

LIFE IN THE U.S.

SPORTS

Beckenbauer & American soccer

By Louis Kampf

Some months ago I noticed that Franz Beckenbauer was about to arrive in the U.S.

"Who," you ask, "is Franz Beckenbauer?"

Merely the greatest libero in the whole world.

All right. I'll explain. Beckenbauer is a soccer player. Only a chosen few get to be liberos. For the libero is what the word implies: he is free. Free to leave his defensive midfield position, and charge upfield leading the attack. He must be in complete control, secure in his own capacity to recover from an offensive thrust, and return downfield to protect his goal. He must have the stamina to be on the run and take risks for the full 90 minutes of a game. He is Captain Marvel with a brain. Beckenbauer is known to his fans in Munich as *der Kaiser*.

Munich is a bourgeois paradise. Yes, some unpleasant neo-Nazis occasionally roam the streets; some people might even remember what happened at nearby Dachau; but such dreary thoughts fade as one tries to choose between a wedge of Bavarian cream pie and a square of Linzertorte at one of the city's baroque pastry shops.

So why has Beckenbauer left to join the Cosmos, New York's entry in the North American Soccer League (NASL)?

Two million and eight hundred thousand dollars, that's why. This is not quite as much as the Cosmos pay for Pele's services, but Beckenbauer is a man of modest ambitions, unlike his flamboyant teammate from Brazil.

I heard of Beckenbauer's decision to leave the Bayern Munchen team while I was trying to fight off a sunburn on a shimmering beach on the Tunisian island of Djerba (honest!). The night before I had been glued to the TV watching Bayern Munchen defeat Red Star of Belgrade in a European Cup match. No Beckenbauer.

"What happened to Beckenbauer?" I asked the postal worker from Munich

The acquisition of Beckenbauer by the New York Cosmos is symptomatic of the corporate effort to make soccer the next big time American sport.

whose fried body reclined in the beach chair next to mine. He responded with a wail, followed by an angry growl. The Americans have done it again. As if the bombing of Munich had not been bad enough, they'd now bought Beckenbauer. "And Americans don't even like soccer. Baseball! Pfui!"

Growing American interest.

But North Americans are, in fact, beginning to like soccer. I came home to the States in time to watch Beckenbauer's American debut broadcast on TV. I could have watched it in Tunisia, since it was going out to the whole world via satellite. More important, there was a capacity crowd of 40,000 on hand in Tampa Bay, Fla., as the hometown Rowdies beat the Cosmos.

Beckenbauer was tired and barely familiar with the other players. Occasionally one would see hints of his tenacious ball control, and his ability to guide the flow of the offense.

But the fans did not seem interested in Beckenbauer. Or in his teammate Pele. They were rooting for the Rowdies, who systematically demolished the Cosmos' defense. I enjoyed the show, in spite of the commercials.

I have loved watching soccer since my father treated me to my first game. I was



five and we were living in Vienna, Austria. After we moved to the U.S. when I was 12, I had to derive my pleasure from playing, rather than watching, since the level of performance was abysmally low.

Indeed, it was low enough for me to become the instant star goalie for the Maccabi Athletic Club juniors in Manhattan. The club was German-Jewish. The league we played in consisted of clubs representing ethnic neighborhoods all over New York City.

"Next time I'll kick you in the nuts, kike," grinned the Italian Fraternal Club's center-forward as I shoved him aside (legally, of course), belly-flopped onto the rolling ball, thereby saving a goal. His grin was not friendly. Fortunately, he did not carry out his threat.

What happened was worse. Our sporting opponents broke into our lockers. Gone were the 50 cents that were to pay for my carfare home from Brooklyn, a hotdog, and a Dr. Brown's celery tonic.

This was my introduction to the virtues of ethnic sporting and social clubs. Things have changed little over the years.

But the persistent nastiness did not diminish my love for soccer. There is no sport like it. You don't need the bulk of Mean Joe Greene. You don't have to be as tall as Bill Walton: five-foot-five will do fine. You don't have to be male.

Imagination in command.

Soccer is cheerfully simple. You just move the ball up the field with your feet, head, chest and try to get it into the opponents' goal. The rules are few. Best of all, nothing is hidden. Every move is out in the open to be savored or put down. Play is always in motion.

