

## **Chapter Three**

### **Our New Thread: America's First Soccer Dynasty**

A slight turn of a small wheel eventually led to the first kick.

Bessie Clark's "exquisitely gloved, delicate hand" had just turned the power on in her father's new thread mill. Built in 1883 for over a million dollars, the massive expansion of the Clark Thread Mill in Kearny sat directly across the river from the company's first mill and corporate headquarters in Newark, the state's largest and most important city. Within seconds "the ponderous fly-wheel began to turn slowly at first, then gaining momentum it communicated power to the immense belts, and then in all parts of the structure the machinery began to work, until the whole building was humming and pulsating with new life." In one ten-hour day, Mill No. 2 promised to produce "a length of yarn sufficient to circle the earth four times." It was a marvel of the American Industrial Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Within months of the mill's opening, soccer formally arrived at the company, setting in motion a string of events that brought the game to life in the area. First, fifty male employees of the Clark Thread Company formed an athletic association on Thursday, November 8, 1883, and another one hundred men joined the following Tuesday, when the body met at the company's firehouse in Newark to elect officers. William Clark, the firm's co-founder and treasurer, then backed the new organization and generously provided money "to fence in and level sufficient ground to form a fine football and cricket field in the rear of the new factory at Kearny." A week after losing its first competitive match to Tommy Tuffnell's Paterson FC in Paterson, the

company dedicated that field on Thanksgiving Day. Fronting Kearny's Grant Avenue, the first corporately built soccer ground in the country fit snugly in between the new mill and the elevated bed of the Erie Railroad.

William and Robert Clark played in that match, and although unrelated by blood to Bessie and her father, also named William Clark, they both worked at the mill. William had been elected as vice-president of the athletic association, and Robert was selected as the soccer team's captain. Among hundreds of men gathered for a contest featuring "the bachelors" against "the benedicts," or single versus married men, the brothers, still single, battled their married counterparts for an "exciting" ninety minutes. The married men won, 4-2, largely because they possessed "more quickness, pluck, and brawn," and returned to work with bragging rights on Friday. The victors couldn't celebrate for long as they agreed to a rematch the very next day.

Word spread through the ranks of the company, and over one thousand "partisans"—some cheering for their single co-workers, others for their married mates—watched from the sidelines of the recently fenced in, freshly sodded lot. Under the headline "BEATING THE BENEDICTS," the *Newark Evening News* detailed "how the single men triumphed in the foot-ball game." The bachelors started brightly, scoring after only eight minutes through some "heaving kicking and rushing." The married men, who had "some old foot-ball players" in their ranks, leveled the score-line just before halftime through some "cautious kicking" of their own. After the break, though, youth and fitness prevailed as the bachelors tallied the deciding goal, avenging their Thanksgiving Day defeat, 2-1. *The News*, like most newspapers of the era didn't list first names in match reports, but Newark's leading daily did mention that one of the Clarks played especially well.<sup>2</sup>

Little things brought the game to what came to be called “The Cradle of American Soccer.” Bessie’s tiny, gloved hand, the Clark athletic association, and the first games on the new field all played a part. But the thread that made the company famous the world over was the real reason soccer flourished. The Clark Thread Company nurtured the game during soccer’s infancy in the United States by employing soccer-loving immigrant workers, building a soccer stadium, helping form the game’s initial governing body, and backing the sport’s first dynasty. Thread and soccer came of age together during an era of welfare capitalism as the Clarks utilized sport to encourage worker loyalty, attract and retain skilled employees, and publicize its products. By 1891, when labor unrest disrupted work at the mills, soccer suffered briefly; but the game more than survived as it had already become embroidered into the fabric of life of several American towns.<sup>3</sup>

George and William Clark were born thread men. Descendants of a thread manufacturing family in Paisley, Scotland, the brothers started the American branch of the family business in Newark in 1864. Initially, the business was a small one, limited to thirty employees, mostly girls, who dyed, spooled, ticketed, and packaged thread. But it exploded after the American Civil War as older brother George invented a durable cotton thread specifically suited for the sewing machine. The Clarks marketed that thread, which consisted of three double strands twisted tightly together, as “Our New Thread,” or “O.N.T.,” and it soon “became known wherever American women stitched.” A gigantic mill modeled on the family’s Paisley threadworks appeared on the Newark side of the Passaic River by 1866, and it soon employed over a thousand workers.

George died suddenly of a heart attack in 1873, and control of the stateside family business fell to his younger brother. Although only thirty-two, William confidently promised to more than double the company's production. In 1875 he built a second plant—Clark Mill No. 2—directly across the river in Kearny, and added to it yet again in 1883. Eventually the plant in lower Kearny consisted of thirty-five buildings on approximately thirteen acres. There an “army of operatives” moved “their busy fingers” with “regularity and precision” across the company's more than eight thousand spindles. Other manufacturers built on the Kearny side of the river, too. Mile-End Spool Cotton Company constructed a factory in 1876, one that Clark took over in 1883. Marshall Flax Spinning Company arrived in 1880, and Nairn Linoleum in 1887. The factories employed thousands of workers, and together they produced more thread, linen, and linoleum than anywhere else on the planet.<sup>4</sup>

William Clark built big, and his private home on Mt. Prospect Avenue was additional proof. As Newark's richest man he was worth five to ten million dollars by 1886, so he lived in the city's most palatial residence. From the upper floors of his 28-room Newark mansion, which was built between 1873 and 1880, Clark could see the Manhattan skyline in the distance as well as look out on his two riverside factories. In time, Clark gifted part of his vast estate to the public. It became part of the Frederick Olmstead-designed Branch Brook Park, the nation's first county park. The thread baron imported every piece of wood and stone, metal and marble from Scotland for the majestic Queen Anne-style house, so it wasn't a surprise that he also imported laborers from his homeland, too. Scottish immigrants, most of them from Paisley, came to work at his mills in large numbers, as did the English and Irish, and by the 1880s some three thousand people toiled at Clark's various mills.<sup>5</sup>

