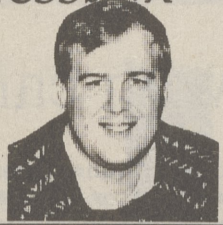


SportsWeek

- School news
- Classified
- Calendar

From the
pressbox



Dave Konopki

"World Cup
Fever..
It's not
contagious"

Let's get something straight right from the start. I like soccer. I really do. And before you jump to any conclusions, this is not another in a long line of World Cup-bashing stories you've been reading on the sports pages in just about every publication over the past month or two.

During the past decade I've covered dozens upon dozens of high school soccer games, including the past 10 PIAA District 2 championships. Many of my friends are former soccer players or soccer coaches and during the past 10 years I have built a solid relationship with many of the outstanding former and current coaches in local high school soccer. People like former Dallas boys' head coach John McCafferty and current girls' mentor Ron Moran; current Lake-Lehman and former Abington Heights head coach Mark Stroney; former Dallas assistant and Meyers head coach Herb Wiedlich; Wyoming Seminary's Tom Rokita; Wyoming Valley West's Ted Tsiolos and Bishop Hoban's Frank Chadwick, just to name a few. And this past season, I had the pleasure of laying the foundation of a relationship with new Lake-Lehman girls' co-coaches Dave and Jan Elston.

I've also seen the Back Mountain Youth Soccer Organization grow from its infancy in the late '70's and early '80's to the statewide power it's become, serving more than 1,000 boys and girls in the Back Mountain community.

Normally I wouldn't, and shouldn't, have to begin a column with a disclaimer like the one above. But I have three strikes against me. First, I am an active manager and board member of Back Mountain Baseball, Inc. What does that have to do with soccer you ask? It shouldn't mean anything. But with the incredible growth of spring soccer during the past three years and the start of a modest fall baseball program last year, there is a quiet tension incubating between supporters of the two organizations. If you don't believe it, then you're either naive or just plain foolish. And now, it seems if you're an active volunteer in baseball and not soccer, you're anti-soccer. And vice-versa. It's a shame, but it's true. But that's another column for another time.

Second, I'm a huge football fan. That's American football, for all you soccer junkies. I could never get enough high school, college and professional football. And after all, someone with a modest high school and brief collegiate football career could never be a soccer fan. Right?

And finally, despite the more than 100 stories I have written about soccer games, teams and players, including stories and letters which have helped a few local players obtain all-state status or a collegiate scholarship, there are those who still maintain that I'm anti-soccer. Most of those people have either: 1) never met or talked to me, 2) never read a sports page in a newspaper for which I've worked or 3) think O.J. Simpson is a cartoon character on Fox.

Now, having finally gotten that off my chest, I'm willing to devote this entire column to the sport of soccer, specifically, World Cup '94 which is currently taking place in the United States. Yes, these United States.

In the 1970's, soccer fans in the United States and those around the world kept telling us how soccer would become the next major sport in America. Finally, they said, the people of this country would wake up and join the rest of the world in embracing the sport. But now, with the year 2000 on our doorstep and the rest of the world's biggest sporting event in our backyard, apathy for the sport continues in this country.

Don't believe me? Don't forget, denial is the first sign of a problem.

A CNN/Gallup poll recently showed that more than 60 percent of those surveyed didn't even know the World Cup was taking place in this country. And nearly 71 percent said they would watch little, if any, of the games. To make matters worse, the Cable News Network sent its cameras to a youth soccer game where even the kids themselves said they planned on watching little more than the highlights on television. Also, a recent survey of Americans found soccer ranked 67th as their favorite spectator sport. No. 66 - tractor pulling (I'm serious). Even last weekend when the World Cup was being broadcast to nearly two billion people around the globe, it pulled in a 5.8 Nielsen rating in the host country. It did, however, edge the U.S. Open golf championship (5.0), but even the most naive person knows that golf, although it's a great sport to play, ranks right up there with watching Grandma clip your grandfather's nose hair when it comes to viewing excitement.

Don't give up on the sport just yet. The number of youth programs and the number of high schools which now offer soccer on the interscholastic level are growing by leaps and bounds each year. But let's also be realistic. The sport, much like hockey did when it began its growth in this country, needs help if it expects to gain acceptance by the power-hungry American sports fan. Plain and simple, the American people like power. And in the realm of sports, that means offense. That's why they spend the money to see Barry Bonds and Ken Griffey, Jr. hit the ball 500 feet instead of watching Tom Glavine and Randy Johnson spin a three-hit shutout. Why do you think they have a home run hitting contest at the baseball All-Star game and not a contest to see which pitcher can throw the most consecutive strikes? Power my friends. Power.

