

2010 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



George Vizvary

There have been many sports greats inducted into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame who have excelled on a local, state and on a rare occasion, national level, however none that have achieved the national accolades and world wide recognition of 2010 inductee George Vizvary. “World Class” is the best way to describe George Vizvary not only as an athlete and coach but also as an individual, and for this, the Saugerties community and members of the Sports Hall of Fame congratulate George for his accomplishments and induction into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame.

Many are aware of George Vizvary’s athletic and coaching achievements in U.S. soccer, but few know of George’s life and experiences before coming to the United States. The story of George Vizvary is unique if not remarkable and being the most humble and unassuming individual as one will find, we are honored that George has shared with us his life story.

Born April 14, 1936 in Ujpest Hungary, George Vizvary was the only child of Ilona and Gyula Vizvary. George’s father Gyula worked as a technician in an aluminum oxide manufacturing plant and introduced George at an early age to engineering fundamentals that would come in handy later in life. As a youth growing up in Hungary, George and his parents lived a modest life. George recalls his earliest participation in sports playing sand lot soccer. “We didn’t have the money to buy a real soccer ball, so we had to make our own. Using a nylon stocking, we stuffed it full of rags, sewed it closed, twisted it, sewed it again and made a ‘rongy ladba’ (rag ball). After playing with it for a few hours, it became unraveled and we then had to start from scratch. I became very good at making the rongy ladba so the kids always looked to me to bring the ball”.

When it came to soccer footwear, George recalls the challenges early in his playing days. “I had no soccer shoes, so as an 8 year old I had to play in my bare feet”. “As a 10 year old, I was selected to play soccer with the “Electric Company of Budapest”, and as a reward for making this team, I was provided a pair of soccer shoes. The fact that they were 5th generation hand me downs from other players, didn’t matter. I felt it a privilege to have the shoes and to play on this team”.

Attending a parochial school as a child, George Vizvary began his early studies with aspirations of entering the priesthood. George jokes, “It was my parents dream for their son to be a priest, however once I discovered anatomy I had to change my course of direction”. Subsequently, George Vizvary viewed engineering as his future, eventually going on to attend the Technical College of Hungary at Gyor and following in the footsteps of his father.

George’s development as a premier soccer player quickly progressed through the youth and juniors ranks and as a 17 year old George was already playing professionally. In 1955 George Vizvary was rewarded for his elite soccer skills as he was selected as a member of the Hungarian National Soccer Team, this truly being one of the greatest honors that George has ever received.. As a professional, George played with Tatabanya FC as he and his fellow countrymen traveled throughout Eastern Europe having to compete within the limits of the Communist Block. While being termed a “professional”, meaning he played the game for a living at the time, they did not really play for money – more so they played for goods or services, as well as the pride of their country. As a result, George also needed to continue his schooling, mostly at night, as he stayed busy during the day working and playing soccer. George reminisces about an experience in neighboring Czechoslovakia when he got into a little jam. “Although we were a professional team, it wasn’t in the same sense of what we now understand. We received compensation in the form of beef, shirts, watches or anything else deemed valuable to us back then. While playing in Czechoslovakia, I was “detained” by the police for trading watches for money. At that time the greatest athlete in all of Czechoslovakia was an Olympian long distance runner named Emile Zatopek. He heard of my incarceration and arranged my release within 24 hours. It meant a lot to me since at that time the Hungarians and Czechs weren’t on best of terms. It could have been a bad experience”

As a Hungarian living in Eastern Europe, George Vizvary knows first hand of bad experiences. Those knowing European history will recall that after WWII the country of Hungary was in the grasp of Communist control and Russian occupation and oppression. George recalls playing in a “friendly match” against a Russian military team on Hungarian soil. “Tensions between the Russians and Hungarians were high at the time. The field where we were playing was surrounded by Russian military and at one point in the game I was awarded a penalty kick. The kick struck the goalie in the forehead, knocked him on his “nying-nyeng” and the ball caromed into the goal. You could have heard a needle drop, there was complete silence. Needless to say, there were interrogations after the game”.