Another William Clark, father of the soccer-playing William, Jr. and Robert, was one of those immigrants. He managed the mills at Kerr & Clark Thread Company in Paisley, Scotland for twelve years before coming to America in 1865 to work for George and William Clark. He brought his young family and went on to manage the firm's ever-expanding complex of buildings for the next twenty-six years. This William Clark lived in a "handsome home" on Mt. Pleasant Avenue, which was about equidistant between the big boss's mansion on Mt. Prospect and the Newark mills. Clark's neighbors were proof of both Newark's diversified economy and her rising managerial class. One neighbor owned a foundry, another was the superintendent of a ship line, and a third was a tea and coffee dealer. Alfred Lister, an Englishman who lived two doors down, was a "bone dust manufacturer." Twenty-three-year-old William, Jr. worked at the mill as a machinist, but twenty-year-old Robert was still in school in 1880. A member of Princeton University's Class of 1882, he joined the firm after graduation.<sup>6</sup>

At Princeton, Robert was quite active on the athletic front, playing for the class football team that defeated the University of Pennsylvania squad at Germantown's Young America Cricket Ground on November 27, 1880. Although Robert, or "Bobby" as all his classmates called him, dropped football after a year, he did join the lacrosse club, and notably, he became president of both the Princeton Bicycle Club and University Boating Association. William, Jr. was also a rowing enthusiast, and served as vice-president of the famous Eureka Boat Club in Newark during the late 1880s. In August 1882, Robert began his apprenticeship at Clark Thread and within a year he became involved in the company's athletic association.<sup>7</sup>

In the months after Mill No. 2 opened in Kearny, the very place where Robert worked, the ONT Athletic Association was formed to allow men to play soccer, cricket, and baseball. It was unclear if male operatives at the new mill petitioned for the association, named after the product that made Clark the country's largest thread manufacturer, but management certainly backed it. The historian Steven A. Reiss has argued that industrialists supported athletic programs because they wanted to produce "a happy, contented, loyal work force that would be punctual, efficient, hardworking and non-union." ONT teams, the reasoning went, would also boost worker morale and promote the company's image outside the mills, and in some way, it could lead to recruiting new workers while also maintaining control over the shop floor.<sup>8</sup>

Clark Thread Company prized efficiency and productivity in their workforce. "Industry and skill in these truly wonderful works always find their reward," noted a visitor to the Kearny mill, "while sloth and awkwardness maintain but a short career." While management provided for "the comfort and happiness of his operatives" and encouraged employees to form associations "for mental as well as physical improvement," those efforts didn't always lead to a compliant, peaceful workforce. Mr. Clark funded the athletic association, which the *Newark Sunday Call* said was "additional proof of the liberality of the firm," but wages were wages. Six weeks after the formation of ONT AA, cotton spinners vowed to fight a proposed ten percent reduction in pay. They worked by the piece, getting three dollars for every one hundred pounds of yarn, which was about fifteen dollars for a week's work. Management said they had to reduce wages because of local competition.<sup>9</sup>

Players in work teams like ONT surely talked "shop" at training and games, and since the company didn't pay its players a drop in wages was always a concern. As the oldest company soccer team in the United States, Clark Thread followed in the British tradition of workers

forming teams. For example, railway workers formed Stoke City and Manchester United football clubs in 1863 and 1878, respectively. Other types of groups organized teams, too. The oldest Scottish soccer club, Queen's Park, had roots in the local Young Men's Christian Association. A group of Scottish gentlemen formed St. Mirren FC of Paisley in 1874. Still others emerged from local churches or even taverns. Regardless of a club's origins, players needed access to time and space in order to play the game, and at Clark Thread workers were granted a "half-holiday" on Saturdays, a half-day that male workers filled with playing soccer. And for his part, William Clark paid for a field to be fenced-in and leveled, and promised to erect a first-class clubhouse with all "the modern improvements" in the near future.<sup>10</sup>

The men of ONT clearly enjoyed their new athletic grounds, but they must've tired of just playing amongst themselves. They needed a rival. Soccer has always needed rivalries, and one of the first in the annals of American soccer history was not the one between single and married men, but the one between Paterson FC and ONT. Fifteen miles downriver from Paterson's silk mills, Clark's mill teams sought to emulate, and then surpass, Paterson's soccer success. After losing to Paterson in its first-ever match, ONT next planned to travel to Paterson on Christmas Day, 1883. A snowstorm cancelled that Yuletide exhibition, and foul weather through January prevented any games from being played, a recurring problem as soccer was an "outdoor winter sport." The soccer season usually started after the baseball season ended in October and continued uninterrupted, except for the predictable foul weather, through May. The weather improved enough by mid-February for Paterson to visit ONT's new home for the first time on February 10, 1884.

