



25 Years in Sports

Twenty-five Years in Sports
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HISTORICAL REVIEW
OF ACTIVITIES DURING THE
FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS



Viking Athletic Association

Chicago
Illinois
U. S. A.



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Twenty-five Years in Sports

Twenty-five years ago, on May 20, 1926, seven young, strong-bodied Swedes held a meeting. All of them had but recently arrived in the United States, and all of them had an inherent love for sports. The purpose of their meeting was to form a club—a club where they and other Swedish immigrants could come together and engage in the various athletic activities which had become such an important part of daily life. They had courage, a fighting spirit and unlimited vision, but, as is often the case, they had very little money. Their enthusiasm was considerably greater than the sum of money which they were able to raise, and it was only after considerable difficulty that they were in a position to buy one soccer ball from the money which they had pooled together. However, that one soccer ball gave them the opportunity to start playing their favorite game on Sunday afternoons.

Little did they realize that their modest beginning was laying the solid foundation which was, in time, to support one of the foremost soccer clubs in the United States—the Viking Athletic Association—a club whose determination and skill on the field was to become well known and highly respected in soccer circles all over Sweden, to say nothing of the other European countries and their own adopted land.

Liberty Ball Club

When the Viking A. A. was first formed, it took the more American name of Liberty Ball Club. Word soon spread around Chicago that some Swedes on the northside were organizing an athletic club and that they were particularly anxious to get soccer players into their organization. As the weeks went by, more young athletes requested membership and, before long, there was enough booting talent available to justify fielding a team. Officers for the team were elected and the Liberty Ball Club made their first shaky bid for soccer honors in the fourth division of the International Soccer Football League. As they placed their foot on the lowest rung of the

ladder to soccer fame, little did they realize the difficult climb before them—the climb that was to bring them to the very pinnacle of soccer distinction, the National Open Championship of the United States.

In the first of its existence, the club held its meetings in the homes of some of its members. Many of the gatherings took place in the home of Mrs. Theresa Strand, aunt of the Viking's popular, ten-time president Ivar Strand. It was not until August 1927 that the club acquired a place of its own, a one-room location at 1706 Foster Ave. It was here that they met and talked business and, believe it or not, they were even able to sneak in a little inside soccer practice, much to the dismay of the landlord, but, of course, to the ultimate improvement of the soccer team.

In the first year of their determined fourth-division play, Liberty bested all their competition and landed on top of their league. Rugged play coupled with old-country skill, earned for them their promotion into the next highest division where their continued spirit and enthusiasm carried them to a first-place position. By 1928 the hard, clean play of the Liberty Ball Club was beginning to win the respect of the Chicago soccer enthusiasts.

The membership of the club had now grown from the original seven to an encouraging total of 150. It was generally felt that the time had come at last when the club could place more teams on the soccer fields in Chicago, and, as a result of the endeavors made in this direction, the new season began with Liberty represented in the first, third and fourth divisions.

The club was even getting to be known outside of Chicago and in 1928 they received an invitation to play a formidable team in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Travel was made by boat to Muskegon and then by bus to their destination. The booters, playing their first inter-state match gave a good account of themselves but dropped a close 4-3 contest.

During the early years, soccer was not the only sport in which the members engaged. In 1928 a strong bowling team was formed

which added several trophies to the club's growing collection. A gymnastic troupe was also organized and at several exhibitions they were enthusiastically applauded for their fine performance.

By 1929 the fast-growing club had outgrown their small, wholly inadequate quarters. Fortunately, a five-room flat was available right next door to their one-room setup at 1702 Foster Ave. In March of that year they moved into their new headquarters which they were to occupy until September 1931.

Ladies' Auxiliary Organized

As the club desired to be as successful in their social activities as it was on the soccer fields, it invited the wives and sweethearts of its members to form a ladies' auxiliary. The ladies were more than eager to be of help and in December of 1929 they were completely organized. Needless to say, the women were a boon to the young club. Their willingness to contribute to the club's growth became apparent immediately and the proceeds from their dances and social gatherings contributed substantially to the financial stability of the Liberty Ball Club.

