ED ON SOCCER

Here’s a sweaty memory from somewhere on my life’s journey. It was a hot Sunday in Anno Domini 1916.

It happened that on a hot Sunday we were destined to play a soccer league championship between “Reipas” of Fitchburg and “Tarmo” of Maynard.

We left Maynard early in the morning. For transport we had the Co-op’s small Ford truck into which we loaded 11 players and a referee. The driver was the Co-op’s manager, Waldemar Niemelä.

We were half way there, the sun warming both the passengers and the Ford to quite a degree. The poor Ford was enthused by the sun’s gentleness to the point that it considered itself to be the engine of a train and began to emit steam from a hose that was attached for quite another reason. After we had watered down the self-important Ford, we were able to continue the journey.

We arrived in plenty of time and prepared for the match with varied thoughts. People were inspired by and inspiring to others in those days. The crowd around the field was as big as at a Whitsuntide gathering and there were strong opinions expressed on the possible outcome of the game.

Athletes know from personal experience that the Saima athletic field is a hot place on a midsummer day. So it was! Not a breath of wind and the sun beaming down as if we were in a kettle. Playing under these conditions did not promise to be pleasant.

The referee blew his whistle and we had to start the game. In no time the players were bustling around the leather ball with varying energy.

I was a defender on the left and it was my very good luck to be situated near the shade of a nearby apple tree to which I clung whenever I could. When I had to take action in the game, I had to leave my bower. On one such rush, I decided that in order to control the game, I had to take a flying leap in the air. I landed on the ground head first. I got up, looked around and what did I see? Stars! In the middle of a July day. Then my head cleared and I knew where I was. I joined the game carefully and hung

In to the end.

We won the game and the championship with a score of 3-2. We gathered to cheer the opposition as good manners required. We could not make much noise and the field where we stood was soaked with our perspiration.

On the way home, the Ford behaved perfectly. The players were quite subdued. The only one with the energy to sing was Sipola, the referee. We had had a taste of playing soccer in America under a beaming sun.

Ed Helander