When Paterson FC arrived a sizeable crowd had already gathered, eager to see how ONT would fare against the oldest club in the United States. Robert Clark kicked the ball off at 3:15

P.M. that afternoon, booting it deep into Paterson territory. For the next ninety minutes the two sides slipped and slogged on the soft, wet, muddy field. Down two goals by half-time, ONT started the second half aggressively, scoring after “some excellent rushing of their center forwards.” The large crowd cheered wildly as ONT pressed for an equalizer, but a second goal was disallowed “on the ground of ‘off side.’” Towards the end of the game, which ended in a 2-1 Paterson victory, both teams were virtually indistinguishable as mud covered all twenty-two men. “For whenever they came in contact with mother earth, which was very often, she left her mark,” wrote a Paterson newspaperman. “They all presented a sorry spectacle, covered as they were from head to foot with mire.” It all added to the festivity and friendliness of the occasion as spectators laughed whenever a player fell in the mud. Afterwards the fellowship continued as the hosts treated their guests to dinner at a nearby hotel.<sup>11</sup>

That spring new clubs sprouted up in Paterson, Newark, Kearny, New York City, and other places, especially wherever “Britons [were] constantly finding homes.” For example, the Kearny Rangers formed in March 1884 with twenty-two members and had an important patron in John Watts Kearny, the father of the slain American Civil War hero and namesake of the town, General Philip Kearny. The financially sound organization had its own clubhouse on John Street, just blocks away from the mills, and sought out “young men of good character.” Tiffany & Company, the famous jeweler, and the Domestic Sewing Machine Company formed company teams. The aptly named Domestics consisted of only native-born Americans. Although they had never played soccer before, they managed to draw ONT’s second team as well as four other local sides that spring; their speed and endurance helped mask their lack of skill and playing experience. The local soccer scene blossomed.<sup>12</sup>



So did the local sport scene. Founded by Puritans in 1666, the first Newarkers had little time or inclination for recreation, but old Newark did have its share of hunting, archery, and fishing. Prizefighting, footraces, and dogfighting existed, too. The first team sports—cricket and baseball—appeared during the 1850s, when the young city was more village than metropolis. But the American Civil War utterly transformed Newark as the dual forces of industrialization and immigration soon made it the third largest manufacturing city in the nation. Newark made things, everything from asbestos to zippers, and immigrants flocked to work in its shops and factories. As a result the city’s population skyrocketed from 72,000 in 1860 to 246,000 in 1900. Nearby Harrison and Kearny thrived, too.

It wasn’t until the 1880s, though, that modern urban industrial sport arrived in the area when more and more people took “sufficient time out from daily chores to really devote time to athletic endeavor as a pleasure.” Some had more time and money than others, which helped make sport become a marker of social class. Wealthy Newarkers not only built big mansions, they lined the Passaic River for rowing and yacht races, including mill owner William Clark, who was also part of a Scottish syndicate that built *Thistle*, a challenger to an American boat in the 1887 America’s Cup. They joined exclusive athletic clubs and country clubs, too. College football became a major high society spectacle as Thanksgiving Day games between Ivy League teams drew thousands. For the wealthy, argued the sports historian Steven A. Riess, “sport provided a means to separate themselves from lesser folks.”<sup>13</sup>

Middle-class Americans also took to sport, especially as a new ethos promoted its wholesome aspects. Sport not only improved one’s physical well being, it was now deemed to be morally uplifting and able to built character. In Newark, baseball was a middle-class sport, as it was in most other cities, so “teams popped up all over the city until not a single window or top

hat was safe in the vicinity of a vacant lot.” Clerks from various telegraph, railroad, and banking firms, who were part of the burgeoning middle class, routinely played the “national pastime.” The cycling craze saw people “straddling the steel skeleton” wherever they went, and by the 1890s Newark was considered the cycling capital of the United States. The Newark Velodrome hosted the world sprint championships in 1912. To buy a baseball bat and mitt, or a bicycle, was a way of demonstrating one’s white-collar status, and it was “to participate in an ever more important part of American culture: the consumption of goods produced by others.”<sup>14</sup>

Working people played and consumed sport, but they didn’t always have the time, money, and space to copy their social superiors. “A workingman wants something besides food and clothes in this country,” stated a congressional hearing from 1883. “He wants recreation. Why should not a workingman have it as well as other people?” It wasn’t always wholesome, uplifting sport either. In 1878, for example, two men raced along Passaic Avenue in Harrison and Kearny for a keg of beer, and by the early 1880s, Paddy McGuigan’s “Bucket of Blood,” a Harrison tavern and fight club, staged matches even though it was illegal. Workingmen did play the more respectable sport of baseball, too. And, of course, there was soccer, which first appeared in the neighborhoods around the mills in Newark and Kearny in the 1870s. Soccer, which had started off as an elite sport in Great Britain, had swiftly made its way down the socio-economic ladder by the mid-1880s. On both sides of the Atlantic, it was considered a working-class sport.<sup>15</sup>

The Clark brothers were among those caught up in the local sporting scene and they believed their soccer team was getting better, even good enough to beat their nemesis from Paterson. William, Jr. and Robert, rising stars in the company, still wanted to play soccer despite its working-class status. After a string of victories at what had been dubbed Clark Field, ONT

traveled to Paterson in April. Even though O.N.T. played with “vim and skill” they lost once again, and “returned somewhat crestfallen over their defeat.” The Clark family wasn’t used to losing, and after four successive defeats to Paterson F.C., one of the brothers told Tommy Tuffnell that he was on a quest for a championship team, even if he had to go to Europe to get better players.<sup>16</sup>

Local soccer officials not only looked to England and Scotland for players, they also relied on the self-proclaimed “home of football” for leadership. In the wake of the extraordinary springtime growth, representatives from New York and New Jersey clubs met in the summer to form the American Football Association (AFA), the second oldest national soccer association outside the British Isles. The officials met at the Clark firehouse in Newark, where men met the year before to form the ONT AA. There the forerunner of U.S. Soccer adopted the rules of the English Football Association, but it agreed that the rules were “subject to alteration from time to time.” Tinkering with the rules of “the simplest game” would become a fine American soccer tradition, as would the administrative contributions of Kearny men. The AFA named Kearny Rangers’ Thomas B. Hood as vice-president and ONT’s Robert Craig as treasurer for the coming season, and these two men became the first of many Kearnyites to serve as custodians of the game.

