

UNSUNG AMERICANS

Tuesday Touchline's Tribute to Consistency, Decency, and Humanity: The American Conference

CONNIE MACK STYLE



Wrong sport but I love Connie Mack and both of his eyebrows! BY BEN WINDERMAN

I called around to the coaches of the American Conference and asked about their players who show up day after day, the Cal Ripken's (still baseball I know) who no one ever worries about missing practice or playing with their spirits half inflated. The guys who play anywhere,

faces anyone, and generally receives minimal attention/applause. What then motivates these players to endure the grueling 18 game soiree with muscle/heart-ache? I learned

from a class group of coaches and players some answers and I'd be honored to share. Watching the focus of Upper Dublin's magician midfielder Kevin Devlin (shown left) or the fearlessness of Upper Moreland's GK Matt Sheldon (below) helps me understand some, a little.

Motivation is a phenomenon of mystery and soccer is a

clear and sometimes harsh showcase of each player's propensity to give. Endurance and the willingness to sacrifice provides authenticity to all great competitors. Connie Mack understood this and more than most, and



yet he's considered to "unsung" even "unknown" to many athletes. Let's know him a bit! These are the words used to immortalize CM in the MLB Hall of Fame in Cooperstown:

"Humanity is the keystone that holds nations and men together. When that collapses, the whole structure crumbles. This is as true of baseball teams as any other pursuit in life."

We all need some old fashion inspiration sometimes I think; how about this? A 1916 code which Cornelius Alexander McGillicuddy i.e. **Connie Mack** demanded all of his players to recite from memory; remember many of them couldn't read.

- I will always play the game to the best of my ability.
- I will always play to win, but if I lose, I will not look for an excuse to detract from my opponent's victory.
- I will never take an unfair advantage in order to win.
- I will always abide by the rules of the game—on the diamond (pitch) as well as in my daily life.
- I will always conduct myself as a true sportsman—on and off the playing field.
- I will always strive for the good of the entire team rather than for my own glory.
- I will never gloat in victory or pity myself in defeat.
- I will do my utmost to keep myself clean—physically, mentally, and morally.
- I will always judge a teammate or an opponent as an individual and never on the basis of race or religion.

Choose a favorite if you can, I can't I tried, but I can extrapolate what CM was demanding on the diamond and project it onto the pitch, easily. So I did and then decided to write a story about **UNsung AMERICANS**

Simple really - I asked all of the American Conference boys soccer coaches to share some thoughts about their squads and in particular their *unsung heroes*. I didn't provide any Connie Mack criteria other than requiring that all of their choices have eyebrows. The coaches took time out, their choices were insightful, and their candor was consistent: Good luck in each of your remaining fixtures; count on an American Conference side, or two, playing soccer past October.

Scenario

Try playing 80 minutes on a Wednesday night away at Wissahickon, fighting valiantly but falling 3-0, riding the bus home with your team and waking up a bit after 4 am to complete your homework. Imagine getting through AP Economics, Spanish 5, and some phys ed teacher's class who thinks soccer is a *lefto* sport and it's players are yellow card loving lunar eclipsos. Picture racing home for a hopeful snack but finding stale goldfish as the best option, then racing back to school by 4:00 pm which actually means 3:45 to you because you're a captain and coach expects you to get there early to help with water, where's my armband!? Now pretend you're riding a bus down 309, inhaling the fumes of fossil fuel, stinky shinguards, and freshmen with good snacks, only to exit off Susquehanna, turn right on Spark Drive, and remember you're there for the Cardinal's senior night.



Envision standing respectfully while the men in white and cardinal red get their much earned due... Think about these boys in blue, led by Head Coach Kevin Woulfe and you may agree they deserve some show of recognition, some nod of respect: For just showing up, riding that bus, lacing em up, getting a sweat, having a go, and adhering to Connie's code,,, Quakertown Panther style.

Explanation

This recognition has little to do with wins and losses and much more to do with the unwavering habit of showing up to play... Playing hurt, playing braced, or playing obviously thanks to a forged Dr. *Rosen Rosen's* note or one from *Epstein's* mom.