At the beginning of 1930 a slight lack of interest was evidenced among some of the members and in order to bolster a sagging morale the decision was made to reorganize the club and change its name. On June 6th of the same year the Liberty Ball Club became, more appropriately, the Viking Athletic Association. In July the uniforms worn by the soccer players were changed to a combination of yellow jerseys and black pants. It did not take long, however, before their Swedish pride insisted on replacing the black pants with blue ones.

The Viking's showing during the season of 1929-30 was remarkably good. The new teams in the third and fourth divisions became champions in their respective divisions, earning for them the right to move up into the next highest divisions. When the fall season of 1930 opened, the blue-and-gold uniformed Vikings had teams represented in Chicago's first, second and third divisions. Everyone looked forward to a bright future. Then came the depression and hopes dimmed.

The early days of 1931 ushered in a period that was to be the most dismal and discouraging one in the club's history. The great depression was quickly gathering momentum. Many of the members were thrown out of

work; collection of club dues dropped to almost zero; dances and parties, chief sources of the organizations revenue were poorly attended and, more often than not, ran at a loss. In August the third team had to be dropped from its league because of the lack of operating funds. In September the members received their severest blow when they were told that they had to give up their club rooms.

During the balance of the depression it required considerable fortitude to hold the club together. Without any club rooms of their own the club drifted about from one make-shift arrangement to another. Garages and basements were used as dressing rooms for the players. Restaurant side rooms were rented so that the necessary meetings could be held. Time and time again depression's mighty wave threatened to toss the club upon the rocks. Time and time again the hardy Vikings weathered the storm.

Along with the club's treasury, the soccer teams, too, felt the effects of the disaster. In the 1933-34 season of the Viking's major division team bogged down to a last place tie with the Chicago Sport Club. A play-off was necessary to determine which of the two teams should be retained in Chicago's top division. Fortunately the Vikings bested their hard-fighting opponents 1-0 and thus maintained their right to continue play in soccer's select group.

The near-tragic soccer demotion acted as a stimulant with the result that all the teams were sparked to a greater effort. On July 15, 1934, a team of Swedish All Stars played a group of Italian All Stars in the final game for the then existing Thompson Trophy. With one exception, every member of the Swedish team was a Viking player. The Swedes won and their fine showing evidently restored confidence to the Viking booters.

During the following season of 1934-35 the reserve team distinguished itself by taking first place in their division and with it the attractive gold medals. The major players, although they had a hard time of it, came through to win the title of their division, but only after they had conquered the stouthearted Norwegian-Americans in a stubbornly fought 3-2 match. However, the most important game of the season, as far as the Vikings were concerned, was that in which they beat their traditional rivals, the Swedish Americans, by a close 1-0 score. It was the first time since their organization that the Vikings had beaten the Swedes.

The publication committee has been unable to find records covering a period of almost ten years. However, suffice it to say



Major and Major Reserve Division Champions 1935

BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

WALTER NORELL, JOCKE JOHANSSON, KURT DAHLEN, ROLAND BECKMAN, HERBERT HAWKINSON, HELGE CARLBERG.

SECOND ROW:

NELS BROSTROM, FOLKE SWANSON, HANS JENSEN, NELS DAHLQUIST, EINAR LINDQUIST, ALLAN LINDSTRAND, JOHN SWANSON.

THIRD ROW:

FRITZ PETERSON, FRED GRANQUIST, STURE FORS, JOHN GRANQUIST, WALTER PETERSON, RUDY NYSTROM, MARTIN ERICKSON, RUDOLPH PETERSON, KNUT MAGNUSON.

TOP ROW:

ROBERT SHOLIN, BERT ZETTERWALL, IVAR STRAND, ARTHUR NELSON, JOHN JOSEPHSON, AXEL OHMAN.

that these were eventful years during which, among other things, our present club house was acquired and completely remodeled by a number of members who donated labor and material to complete this project.

World War II had its beginning in this period and a great number of our members saw service in the armed forces of our country.