Six clubs joined the organization in its maiden year, but by 1887 it had over a dozen, including five Newark clubs: Almas, Tiffany Rovers, Thistles, Domestics, and Riversides; two New York sides: New York FC and the New York Thistles; Connecticut’s Ansonia F.C., and two clubs from New England: Fall River Rovers and East End FC of Fall River, Massachusetts. Prominent businessmen raised over five hundred dollars to support the fledgling body’s efforts, and of course, Clark Thread “contributed liberally to the fund.” They used three hundred dollars

to purchase a trophy from Newark's Gaven Spence & Company for a knockout competition modeled after the English FA Cup. Since there were no soccer-playing figures available, the trophy was topped by a runner with a small soccer ball placed in front of his right foot. Merchants displayed the silver trophy in various storefronts in New York City, Newark, and Paterson. A Broad Street store in Newark put it on display and thousands viewed it because it was near one of the busiest intersections in America.<sup>17</sup>

The soccer historian Roger Allaway has rightly pointed out that both the AFA and its cup competition were regional affairs, but officials hoped that the game would grow out of its early epicenter of northern New Jersey and New York City. When the AFA met at Paterson in late September to determine the first-round matches, only six teams were prepared to vie for the first soccer championship of the United States. James Lennox, a member of the Kearny Rangers, walked from his family home on Grant Avenue to Clark's Field to referee the tournament's first game on October 25, 1884. Having taken over for his younger brother, William Clark, Jr. captained ONT that day against the Domestics, the inexperienced all-American born team. Notably, brothers Jack and Joe Swithenby, recent arrivals from Bolton, England, debuted for the side. Jack, a skillful forward, assisted on both goals in the opening round victory. Joe played in midfield. The Clark brothers had delivered on their promise to find top players, even if it meant going to England to do so.

Lennox put aside the whistle the following Saturday and laced up his high-top leather soccer boots for Kearny Rangers to play against Paterson's Caledonian Thistle. The Rangers started "a little nervous and wild," but eked out a last-minute 3-2 victory. In the other final first round match, New York FC crushed Paterson FC, 5-0. Secretaries of the three victorious clubs met the following Saturday to "toss for the next round." ONT won that coin flip and advanced

directly to the final, but the Rangers' Lennox and John Hood, the AFA's vice-president's son, braced for a visit from the powerful New York side on Thanksgiving Day. In fact, soccer was fast becoming a holiday staple as the *Newark Evening News* commented that the national feast "passed quietly" as "target shooting, foot ball, and kindred sports helped to make the day an enjoyable one." It was target practice of sorts on the Rangers' goalkeeper, though, as the New York FC blasted four goals past him.<sup>18</sup>

The AFA planned on staging the grand finale on Christmas Day, so ONT were "practicing at every opportunity, determined that it shall be no fault of theirs if the prize leaves this city." Amid the serious preparations for the cup final, Mary Magee, a former employee of Clark Thread, visited the Clark residence one Saturday night. William, Jr. had scored two goals that afternoon, but wasn't home when Ms. Magee called on him. When his father appeared at the front door she threw the contents of a vial of nitric acid at him. Feeling an extreme burning sensation, he slammed the door and sought immediate medical attention. Luckily, the brim of Mr. Clark's hat and eyeglasses shielded most of his face and eyes from serious injury.

When police arrested Mary and asked her why she threw "the vitriol" at Mr. Clark, she said, "It was intended for Will Clark and not the one who got it." Mary had attempted to shoot Will the year before because she claimed he "ruined" her when she worked at the mill. After serving a three-month sentence at the county penitentiary, she threw a large stone through a window at the Clark home. They sent her to the insane asylum, and upon parole she once again visited the family's home, this time with acid. Mary had also tried to commit suicide by jumping off the railroad bridge and into the Passaic River. After she was sentenced to ten years in prison for throwing acid on Mr. Clark, the court officers dragged her away, crying and sobbing

uncontrollably. The incident rocked the Clark family, and perhaps even caused a sensation at the mill and in the team.<sup>19</sup>

The cup final loomed, though, but foul weather on both Christmas and New Year's Day postponed the final until February, two weeks after Mary's sentencing. "An immense and enthusiastic ring of spectators" lined a baseball ground in Newark to witness "the long-looked-for final" between ONT and New York FC even though they had to pay a twenty-five cent admission fee on a bitterly cold Valentine's Day afternoon. It was so cold that the players only shed their "warm overcoats" minutes before kick-off. Underneath, ONT sported crimson jerseys and matching wool socks along with long white knickers. The New York side wore blue. It was clear from Referee Lennox's opening whistle that the weather would be a factor. A blanket of fresh snow hid thin sheets of ice underfoot, and caused "innumerable falls" throughout the first half.

The match started well for ONT as they controlled play with their "superb" passing, and stand-in captain Jack Swithenby scored from a goalmouth scramble after only fifteen minutes. He did so to "a perfect hurricane of cheers." William Clark, Jr. cheered on from the sidelines, too, as he sacrificed his spot in the starting line-up to insure ONT fielded its strongest side. The decision proved ill fated. When one of the ONT forwards headed home a second tally before halftime, it sent supporters into a delirium. "Men could be seen shaking hands and congratulating each other as though they had already won the game," observed the *Newark Evening News* reporter. They believed that ONT had one hand on the cup, and the other on the \$150 first-place prize money.