This grueling saga of 18 games occurs, and the roller coaster ride gives us fans a treasure box full of memories, but what about the players, what besides bruised bones and rasberrie'd egos do they procure? As an SOL coach I



was fortunate to take part, as a parent I've been proud to root, root, and ROOT, and occasionally rail on referees. As a writer I am fortunate to applaud in print, hoping to give a bit back to the kids who give the very most.



*So sorry to all PIAA referees for that jab - I totally get that it's ridiculously tough to officiate a game at the pace of Usain Bolt on a bender. And the two man system to soccer boot... It's no excuse, but a friend told me once, 'it's just that it's your kid out there is all, it's your heart'

OH BEHAVE!

ONWARD!

To the players mentioned in this story and to the many more unmentioned but not overlooked, THANK YOU! You consistently give your spirit to your team and your soul to the game. You give in the form of your time and personal want, you give by carrying balls and water jugs whilst simultaneously dropping lbs in sweat. Consistent giving includes the capacity to celebrate a sudden *Victory* and also the resilience to endure its evil step-sister, *Agony in defeat*.

“Unsung” might mean that giving is a way of living and somehow certain players know that, believe it, and help learn it to others in their midst. More of us are watching than you might imagine, taking notes and making comments,



or at least admiring your stoic stance. So please STAND up for a moment of recognition: Raising of Connie Mack's Brow ↑

This week's Tuesday Touchline salutes all of the players from the American Conference SOL who earn only the satisfaction of soccering right, training, studenting, playing, and even *citizenizing right*. Coach Woulfe described his senior captain this way: “He plays for

us, helps us, and leads us in everyway,” Coach Woulfe said of senior . “He’s just a great player, great student, and a great citizen!”

Ben Wackerman



(shown here adorably) with his proud family. My hunch is that those little kneeling Wackermans will know the ins and outs of decency, consistency, and humanity just like CM demanded on the diamond (photograph printed with gratitude one BW to another BW).

Woulfe praised junior **Nate Besch** from Qtown too. Like several others in this archetype Besch experienced a very severe injury as a sophomore, but now as

a junior his broken leg healed and his heart cauterized against pain Besch is helping the Panthers not just getting on that bus but also getting better. The Panthers are off to play the Cardinals tonight and be sure that you’ll see toughness from Wackerman, Besch, and all of the blue kit boys. With ancestors like Len Ostroff and Kevin Woulfe Jr. they have plenty of Panther pride. How many of these workmanlike players have endured the emergency room, 20 minutes on/20 minutes off ice packs, watching your teammates from the sideline on crutches, or bracing for another season of junior varsity, or worse *swing*.

Sparked

Upper Dublin is led by first year skipper Andy Meehan, new perhaps to the HS ranks but certainly not to Southeastern PA soccering. Meehan, Malcolm, and McGrath all epitomize the culture of this conference: approachable, humble, and admirable always. Wissahickon, PW, and HH collectively chase Meehan’s Cardinals for conference title, but all 4 schools are likely District 1 Playoff qualifiers. For Coach Meehan his inaugural

100 days have been very decent and downright exciting. Meehan has some weapons in the mix along an emerging tradition and excellent facilities, but this coach is quick to point to his players first. Kevin Devlin pictured previously experienced a terrible injury as a youth player, but watching the seasoned midfielder in 2017 one would never know that his soccer career was one time considered questionable, at best! Coach Meehan can't say enough about the credit that Kevin deserves. "Kevin Devlin is our Co-captain and quarterback of the team," UD skipper Andy Meehan explains. "He plays that holding center mid position and when you look at teams doing well they typically have a good player playing in that roll." Coach Meehan speaks the truth and good coaches know who has this competence. "Fortunately for us," Meehan continues, "We have that player in Kevin. He's one of the main reasons we sit atop of our conference currently. The best part is he is a team player," *CM Salute* "He never complains and is always positive, and he has suggestions to improve the team and they way we play. I'm lucky to have a player like him on the team." Coach Meehan is also willing to listen to a real soccer player/high school kid! Wissahickon's Stuart Malcolm, *The Scottish Scarecrow*, ranks just ahead of Springfield's Skipper Dan Meder, as the senior serving coach of this American Conference crew. Although known for his technical teaching ability and proven tactical savvy it is Malcolm's uncanny and distinct knack to guide sides down a (blue) and *yellow brick road* of improvement throughout the fall campaign that once again has the Trojans hovering, with HH and PW, behind the front running Cardinals of Upper Dublin. Coach Meehan's sure