All this allows someone like Beckenbauer to use his talents to the full. And the talents are never those of sheer strength or size. They involve the capacity to control the ball, to pass accurately and with daring, to anticipate an opponent's or a teammate's moves, to play in relation to the whole team. You can't simply go through the motions drilled into you by a coach: the imagination must take command.

The trouble is that though it's fun playing soccer at any level of competence, it's dreary to watch anything but a first-rate performance. When skilled feet are not in control over the ball, teams degenerate into mobs. That was the condition of North American soccer until a few years ago. Then teams began to import the likes of Beckenbauer.

Why?

Though soccer may be the world's most beautiful competitive sport, why should anyone want to impose it on North America?

Continued on next page.

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Old timers teach and learn with NAM

Most of the heads of hair in the room were gray or thinning. They weren't wearing the blue jeans and t-shirts that nearly everyone around them chose.

At times they seemed to feel a bit uncomfortable. Several had once been powerful leaders in one of the largest and most influential leftist organizations this country has ever seen.

Now they were mainly rank-and-file members or sympathetic observers of a group called the New American Movement that was at least very different, whether for better or worse, than the groups they had known and led.

"Can you help us understand these young people, their amorphousness?" someone asked. "Why do they reject strong leadership and direction?"

"It's a different culture," John Rossen, a veteran of movements of the Great Depression era, tried to explain, "that rejects the authoritarian approach that we found useful to some extent in the '30s and '40s." But others talk of the need for "personal unfolding" as an alternative to party discipline provoked raised, quizzical eyebrows.

If NAM seemed a bit strange to some of the old leftists, it also was exciting in many ways. Largely a product of people who came to socialism through the new left, NAM has since picked up members who are simply new to the left. But it has also drawn in a number of veterans of the old left, mainly members of the Communist party who were in the wing that stressed greater democracy and independence from the Soviet Union.

Having left the Communist party at varying times from the early '40s to the early '70s, they were now trying to feel at home in or near NAM. They also hoped to offer people in NAM the kind of depth of personal experience and familiarity with the past that was so glaringly absent from most of the new left.

Promising, but a ways to go yet.

Yet there was no consensus among them, except perhaps that NAM was promising

but still nothing like the good old days. Perhaps that might even be for the better in many ways, some speculated.

Nearly everyone was deeply impressed by the role women play in NAM by comparison with the Communist party of the past. "The CP probably had more active women than any other political organization," Max Gordon, an editor of the *Daily Worker* from 1942 to 1957 and now a NAM member, said. "Yet in its leadership it had nothing like the participation here, especially by young women."

On the other hand, NAM had virtually no blacks and few industrial workers at its convention, in strong contrast to the CP.

Weak organization, strong minds.

Like all the older ex-Party people, Gordon found NAM's convention and organization far less disciplined than those in his past experience. There was not the same systematic review of work and assignment of tasks that came with a centralized organization, a convention of delegates rather than members and a stricter division of labor.

Herbert Benjamin, 77, a former "Wobbly" (member of the Industrial Workers of the World) who was the head of the Unemployed Councils and the Workers' Alliance in the '30s, thought that NAM lacked sufficiently strong leadership. "This organization is in the state I might have found a small city organization [of the Communist party] in 1925 or 1926," he said, "Even more immature politically, not as well organized."

Benjamin was not entirely critical. "I see a good potential," he said. "I see young people who want to create a socialist movement. I see them as the best elements we have in the country today and the only ones who can do the job. I see them as groping and trying to achieve this. ... Old-timers such as I look at the present scene and are very much disturbed. We have a lot of competing small groups and sects. Some, such as this one, have more promise than others. But NAM reflects all

the weaknesses of the socialist movement."

A strong advocate of publicly, continually educating for socialism and working to unify all socialist forces, Benjamin was less upset than many others at the predominance of educated people in NAM.

"There's too much of an inferiority complex on the part of intellectuals," he said. "They think they can't build a socialist movement until they get the proletariat in. But they can't wait. The only people who can build a socialist movement are socialists. If they're all intellectuals, too bad, but that's the way it is."

