference—a respectable finish despite a miserable beginning. The closing games inspired hope for the future. Geoff Murphy was especially cheerful and predicted that the Jays would win the conference the next season. He based his prediction on his belief that Americans are talented soccer players. “They may not pass as well, but they make up for it with hustle. Every year the top conference teams get better” (*Record*, November 2, 1973). Coach Sikich shared the enthusiastic optimism of his players.

— 1974 —

In his introduction of the 1974 soccer team to readers of the *Record*, Carl Neuburger prophesied that the “soccer fans are in for a treat this year as SJU is fielding what is proving to be the best team ever in the history of St. John’s.” Nothing could have been truer. The high hopes of Coach Matt Sikich at the end of the 1973 season were by no means unfounded. The number of star soccer players returning from the previous year was unusual: senior Captain Tom Rocheford; juniors Jim Sawyer, Jack Sandberg, Geoff Murphy, Bernard Rahming and Carl Neuburger; sophomores Joe Speltz, Jim McGough, Brian Murphy and Joe Mueller. Not mentioned, however, were three freshmen, Chi-King “Paddie” Lai, Ken Potts and Mike Lilly, three superb soccer players without whom the Johnnies would not have won their way to the semi-finals in the NAIA national tournament.

Apparently Coach Sikich became aware early that his three freshmen were highly talented performers, for their names figure consistently in the scoring columns throughout the entire season. After an initial loss to St. Olaf (3-6), the Jays ran up a streak of eight victories, one tie with Gustavus (3-3) and then a one goal loss to Augsburg, 1-0.

There remained the post-season games for the national championship, as St. John’s, by virtue of its record, was eligible to enter competition for the championship of NAIA District 13. In the play-offs the Johnnies first defeated Lakehead of Canada by a score of 2-1. They were then pitted against the tough Augsburg team and emerged the

victors in a thrilling 1-0 victory. It was a game that left the SJU supporters jubilant and the defeated Auggies stunned in disbelief.

St. John’s placed five players on the all-MIAC team: Captain Tom Rocheford, goalie; Geoff Murphy and his brother Brian, forwards; Mike Lilly, only a freshman, center-forward; Jim McGough, defense.

ROSTER		SCORES	
Chi-King “Paddie” Lai	3	Bethany	1
Michael Lilly	4	Bethel	0
James McGough	3	St. Olaf	6
Joseph Mueller	0	Augsburg	0
Brian Murphy	3	St. Thomas	2
Geoff Murphy	1	Macalester	0
Carl Neuburger	3	Gustavus	3
Kenneth Potts	7	Hamline	0
Thomas Rocheford	4	St. Olaf	1
Bernard Rahming	1	Augsburg	0
Joseph Sandberg	(?)	St. Thomas	(?)
James Sawyer	2	Macalester	1
Joseph Speltz	8	Hamline	2
		Coach—Matthew Sikich	
		Captain—Tom Rocheford	

The 1974 Quest for the National NAIA Championship

Carl Neuburger wrote a lively account of the SJU struggle to annex the NAIA championship to its 1974 laurels:

“The soccer team, which ended its conference season with an 8-2 win over Hamline, played some of its best soccer of the year last weekend as they defeated Lakehead of Canada 2-1 and Augsburg 1-0 to take the District 13 regional crown. Lakehead had defeated the Johnnies two weeks earlier and were a trifle arrogant coming into the match, but the cocky Canucks were sent to the showers, bedazzled by a tough Johnnie defense led by the Rock of Gibraltar (or rather the Rocheford of St. John’s) that allowed only one goal to the tough Lakehead team. Ken Potts and Brian Murphy were each able to beat the Lakehead goalie to advance the Johnnies to the finals of the District 13 NAIA play-offs with Augsburg.

“In an exciting game against Augsburg the Johnnies were able to break a 0-0 deadlock with a perfect 35-yard shot by Geoff Murphy that caught the Augsburg goalie slightly out of position. Solid defensive play by Joe Speltz, along with Jim Sawyer, Jim McGough, and Brian Murphy kept the Auggies in check, and magnificent goal-tending by Tom Rocheford left the Augsburg players and fans in bewilderment and at the short end of a 1-0 score” (*Record*, November 18, 1974).