If the nation of Hungary could have resolved its problems with the Russians on the soccer field, things would have been much easier, however it didn’t work out that way. On October 23, 1956 a crowd led by Hungarian college students, many from the Budapest Technical University, assembled in mass in central Budapest to protest Russia’s presence and to present a 16 point demand to the controlling Communist party leaders. What began as a peaceful protest ended in the slaughter of hundreds of Hungarian students and workers by Russian military and the detested Communist secret service (AVH). For the next 2 months, Hungarian freedom fighters fought a brave and tenacious battle against the Russian military in what history knows as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In the middle of this battle was 20 year old George Vizvary. George emotionally recalls, “The Russians were ruthless and we wanted them out of our country. My father was one of the unfortunate who were imprisoned by the Russians and placed in a concentration camp. He was held as a political prisoner and treated very harshly. They could never take away our pride or spirit to fight them however we didn’t have the firepower to sustain our fight once they sent their full military into Hungary”.

As a result of his participation in the revolt, George knew that he had to escape Hungary for asylum in the United States or risk capture and possible execution by the Russians. He and his close friend Joe Hevesi along

with 3 other families attempted to make their way out of Hungary. “A small amount of money, a gold ring, and a camera were used to pay off a former Hungarian soldier to act as our guide to safely get us out of Hungary and through the Iron Curtain. George recalls his escape, “We had to contend with electrified fences, barbed wire, land mines and Russian patrols. I remember having to hold my hand over the mouth of Joe Hevesi’s 3 year old daughter Judy to quiet her as we hid in a hay stack while a Russian tank patrol passed a few feet away from us. On our first attempt, we were chased by a Russian tank, and as a result the other 3 families gave up and returned home. On our second attempt, we came under heavy fire by the Russians, however we were too far away and out ran their bullets”.

“Once we escaped through the Iron Curtain into Austria, we went to a refugee camp in Landek, Austria. With the assistance of “Radio Free Europe” we were able to send coded messages to our families to let them know that we had successfully made our escape. “Village with the white church” was the code word used to inform my family that we were safe”. From Landek, we travelled to Innsbruck where we had background checks done, and then to Salzburg where we received vaccinations and lastly to Munich where we boarded a military plane.” This plane flew to Iceland where it was refueled and from there we went directly to the United States...a 27 hour flight in total”

Once in the United States, George and his fellow Hungarians were placed in a refugee camp at Rutgers University (Camp Kilmer). The United States government, as a result of its failure to go to the aid of Hungary in their fight against Russia (due to fears of a nuclear Armageddon), felt a strong obligation to assist the 200,000 Hungarians that fled to the U.S.. George and his friend, Joe Hevesi, were the beneficiaries of this aid as shortly after arriving in the U.S. they were taken to Madison Avenue in NY City where they were both interviewed and hired by computer giant IBM.. A few days after their hiring, a large black limousine pulled up to Camp Kilmer. “To discover that this car was for us was amazing. It brought us to Neighborhood Road in Lake Katrine and dropped us off at the front door of IBM Kingston”!

George’s technical background and experience had paid off and the beginning of a new life was within his reach as IBM set up George Vizvary with not only a job but also his first U.S. residence at the Governor Clinton Hotel in Kingston. Speaking only a tad bit of English, both George Vizvary and Joe Hevesi were taken under the wing of Hungarian speaking IBMers Andy Horvath and Bill Olah and over the next 12 years George advanced through IBM becoming an Engineering Designer. In 1968 George’s IBM manager, George Green, assigned George to participate as an instructor at Ulster County Community College as part of the co-op program between IBM and the community college. It was at this time that George Vizvary saw an opportunity and seized it. A decision which in retrospect George admits “consumed and changed his life”. In 1968 George took over the reigns as head coach in establishing the Ulster County Community College men’s soccer program.

Appreciative of the experiences that he had enjoyed as a professional soccer player as well as the opportunities that he was given after arriving in the United States, George Vizvary had developed an inner desire to “give back” for what he felt were blessings that he had received. In 1970, now fully entrenched in teaching and coaching at Ulster County Community College, George felt that his true calling in life was to be an educator and a “shaper of young lives”. In 1972 George made the difficult yet confident decision to leave IBM to become a full time teacher and coach at U.C.C.C.. George humbly recalls, “The decision to leave IBM was very hard. Everything I had accomplished in the United States was due to them. They helped me build my life here, so leaving this great company to follow my life ambition was bitter sweet”.