Ben Margolis, 67, a labor lawyer who defended hundreds of witnesses called before the House Un-American Activities Committee and Communists charged with violating the Smith Act, thought NAM's problems were now mainly organizational and financial rather than ideological.

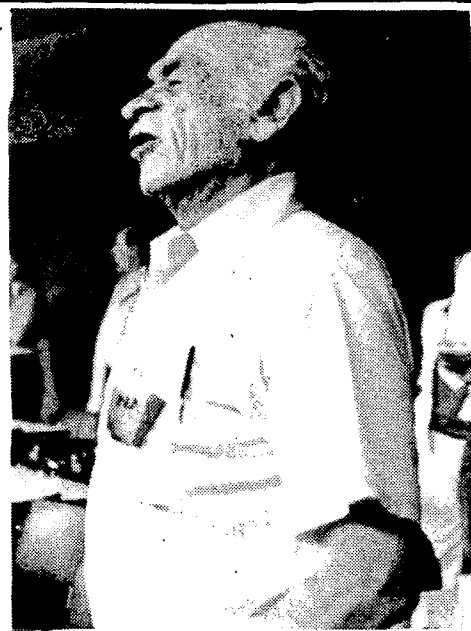
"The left used to make pitches and get every penny they could out of people's pockets for the cause," he said, "but with NAM it is either not done or done in such a milk-toast way as to be ineffective."

Now "cautiously optimistic" about NAM's future, Margolis said that "the biggest single thing" about NAM that distinguishes it from the old left "is the lack of dogmatism. People think for themselves. I don't mean to suggest that people didn't think then but they thought about implementation, not creation of policy. That's not true here."

"One advantage the old left had was discipline. The problem was that came out of leadership running things. Discipline out of a sense of responsibility is the aim."

Shared learning.

Much as less experienced NAM members could gain from learning about earlier decades, the old recruits and observers were learning as well. There was, for one thing, a turning of tables. Stella Nowicki, one of the women featured in *Union Maids*, a film about women union organizers in the early CIO by Dayton NAM members Julia Reichert and Jim Klein, was feeling



Ben Dobbs, newly elected to NAM's leadership, singing the Internationale at the closing session.

ecstatic not only from the convention and the "activist, creative leadership of the young women," but also from her own new celebrity.

Once a packinghouse organizer and a low-level Communist party functionary, Nowicki had known of one of the former leaders of the CP who was at the convention only at a great distance. She was shocked when he, once her superior, sought her out for the autograph of the now-famous rank-and-filer, Stella Nowicki.

Another elder statesperson surprisingly called a speech by singer Holly Near "the highlight of the convention." Her poetically forceful speech was hardly a statement on the "woman question" familiar to the old left or even a very common view within NAM. Yet this man thought her call for a "woman-identified" politics, centered on lesbian separatism, was forcing him to think about things he had rarely considered.

Later, after a strongly feminist concert Saturday night, the first two people up on the stage to buy copies of singer Kristin Lems' records were not young women but two men in their 60s, former leaders of the Communist party.

—David Moberg

Soccer

Continued from page 19.

cans? After all, sports with a mass following generally develop out of some sort of intimacy with a community or a social class. In England soccer teams emerged in the 19th century from working class neighborhoods in cities like London, Manchester, Liverpool. The great Arsenal teams of the 1930s were manned almost entirely by players from a single London neighborhood. Things have changed, of course. But Liverpool fans still sing "You'll Never Walk Alone" when their team seems in trouble.

The search for money.

But the NASL imports Englishmen, Germans, Italians, Brazilians in the hope that soccer will catch on in spite of not being grounded in local traditions. The reason is obvious: money.

The Cosmos are owned by Warner Communications, which also controls the Rolling Stones. "We feel that soccer is the fastest growing sport," says Warner vice president Jay Emmett.

An expanding conglomerate like Warner must look for new investments. Coca Cola, according to *Business Week*, is investing \$5 million in soccer to build good will.

They seem to be hitting the jackpot. The other day the Cosmos got 60,000 people to venture to their stadium in the cancer-inducing meadowlands of New Jersey. Thousands of men and women are beginning to play soccer at all levels.