The defeat of Augsburg entitled the Johnnies to enter the NAIA Nationals in order to compete for the national title as top team of its class in the nation. The *Record* failed to post a report of the Johnnies’

fortune in the national meet. The fact is that St. John's was seeded to meet the Kickers of Quincy College, Illinois, a team that for years dominated the NAIA nationals. St. John's lost the semi-final game by a score of 8-0.

— 1975 —

Coach Matt Sikich, when he saw his 1975 soccer team in action, was convinced that this was the best of his three teams. A large number of his 1974 players had returned and, except for the absence of Tom Rocheford, it was basically the same as that of the previous year.

The Jays made a fast start in the conference race by blitzing Hamline 5-0 with ease and defeating strong St. Olaf in a hard-fought game by a score of 3-2. The two initial victories left them in first place in the conference and full of confidence for a big year. The team was well balanced with a stout defense and a versatile offense led by sophomore Mike Lilly, who already had scored five goals in the first two games. Flanking Lilly were sophomore Ken Potts, freshmen Tim Rutka, Patrick Lilly, Mark Cote, Pete Rocheford and Angelo Castellano. Among the halfbacks were veterans John Sandberg, Captain Geoff Murphy, and freshman Shawn Dougherty.

On the defense was junior goalie Tom Kozlak, protected by fullbacks James Sawyer, Joe Speltz, Steve Westlund, Carl Neuburger, and freshmen John McHale and Dale Kiedrowski. The squad was larger than usual, but numbers were necessary because of the freshmen and other inexperienced players.

The *Record* is silent about the progress of the team until the October 28 issue which carried a brief statement under a snapshot of Tim Rutka in action to the effect that the soccer team had suffered reverses. St. John's had dropped games to St. Thomas (1-3) and to league-leading Augsburg (1-4), losses which relegated the Johnnies into third place with only one more game to go. The record for the season was eight victories, four losses, and two ties. Winner of the 1975 soccer title was Augsburg.

— 1976 —

It is difficult to write an adequate resume of the 1976 soccer team in the short space allowed for each year in this history. It was a glorious season played by what was undoubtedly the strongest, most versatile and most unified team in St. John's soccer history. After an initial loss to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay by a score of 2-3 and a 1-1 tied game with Gustavus, the Jays exploded with a string of eight conference victories, then a tie, followed by three more conference wins

for a record of eleven wins and three ties for first place and the MIAC championship. The overall record was thirteen wins, two losses, and three ties.

Credit has to be given to Coach Matt Sikich who assembled the team and coached it, but, as for playing the games, even more credit has to go to Captain Mike Lilly and his companions in arms who formed a unit more powerful than the brilliant team of 1974. The outstanding scoring star was Mike Lilly, probably the most prolific scorer that St. John's had ever seen, but the championship was essentially a team achievement, scoring 47 points to eight by the opposition. The defense was "awesome," as one columnist wrote. The defense shut out the opponents in eight conference games, with an average of only one goal per game for the season.

According to the reports of games, the total number of key members was fourteen: forwards Pat Lilly, Mark Cote and "stylish" Tim Rutka; midfielders Mike Lilly, John Cella, Shawn Dougherty and John McHale; on defense were, first of all, two gladiatorial goal tenders, John Warren and Robert Cherry, with fullbacks Dale Kiedrowski, Joe Speltz and Steve Westlund. Key substitutes were Michael Bruckbauer, Pete Weyandt and Pete Rocheford, all-purpose men who were called upon often to substitute for an injured player.

The NAIA Play-offs

The play-off games for the district championship were almost as dramatic as the games of the regular season. St. Thomas and Augsburg, second and third place finishers in the MIAC standings, were both eligible for the district play-offs and hence were forced to play one another to decide who should meet St. John's.

Augsburg defeated St. Thomas in a game that went into seven overtime periods before the Auggies finally broke the tie to win the right to play St. John's for the District 13 championship. The Augsburg-St. John's game also ran into extra periods and only ended when, in the second overtime, John McHale spotted Mike Lilly breaking for the goal and threaded his way through the Auggies' defensive line to pass the ball to Lilly, who fired the ball into the net for a 2-1 victory and the undisputed District 13 championship.