With his departure from IBM, George Vizvary was now poised to devote his full attention to his new mission in life. In 1970 U.C.C.C soccer experienced its first winning season, however George Vizvary felt that the program was at a disadvantage since most of the better local soccer players were going off to 4 year colleges or universities and were luke warm to the idea of attending the local community college to play soccer. It was in 1972 that George Vizvary and U.C.C.C.men’s basketball coach Mike Perry recognized the fact that locally they couldn’t attract good players (or enough players) for their programs, so they began recruiting in New York City, New Jersey, or anywhere else they could find players interested in attending the small community college

in Stone Ridge. George confides, “Many times, the types of kids that we recruited had unstable backgrounds. Some of these kids were troubled and often came from broken homes, or worse. We brought them to Stone Ridge, set them up with housing and became their surrogate parents. It was not easy, but it was necessary in order to build our programs. We knew that eventually if we developed successful programs, we would be able to attract more talented athletes making the recruiting process easier”.



Coach Vizvary Reviews His Lineup

As a U.S. citizen, George continued his athletic aspirations playing soccer with the well known Kingston Sport Club. The elite local team organized by fellow Saugerties Sports Hall of Famer Oskar Benzenhoeffler was made up from a mix of talented American and European players who traveled the North East competing. As the team’s captain for five years, George Vizvary and this elite squad of soccer stars compiled an amazing 51 game undefeated record. The team also included some other notable future soccer coaches, such as Italian native Geno Ventriglia (who played on the KSC team at the age of 16) and Al Miller, SUNY New Paltz’s first soccer coach. Ventriglia went on to coach the women’s program at West Point for 24 years amassing 262 wins with the Black Knights before retiring. Ventriglia quickly attributes much of his soccer success to his idols and older KSC teammates George Vizvary and Al Miller. Referring to Vizvary and Miller, Ventriglia appreciatively exclaimed, “They taught me so much, those guys”!

As a reward for his performance with the Kingston Sport Club, George Vizvary was selected to the New York State All Star Team and traveled to Montreal to compete against teams from around the world. Unfortunately it was in Montreal that George suffered a knee injury which led to his retirement from competitive play, and ultimately to his full-time focus on coaching.

On a local level, George was also very involved in establishing the local youth soccer programs. He served as the president of the Mid Hudson Soccer Association, overseeing 27 teams from the Kingston, Rondout and Saugerties areas. As a true grass-roots organization, George passed along his passion & knowledge of the game in teaching the rules (laws) & game tactics, training referees & coaches, as well as performing basic maintenance tasks such as mowing and lining fields, as well as building goal posts. An off-shoot of the Mid Hudson soccer program was the creation of the Saugerties (youth) Soccer League, under the direction of Wes Maxwell & Oskar Benzenhoeffler, which evolved into the current Saugerties AYSO soccer program. George Vizvary’s dream to create youth soccer programs in our area successfully came to fruition, and today, over 700 children in Saugerties participate in the highly successful Saugerties AYSO program. Currently, George Vizvary is very involved with the Newburgh based ‘Quickstrike Football Club’. Quickstrike was developed by one of George’s ex-players, Jesse Kolmel, and is an elite-level soccer academy which prepares players for top level soccer competition, developing elite players, many who go on to play collegiately, professionally, and some at the Olympic level. George currently coaches the boys U14 team and is very active assisting Jesse Kolmel with the program’s development.

As you learn about his motivation and passion, when George Vizvary commits himself to a task he goes all-out – and in coaching soccer, in his words “I put soccer ahead of everything.” In demanding excellence in himself & his teams, George quickly molded U.C.C.C. soccer into a major junior college powerhouse, as his teams posted a 534-159-28 career record over his 36 seasons. In 1977 & 1978, the Ulster men’s team claimed consecutive NJCAA national championships. More recently, Ulster finished second in the 2007 national tournament, and posted a 3rd place finish on the national level in 2000 & 2001. All told, the Senators captured 17 region titles and 24 Mid-Hudson Conference championships. Forty-five Ulster players competed professionally and 52 achieved All-American status from the NJCAA and National Soccer Coaches Association