And that's why soccer, in its current form, will never be fully embraced in this country. It may be intriguing and it may be fundamentally sound, but not many people want to watch Bolivia and Saudi Arabia battle to a scoreless tie after 90 minutes of action.

Hockey made rule changes recently to promote more offense and increase fan interest. The result: the most exciting hockey playoffs in the sport's history this year. Now, it's time for soccer to follow its lead.

Here are three simple suggestions (with tongue firmly in cheek):

First, put another ball into play at the beginning of each period. Then, you will have four balls in play by the fourth quarter (in high school) and two balls in play in the second half (professional play). Now, no team can just stand around and kill the clock once it gets a lead. Imagine the excitement as one ball heads towards the net, another crosses midfield and two more are coming strong down the wings.

Second, with two minutes remaining in the period, replace one of the regular balls with a multi-colored one. This ball would be worth two goals if it enters the net, much like the "money ball" in the three-point shooting contest in basketball.

And third, have a goal, on wheels, attached to a track surrounding the field. In the final quarter, or final 10 minutes in World Cup action, start the goal on its way around the field. The portable goal would travel around the perimeter of the field with the opening facing play. Think about that for one minute. What does a coach do? Does he have a goal-keeper follow the net around the field to prevent a goal or does he let it wander unprotected, hoping the moving target would be too hard to hit. And just imagine: In the final two minutes of the game you would have four balls in play, including a "money ball" and another goal making its rounds around the field. What excitement!!!! "And this just in Dan, the United States came back from six goals down to beat Columbia 13-11."

Obviously, there are tens of thousands of people who know little or nothing about the sport. Therefore, I've created this little soccer quiz to enhance every American's knowledge of the game. So, all of you futbol fans, get your paper and pencils ready. Good luck!

Turn to page 14 for the quiz



MVP

Kelly Janosky was named co-MVP for the West squad in Monday's Dallas Kiwanis Senior All-Star softball game. She went 3-for-5 at the plate, scoring two runs and stealing four bases. At left, Janosky applies the tag at second, but without the ball which skipped out of her glove. Other Back Mountain all-stars in the game were Carra Giardina and Michelle Siglin of Dallas, and Julie Babcock and Heather Gray of Lake-Lehman.

POST PHOTO/IRON BARTIZEK

NL top spot still up for grabs

The Dodgers moved on the verge of capturing the National League regular season championship, a trio of Phillie pitchers combined to toss a no-hitter and the Rangers prepped for the post-season with two huge wins, as Back Mountain Baseball, Inc. completed play in Week 9 of major league baseball action.

The Dodgers, under manager Tom Dougherty, rallied to post a come-from-behind, last-inning win over the Phillies, 7-6, to hold a two-game lead over the Phillies and Giants with just two games remaining. The Dodgers began play in the final week of the regular season with a record of 14-4. The Phillies and Giants remain in second place with records of 12-6 while the Reds remain in the chase with a mark of 11-7. The regular season's final day should be an interesting one with the top four teams playing each other on Saturday. The top four teams in each league at the conclusion of the regular season will participate in the playoffs beginning this Sunday.

In the American League, the Rangers, under manager Tom Evans scored 38 runs in two games to improve to 16-1. The Tigers (10-8), Red Sox (8-10), A's (7-11) and Yankees (6-12) each remain in the thick of the American League playoff race.

REDS 10 - GIANTS 9

The Reds, who led by five runs in the fifth before a furious Giant comeback in the top of the sixth, scored three runs in the bottom of the sixth to post a win over the Giants in a wild game last Thursday night. Trailing 7-2, the Giants stormed back in the final inning to plate seven runs and take a 9-7 lead. Joel Whipple had three hits, including a double, to lead the Giants, while Mike Domzalski

STANDINGS

National League	American League
Dodgers 14-4	Rangers 16-1
Phillies 12-6	Tigers 10-8
Giants 12-6	Red Sox 8-10
Reds 11-7	A's 7-11
Astros 7-11	Yankees 6-12
Cardinals 6-12	Indians 4-13
Pirates 3-15	Orioles 3-15

added a triple. Winning pitcher Jon Habrack had three hits, including two doubles and a triple, and scored the winning run. Habrack struck out 13 batters over six innings. David Jumper and Matt McMahon each had a double for the winners.

RANGERS 18 - RED SOX 4

Mike Faneck had three hits, including a double and triple, and Darrell Evans picked up the mound win to lead the Rangers over the Red Sox. Matt Wycallis added three hits for the winners, while Brian Vetter belted a pair of doubles. Brett Larson, Luke Miller and John Lorah had the only hits for the Red Sox, all singles.

ASTROS 10 - CARDINALS 3

Winning pitcher Greg Stanislaw allowed just one hit over four innings and had two hits at the plate himself to lead the Astros over the Cardinals. Mike Stanislaw and Lorne Trapani each had two hits for the Astros. Steve Liparella had two hits, including a double, for the Cardinals.