The next move was to win the deciding game over the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, District 14 champions, for the Area III play-offs, preliminary to the semi-finals of the NAIA tournament in the Rose Bowl, Pasadena, California. In fact, the Jays defeated Parkside easily, only to discover that the next opponent would be Quincy College, the perennial winner of the meet. With a gulp of dismay but

plenty of courage the Jays fought the Quincy kickers valiantly but lost by a score of 5-0. We will let the *Record* columnist relate that story:

"The soccer team's recent loss to Quincy College was a generally expected fate. But the final score of 5-0 was a marked improvement over the trip taken two years ago.

" 'They outclassed us,' said Mike Lilly. 'They were quick and had good defense. We had two very good chances to score in the first half but we couldn't quite put them in.'

"One consolation was that it took Quincy eight minutes to make its first goal.

" 'The last time it was the first nineteen seconds,' said Lilly. 'That doesn't mean anything, really; but still, we are a better team than we were two years ago' " (*Record*, October 13, 1976, p. 11).

The following players of the 1976 soccer team were awarded berths on the all-conference team: Mike Lilly, Mark Cote, Steve Westlund and John Warren. Lilly and Warren were also awarded All-District 13 honors.

The team roster included Michael Bruckbauer, John Cella, Robert Cherry, Mark Cote, Shawn Dougherty, Dale Kiedrowski, Michael Lilly (captain), Patrick Lilly, John McHale, Timothy Rutka, Joe Speltz, John Warren, Steve Westlund and Pete Weyandt.

Games won, tied or lost: Green Bay 2-3 (lost), Gustavus 1-1 (tied), Hamline 6-0 (won), St. Olaf 1-0 (won), Augsburg 4-3 (won), Macalester 3-1 (won), Gustavus 2-1 (won), Hamline 7-0 (won), St. Olaf 2-2 Augsburg 0-0 (tied), St. Thomas 1-0 (won), Macalester 8-0 (won), St. Mary's 8-0 (won).

— 1977 —

Coach Matthew Sikich was succeeded by Peter Rocheford, a 1976 graduate of St. John's who had played under Sikich for four years. Coaching was new to him, but he managed to lead his team to a second place finish in the MIAC. Assisting him was Pat Haws, director of the swimming pool and coach of the swimming team.

Coach Rocheford inherited a strong team that included Mike Lilly (styled in the *Record* as the "Gem"), scrappy Kenneth Potts and stylish Timothy Rutka. Also on the team from 1976 was the 1976 all-conference goalie, John Warren. Lost, however, were two other all-conference players, Mike Cote and Steve Westlund. Goalie Bob Cherry, who had alternated with John Warren as goal tender, was also lost as a "defector to St. Thomas," as the sportswriter jokingly expressed it.

To some extent the 1977 season was a rebuilding year, inasmuch as the brilliant passing combinations of 1976 had been broken up. The

inexperience of the new men in working with one another was responsible for the conference season opening loss to St. Olaf by a score of 2-1. The Johnnies then lost a game to tough St. Thomas, 2-3, the favorite for the championship, as the Johnnies quickly learned. Other scores of games were victories over Macalester, Hamline, Augsburg, a tie with St. Olaf and St. Mary's, followed by a second defeat by St. Thomas. The season's record in the conference was four wins, two ties and three losses, for a second place finish tied with Augsburg. St. Thomas won the 1977 championship with only one defeat, a 4-2 loss to Augsburg. St. John's overall record was seven victories, two ties and three losses.

St. John's Peter Rocheford was optimistic about his team's chances of making a good showing in the play-offs for the District 13 championship. "St. Thomas has to be considered the favorite," he conceded, "but anything can happen in the play-offs. After all, we're the defending district champions and some team will have to knock us off first." St. John's finished second in both the conference and the District NAIA III play-offs.

On the team roster were John Cella, Dale Kiedrowski, Michael Kilian, Michael Lilly (co-captain), Patrick Lilly, John McHale, Robert Potter, Timothy Rutka, Paul Schoen, George Theisen, Michael Tierney, John Warren (co-captain), and Thomas Wiesenbahn.