to be on the lookout for Trojan horse-sense of this brainy boss and his boys in darker blue; in the 2nd darby of 2017 Wissahickon will once again attempt to find the defending champ Cardinal's Achilles heel. Always a stalwart competitor Dr, Malcolm responded to my request for an unsung hero intriguingly. "Our back up goalkeeper John Gonzalez," he began. "John came from Norristown where I



believe he was a starter during his Junior year. Now as senior he is behind our Junior keeper (Jun Yuh), but he has been really positive regardless. John (Gonzalez) has really played only about 100 minutes total so far this season,” Malcolm pointed out, “but his attitude is absolutely admirable, he’s the sincere leader we needed.



In addition Coach Malcolm considered “Liam Weiss (shown left with possession) plays a lot of minutes as a starting midfielder,” Coach Malcolm continues. “In Liam we have someone who came in as defensive midfield player and started after 8 games, only seeing the field for 10 minutes prior to acquiring his starting role. We are now unbeaten with him (Weiss) in the line-up and I’d say he has

profoundly helped us to achieve our present position.” The Trojans last loss was actually a 2-1 defeat to an unselfish and unsatisfied Hatters squad. H-H have some real special athletes on their roster, including #5 Colin Bateman, who’s perhaps the American Conference’s most complete player, however the *put up your dukes, put up your dukes UN-cowardly* coach from the Avenues, H-H’s Head Man Kyle McGrath deserves a LION’S share of credit for organizing a brand new



defense this season, including three players with no previous varsity experience. McGrath's defensive corps is composed of players of little local notoriety, a freshmen, two juniors, and two senior backs, and although each of these Hatters does have a name, Coach McGrath Raised his own *Baseballin' CM Brow* for his senior center backs Joshua Hagerty and Will Kemp (above McGrath appears unconcerned as Hatter's goalscorer Danny Harmon engages in a frivolous staring contest with Wissahickon Eddie Fortescue. BEHAVE BOYS - "Oh the humanity...")

Coach McGrath, a former standout soccer and baseball player for H-H himself certainly



seemed more interested in roaring about the middle of his defensive four.

"Josh has been a varsity player for 3 years and had taken on a leadership role this year.," explains McGrath. "He is hardworking in the classroom, and because of those efforts Josh is a candidate for up for the

prestigious **Christians Brother's Scholarship** at Lasalle." McGrath paused. "Josh just sets a great example of what being a student athlete means and should mean, when he's not in the classroom or on the field," McGrath continued, "he's either working, working out, or volunteering at a local retirement community. Josh is an old fashioned player who does not always get a lot of recognition, but he has been a major part of our success this season."

McGrath takes a special pride in talking about Hagerty and Kemp (Will pictured



to the right) since he has served as both their HS and Ukrainian Nationals club coach for several years now. The relationship, both players convey, is one of trust and mutual respect, as can be witnessed in McGrath's descriptions of deserving Brow Raising players. "Will (Kemp) has always been a pleasure to coach," McGrath added. "He just brings an incredible work ethic to our team and program, and he's not afraid to hold guys accountable when they aren't working hard enough. Will knows when to crack and joke and when to be serious, he's just our rock in the back and a really big reason for our success the last two years."

Pictured below left is HH's Zach Kim vs AB Wood. ZK is the keeper in HH's quest for an American Conference King's Crown.



Picture above right is Coach Kyle McGrath and referee John Cochtostosis having a different sort of staring contest

Coach Dan Meder's Springfield Montco Spartans started the 2017 campaign very well and surprised many outside of their ranks when they upset the Hatters at home 4-1. At the time the win created a 5-way tie for 1st in the American Conference. The Spartans ran into some peloponnesian pot/bad-luck in the form of injury, and as usual the 18 game marathon afforded them no time to call *time*. However Coach Meder and his boys will never buckle, just check out some of the great resources that he makes available to his and all players at <https://shsboysoccer.wikispaces.com/home> - You can tell this man is educator first and a lefto second - KIDDING DM!