TIGER 9 - YANKEES 0

Mike Keating and Randy Knappman combined to toss a one-hitter as the Tigers beat the Yankees. Brian Phillips and Jim Jordan each had two hits to lead the Tiger offense while Knappman helped his own cause with a triple. Brad Balutis had the lone hit for

the Yankees. REDS 20 - ASTROS 5

The Reds banged out 11 hits and Matt McMahon pitched four innings of solid relief for the win, as the Reds beat the Astros. David Jumper had three hits, including a pair of doubles, to lead the Reds while Jon Habrack added another three hits, including a triple. Dan Laurenzi and Dan Fetko had two hits apiece for the Reds. Greg Stanislaw led the Astros with two hits, including a double, while Matt Harrison also had two hits. David Walters hit a double for the Astros.

RANGERS 20 - A'S 3

The Rangers, behind the bat of Darrell Evans, banged out 18 hits en route to the win. Evans finished with four hits, including a pair of doubles. Matt Wycallis added a pair of doubles while Brian Vetter and Billy Evans had two hits apiece. Lloyd Droppers led the A's with two hits, including a double. Dan Marascio blasted a triple for the A's while Mike Sabol and Al Pisaneschi each hit double.

JUNIOR LEAGUE ROCKIES 2 - BOB HORLACHER EAST 0

Kevin Pizzano and Kyle Droppers combined to throw a three-hitter to lead the Rockies past Horlacher East. Droppers helped his own cause with a triple while Chuck Fehlinger added a double. Marcus Sowcik had the other hit for the Rockies. Matt Gio had two hits to lead Horlacher while Smith added a single.

SENIOR LEAGUE PIRATES 8 - ROCKIES 7

Fran Brown picked up the win in relief of Josh Yoh and Dave Rogers had four hits to lead the Pirates over the Rockies. Yoh, who struck out nine batters in four innings, had three hits at the plate. Keith Zinn and Dennis

Wengrzynek each had two hits for the winners. Chris Habrack had three hits to pace the Rockies while John Fagan struck out eight despite the loss.

GIANTS 3 - CARDINALS 1

Mike Domzalski pitched a gem, allowing just three hits while striking out 15 batters without allowing a walk, to lead the Giants over the Cardinals in a nail-biting contest. Joel Whipple led the Giants' offense with two hits, including a double. J. B. Bucha and Mike Barlow each had as triple for the winners while Tom Byron added a double. Matt Metz and Mike Regan each belted a double for the Cardinals while teammate Mike Tanner added a single.

RED SOX 17 - INDIANS 1

John Lukasavage led a potent Red Sox offense with four hits, including a pair of doubles, en route to a win over the Indians. Lewis Spurlin also had four hits for the winners while Andrew Lohin had three. Dave Spurlin, Brett Larson and Luke Miller had two hits apiece for the Sox. Paul Hiller led the Indians with two hits while Kevin Piekara added a single.

SENIOR LEAGUE BASEBALL STANDINGS

(All teams are Back Mountain teams unless otherwise noted)

Pittston	7-0	Harveys Lake	5-4
Braves	7-2	Blue Jays	5-4
Bob Horlacher	5-3	Indians	3-6
A's	5-4	Avoca/Dupont	3-6
Pirates	5-4	Rockies	0-9

Major League Girls' Softball

Battle for second place

With only one week remaining in regular season play, three teams are fighting for second place. The Red Sox remained unbeaten to clinch first place for the third consecutive season. The Dodgers, Cardinals and Phillies will have to wait to the final week to decide 2nd, 3rd and 4th place. The top four teams will end the season with a single elimination tournament.

League Standings	League Record	Overall Record
Red Sox	9-0	16-0
Dodgers	4-3	11-3
Phillies	4-3	6-3
Cardinals	3-3	5-3
A's	1-6	2-9
White Sox	0-7	2-10

RED SOX 19 - WHITE SOX 5

Amanda Stolarick had a homerun, two singles and got the win for the Red Sox in a 19-5 win over the White Sox. April Naugle went four for four with a double. Jennifer Noon doubled and singled and Sarah Stolarick and Julia

See SOFTBALL, pg 14



Attack takes second in tournament

The Northeast Attack U-14 boys' soccer team, recently took second place among a 12-team field in the 15th Annual Lehigh Valley Soccer Tournament. Members are from left, first row, David Giusti, Jon Townes, Jason Perlis, Matthew Koch, Mike Madera, Aaron Litzzi; second row, Ryan McKenna, Dan Dulebohn, John Fagan, Sean Killeen, Charlie Evanofski, Mark Steele and Pete Evanofski, coach.