of America. Two of George Vizvary's former players, Tom Mulroy (in 1993) and Joe Ulrich (in 2000), also were inducted into the NJCAA Hall of Fame. Mulroy, Ulrich, Niels Guldbjerg, and Njego Pesa (both key members of the 1977 & 1978 teams) were chosen on the NJCAA Team of the Century. Furthermore, hundreds of George Vizvary's players have transferred to 74 different 4-year programs, notably U.C.C.C. standout Joe Ulrich who went on to attend Duke University and earned the Herman Trophy as college soccer player of the year in 1982 (the Herman Trophy is the equivalent of college football's Heisman Trophy).

On a personal level, George was inducted into the National Junior College Athletic Association Hall of Fame in 2007 and has the most victories in junior college soccer history. George Vizvary also earned Kingston *Daily Freeman* Sportsperson of the Year honors in 2007 along with his second Region XV Coach of the Year award. George's Freeman Sports Person of the Year Award of '07 sits on his mantle next to the *Freeman* Sports Person of the Year Award that George also won in 1991.

While humble regarding his impact on Ulster's soccer program, it is difficult to overlook George Vizvary's involvement as the catalyst in the team's success. In 1996, he resigned at Ulster to coach Division 1 women's soccer at the University at Albany for three seasons. In his absence, the U.C.C.C. program struggled, posting a 2-14-2 record in 1998, and in 1999 the Senators failed to field a team for the first time in 33 years. Upon his return for the 2000 season, Ulster returned to past success with a 3rd place national tournament finishes in 2001. And as if to prove he is not one-dimensional in coaching soccer only, George also served as Ulster's baseball coach in 1979 & 1980. To hear George describe his impact on coaching, "It's not the winning records, it was the lives....these boys were my sons."



George (center) and UCCC team mates at 2009 Alumni Reunion

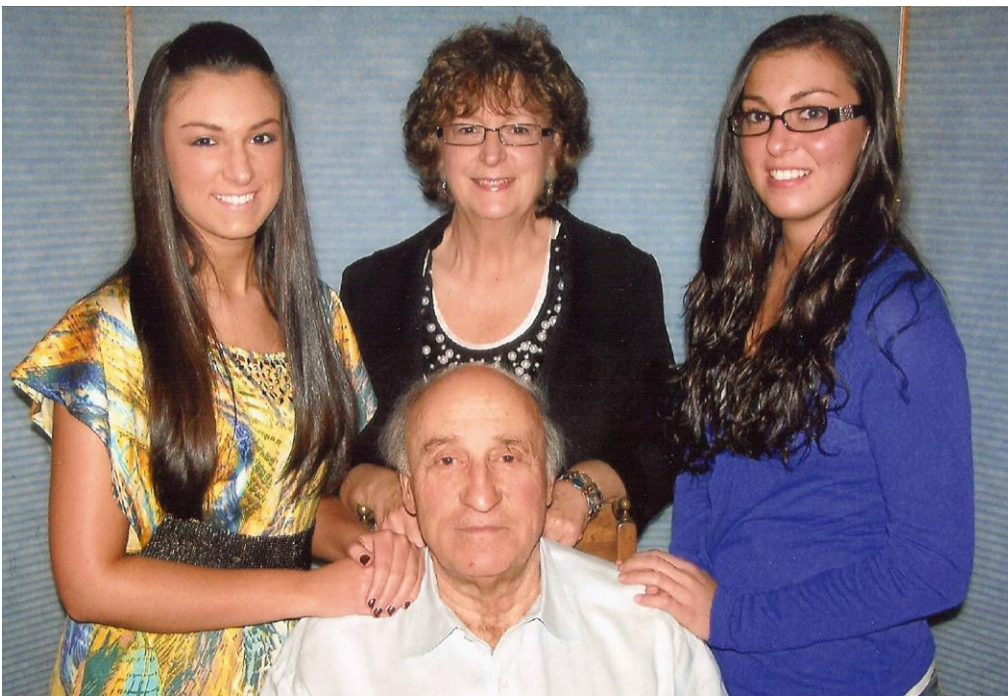
George Vizvary's other professional soccer accomplishments are no less impressive. He served on the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) coaching staff for 15 years, producing coaches of men's & women's national and collegiate teams, including Clemson, Wake Forest, and Indiana. He also fostered relationships with many soccer development camps, such as the World Cup Soccer camps, traveling throughout the country for 7 to 8 weeks of continuous camps. George was also on the coaching staff of the Tampa Bay Rowdies professional soccer team (North American Soccer League) for several years and