Games won, tied or lost: St. Olaf 1-2 (lost), Hamline 6-1 (won), St. Mary's 2-2 (tied), Augsburg 2-1 (won), Bethel 1-0 (won), Gustavus— (won), St. Olaf 2-2 (tied), Macalester 4-1 (won), Hamline 4-2 (won), St. Thomas 2-3 (lost), Augsburg 3-1 (won). The season record was eight wins, three losses, three ties.

"Senior Co-captain Mike Lilly finished a brilliant college career by being named to the all-conference and all-district teams for a fourth straight year. Lilly was also named to the NAIA 1977 Area III all-star team, the only Minnesotan ever to be so honored.

"Joining him on the all-conference team was brother Pat Lilly as well as juniors Tim Rutka and John McHale" (*Sagatagan*, 1978, p. 123).

— 1978 —

Coach Peter Rocheford entered the world of business following his graduation from college and was succeeded by Patrick Haws, his assistant in the 1977 soccer season. Graduation had also left gaping holes in the players' line-up. Gone were several of the top performers such as John Warren, a star goalie, and super-star Mike Lilly. In compensation for their loss Coach Haws had gained two freshman stars, James Phelps and Richard "Dick" Teigen, all of whom would eventually fill in the vacancies.

The season began most propitiously with four victories of the first five matches played. Then the reverse took place; the Johnnies won only one game of the last five. The record for the regular season of play was 5-4-3 (five wins, four losses, and three ties). The overall record was 5-5-3.

Far from being a losing team, the 1978 "kickers" were a well-balanced organization that lacked only aggressiveness or a bit of luck in making the one point more in each game that would have launched the team into the upper stratum of the conference. To use an athletic cliché, the Johnnies were "never out of the game." Only Augsburg and St. Thomas (winner of the 1978 soccer title) defeated St. John's twice. The other scores all indicate that the 1978 Jays were a well-balanced but unspectacular team in an unspectacular conference season.

The season record is as follows: games won—over St. Olaf 3-1; Hamline 2-1; Macalester 1-0; St. Mary's 3-2; Bethel 2-0. Games lost: to St. Thomas 1-2, 0-1; Augsburg 1-3, 1-2. Games tied: Gustavus 1-1, and Bethel 2-2.

Squad members: John Cella, Dave Theissen, Paul Gelbmann, Robert Porter, Thomas Torborg, Timothy Stevens, Thomas Wiesenhahn, David Uppgaard, Paul Schoen, Timothy Rutka (co-captain), Frank Pilney, Patrick Lilly (co-captain), David Clark, John McHale, Roger Hassinger, Richard Teigen, Michael Kilian, Michael Tierney, Daniel Mulvaney, James Phelps, Kerry Fitzgerald, George Theisen, Robert Schmidt, Tom Hotz, Mark Jansen, Timothy Frederick, Gregory Wolff, Bill Moran, Gregory Steveken.



CHAPTER XII

Rugby

Historically, one William Webb Ellis, a soccer playing Englishman, is credited with inventing the game of rugby when, frustrated by the exclusive use of the feet and in defiance of the rules, he simply picked up the ball and ran with it to the goal line. This was in 1823. The new tactic (even though against the rules) caught the fancy of the athletes at Rugby School, who quickly developed a running attack that has been the hallmark of the sport ever since. The rules for rugby, as we know them, were standardized in 1871, a period during which the great prestige schools of the United States, such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton, adopted rugby as a favorite college sport.

With one lapse of time, rugby—USA—has been around for over one hundred years. The fantastic upward surge which it is undergoing today followed a drought of approximately forty years, from the early 1920's to around 1964, when a revival of the game took place. The popularity of the sport before the early 1920's is attested by the fact that the United States took the gold medals in the 1920 and 1921 Olympics, after which rugby for some reason was struck from the list of Olympic events.

Unfortunately for the purpose of this history, few Americans have ever seen rugby played. To the casual observer it may seem to be a chaotic form of mayhem disguised as a sport. Actually, if he watches a rugby match carefully, he will soon observe that the seeming chaos conceals finesse and strategy that belong specifically to the game. American style football players who have also competed in rugby have learned to respect a fast-moving sport played by rugged performers

without the helmets, face masks and shoulder pads they are accustomed to see on the American football players.

