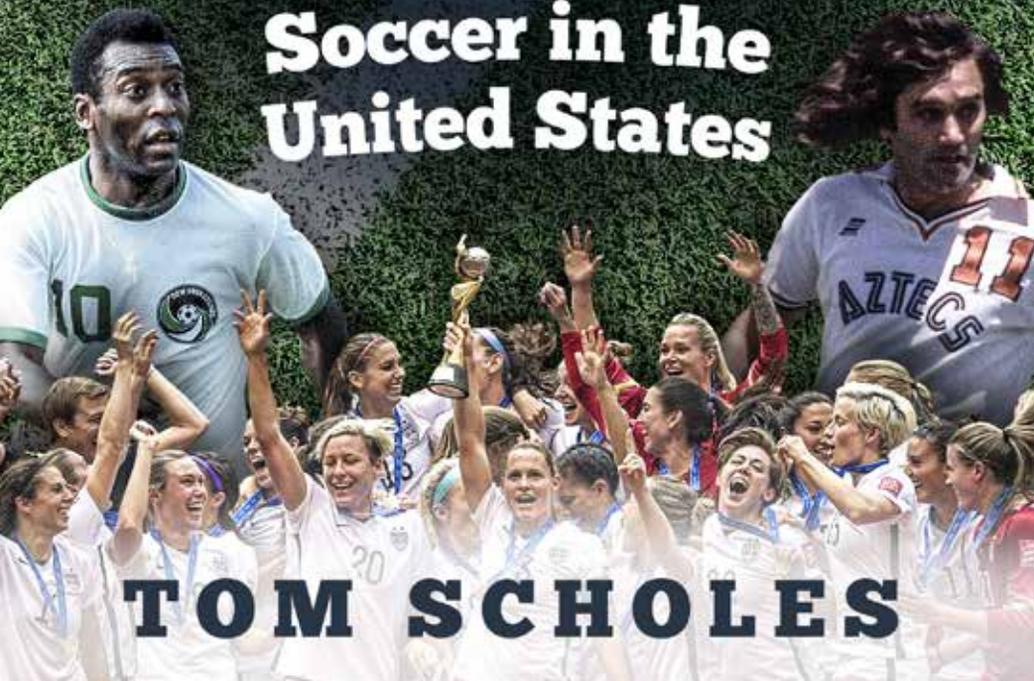




★ STATESIDE ★

SOCCER

The Definitive History of
**Soccer in the
United States**



TOM SCHOLLES



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Chapter One

The Early Years – Origins

IN the US, you have your traditional sports that have a lasting legacy for many, many years. Baseball has been a staple in American society since the 19th century, going as far back as 1839, while college football emigrated from Great Britain over to the US just 30 or so years later, with the very first game taking place in 1869 when Rutgers hosted New Jersey, before the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) officially started in 1910. Sport and American culture go hand in hand, and it is still the same today, but the origins of arguably the third most popular sport for a large part of the 19th century and bordering over into the 20th century are debated regularly.

Some argue that the game of soccer was introduced to the United States via immigrants coming from Europe into Ellis Island, with thousands of immigrants coming over from countries like Italy, Greece, Austria, Hungary, the Balkan regions of Europe as well as various other parts of western and northern Europe. These were countries and areas in Europe where soccer was vibrant and the people were obsessed with it, so it makes sense that a lot of influence came via immigration, but some also suggest that in Louisiana some of the earliest

games of soccer in American history were played by working-class people from the 1850s, with a lot of Scottish, French, Irish, German and Spanish families emigrating to the state and possibly influencing the history of soccer without even realising it. In Scott Crawford's Book, *A History of Soccer in Louisiana*, he suggests that the very first time modern English rules for soccer in the United States were played was in Louisiana during the 1850s, a good 20 years or so before the reported influx of immigrants at Ellis Island brought the game over, and, therefore, recognises the official birthplace of soccer in the United States as Louisiana. Others suggest that the origins lie elsewhere, in particular the eastern coast of the US and in the New England area, due to the influx of immigrants who reached the east via Europe.