I'm glad that I'll be able to watch the likes of Beckenbauer in the future. But what, I wonder, is the future of sport, when soccer, or any other game, can be made part of our collective life from the top down.

Louis Kampf lives in Boston and teaches at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

NAM

NAM is weak on organization, yet it has had a promising, innovative beginning.

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One side effect of greater clarity in NAM's political viewpoint may be a lessened fear of working with other groups. A talk on the relationship of NAM with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee by Saul Wellman, a veteran organizer who started with the Young Communist League in 1930, was one striking symbol of the urge within NAM to unify the broadest possible range of socialists.

Despite his antipathy, at times extremely harsh, toward the old Socialist party and "social democrats," Wellman recalled that he had experienced a curious relationship with them. From a free speech struggle in 1930 in Jersey City, N.J., through a rank-and-file movement in the Teamsters in 1937, to the Spanish Civil War and on through the Cold War persecutions of Communists under the Smith Act in the 1950s, Wellman recalled that he would continually find Socialist party leader Norman Thomas—or another Socialist—on the same platform, in the same demonstration, or on the same front with him and other Communists.

"I have a dilemma," he said. "Why is it that on so many questions I could be on the same platform with Norman Thomas of the Socialist party and so hate the Socialist party?"

After leaving the Communist party in 1957, Wellman said, he began to reconsider his views. He "jettisoned Stalin" and

came to the conclusion that the democratic road to socialism was the only possible and desirable path for America. Over recent years he said that he had seen author and socialist propagandist Michael Harrington, parts of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and others who might claim to follow in Thomas' tradition emerge from "the swamp of anti-communism" and repudiate many of their past mistakes, such as support for the war in Vietnam.

Perhaps, he reflected, despite the vast differences he still feels with DSOC, such as its total immersion in the Democratic party and concentration on top union leaders as agents of change, they can "find a way to heal the historic breach [between socialists and communists] that began in 1919."

How to have a socialist impact.

As NAM begins to move into large popular organizations and works with groups that have a very diluted, if any, vision of socialism, its members worry about making an impact as socialists. "We have not found a way to project a socialist vision and make our ideas clear to people," outgoing national secretary Roberta Lynch said flatly.

Socialism is most vigorously projected in NAM schools, such as those run by the Oakland, Calif., or Austin, Texas, chapters; local newspapers, such as the *East Bay Voice* or the *Somerville (Mass.) Community News*; or in speeches and forums, such as those in Los Angeles that often draw 500 or more people.

NAM theoretical discussions have also improved, drawing on the vast "unofficial and dissident Marxist writings of the past decades as well as new "Eurocommunist" notions.

To take a few examples from the convention:

• Richard Healey presented a view of class that revised the old NAM perspective that everyone, except for corporate rulers, was part of a working class differentiated only by income, race and sex. Class groupings were differentiated, Healey argued, according to their control over investment and capital, over labor (theirs or others') or some physical equipment or plant. Some groups have control over none of these, others over some, and a few over all—each potentially leading to different interests.

• Barbara Ehrenreich dissected the way in which the "liberated" woman of the mass media is torn from a home, however stifling, and thrown into a market of intensely competitive and isolated egos straining for elusive, transitory, isolated satisfactions.

• Stanley Aronowitz delivered a broadside against the socialist realist and propagandist visions of art in favor of art forms that carry on their revolution in form as much as content.

Although NAM will be working in the coming year to develop a cohesive national program in several areas, according to Holly Graff, a NIC member, it is still far from having a national impact on issues. There is strong sentiment from most chapters, however, to transcend the organization's origins as a federation of local groups and tackle national issues in a coordinated fashion.

NAM needs more of nearly everything a strong political organization needs, yet it has had a promising, innovative beginning. If after five years of work the results are not as impressive as members had hoped, it is certainly not because the organization is bankrupt.

"What does it take to be a revolutionary?" a young man asks a veteran Spanish Civil War fighter played by Yves Montand in the film, *La Guerre Est Finie*, Dorothy Healey recalled. His answer—and hers for NAM—was, "Patience and irony. Patience and irony."