

Colin Jose

Peter Mallett, Globe and Mail Update

He may not have scored any memorable goals, recorded any shutouts or hoisted any championship trophies during his career but soccer historian Colin Jose will finally join an esteemed list of soccer legends and be inducted into Canada's Soccer Hall of Fame in Vaughan, Ont. this weekend.

On Saturday evening the 72-year-old London, Ont. resident will tear himself away from his vast archives of game reports, statistics, miles of microfilm, stacks of old photos, books and video tapes and finally join the ranks of an institution of which he is also widely considered the father and creator.

“Colin's unassuming nature completely belies the intensity with which he pursues his research,” said Soccer Hall of Fame chairman Les Jones. “He is ‘Mr. Soccer’ when it comes to the documenting the sport in North America with soccer journalists, statisticians and even FIFA relying on his information and expertise. Without him our knowledge of the beautiful game would be greatly diminished and far less accurate.”

Jose will be inducted into the Soccer Hall of Fame during Saturday's ceremony at the Woodbridge Golf and Country Club along with a list of inductees including former Montreal Impact and Canadian Soccer League All-Star John Limniatus and former North American Soccer League legend Mike Stojanovic.

World soccer icon Eusebio will also attend Saturday's event. Eusebio was a star for Portugal at the 1968 World Cup but also helped Toronto win its only North American Soccer League crown in 1976 when he was a member of the Metros-Croatia who defeated Minnesota in the final game.

“It is a great feeling to finally be recognized for the work I have done,” said Jose. “It is rewarding to know that people understand the scope of what was involved and the hours of work that went into putting all of this together.”

Jose immigrated to Canada in 1957 from his home in Falmouth, England, escaping the grim reality of an economically depressed Great Britain and Europe still reeling from the destruction and chaos wrought by the Second World War.

Although he is quick to point out that the war had nothing to do with his immigration to Canada – he also recognizes that it did have much to do with the arrival of many others who brought their passion and zest for soccer to Canada.

Jose first found work as an electrician with the Canadian Pacific Railway in Moose Jaw, Sask., and then finally settled in Hamilton, Ont., where he worked several years for Westinghouse and Camco.

It was during his spare time that he gradually began piecing together a previously non-existent Canadian soccer history from kilometres of newspaper microfilm at university libraries.

Many times during his shifts in the factory he would be summoned over the intercom and taken away from his work on the floor to speak on the phone with a reporter looking for an answer to a soccer question.

He always delivered the goods and had an encyclopedic mind which could access information like a sophisticated data base.

He notes that although the soccer's history in Canada is very rich, the founders of the game "never bothered much to keep records and notes of their accomplishments" and it became his task to uncover a history which could have been lost forever. "Even today, every time I go to the library to research an old team or player – it opens another door – more and more I go looking for one thing and I find something new," said Jose.

One of his first research projects eventually led him to uncover details behind Galt Football Club's gold medal at the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis. But his research of the Galt team – located near Kitchener, Ont. – also led him to a wealth of information about the roots of the game in Ontario and eventually the rest of Canada.

Jose eventually found out that Galt FC tied the famous English touring team nicknamed "The pilgrims" the following year in a long forgotten exhibition match. Sifting through endless microfilm reels from the Toronto Mail newspaper – the forerunner to today's Globe and Mail – Jose would later discover that the region west of Toronto had a far greater soccer history than previously known. Jose notes that many of the great players of the day in Ontario were from tiny farming in Western Ontario like Stratford, Clinton, Woodstock, Milverton and Listowel.

Nearly 25 years after the creation of the Football Association of England in 1863, a team of Canadian born All-Stars from the Western Football Association toured Great Britain and shocked some of soccer's most famous clubs in the fall of 1888. The Western Ontario all-star team faced great sides like Glasgow Rangers, Hearts, West Bromwich Albion and Aston Villa.

Jose discovered that the Canadian side tied Rangers defeated Hearts and finished the

tour with as many wins as losses while turning many heads with their skill and athleticism.