Of course, as with any nation who embraced the sport, you can trace back through history and find various examples of other sports that closely represent what we now know as soccer. China and Greece had it, as mentioned before, but in America there was a game called Pasuckuakohowog, which roughly translates to they gather to play ball with the foot, but, according to the US Embassy, it was this game that was first discovered by Pilgrims that set sail into the harbours of Massachusetts in the 1620s. By all accounts, Pasuckuakohowog was an absolute mess of a game, with between 500 to 1,000 people playing at a time, multiple players wearing disguises including war paint to avoid retribution after the game had ended, with games usually lasting for hours, and in some cases even for days on end. While this is the first instance of a soccer-like game in the US, the 500 to 1,000 players, war paint and post-match feast probably isn't like anything we've ever seen in the modern world. So while it's technically the first sport like soccer that the US saw, it's only a variation and in turn was nothing like what soccer would evolve into in the 1820s. Thankfully for future generations, the numbers were whittled down dramatically and the need for masks was gone. If you two-footed someone, you had to own up to it at the post-match meal, which probably still carried on after the final whistle.

But while we take a look back at the origins of soccer, we move on in the timeline to the year 1862, in the same state as Pasuckuakohowog, but this time America got its very first organised soccer team in Boston called Oneida Football Club. Formed in 1862 by a graduate of Latin School of Epes Sargent Dixwell – a private college prep school in Boston – by the name of Gerrit Smith Miller, Oneida and Miller wanted to create an organised league in America to stop the violent and chaotic games against other schools and areas, which had their own set of rules and variations of soccer. Ironically, what Smith Miller was doing personified what was going on in the United States at the time, as the American Civil War was taking place during this period, and while the entire country was divided in two, Smith Miller wanted to split ‘football’ into two different sports. On one side you had what would become ‘American football’, a variation of rugby and a game that allowed the use of both hands and feet but prioritised the use of hands over feet. Eventually this manifested into what we now know as just plain old American football, but this is where many believe the start of that game was. On the other side, was ‘soccer’, a game that was mainly about footwork rather than using your hands, and again that broke off into its own game, as we are about to find out. In fact, before we get into the story of Oneida Football Club, let’s take a look at the life of its founder.

Gerrit Smith Miller was born in Peterboro, New York, in 1869 and was born into quite an important family. Smith Miller graduated from Harvard University in 1894, studying botany to become a professional botanist, which he eventually did. He became assistant curator of mammals of the United States National Museum in Washington before becoming the head curator from 1909 to 1940, when he then left to work at the Smithsonian Institution. What does any of this have to do with soccer? Surprisingly, not one bit of this information has any relation to it, but Smith Miller does and his time at Harvard certainly does. To understand Smith Miller and how he got to Harvard, you have to look back at his life story, and, whilst not an awful lot is known about the early life of the future botanist

and zoologist, what we do know is that he was named after his grandfather Gerrit Smith, who will go down in history as one of the leading United States abolitionists of slavery and was a candidate for the President of the United States in the years 1848, 1856 and 1860.

Just by reading about Smith, you can see that he was staunchly anti-slavery and even tried to help black slaves become self-sufficient by donating several acres of land and money to the African-American community in North Elba, New York. Whether it be financially or in land donations, Smith was a very influential figure in the anti-slave movement and was a member of the 'Secret Six', who helped fund John Brown's raid of Harper's Ferry. Brown was another abolitionist who was searching to free slaves and concocted a plan to raid Harpers Ferry, an armoury for the United States in Virginia, convinced that his plan would work and it would spark up a similar kind of uprising across the nation. He even contacted Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass to help him with the raid, but Tubman was suffering from an illness at the time so was unable to be of any aid, while Douglass turned down Brown's offer because he believed that the plan was going to fail. Ultimately, John Brown carried out his raid and saved a handful of slaves before being captured, charged with treason and hanged as a result of his actions. Found in his coat pocket, however, was a cheque written by Smith, which then led to the hunt for Smith. The State of Virginia were on the hunt for Gerrit Smith, and while he always denied any knowledge of the raid the State failed to fully charge Smith with any crime. However, due to the stress and mental anguish of the ordeal, Smith suffered a mental breakdown and was admitted for several weeks into the state asylum in Utica. You may realise that most of what you've just read had nothing to do with soccer, but the latter parts do (you've just got to keep with me on this one, it can get quite lengthy trying to explain everything) because during the hunt and attempt to charge and hang Smith, a young Gerrit Smith Miller was moved from their estate to Dixwell Private School in Boston to avoid getting the teenager into any trouble by association.