One of the most successful years in Viking's history was that of 1945 when the teams in both the major and reserve divisions finished on top of their respective sections with remarkable records. The major head and toe artists racked up 12 wins, one tie and one loss, for a robust total of 25 points. The reserves, not to be outdone, swept through their schedule without a single defeat.

The Vikings were also way up in the cup competitions of that year. In the National Challenge Cup competition they fought their way into the semi-finals of the Western Division only to lose to a strong St. Louis contender. They met a similar fate in the Illinois State finals where they lost a thrilling two-hour battle to their old rivals, the Swedish-Americans. However, they were soon back in winning stride and turned in four straight victories to take the honors in the National League's seven-a-side tournament, beating Schwaben 4-1 in the final.

Other sport groups within the club also came to life in 1945. The basketball team, playing in two leagues, ended the season as runners-up in one league and placed third in the other. The strong, silent chess players also showed their competitive spirit by finishing second in the city tournament, and a much-improved softball team exhibited definite promise when they closed their season well above the .500 mark. Golf was also being added to the Viking sport family in 1945 and although no tournaments were held in that year ambitious plans were being made for the future.

The Climb to the National Championship

Then came the year—1946—the year the Viking's biggest dream came true, the year they reached the goal sought after by every soccer organization in the United States—the National Open Challenge Cup. To make the achievement even more fitting, they soared to the soccer heights during the twentieth anniversary of their club.

The thrilling story of how the Vikings travelled the hard road that led them to the United States title is best told in the follow-

ing report, written by the team's energetic and capable manager, Jocke Johansson:

"On January 13, 1946, the Viking A. A. opened their play in the National Open Challenge Cup competition by playing the Slovaks at Winnemac Park Stadium. We chalked up a score of 7-2. In the second round we played Schwaben at our home field and came through with a count of 6-2. That victory put us in the quarter final of the Western Division National Cup, meeting Sparta.

"As both clubs have stadiums as home grounds, a drawing was to be made as to where the game should be played. The Viking club again depended upon 'Johansson's luck,' and we won the decision and the game was played at Winnemac Park Stadium on April 14th.

"Sparta had strengthened their team by lining up several of their returned servicemen. The Vikings also had secured the services of Johnnie O'Boyle, recently released from the Army after serving overseas; Harry Phillips, a crack center-half from Toronto, Canada; and one of the finest goal tenders we have seen in action at Winnemac Park, Dick Arends also from Toronto. Jeff Coombes, another ex-GI, who formerly played with the Detroit Chryslers, also signed for our club.

"The game was a very tough contest and at the half there was no score. At half time the Viking team had a pep talk and after ten minutes of play in the second half they put our team ahead 1-0. We were leading up to the closing minutes, but then Sparta came through to tie the score. Overtime had to be played and in the first period Nels Brostrom put over a fine pass to Jimmy McDermott who booted the ball home. With our defense playing high class soccer, 2-1 was good for the final victory. This victory placed the Viking A. A. in position to represent Illinois in the National Cup.

"In the Schwaben game our outstanding left halfback, Danny Dawson, was injured when he received a broken arm.

"A little mix-up in the Sparta game put Johnnie O'Boyle out of the game for a month. With the powerful St. Louis Carondelets coming up as our next opponents, the Viking officials signed one of the outstanding outside rights, Art Garcia of St. Louis. On April 28th we played the Carondelets at Winnemac Park Stadium and with both teams having strong defense it was hard to crack through. In the first half Nels Brostrom sent a beautiful pass across the field and Art Garcia connected a hard drive which beat the St. Louis goalie. In the second half both teams were

pressing very hard, but when the final whistle blew, the Viking A. A. walked off with a 1-0 victory.