There's always a second half, though, and while New York had to play into a fierce wind and driving snow, they were able to score a goal ten minutes from time. It set up a furious finish, one that saw New York make "charge after charge." ONT held firm to grant the company team its first cup. At the time, the game was called "the most perfect exhibition of scientific play ever seen in the country," but it was put under immediate protest. The New Yorkers accused their Jersey counterparts of fielding an ineligible player and staging the final on an illegal field (the goalposts were not regulation size). William Clark, Jr. had given his spot to Peter Garron, a regular member of the Domestics who just joined ONT for the final. The AFA Executive Committee ordered a replay in Paterson in late April. ONT won again on a lone goal by Jack Swithenby, and "competent judges" said "the playing of the ONT eleven would compare favorably with that of the best clubs of England and Scotland."<sup>20</sup>

The side that won the championship was a mix of players from the British Isles, but the style of play imitated what the historian David Goldblatt called "the Scottish inheritance," a blending of short passing, good ball control, and multi-player build-up play. This style descended from soccer's first international between England and Scotland in 1872, when a physically overmatched Scotland passed the ball around their heavier English counterparts. The Scots ability to zigzag between the opponents' defensive lines through short passing combinations defined their style of play, and influenced the game's stylistic evolution. Scots brought that approach wherever they went, and ONT was no different. On March 7, 1885, for example, the threadmen strung together pass after pass to initiate a bewildered Trenton FC "into the mysteries of combination play." In another instance, that interplay led one reporter to write, "the team had no chance with the ONT, who worked as one man." With so many Scots immigrating to the area

in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the legacies of the “Scottish inheritance” were felt for quite some time.<sup>21</sup>

It had been a banner year for ONT, but it was far from finished impacting the growth of the game. At the end-of-season meeting of the AFA, hosted by the Catholic Institute in downtown Newark, the Executive Committee presented William Clark with the trophy. He was told that if his team won it three years in succession, the club could keep it. Finally, Clark told the group that he planned on taking ONT on an early summer tour of Ontario, Canada. He had originally talked about taking a team to England and Scotland, but opted for the neighbors to the north instead. The company paid for all the expenses, and ONT won nine games, lost one, and tied one on their first trip abroad. More importantly, it led to the first “international” match on United States soil.<sup>22</sup>

When the Western Football Association of Ontario visited the following November it was called “one of the most interesting events in the history of Newark athletics.” A fife and drum corps played as the Canadians arrived at the Market Street railroad depot the evening before Thanksgiving. Mayor Joseph Haynes, as well as AFA officials, officially welcomed the visitors to the city at a ceremony at the Newark Roller Skating Rink, where approximately twenty thousand people skated each week. The “fine looking and well built” Canadians easily defeated ONT on Thanksgiving Day, 5-1, but the main attraction, the United States-Canada tilt, drew some three thousand fans to Clark Field that Friday. Neither team was a real national team, though, with select university players representing Canada, and some of the top players from the AFA suiting up for the United States, including five ONT and three Kearny Rangers players. The cynic would’ve called the side a neighborhood all-star team, a far cry from a full national team, and this is why U.S. Soccer has never recognized the match as an official international.



It was much closer than the ONT match, and it was faster and more physical. “The play was very rough at times, so much so that the referee had to interfere several times,” a *New York Times* match report stated. “Once two players indulged in a regular fist fight.” The game’s only goal came when a Canadian winger “beautifully centered” for forward Alex Gibson, who duly passed it “through the home eleven’s goal.” The Canadians also beat the Almas and the Kearny Rangers on their tour, and later in the week the roller skating rink staged the “novel attraction” of indoor soccer, the first recorded indoor game in the world. ONT and their visitors competed for an “international challenge cup,” a series of three games that included both outdoor and “rink” matches. The first “internationals” on American soil all ended in defeat for the Americans; they would have to wait a year for revenge.<sup>23</sup>

There was also a good deal of activity outside Clark Field that momentous day. A group of boys and young men, unable to pay the admission fee, amused themselves by lobbing stones at Michael Kennedy, a Kearny policeman on duty inside the ground. Constable Kennedy finally lost his patience and vaulted himself over the fence to confront one of his assailants. He singled out William Craney, ran up to him, and pulled out his revolver. He pointed it at his head and ordered him to leave. Craney’s friends came to his aid and scuffled with Kennedy. They came away with the policeman’s revolver, club, and badge, and duly marched him to the police station. Once there, the gang took the janitor’s keys and locked him up. It was a place where law and order often took the most unexpected turns, and rough-and-tumble justice prevailed both on and off the field.<sup>24</sup>

The Canadians returned to New Jersey the following Thanksgiving. Unlike the year before when a handful of AFA officials simply named the team, a trial match was arranged to select the best players in 1886. “As might be expected from a scientific point of view the game

was not exciting, each individual player doing all he knew to achieve prominence, so that he could be picked in the eleven to oppose the visitors,” opined the *Newark Sunday Call* reporter. William Clark, Jr. refereed the match, where “passing, always a prominent part of good team playing, was noticeably absent.” It was every man for himself, but the side the AFA selected eagerly awaited the rematch. It included six ONT men.

The Canadians arrived by train at noon on Thanksgiving Day, and only managed to finish eating at Newark’s Continental Hotel by three o’clock. It was pouring rain outside, and Clark Field was full of puddles, so some thought the game would be postponed. Yet, when the Canadians arrived at the ground, two thousand spectators “stood shivering in the rain anxious to witness the contest.” For those who didn’t want to stand in “a little lake” along the sidelines, perches were found along the fence and atop railroad freight cars. They had the best view of the proceedings, and after going down a goal the Americans scored three straight second-half goals. The “clever passing” of the ONT trio of Jack Swithenby, Joe Swarbrick, and John McGurck led the Americans to their first “international” victory.<sup>25</sup>