After making his way to Boston to avoid getting into any issues with the likeness of name to his famous grandfather, Smith Miller set about creating his organised soccer and it's at this point that we jump off the Civil War part of this story and move back on to the origins of soccer platform. It was interesting to learn about the tie between soccer and the Civil War, but now we have to leave the Civil War to one side and return to Boston, more specially Oneida. During his time at Dixwell, Smith Miller was a star of the informal style of soccer that was played in the area, bearing in mind that there weren't any formal rules for soccer at the time in any area because each area code had its own set of rules, and when you went from state to state, school to school, you could have encountered two different versions of the exact same game. At this point, despite being arguably the first 'star' of American soccer, Smith Miller grew tired of the lack of rules, the violence and the chaos and wanted to form a club made up of other prep school graduates in the Boston area, and he created what would be known as the 'Boston Game'. The Boston Game was something that acted as a precursor to other sports in America, such as, of course, soccer but also the introduction of rugby and American football, and when you read about the early history of American football in the United States and its introduction in colleges, the Boston Game is mentioned due to the fact that Harvard – the premier university team at the time – insisted on playing by these rules. While there aren't any records of other teams that Oneida played, maybe because the teams they played weren't organised sides like they were and didn't record results or find a need to record them, legend has it that Oneida never lost a game between their inception in 1862 until 1865, and never even conceded a goal. Whether this is just a rumour that got way out of hand as the years went by, we'll never truly know, but the legend and memory of Oneida remains strong in the area. Oneida – named after a lake that Smith Miller grew up near in Peterboro – played their games in Boston Common and to this day, across from Frog Pond, there is a monument dedicated to Oneida, which was erected in 1925 and an opening ceremony

was held with six of the seven surviving team members attending the service. The inscription reads:

On this field the Oneida Football Club of Boston, the first organised football club in the United States, played against all comers from 1862 to 1865. The Oneida goal was never crossed.

It's only fair that we end our little section on the very first organised football club in America by giving credit to the 16 listed members who are engraved on that monument in Boston Common:

Gerrit Smith Miller
Edward Lincoln Arnold
Robert Apthorp Boit
Edward Bowditch
Walter Denison Brooks
George Davis
John Malcolm Forbes
John Power Hall
Robert Means Lawrence
James D'Wolf Lovett
Francis Greenwood Peabody
Winthrop Saltonstall Scudder
Alanson Tucker
Louis Thies
Robert Clifford Watson
Huntingdon Frothingham Wolcott

The organisation of Oneida clearly rubbed off on the rest of the soccer teams in the surrounding areas, because soccer was initiated as an organised college sport in the US. The Civil War had ended and citizens of the United States were attempting to get back to their normal lives in whatever fashion they could, and soccer was slowly taking off in its early forms as the years went by. The first year association games held in the

United States were recorded was in 1866, and while records of this league may be sparse, there are three games involving American college sides. The first two were between Carroll College from Wisconsin going up against the Waukesha Town team, also from Wisconsin. These two sides ended their double header with a win each, while the third game was an inter-university match between two Trinity College teams, with the class of 1869 going up against the class of 1870. If you were wondering, it ended in a draw. Slowly but surely, more soccer was played in the coming years. A third match between Carroll College and Waukesha was played later on in 1866, but the score of that game is unknown to this day, so we will never know who won the final tiebreaker game in this great rivalry. In 1867 no club games were reported in the United States, but in 1868 soccer had spread out west and down south to Utah and Louisiana, mainly thanks to an influx of immigrants from Europe. Remember earlier how we mentioned immigrants had gone to Louisiana to bring soccer to the state? Well, it looks like they finally managed to organise some games with New Orleans St Joseph's Association, playing three organised club games from 12 July 1868 to 21 July 1868. Unfortunately, there aren't any recorded results for the team as their first match was registered as 'postponed', while the other two matches were unknown. A lot of these teams didn't keep records of their scores – as you're well aware by now – and a lot of their history is passed down by photographs (which can still be found online) and by word of mouth. One person said one result, who then told another person, and it took off from there. It was often difficult for teams to fully keep account of their scores, because either no one was there to note the scores down or no one was 100 per cent sure what the final scores actually were. It was a similar story in Utah, as Salt Lake City Team A played Salt Lake City Team B in February of 1868, the score was unknown, whilst in West Jordan, Utah, West Jordan Lower Branch and West Jordan Middle Branch played to another unknown scoreline. Regardless, the pattern was emerging across the country one way or another. Whether it be via immigrants

from Europe, word of mouth or variations of another game a certain area played, soccer was travelling in the United States and more teams were cropping up, playing against each other in organised games. What happened next took the sport to the next level. The first ever fully recognised game of university soccer took place on 6 November 1869, as Rutgers ran out 6-4 victors over Princeton, and thus ushered in a new era.