"On May 12th the Viking club traveled to Pittsburgh to play the Heidelberg-Losegos. We chartered a 36-passenger bus and several enthusiastic fans went along to cheer us to victory. When the game started it looked like the Vikings really had the winning combination. Jeff Coombes, playing inside right, put the Vikings ahead 1-0. As the game proceeded it was only a matter of time when we would increase the score, but Heidelberg had other thoughts. They tied the score before the first half was over. Coming out in the second half they were like a new team, fighting their way through our defense. Before the Vikings knew what happened the Heidelbergs had scored two more goals, thereby leading 3-1. When the game was over it was a sad set-back for the Vikings.

"As the Western Final is played on home and home basis with total goal count, the following Sunday we were hosts to the Heidelberg team at Winnemac Park Stadium. The Viking manager and club officials worked overtime to rearrange our team set-up. Before starting the game we were two goals down, but the Viking spirit carried through and before a crowd of 2,000 people we chalked up a powerful victory of 2-0. Our first goal was scored on a strong play by Harry Phillips, who worked the ball up to Jimmy McDermott and Jimmy crashed the net for 1-0. This goal looked like the pay-off for the Vikings because we were storming Pittsburgh, but their defense was working in good style. In the closing 15 minutes Nels Brostrom sent a fine pass to Roscoe Andersen who added another goal for the Vikings, making the score 2-0. This made the score of the two games a 3-3 tie.

"All National Cup games have to be played to a finish, and the referee ordered overtime play. No matter how both teams worked, neither could score. By this time it started to rain and the ground was very slippery which made for dangerous play, but two overtime periods were played, without a score. Then the Heidelbergs thought they had had enough and agreed to come to Chicago the following Sunday for the play-off game.

"On May 26th in the deciding game the Vikings were in high spirit to go through and win the Western Final. Both teams were playing heads-up soccer. About nine minutes after the kick-off Mons Sebbby set up a fine corner kick which Harry Phillips headed straight into the goal for our first marker. At half time the score was 1-0, but in the opening minutes of

the second half Pittsburgh bounced right back into the game, tying the score. Then the Vikings put on the power and Jimmy McDermott, drawing out the Pittsburgh goalie, passed to Bill List who put in a strong low grounder making the score 2-1. Roscoe Andersen moved to the outside right position and his speed carried him through to send a sharp cross-ball which McDermott connected to increase the score to 3-1. That was the pay-off of the Western Final, making the total score of the three games: Vikings 6, Heidelberg-Losegos 4.

"The Ponta Delgadas of Fall River, Massachusetts, were the winners of the Eastern Open Division. The United States Soccer Football Association's ruling was that the final for the National Cup would be a two-game total point series.

The Finals

"The following players and officials were selected by the Viking club to go to Fall River and represent the Viking Athletic Association: Dick Arends and Steve Wisniewski, goalies; Erne Kuehl, right fullback; Hans Jensen, left fullback; Johnnie O'Boyle, right halfback; Harry Phillips, center halfback; Danny Dawson, left halfback; Nels Brostrom, outside right; Jeff Coombes, inside right; Jimmy McDermott, center forward; Geo. Nemchik, inside left. Andy Hritz, outside left; Roscoe Andersen, center forward; Einar Lindquist, halfback; Mons Sebbby, halfback; Bill List, forward; Ivar Abrahamson, trainer; officials: Jocke Johansson, manager; Nels Dahlquist, business manager.

"On Saturday, July 6th, at 1:00 p.m., we left the Municipal Airport of Chicago for Providence, Rhode Island, in a 21 passenger chartered plane. Our first landing was at Detroit, where we picked up Jeff Coombes. By this time everyone had become well acquainted with our 6 ft. 4 in. pilot, Bob, his co-pilot, Frankie, the business manager, Stanley, and the stewardess, and the wonderful way they had of taking care of us. It was perfect flying weather and we all agreed that it was the only way to travel.

"We arrived in Providence, Rhode Island, about 7 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time), where we checked in at the beautiful Biltmore Hotel. In the evening we went out to look over the town and took advantage of the wonderful breeze from the Atlantic Ocean. It was really hard to believe that only that morning we had been in Chicago.

Sunday was the big day. Nels Dahlquist had arranged to have a Greyhound bus pick us up at the Hotel Biltmore at 1:00 o'clock, to take



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