By November 1886, ONT had firmly established itself as a soccer dynasty, winning the first two AFA cups. The company kept adding an employee-player or two to strengthen the team, and absolutely crushed New York Rovers, 10-0, and Paterson’s Caledonian Thistle, 5-0, in the run-up to the 1886 final. One thousand spectators turned out on an early April afternoon to see ONT hoist silverware for a second time after defeating neighborhood rivals Kearny Rangers, 3-1. In the early rounds of the 1887 edition of the competition, ONT edged Alma FC and Trenton FC before once again facing the Rangers in the final. On a beautiful spring day in April, and on a good field, ONT made American soccer history by becoming the first team to win three straight championships. Jack Swithenby was involved in all three goals, scoring the first in the fortieth

minute before assisting on Swarbrick's two second-half strikes. By winning the cup three times in succession, ONT was entitled to keep it. Over time, the cup was lost, but Jack Swithenby found it one day in a local pawn shop. The cup final hero not only bought it, he restored it to its late nineteenth century glory.<sup>26</sup>

Swithenby must've had an interesting point of view on the growth of American soccer. He left the soccer hotbed of Bolton, England to work and play for Clark Thread Company. The star forward helped make ONT the first American soccer powerhouse, but he soon found that teams from other regions played well, too. A few months before ONT won its third cup, the Fall River Rovers of Massachusetts visited Clark Field. Thousands attended the much-anticipated "battle of giants," and according to the *Newark Evening News*, "hundreds of people, both old and young, whose bank accounts would not warrant an outlay of twenty-five cents, viewed the struggle from the Erie Railroad, while scores of enterprising youngsters perched upon sheds and cheered enthusiastically." A Scottish band piped the twenty-two players on to the field. ONT wore "snug-fitting" striped jerseys, knickers, wool stockings, and "curiously shaped caps" atop their heads. The cap-less Fall River Rovers, champions of New England, wore yellow shirts, blue shorts, and red stockings. The visitors won on a "beautiful drive" from a Rover forward.

It was a seminal victory because it demonstrated that there were other soccer hotbeds, notably the one fifty miles south of Boston along the Massachusetts-Rhode Island border. Fall River was its center, and the industrial, working-class town was also a magnet for immigrants. Teams popped up all over, and the Fall River sides were so successful that a local newspaper called it "the capital of the American football world" in 1891. St. Louis made similar claims. In the wake of the eye-opening victory, the Rovers petitioned the AFA for membership. So did other New England clubs, some of whom played in the 1887-88 cup competition. The Almas

knocked O.N.T. out of the cup that year, but lost to the Fall River Rovers in the final at Clark Field. Only four hundred people watched as the cup left The Cradle for the first time. Fall River teams won it for the next five years; Clark men would not win it again for another nineteen.<sup>27</sup>

That drought doesn't undermine ONT's sizeable contributions to the birthing of American soccer, though. In fact, the company team and its officials were omnipresent during the 1880s, constantly supporting and growing the game. Importantly, the company built a field in 1883, before building a bigger one fronting the river only four years later, and continually poured money into the team. Moreover, when William, Jr. became honorary president of the AFA in 1887, its membership nearly doubled. The club endorsed regional play with New England teams, a move that a local reporter said "speaks volumes for the spread of the game." ONT spent money to foster international tours beginning in 1885, and even made money from gate receipts when the Canadians returned the following year. Other innovations included staging benefit games to augment the A.F.A.'s coffers, aid injured players who couldn't work, or even to raise funds for a local hospital. Above all, the company helped build and foster the local soccer community, one that grew substantially during the 1880s.

Yet, as with any growing entity, progress can be halted, whether for days, weeks, or months, and American soccer has been no different. Robert Raeburn of the Kearny Rangers, for example, halted it for days after he let loose a "cannon" shot during a league game in 1885. He struck it so hard that "the ball resented the ill-treatment it had received by bursting," and the unfortunate event "brought the game to an abrupt conclusion." Since no one else brought another ball, the teams vowed to play out the rest of the game "some day soon." When the Kearny Rovers entertained a new club from New York called the Cosmopolitans, pre-dating their famous

successor by ninety years, not one but two balls burst. When no one could find another ball, the match was declared a draw.

Weather often cancelled games, especially in the winter, when rain, sleet, and snow wreaked havoc on the often dirt fields. “The torrent of rain that fell yesterday was so great that even football players were compelled to postpone their games,” observed a Newark newspaper, before adding that there had been twelve inches of rain. Snow knocked out games for weeks as it did in the wake of the Blizzard of 1888, a three-day, twenty-two inch monster storm. Snowdrifts stood some twenty feet tall and it took weeks to clear it all from the streets, not to mention Clark Field. One storm survivor joked, “It was so cold that when people sang songs the words froze in the air and couldn’t be heard until Spring.” Play finally resumed in early April and tragedy hit when Joseph Lucas, a young Tiffany Rovers outside forward, ran up and down the flank only to collapse after the final whistle. He died shortly thereafter, possibly of exhaustion. Out of respect, league officials cancelled games for the next week.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to soccer at ONT was labor strife because a long, bitter strike led to the near cessation of the game at the mill and to the resignation of William Clark and his two sons. Robert joined the firm after graduating from Princeton in 1882, and by 1885 he had been appointed assistant manager of Mill No. 2 in Kearny. His brother William, Jr. assumed the same post at Mill No. 1 in Newark. William, Jr. occasionally served as an umpire, or linesman, notably in the United States-Canada “international” in November 1885. But by that time both William, Jr. and Robert most likely stopped playing for the ONT soccer team because they didn’t appear in the first-team line-up after the end of the 1884-85 season. Perhaps as upper management they couldn’t see themselves stepping inside the lines of Clark Field and recreating

with the rank-and-file. Maybe they just wanted to be in official roles, or perhaps they weren't good enough anymore.