The following year, a few more university schools joined in with the soccer fun, with seven games being played across January, October and November. Adelphi University – home to such alumni as Chris Armas, the current head coach of the New York Red Bulls, Public Enemy rappers Chuck D and Flavor Flav and Howard Stern guest Gary Dell'Abate, AKA Baba Boeey – opened up the year with a fixture against a team that officially had no name, so technically isn't known by any name other than 'Unknown Team'. The first game where we can positively identify both teams, the venue and the score was between Rutgers 1874 and Rutgers 1873, with the Class of '73 running riot in a 6-1 mauling of '74. Yale, Dartmouth and Columbia would all have matches at some point during the year but, with the exception of those games, that was it for organised soccer in the 1870s. Why? Because the college/university game just collapsed. Again, it begs the question why did the game that was taking shape just collapse amongst those who organised it? Well, they adapted the Boston Game to create what we now know as American football – while a form of soccer was played and will be recognised throughout history as soccer, the universities took the next step on from what Gerrit Smith Miller and Oneida had started and took the rugby aspect of the Boston Game to form the new American football. As mentioned before, this had been growing for some time and now that it was growing on its own, separate to soccer, it split colleges and universities in two, which, in a way, was the plan all along.

It was a blow to the soccer scene in America at the time, but arguably what happened next was the second part of the new era of soccer. The universities had their time with the sport and decided to develop a new one, which was fine because

college football is still alive and well now, but when working-class immigrants arrived from Europe they had not only a more refined version of soccer, but they also had little teams set up in their own communities and within their own fields of work, much like how teams across Europe and in South America were formed. The textile mills had their own team, as did the shipyards, quarries and miners, and soon enough this trend found its way across the nation. New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia were the first ones where you could see a strong development, before it spread further to the midwest, and Pacific side. The more immigrants that came to the country, the more this new culture spread, and soon enough teams were formed and started to play. But there was one problem: they had nothing to play for. The universities would play each other in a bid to show who was the stronger school, but the new community teams just wanted to have fun. These teams needed a competition and they needed a body to govern them, or to at least enforce some ground rules. In 1884 they got their wish as the American Football Association (AFA) was formed, making it the second-oldest sports league in American sports history (behind the National League in Major League Baseball (MLB), which was formed in 1876) and the oldest official American soccer league.

The same year of its formation, the AFA created the American Cup, a tournament that was the very first in the country to pit teams from different leagues against each other, and it was largely dominated by teams from New Jersey and Massachusetts in the first 12 years of the competition's existence, despite the fact that the AFA expanded itself to include teams from Pennsylvania, New York and, to a lesser extent, Texas. In the very first edition of the competition in 1885, five teams hailed from New Jersey and one from New York, with Clark O.N.T. winning the inaugural American Cup (Clarke O.N.T. stands for 'Clarke Our New Thread' which was a marketing tool for the Clarke Thread Company to promote their new product. Oh, you thought using soccer teams as a promotional tool was a recent thing?) Clark O.N.T. won the tournament in 1885, and

again in 1886, and completed the three-peat in 1887 with a win over Kearny Rangers – which was a local derby – marking the first dominant team of the era, but the first victory didn't come without controversy. The very first American Cup Final in 1885 was played on Valentine's Day, with O.N.T. running out victors, but their opponents, simply known as New York, complained that they had used an illegal player(s). A replay was demanded and two months after their initial victory, O.N.T. won the cup again. No love lost there from the Valentine's Day fixture ...

The American Cup seemed to work a treat, with many sides entering, and for the first twelve years it rotated around New Jersey and Massachusetts, with Clark O.N.T. winning the first three, before Fall River domination in 1888 and 1892 as Fall River Rovers, Fall River Olympics and Fall River East Ends all took home the trophy (these were all different teams, not just one club going under three different names), which meant that two states had eight different winners across a 12-year spell, and it wasn't until 1897 that Philadelphia Manz broke up the duopoly, beating Paterson True Blues, a New Jersey team (shock) who were considered to be one of the first dynasties in American soccer, with three American Cup wins and five runner-up finishes.

