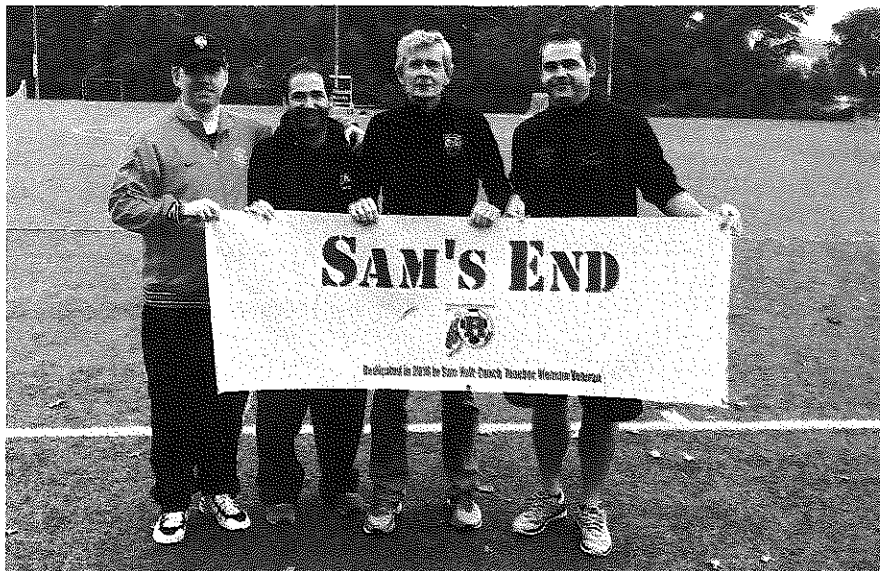


EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA YOUTH SOCCER ICONS:

Sam Holt

The longtime Radnor High School coach & teacher and creator of FC Delco, the greatest dynasty in Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer history, remains a strong influence on soccer in the state long after his retirement.

By Dillon Friday, Communications Manager, Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer



Radnor High School named an end of the soccer field in honor of Sam (middle right). He's joined by current Radnor boys soccer coach Joe Caruolo (middle left) and former Radnor coaches Alan Mezger (left) and Kyle Shilcock-Elliott.

Sam Holt splits his time between the Florida Gulf Coast and the Jersey Shore, his chosen retirement from coaching and teaching—but not from soccer. No, soccer still plays a big role in his life, whether that's attending Tampa Bay Rowdies games or following his son Tim's San Antonio FC club, where the younger Holt, as Managing Director, is trying to sell Major League Soccer on the Alamo City. Sam—and it is Sam, not coach, or Mr. Holt; even Tim calls his father Sam—loves the game.

"I could never leave the house, and watch soccer all day, which I've tried to do," says Sam. "Pattie," whom he's been with for 52 years, "would be introducing me as her first husband. I had to cut back."

Sam has been a lot of things in soccer: coach, administrator, player, manager, assistant coach and mentor. His longtime colleague, friend and pupil Mike Gorni calls him both a "consummate teacher" and a "true student of the game." But above all, Sam, 76, has been a fan. His passion for the sport, combined with a sense of purpose, has made him one of the

most influential figures to ever grace an Eastern Pennsylvania sideline.

"He's just an amazing guy," says his younger son, Erik. "I'll take myself away from it as a son and just tell you, my dad has the utmost respect for you as a person, and he's never met you. When he engages with you, it's honest. It's real, and it's something that permeates. It's why he was a great teacher. It's why he was a great coach."

Sam is a tremendous observer, which got him into soccer in the first place growing up on the Main Line. A standout baseball player in the spring and summer, he was a middle school football player in the fall, though the sport wasn't for him. Sam didn't like the stop and start nature nor being told what to do; he liked to figure things out on the fly. He found that in soccer. It led him to pick up on the latest innovations at soccer tournaments he attended as a coach or parent to Tim and Erik.

"At U14, the (Greater) Chester Valley team I was coaching went to regionals," says Sam. "I would wander around to these other fields, and I would see these teams that had no

name recognition at U14."

He had a special group at Greater Chester Valley but knew the game was changing. He wanted to provide his players the opportunity to play on the national stage. So, with the help of Nick Chrisanthon and Rick Silva and the blessing of then Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer President Richard Groff, FC Delco was born.

"I think my dad and others at the time were taking a broader view," explains Erik, who starred as a goalkeeper on the original FC Delco Demons team. "That was the opportunity when we were 13 or 14 of not winning regionals but also having this group of talent within 30 miles of Philadelphia. There was an opportunity for a power club to be created there."

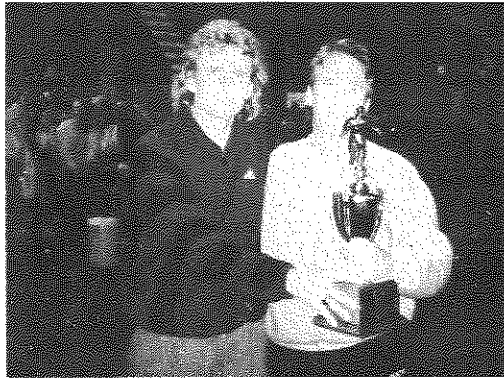
FC Delco became a bastion of Sam's vision, professionalism and empowerment. He wanted to mimic the other national clubs he saw at various events like the La Jolla Nomads (five-time US Youth Soccer National Champions from Cal South).

"I watched how they handled themselves," Sam says. "I watched how when the 18's game was over, they'd watch the 14's. They traveled together. They looked professional, and they acted professional."