Herbert Walmsley upset the rank-and-file beginning in January 1888, shortly after he took charge of the cotton department at Mill No. 2. Spinners accused him of “breaking down customs which had been time-honored in the mill” and “introducing reforms in the discipline of the various departments under him.” Workers said Walmsley pushed them, insulted their work, and even cursed at them. They called his managerial style “downright tyranny.” Eight hundred spinners walked out after he fired two well-liked foremen. They wanted the firm's founder to fire Walmsley, but he opted to back him instead of acknowledging employee dissatisfaction. Later in the year Democratic Party officials accused the company of “attempting to coerce or intimidate their employees into voting the Republican ticket” because its tariff policy favored business. Benjamin Harrison, the Republican candidate, beat the Democratic incumbent by carrying the Electoral College. It was the third time in history that a president-elect won without the popular vote. Industrial relations were on the verge of breaking down.<sup>29</sup>

By late 1890 and early 1891 those relations had completely broken down as angry spinners embarked on a five-month strike. Once again, they blamed Walmsley, who employees called “the most obnoxious superintendent ever imported from Russia or elsewhere to this beloved country of ours.” When they brought their grievances to him, which also included concern over a wage reduction and outrage over the firing of several more foremen, Walmsley rebuffed them, saying at the time: “I am the Clark Thread Company representative. I am a practical man. If you do not like it, get out—individually or in a body. I prefer the latter.” More workers walked out and pledged to cripple the company with a general boycott of its thread.<sup>30</sup>

For their part, Clark management brought in substitute labor, or “scabs,” secreting them through the mill gates between cotton bales in the back of a company wagon. The “scabs” lived a sequestered life inside the firehouse at Mill No. 2, and within a few weeks construction on a new wooden dormitory began. Striking spinners called it “Hotel de Scab.” In early February, some strikebreakers kicked a soccer ball around the mill courtyard and it drew a small crowd. One former Clark employee sat atop a nearby shed roof and looked down on the kick-about. He shouted to have the ball thrown up to him so he could kick it back, but before he could Robert Clark had him removed from the scene. The young man who had helped start soccer at the thread mill, now, as assistant superintendent, blocked it. In fact, ONT barely played soccer during that winter and spring (they withdrew from the AFA cup), but others did to support them. Spinners in Fall River staged a benefit match in January.

The protracted strike brought out some rather high-profile visitors, too. Samuel Gompers, the president of the American Federation of Trades, addressed the strikers at a union hall in Kearny, telling them to “stand together to win or lose together.” He was confident that they could inflict damage on the company, saying, “There is no product so easy to attack as the ONT thread. Men and women wage-workers use that thread, and if we can not beat them on the strike we can on the boycott.” In mid-February, after a small band of rioters attacked the Kearny Mills and smashed windows and damaged equipment, Governor Leon Abbett visited to address both management and labor. He asked the warring sides to consider negotiations, but talks broke down after only one day. The strike and boycott continued through to April 18, 1891, when spinners finally returned to work.

William Clark and his soccer-loving sons were victims of the strike, too. In fact, while Mr. Clark was away in Jamaica on vacation, his two sons resigned from their posts as assistant

superintendents at the mills. A few weeks later their father resigned as well, and according to a company history “the fact that these resignations followed the termination of a protracted, turbulent and costly strike of the spinners, it may be inferred that this labor trouble had caused a rift in relations between the Company and the general manager.” The Clarks had repeated conflicts with Walmsley over the past two years, and there was every reason to believe that those problems influenced their decisions to leave. At first, the trio contemplated building a thread mill in North Arlington, just north of Kearny, but they departed that summer to set up their own thread company—the William Clark Thread Company—in Pawcatuck, Connecticut, just opposite Westerly, Rhode Island. The Cradle had lost vital soccer pioneers and patrons.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, the soccer season resumed in the fall, the first one since 1883 without the Clarks, and ONT once again took to the field. Old stalwarts like goalkeeper Paddy Hughes, defender Harry Holden, and forward Joe Swarbrick still played, but ONT was not the dominating side it had been. The Swithenbys left to play for Kearny Rovers. An old player watched a match and remarked that “a good passing game” was harder to find. “Some of the younger players are given to indiscriminate kicking. This should be checked, or the game will deteriorate in this vicinity, and the championship cup will never return here,” he warned. It seemed altogether appropriate that the game struggled in local circles after the departure of three important men, and when ONT played against a picked team from Paterson a week before Thanksgiving it had to be called after only ten minutes of the second half. It had gotten too dark.<sup>32</sup>

It may have been a dark period in The Cradle as soccer struggled with a range of issues, from labor strife and infighting among soccer officials, to league mismanagement and what one critic called “indiscriminate kicking.” Soccer, which had received solid coverage in the local newspapers, was increasingly being relegated to the margins of the Newark dailies in favor of



high school and college football coverage as well as baseball. Basketball would be invented eight months after the strike and within a decade it would become the reigning winter sport. Some scholars argue that soccer has been repeatedly “crowded out” of American sporting space, and perhaps that is true, but certain neighborhoods, real American soccer neighborhoods, have always kept the game alive even when it seemed to struggle most. One of America’s first soccer neighborhoods, the same one that housed the Swithenbys, Swarbricks, and Holdens, nurtured new generations of soccer players. That neighborhood, affectionately known as The Block, is where the ball takes us next.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, January 16, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> *Newark Evening News*, November 30 and December 1, 1883; *Newark Sunday Call*, December 2, 1883.

<sup>3</sup> Elliot J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 104-105; Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 82-84; David Leverenz, *Paternalism Incorporated: Fables of American Fatherhood, 1865-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Shaw, *A History of Essex and Hudson Counties*, 611-613; *Newark Evening News*, May 23, 1947.