Unfortunately, as the 20th century introduced itself, the American Cup was going through a turbulent time and wasn't held from the 1899 season to the 1906 campaign due to internal conflict within the AFA. On the surface, it just looks like a gap in time where an association needed to fix some issues, but in reality it proved to be a much more important moment in American soccer history as it opened up the discussion about whether it would be beneficial to have a governing body that would be able to oversee the entire United States soccer scene, as opposed to just the north-east. The opening decade or so of the 1900s would prove to be pivotal in the expansion and growth of soccer, not just in the US but worldwide, as FIFA was formed in 1904, and while the AFA was somehow gripping on to its power as the main governing body in the US, 1911 saw the introduction of the American Amateur Football Association

(AAFA) and it capitalised on what the AFA hadn't, by expanding out of the north-east, and even started its own cup to rival the American Cup called the AAFA Cup (very creative bunch).

Things in American soccer were moving at a rapid pace, a pace that was in keeping with the growth of the sport in the country. These groups didn't just form for the sake of it, there was a real demand to govern the sport across the country, and having two go head to head to essentially battle it out for the right to rule US soccer meant that the sport was on the edge of two things. It was on the edge of a golden era that would be the first 'boom period' in the country or it was on the edge of implosion. To use a somewhat modern (yet rather niche) reference, it was like WWF and WCW back in the late 90s–early 00s. Both had their core markets that they fed off, but the AAFA (the WWF in this scenario) capitalised on the mistakes that the AFA (WCW) had made, and when people started to realise that 'hey, maybe the AAFA have a better idea on how to run this joint across the country', there was only going to be one winner, and, even though both applied to be recognised by FIFA in 1912, it was in 1913 when the AAFA – which had renamed itself the United States Football Association (USFA) – was officially recognised by FIFA as the governing body and thus started to exert their influence across the United States.

Teams now had two competitions to fight for, a national team was now playing regularly after first playing against Canada in 1885 in what is widely recognised as the very first international soccer match played outside the United Kingdom, and the United States Men's National Team (USMNT, as we will refer to them from now on) toured Norway and Sweden. They weren't the only other team to tour Sweden, as Bethlehem Steel, one of the powerhouses of American soccer at the time, who managed to win the American Cup in 1914, 1916, 1917, 1918 and 1919 as well as the National Challenge Cup in 1915, 1916, 1918 and 1919, went away too, but by the time they came back to American shores what is now called the first golden age of American soccer had begun. The fact that teams were touring areas of Europe was a big enough accomplishment because

not only did it show that teams felt they could go to Europe and attract big enough crowds, it also showed that these teams could go to Europe and beat the Europeans. Consider this in today's game where a semi-professional club like Hitchin Town or North Ferriby United went over to South America and took on the likes of Boca Juniors or Santos. It seems far-fetched now, but that's essentially what Bethlehem did! But if touring was the first step, the creation of the ASL in 1921 was the giant step the sport needed to take. Was the ASL the first professional soccer league in America? Some say yes, some say no, but was it the biggest and most popular? Absolutely, so popular that Scottish and English players risked FIFA sanctions for leaving their countries just to play in the ASL.

Soccer in the US during this time was huge. Maybe not as big as baseball, seeing as they were just about to enter the Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth era, but big enough to generate attendances in the tens of thousands, attract suitable sponsors and bring in two teams who had rich backers but also rich history on the field: Bethlehem Steel and Fall River Marksmen. The two fought tooth and nail to become the era's most dominant team, but with seven ASL titles and four National Challenge Cup wins, the Marksmen were the dynasty of the 20s. The Marksmen went on tours and faced huge European names like Glasgow Rangers and Sparta Prague and managed to hold their own at times. Teams like the Marksmen and the Steel would have big effects on soccer in the coming years, both positively and negatively (which we will jump in to in the next two chapters) and during the 20s, while America was experiencing an economic boom, these two teams represented what America was about. They spent the most money on the best players to increase their chances of winning. Who did the Marksmen beat by six points to win their first ASL title? The Steel. When they retained it the following season, who was lagging three points behind? The Steel. When they completed the three-peat, who was behind them? Not the Steel, but you get the point: these two were the dominant force of American soccer in the 1920s.

While it's important to move forward with the history of soccer in the US, it's imperative to look at the ASL as a whole and how important it was to the future of the sport and the lasting effect it had on not only domestic matters for club sides, but also on an international level for the US men's national team. We've touched on Fall River Marksmen and Bethlehem Steel, but why just stop at where we did? These two teams are widely considered to be 'dynasties' in American soccer, so without further ado, it's time to get stuck into the first golden age of soccer in the United States.