A total of 35 candidates signed up for membership in the squad. Of the 35 members who eventually remained on the team, seven were foreign students: Abel Laguna, from Peru, who was the coach and principal strategist; Roberto Marchan, captain, from Puerto Rico; Juan Russo, Panama; Jose Ertze, Mexico; James Burrows, Bahamas; Douglas Apel, Guatemala; and Kinwah Ng, Hong Kong. American members of the team were Steve Pavkovich, Dick Oman, Douglas Pels, Richard Tichich, Robert Pinder, James Vivaldelli, Mark Juetten, Mike Molitor, John Ferret, Larry Schmitz, Thomas Hogun, John Cretzmeyer, Larry Kidder, Steve Zwisler and Fred Thielman.

Outcome of the season was a record of 3-2-1—three wins, two losses and one tie. The Jays defeated Macalester 4-2, Hamline 3-1 and 3-1, then won by a forfeit over St. Mary’s, and tied Gustavus in the rain 0-0. They lost to the University of Minnesota 7-0 and St. Thomas 3-2.

Prospects for the future looked good to Coach Abel Laguna. What was lacking mainly was experience and coordination of the team in passing the ball by kicks from player to player, and the patterns of play in advancing the ball to the goal, much as in hockey. George Durenberger promised to do his best to get soccer accepted by the conference as a championship, letter-winning sport.

1968 —

1968 was the first season of organized soccer in the MIAC, with teams representing five of the colleges: St. John’s, St. Thomas, Hamline, Augsburg and Macalester. Concordia, Duluth and Gustavus had not officially joined the league as yet. Gustavus, a particularly tough competitor, joined at the end of the 1968 season.

Once more the St. John’s team was coached by Abel Laguna, the Peruvian soccer strategist, with Puerto Rican Bob Marchan as team captain. There was little change in the team personnel, with the exception of Dave Kowalski, Mark Studer and Steve Pollock, all three of whom made valuable contributions to a good season, especially on the offensive. Bahamian Jim Burrows served as the star goalie and made good use of his baseball experience in blocking the entrance to the goal, despite a leaky defense that sometimes left him as the sole guardian of the net. It was a developing team, however, with the greatest weakness being the lack of finesse in scoring goals after the fullbacks and halfbacks had turned the ball over to the forwards.

The conference season opened with a defeat at the hands of St. Olaf, 4-3, but the team continued to advance in skill until finally, in the best game of the season, the Johnnies exploded to defeat Macalester 5-2. It was in this game that the new trio of Dave Kowalski, Mark Studer and Steve Pollock came into their own. Kowalski and Captain Roberto Marchan each scored two goals and Mark Studer one. Jim Burrows blanked the Macs in the second half as defender of the net.

The season ended in a three-way tie between St. John’s, St. Thomas and Macalester, with identical records of four wins and one loss.

The season was noteworthy for being the first year soccer letters were issued—fifteen in number. At the end of the season Coach Laguna proffered the special thanks of the team to George Durenberger for getting the game recognized by the St. John’s Monogram Club and the MIAC. “It took George three years,” he said, “but he did it!”

— 1969 —

Coach Abel Laguna graduated in the spring of 1969 and was succeeded in office by James “Big Red” Vivaldelli. On the schedule were five conference games: Macalester, Augsburg, Hamline, St. Thomas and Gustavus Adolphus. It was a season in which several new names were added to the team roster, players who were instrumental in promoting the success of the team: freshman Tim Broback was one, scoring the only point in a victory over St. Olaf, 1-0. Then there were rugged and effective Tom Keul, goaltender, who had three shutouts over the season, halfbacks Tim Hogan and Kinwah Ng. The 1969 Johnnies were called the “Five Nation Team” because of its makeup of Douglas Apel, Guatemala; Vinh Dink Nguyen, South Viet Nam; Ramsey Shu, Hong Kong; Ning Uyen Chen and Kinwah Ng, both from Hong Kong; finally Paul Gotay, Puerto Rico.

American members of the team were Rick Althoff, Tom Bates, Tim Broback, Rich Bunting, John Cretzmeyer, Weston Cutter, Peter Daudu, Tom Gilligan, Tim Hogan, Steve Pavkovich, Bill Russ, Mark Studer, Jim Vivaldelli, Tom Weber and John Weiss.