“They were perceived as a rag-tag team from the colonies but people became surprised how well they could play,” said Jose. “A lot of these players were great athletes in other sports like hockey and many think their success at soccer was simply because they wanted to do something between the hockey seasons, and (so) played soccer in the summer.”

The link between hockey and soccer is a common thread in much of his research and he notes that some of hockey's greatest Canadian born players were also talented soccer players.

Hockey legend Gordie Howe played soccer with the Saskatoon Nutana; Frank Calder, the first president of the NHL was a formidable soccer player who played in the Montreal District Soccer Association between 1903 and 1911; Montreal Canadiens and Ottawa Senators great William John (Legs) Fraser played centre half for Winnipeg South which won a Canadian soccer championship in 1947.

Others like famed goaltender Gump Worsley and the late Peter Zezel also had their roots firmly planted in the beautiful game while growing up – Zezel with Toronto Italia and Worsley with a Saskatchewan all-star team which once played English club Tottenham Hotspur in 1952.

Despite commonly held views that soccer is a relatively new game to Canada, Jose and his research has uncovered that soccer was actually thriving in many parts of Canada before World War I.

Jose is fascinated of the reasons why there was such a great separation of soccer from the Canadian sports psyche after the war years.

“There is a rich history here – I don't think many people realize that it goes back as far as 1876 and until the First World War – the majority of people who played then were native born Canadians,” said Jose. “If you look at the First World War – thousands of Canadians went overseas and were killed – nearly an entire of generation of Canadians were gone and there was a vacuum created – in the demographic of young men.” “Then we had this influx of British people who came into the game and almost took it over – I think the native born Canadians felt alienated from their own game that was actually theirs.”

Jose is quick to point out that the war years also did much to shape his life but at the same time this period of devastation also did much to transform soccer into a foreign sport in his soon to be adopted country.

Fast forward to 2009 and soccer is the most popular participatory sport in Canada - with more than 815,000 players registered across the country - and has been for several years.

Former New York Cosmos and NASL president Clive Toye, who once signed the legendary Pele and orchestrated a modern day soccer boom in the United States and Canada, credits Jose's work as invaluable to Canadians' understanding of the modern game.

“Too many people tend to forget too much about the past and about the people who contributed to the foundations and the building of the game,” said Toye. “Colin, with his great knowledge, his scrupulous searching for and reporting on, has made sure that the facts are there for those who want to see. Much knowledge would have been lost without Colin's work.”

Twice in his career Jose rescued the standings and statistics for the North American Soccer League, once when it folded in 1984 and once in 1968 (check date) when the forerunner to the league had also closed its doors. “They were simply thrown out, nobody had realized it was important to keep these records,” Jose recalled. “But I collected everything.”

He has published 10 books documenting soccer history including *On-Side: 125 Years of Soccer in Ontario* and *NASL: A complete history*.

In the United States he is also revered, with the United States Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta, New York naming its annual national soccer media award after Jose for his contributions to historical research south of the border.

Bruce Wilson, the former NASL all-star defender and Canadian national team stalwart who is now a coach with the University of Victoria, recalled Jose's brilliance from a broadcasting gig with TSN during n the 1986 World Cup.

“[After Canada was eliminated from the tournament] I did a couple of weeks work for TSN on the remaining games,” recalled Wilson. “Guess who saved all our lives – not just mine but Dale Barnes and Tommy Docherty with a total background on every team and every player who played in the World Cup – it was Colin.”

During a ceremony at Saturday's Toronto FC-Los Angeles Galaxy game at BMO Field, Jose and some members of that 1986 team will be honoured in a ceremony commemorating this year's inductees.

Bob Lenarduzzi, a former Canadian World Cup coach and currently the president of the Vancouver Whitecaps, says Jose's induction is long overdue and said “without his passion towards the history of the game we would not have our history documented.”

Added Kevan Pipe, the former chief operating officer of the Canadian Soccer Association: "I always saw Colin as the Encyclopedia Britannica of Canadian soccer – he was seen by most as the Professor Emeritus of the history of soccer in Canada."

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