additionally served as Tampa Bay Rowdies northeast scout. As a coach of professional soccer, George Vizvary was at the helm of the NY Eagles and the NJ Eagles of the American Soccer League as well as the New York Fever of the USISL. In addition, George is the owner of Dixie Magic Camps and travels extensively throughout Tennessee, North & South Carolina, and Florida teaching at the camps.

As for his own personal highlights from his playing days, George is most proud of wearing the Hungarian national team uniform, in representing his home & country. In discussing his roots, George is very emotional and passionate of his upbringing and has a sincere appreciation for his freedoms & for the opportunities afforded as an American citizen. In coaching, he is quick to count the first national championship, 2-1 victory over Flourissant Valley (MO) Community College, as his major achievement. As for inspirations, there is Robert Markes, former U.C.C.C. Dean, "for his understanding of human nature, and government.... a great person." George also names Robert Markes son, Albany University's John Markes, who possessed the same leadership qualities as his father..

George Vizvary was never one to be afraid of trying something new. One of George's proudest athletic accomplishments was his participation in the IBM fast pitch softball league. The Kingston IBM Fastpitch League at one time was very competitive, just the way George Vizvary likes it, and having little to no knowledge of the game of baseball George looked forward to the challenge. Once George discovered that third base wasn't his cup of tea (he couldn't quite grasp the concept of throwing the ball to first base after fielding it), he tried his hand at pitching. Possessing the fire to master everything he tried, George developed into a very capable windmill pitcher and perennially was one of the better hurlers in the league. George tells a hilarious story involving his catcher Robert "Nippy" Lasher, Nippy's wardrobe malfunction, a cross up in signals, and an ill advised "change up" to Kingston Sports Hall of Famer Hobey Armstrong", George chuckles, "Nippy was just trying to hold things together and I thought he was giving me the signal for a change up... They're still looking for that ball", George chuckles.

When speaking of his sports achievements, George Vizvary is low key and modest, however when asked about his family George lights up. George & his wife Jean (of 19 years), have two daughters, Erika & Patti (both high school seniors at SHS). Both are enrolled next year at Marist – Erika will study fashion design, while Patti will major in environmental science. Jean Vizvary is the Director of Special Services at Marist College. George also has two daughters from his first marriage: Dora, who works for the NY State HIV program in Albany, lives in Ballston Spa, and Judith, who works in the Onteora School District Special Education program. George also proudly boasts 5 grandchildren, and if he weren't busy enough, George and his wife Jean are also owners of the Sun Zone in Barclay Heights.



George and Family

In early 2010, George Vizvary abruptly resigned as head soccer coach at UCCC. His resignation has led to much speculation as to the reasons for his departure but true to form, George has kept the matter private and between him and UCCC. George is delighted that one of his former players, Victor Tobar, has taken over his position and is happy to see the program stay in the family. When asked of potential future coaching plans, George hasn't tipped his hand as to anything in the works, however

knowing his love of the game and knowing that he still has more to give, one would not be surprised to see George Vizvary on the sidelines somewhere in the near future.

Some might question the relevance & importance of the game of soccer on a local level – while it is true that more prominent & well known "American" sports such as baseball, basketball, golf, and football enjoy more limelight on a professional, national, and local level, one must realize that in the town of Saugerties the number of participants in the Saugerties youth soccer leagues matches that of Little League & Babe Ruth baseball, and far surpasses any other local youth sport. Also baseball, football, and basketball do not share the international

acclaim as soccer – the World Cup is bigger than the American football Super Bowl or World Series in total world-wide interest. In George Vizvary, Saugerties is home to an international, as well as local & national presence of one of the most brilliant & successful personalities and role models in the soccer world, as well as sports and life in general. We congratulate & honor his accomplishments and dedication to his players & the sport of soccer and we are proud to bestow the title of Saugerties Sports Hall of Famer to George Vizvary.