<sup>5</sup> *Newark Evening News*, August 6, 1900; Rowland Berthoff, *British Immigrants in North America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1953), 44.

<sup>6</sup> *Newark Evening News*, December 21, 1932; *Bric-A-Brac*, 1881-82, 16; “Personalities at Newark, 1864-1947,” company history manuscript at Kearny Public Library, B2, 1-2; *United States Census*, 1880.

<sup>7</sup> “Fifty-Year Reunion Book, Princeton University, Class of 1882,” courtesy of Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library; *Bric-A-Brac*, 1880-81 and 1881-82; “Personalities at Newark, 1864-1947,” 1-2; *Outing*, 1888, Volume XI, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Steven A. Reiss, *Sport in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1995), 77-79.

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<sup>9</sup> Shaw, *A History of Essex and Hudson Counties*, 611-613; *Newark Evening News*, August 1, 1914, July 17, 1931; *Newark Sunday Call*, November 11, 1883; *New York Sun*, December 28, 1883.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Murray, *The World's Game: A History of Soccer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 7; James Walvin, *The Only Game: Football in Our Times* (London: Longman, 2001), 29-35; Jack Patterson and Bob McPherson, *Marching On: 125 Years of the St. Mirren Football Club* (Paisley, Scotland, 2005); *Newark Evening News*, November 18, 1883.

<sup>11</sup> *Paterson Daily Guardian*, February 11, 1884; *Newark Sunday Call*, February 10, 1884; *Newark Evening News*, February 11, 1884.

<sup>12</sup> *Newark Sunday Call*, October 12, 1884.

<sup>13</sup> Reiss, *Sport in Industrial America*, 45-57; Riess, *City Games*, 54-57; *Newark Sunday Call*, March 29, 1936; *New York Times*, May 23, 1887.

<sup>14</sup> *Newark Sunday Call*, October 19, 1873; Michael C. Gabriele, *The Golden Age of Bicycle Racing in New Jersey* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011); James M. DeClerico and Barry J. Pavelee, *The Jersey Game: The History of Modern Baseball From its Birth to the Big Leagues in the Garden State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Gorn, *A Brief History of American Sports*, 107, 114-129.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Committee of the Senate Upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital*, Hearings, 4 volumes (Washington, D.C.: 1885) 3:386, as cited in Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1; *Newark Sunday Call*, November 18, 1878 and March 29, 1936.

<sup>16</sup> *Newark Evening News*, March 2 and 17, 1884.

<sup>17</sup> Allaway, *Rangers, Rovers & Spindles*, chapter 2; C.K. Murray, "History and Progress of the American Football Association," *Spalding's Official Association Football Guide, 1910*, 27-37; *Newark Sunday Call*, October 12, 1884; *Newark Star-Eagle*, October 20, 1923.

<sup>18</sup> *Newark Sunday Call*, October 26 and November 2, 1884; *Newark Evening News*, November 26, 28, 1884; *Newark Daily Advertiser*, November 28, 1884.

<sup>19</sup> *Newark Evening News*, December 15, 1884 and February 2, 1885; *New York Times*, December 14, 1884 and February 3, 1885.

<sup>20</sup> Murray, "History and Progress of the American Football Association," 27-37; *Newark Evening News*, February 15 and April 26, 1885; *Newark Sunday Call*, December 14 and 28, 1884; March 8, 1885.

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- <sup>21</sup> Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round*, 192; Jonathan Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid: A History of Football Tactics* (London: Orion Books, 2008), 15-19; *Newark Sunday Call*, March 8 and December 13, 1885.
- <sup>22</sup> Allaway, *Rangers, Rovers & Spindles*, 37-38; *Newark Sunday Call*, May 24, 1885; Colin Jose *On-side: 125 Years of Soccer In Ontario* (Ontario: Ontario Soccer Association, 2001).
- <sup>23</sup> Allaway, *Rangers, Rovers & Spindles*, 36-37; *New York Times*, November 28, 1885; *Newark Sunday Call*, November 1, 22 and 29, 1885; *Toronto Globe*, December 7, 1885.
- <sup>24</sup> *Newark Evening News*, November 30, 1885.
- <sup>25</sup> *Newark Evening News*, November 26, 1886; *Newark Sunday Call*, November 21, 28, and December 5, 1886.
- <sup>26</sup> *Newark Sunday Call*, April 4 and 25, 1885; April 4, 1886; April 10, 1887; *Newark Star Eagle*, October 20, 1923.
- <sup>27</sup> Wangerin, *Soccer in a Football World*, 27-29; *Newark Sunday Call*, March 21, 1886; February 27 and May 30, 1887. For a history of soccer in New England, see Steven Apostolov, "Everywhere and nowhere: the forgotten past and clouded future of American professional soccer from the perspective of Massachusetts," *Soccer & Society* (Vol. 13, 4), 510-535. For St. Louis, see Dave Lange, *Soccer Made in St. Louis: A History of the Game in America's First Soccer Capital* (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2012).
- <sup>28</sup> *Newark Sunday Call*, January 11, 1885, March 18 and November 12, 1888 and November 23, 1890; *Newark Evening News*, March 10, 1968.
- <sup>29</sup> *Newark Evening News*, January 15, 1888; *New York Sun*, October 26, 1888.
- <sup>30</sup> *Newark Evening News*, November 7, 1890; *Newark Sunday Call*, November 21 and 23, 1890.
- <sup>31</sup> *Newark Evening News*, December 22, 1890, January 23, February 1, 14 and March 25, 1891; *Newark Sunday Call*, November 21, 1890; January 18, February 8 and April 19, 1891.
- <sup>32</sup> *Newark Evening News*, February 24, 1891.
- <sup>33</sup> Markovits, *Soccer and American Exceptionalism*.