Coach Meder in his 20th year on the Springfield sideline but finding a photograph of the man coaching is a challenge I failed to complete. I did connect however with Meder's longtime assistant coach, and long long time ago teammate of Coach Kyle McGrath at H-H; the always talented and demonstrative Kevin Grummun. KC Grummun spoke up for the unsung Spartan in this manner: "Dillon Donnelly is our center back. His speed makes him tough to beat one on one and he has taken on the role of field general directing from the back. He is a 3rd year varsity starter and his experience has helped the rest of the back 4." Coach Grummun continued, "Before the game, halftime, at stoppages, Dillon is always giving the crew a big *let's go boys*, and he more than anyone is always out there having fun! Always a smile...win, lose, or draw!"

Coach Kevin Grummun shedding light unsurprisingly upon the most important element of all of these Raised Brow Connie Mack Consistent players who we refer to as "unsung." In order to show up everyday you must really love it! In fact love is the only reason to show up and play; it's the only reason to recover from injury and heartache, it's the reason to root root ROOT for your kids and it's the reason to follow a Panthers, Golden Bear, Cardinal, Colonial, Hatter, Trojan, or Spartan down any street or a yellow brick road. Love is why we stand for senior night, why we know when to crack that joke or study for that Econ exam. Love is why we have a staring contests instead of street fights, write articles ad nauseum (tad too long), and take advice from kids named **Kevin**.

Getting There

Unsung Americans are everywhere folks, they're the real story of glory and friendship, of baseball, soccer, remembering, and misbehaving; just enough to wear your own lion's heart out on your sleeve; just enough to fly straight as a scarecrow and stand



strong as a Colonial. If ever there was a **Connie Mack-Daddy** who raises his share of brows and brotherhood, it's the dad of Coach Kevin Grummun (pictured above), the legendary Mister Walter Wally Grummun. Many of you LOVE Mister Wally from College Settlement Camp and more than a few of a few of you remember Wally's Reformatory School bound "Referees Row." Mrs. Sue Wilson, Our PIAA District 1 Referee Assignor, and really amazing **unsung hero** of SOL Soccer can attest to the fact that Mister Wally and many of the parents then and now, rooting for Ben Wackerman, John Topper, Vinnie Mountney, Dillon Donnelly, Jesse Saxer, Kenny Holliday, Tommy Beckett, Big John Gonzalez, and hey let's get a Timmy chant going (The Searge). We are simultaneously cheering for Cornelius Mack, the guys who show up to practice and to play, everyday.

The Eagle is Asking



The Suburban One League originated in 1922 (Connie Mack's prime), but the current format of American/National Divisions wasn't created until 1977. Then Suburban One League logo was created by Bud DeLaurentis, Upper Moreland High School (Go Bears) in 1985. For many years 4 divisions (Patriot, Colonial, Liberty, and Freedom) composed the SOL until 2004 when the Continental was added as a 3rd Conference replacing the 2 conference 4 division structure of the past. It's more complicated than that but for soccering purposes today's American Conference is basically a blend of the former "Liberty" and "Freedom" Divisions (sans CR South, Norristown, Methacton, and Upper Merion). Sometimes called "The Smaller League" The Boy's Soccer programs of the American Conference have dug in and created a distinct identity of individual ability/team toughness. "All of these coaches are really good," said Kevin Woulfe, head coach at Quakertown Area HS, "All of these teams (American) are consistent and strong." A clear definition of the American Conference, consistent and strong," Coach

Woulfe provides, and for his Panthers who will brace themselves for action next season in the Continental Coach Woulfe remarked, "We're a young crew and we have talent." I never admitted to having talent as a coach so KW gets a nod for bravery from this reporter.

Denouement

All of the American Conference coaches get themselves an honorary *Raising of the Brow* for their much appreciated, well after hours, shuffling through their cars for folders and searching through their phones for photographs; genuinely helping me with the content for this cause, many thanks!



IF

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Ben Winderman