But what quite generally is not known is that rugby is as much a social event as an athletic contest. Rugby matches conclude traditionally with a party provided by the host club. Winning is as important in rugby as in other contact sports, but with the ruggers a loss is not such a calamity as to preclude a post-game party with refreshments. In fact, the rules of good sportsmanship, according to rugby traditions, demand the post-game activities in which the bumps and bruises and hard checks are accepted in the spirit of good fellowship. For them the sometimes rough and tumble style of play falls under the heading of good clean fun. In the "party," opponents of a strenuous afternoon congratulate one another for a good game over a glass—or two or three—of beer (the American substitute for English ale) and look forward to the time when they can meet again.

Thomas Haigh, an instructor in the St. John's department of mathematics, founded the St. John's Rugby Club in the spring of 1968. A former St. John's Prep School student, he learned the game while an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin. During the month of March of his first year as instructor at SJU, he spent a week or so indoors in the gymnasium introducing a group of some twenty college students to the basics of the game, after which he arranged rugby matches with the University of Minnesota and the Carleton College clubs.

The rugby beginners of St. John's lost both matches by scores of 10-0 and 9-6 respectively, but Coach Haigh was satisfied with the results, especially since the number of applicants for positions on the team doubled after the first game. Rugby was popular from the beginning!

Since that time rugby has become St. John's largest club sport—that is, a game not included in the regular program of St. John's varsity and intramural sports, but is independently organized and financed by the club members. Though in recent years the University has provided some limited financial assistance to the club, the bulk of the expenses for uniforms, dues, food, gas, lodging, and post-game activities has been met by the members themselves.

Haigh returned to the University of Wisconsin in the fall of 1968 to complete his doctoral studies in mathematics, but he left behind a group of rugby enthusiasts who took over where their coach had left off—Marty Fenlon, Bruce Bromander, John McCambridge, Mike Drapcho, Rick Moore, Steve Merz, and others. In 1969 the St. John's Rugby Club joined the Minnesota Union, and in 1970 associated itself

with the Midwest Rugby Union (based in Chicago). In 1971 the club was granted full membership. It was a prestigious group that in 1971 numbered thirty teams and seven associate memberships. Heretofore totally independent financially, the St. John's club now appealed to the Athletic Allocations Board (the AAB) for assistance, and through George Durenberger was granted the sum of \$200 for new uniforms and new rugby balls. Under the urging of club president Mike Drapcho they then scheduled games with the University of Wisconsin and the two St. Louis teams in the Missouri Union.

First the St. John's ruggers defeated Tom Haigh's Wisconsin team 9-5, then the following weekend defeated the St. Louis Rebels 3-0 and the St. Louis Bombers 14-3. Plenty of eyebrows were raised! The victories rendered the Jays eligible for the Mid-America Cup Tournament that was to be held this year in Milwaukee. It was the objective they were hoping for—the opportunity to spread their fame beyond the confines of Minnesota by defeating the top rugby teams in the Midwest.

The success of the brash young ruggers was phenomenal, despite a first-game defeat by the Chicago Lions, the 1970 Mid-America Cup champion and also the favorite for the 1971 meet. The defeat automatically dropped St. John's into the consolation round for the remainder of the meet. But the Jays were equal to the occasion. They first defeated Kent State 16-0, then the Amoco Club of Chicago 25-0. The final game was against the University of Minnesota Club that only a week earlier had defeated them easily. The St. John's club met the University head on, however, and won the match and the consolation championship by a score of 18-8.

Marty Fenlon, perhaps the most articulate promoter of rugby in his time, proudly wrote the *Record* report on the victory: "There were two trophies presented after the finals of the Mid-America. One went to St. John's, along with the admiration and compliments of everyone at the tournament. The other went to the University of Wisconsin, and their captain is our own Tom Haigh" (*Record*, May 7, 1971).

The 1971 victory was not the last of the St. John's Club achievements. They again won third place in the Mid-America Cup Tournament in 1972 and continued to take on all the prestigious clubs they could contact and play within the limits of their budget.

Members of the 1972 Rugby Club were Mike Bonacci, Larry Herrig, Peter Harriman, Patrick Hogan, Jeff "Boscoe" Meyer, Mark Caven, Dave Van Landschoot, Dick Howard, Michael "Montana" Stergios, Ferdinand Colon, Andrew Picla, Gregory Wells, and their great star Tom Miller.