The 1969 soccer team finished the year with an overall record of five wins, one tie and two losses. The conference record was 4-1-1 for second place. It was a strong, well-balanced team despite having been defeated by Gustavus 4-0, the Gusties winning the crown with a record of five wins and only one loss.

Soccer had come a long way since its beginning in 1966, three years before. The proportion of games won versus the number lost was approximately the same, but the quality of play had improved significantly. One by one, the conference colleges had taken up soccer until in 1969 the only conference member without a soccer team was Concordia. Players and spectators alike had arrived at the point where
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they could recognize good soccer and appreciate the fifteen goals the 1969 team had scored versus seven by the opponents.

In a resume of the season, Tim Tuohy of the Record staff quoted Coach Vivaldelli’s praise of the work and improvement achieved by the “Kickers.” He attributed their improvement to greater finesse around the opponents’ goal, more skill and astuteness in passing the ball, and greater aggressiveness of the players. Individuals singled out for commendation were Tom Keul for his work as goalie (three shut-outs), Doug Apel for his six goals, and Tim Broback, Mark Studer and Tom Gilligan for their aggressive play. The player-coach Vivaldelli had become an outstanding defensive fullback.

With only Kinwah Ng and Steve Pavkovich graduating, the coach was looking forward to 1970 for the best soccer team St. John’s had thus far produced (Record, November 7, 1969, p. 4).

1970

Sometime in the interim between the 1969 and 1970 soccer seasons, Athletic Director George Durenberger appointed Axel Theimer, music instructor and director of the men’s chorus, coach of the soccer team. The appointment of an Austrian who had played soccer in his native country brought a flavor of Europe to the St. John’s athletic scene. He was a vigorous young man, not yet twenty-five and greatly in need of exercise. He first became interested in watching the St. John’s soccer team practice and in time joined in the training exercises, running and kicking. Now and then he would stop to give the players a tip when it was apparent that a fault was correctable, sometimes suggesting a play that was successful in European soccer—pointers on finesse that the American players at St. John’s had never heard of before.

The appointment was almost to be expected eventually. James Vivaldelli, the 1969 coach and player, welcomed his successor for the reason that it gave him the opportunity as assistant coach to exercise the leadership that the squad needed in order to make progress in mastering the game. Moreover, a number of the 1969 team members had not returned, and there were vacancies to be filled by new men. Missed, especially, were Mark Studer, the leading 1969 scorer, Tom Keul, who had developed into a first-class goalie, and Kinwah Ng, their outstanding halfback who had graduated.

The overall record for the season was four wins, four ties and two defeats; the conference record three wins, three ties and two losses. The number of tied games is indicative of the stubborn defense the team had developed. The season ended with St. John’s in third place behind Gustavus (first) and St. Thomas (second).

— 1971 and 1972 —

The Record for the years 1971 and 1972 showed little or no interest in soccer. For that reason the outcomes of the 1971 and 1972 seasons have been culled from the Sagatagan: 1971, four wins, six losses, four ties; 1972, six wins, nine losses.

Returning for the 1971 season were the following veterans: Weston Cutter, Daniel Dimarco, David Farnesi, Patrick Machogu, Vinh Dink Nguen, Thomas Weber, John Weiss, David Yeh, Stephen Pollock and Steven Young (Record, October 1, 1971).

— 1973 —

The 1973 soccer season was one of transition from an experienced coach, Axel Theimer, to a beginner in the coaching game, Matthew Sikich, a 1972 graduate of St. John’s. Captain of the team was David Yeh, a native of Hong Kong who had done all his earlier playing in the techniques of a country where soccer was an international sport. On the team were two other players experienced in foreign-style soccer, Geoff Murphy and his brother Brian, both rugged American players who had lived in Athens, Greece, during the years when they were going through grade school. Like Captain Yeh, they were expert soccer performers. With the exception of a few other players on the team, the 1973 edition was made up mainly of beginners who had little knowledge of the game and practically no experience. The Record gives the names of only a few of the veterans on the team: Carl Neuburger,