FC Delco would do the same, starting with the Demons. But first, they'd need a new coach. Sam and Chrisanthon decided they had taken the team as far as it could go: "We had more to teach, but they needed to hear it from a different voice."

"We were on an ODP trip when he brought it up," says Gorni, Sam's successor with the Demons. "He said he had a club, FC Delco, forming and wanted to know if I would come over. It was the ultimate compliment. He had enough faith in me. That's the unselfishness of Sam."

Gorni started with the Demons when they were under-15 with Sam as an assistant. The next year, they won FC Delco's first of seven US Youth Soccer National Championships, the most by any Eastern Pennsylvania



Sam presents current Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Technical Director Mike Barr with the District One Championship trophy. With Barr at Strath Haven and Sam at Radnor, the two were friends and rivals in the Central League.

Youth Soccer club.

"When the Demons won that first championship, I just remember as the kids were playing, and they were up 2-0—we knew we had it—he looked over at me and said, 'I just can't believe this,'" remembers Gorni. "A couple of weeks later, he was sitting on the beach, just smiling. I can't believe this.' It's those kinds of things I remember. He gave so many people great moments, including myself."

And yet, you won't hear it from Sam. His own accolades—164 wins at Radnor High School, three Central League titles, one PIAA appearance, six-time Central League Coach of the Year, a member of the PIAA Soccer Hall of Fame and the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame Delco Chapter—are secondary to those of his former colleagues and players.

His favorite memories speak to his humility. When Erik and Radnor upset powerhouse Downingtown in the 1991 District Playoffs, he sprinted across the field to hug Sam, who had watched the decisive shootout from the opposite end. Sam loved that. He also loved when the PIAA referees asked him to speak at their chapter meeting—"That was wonderful," says Sam. He was selfless in the classroom as well, allowing his students to read his personal letters to Pattie he wrote when he was stationed in Vietnam. The letters gave the students a perspective on the war they otherwise wouldn't have.

"I think I have an ego like anyone else," Sam admits. "But (soccer's) a players' game. It's totally a players'

game. There are so many other people who did so much more than I ever did."

The most accomplished of them still lean on Sam, though. Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Technical Director and former Strath Haven coach Mike Barr has filled his office with plaques and awards. He has photos of family and his championship teams on his desk and walls. There's only one opposing coach pictured in the entire shrine. It's Sam, with a full grasp of the trophy, presenting Barr with the District One title. The photo is laminated and faded and has holes dotting its corners from thumbtacks.

"He was a real positive influence on my life," explains Barr. "He did right by the players he coached. Nobody I've met has done a better job at respecting the game."

Then there's Gorni, he of 383 wins as a high school coach. In his final season in charge of Central Bucks East, he led the Patriots to a 26-0 record and his first state championship. Sam was one of the first people to call him.

"I was probably the one who would've been more okay if we didn't win," says Gorni. "He just called and said, 'You've now won everything at every level.' It meant more to me to hear it from him. He means more to me. It made me feel great."

Alan Mezger played for four years for Sam at Radnor and learned important lessons to bookend his career: he failed the fitness test as a freshman and was temporarily placed on JV; he swore at a teammate as a senior and received a one-game suspension. Mezger went on to become a standout coach himself, winning three national championships with FC Delco and succeeding Sam at Radnor after three years as his assistant.

When he became a social studies teacher—at Sam's encouragement—he brought in his mentor to guest speak to his classes. Sam, whose legend as a Radnor history teacher equaled his coaching prowess, was grateful.

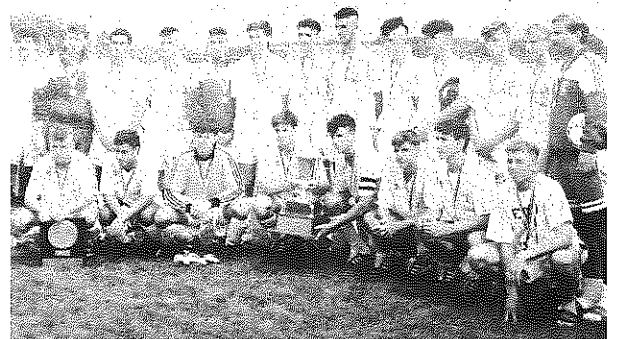
"And I was like, man, you're just good at this," says Mezger. "I kept him at arm's length as a teenager. As an adult, he and I became best friends. He was a second father to me."

Tim Holt sees Sam at the highest level of sports. Because San Antonio FC is owned by Spurs Sports & Entertainment, Tim gets an up close view of how the most consistent franchise in the NBA operates.

"If you listen to coach Gregg Popovich or GM R.C. Buford, the first thing they'll tell you is the most important thing is to have a culture where people are over themselves," says Tim, who also served as the President of the United Soccer League (USL) for 16 years. "There's no ego. Sam kind of did that, too. He could challenge you, but he would joke with you. He was Sam."

"Every one of his people that came out from under his wing, what they do, is they have an unbelievable passion for the sport," adds Mezger. People like Mike Gorni, Alan Mezger, Tim Holt and Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Chief Executive Officer Chris Branscome, who was Sam's assistant coach at Radnor for a few seasons, among many others. And that's all Sam ever wanted.

"I just hope the people who came in contact with me understand how I felt about the game," Sam says. "And how you don't disrespect the game."



The FC Delco Demons put the newly-formed club on the map in 1991 with a US Youth Soccer Under-16 National Championship."