

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Soccer columnist got a new start in Canada

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

Some people go through life planning their every move and knowing exactly what they expect to have achieved by each birthday. Others just let life carry them along and make the best of things as they happen. The Herald's candid and colorful soccer columnist Alex Tough, is somewhere in the middle.

"I believe in going through life with a contingency plan," he says. "The other part of the character is to wait until a thing happens before I make a final decision."

His decision to come to Canada results from just such a belief. The break down of his marriage left him with piles of debt and emotional problems.

"I'd gone as low as I could," he says. "Mentally and physically I was in terrible shape. And the economy wasn't so good either. If my job in northern England ever folded up where would I go. I decided that rather than go back to Scotland I'd emigrate and start fresh. I looked at Australia and New Zealand and Canada. Under no circumstances would I go to Africa and I wasn't particularly impressed by the Americans I met. So it was a toss up between Canada and New Zealand."

FAMILY HERE

He had a widowed sister with two children in Georgetown and she helped with the decision because he had no family in New Zealand.

"It was rather funny the way our two families came to decide on our move," he says. "My sister had had two heart operations so she sometimes got concerned about who would care for her children if anything ever happened to her. She and the children had a vote on which one of the relatives it would be best to try and move to Canada and I was the choice."

In the summer of 1974 he was invited over for a visit without his own children. It was the first time he had been away from the "trauma" and he even put on a bit of weight (an unheard of thing for him).

When he returned his firm was in a turmoil. He started researching costs and money-saving methods for his employers and came to the conclusion that they needed to cut back production in certain areas. That would result in laying off some employees and letting others retire early and "the usual ways of reducing staff". His own job was one of the ones they phased out.



Alex Tough clowns around with Vera Vanlten, captain of his girl's soccer team prior to the start of a match at Cedarvale. He began playing at the age of 14 and has been refereeing since 1952. He also plays on the Ancient Mariners team.

(Herald photo by Maggie Hannah)

"They wanted to keep me but they were amalgamating my job with another one and the other fellow had seniority," he says. "In a way I dug my own little hole."

Immigrating wasn't the easy proposition one might expect for a man with his educational background. It took him 14 months rather than the six months usually required to convince the Canadian authorities that he could make a go of it here. His age was against him as well as the fact that he had no assets, he says. Authorities felt that if he had had a trade or some special skill to contribute to the work force he would be all right but since he was a chartered secretary he'd have problems finding work. A chartered secretary is a British qualification. Mr. Tough says, equivalent to a chartered accountant but with a business administration angle as opposed to accounting.

FINALLY APPROVED
When his application was finally approved he bet one of the men in the Canadian consulate in Glasgow he'd have a job in four weeks. He hasn't gone back to collect his bet.

Mr. Tough is quite proud of the way he has managed to get established even though he only had \$24 and change in his pocket and his two children had less than \$10 between them when they arrived in October 1975. He spent his first couple of days getting his son and daughter enrolled in school

and then he went job hunting. In five days he had three posts offered to him and he is still with Lustru Steel in Brampton working as a certified general accountant, the job he chose from his three options.

Mr. Tough bought a townhouse in Meadowvale in 1976 but he says he will return to Georgetown in the near future. It's part of his master plan.

Mr. Tough's interest in soccer has been going on for many years. He began playing soccer at 14 on a school team, for a boys' club, at Scouts, on a church team and on a youth team. He lived in Edinburgh then and says he was old by European standards to be just beginning to play. It isn't unusual to have two or three or even four soccer games a day to play in, he says.

It is introduced in the schools at about the age of eight but only in the teaching of skills. Competitive teams are begun around the age of 12 by inter-school matches and similar matches. Outside clubs don't get hold of youngsters until they are about 13 and the youngsters determine their level of competence by playing in various clubs. The game is highly organized and very competitive for boys by the time they're 14.

Canadian soccer surprised Mr. Tough. He says he found the young players much better than he expected them to be and the whole game was superior to his expectations.

Canadian youth has made "quite fantastic" strides in developing their game in the last few years. While a few years ago a European team playing a Canadian one would have had a three-goal edge automatically before the game even started, this is no longer true. He cites the case of the Canadian National Youth side who entered the World National Youth Championships in Japan this year and acquitted themselves very well.

WON GAME
"In four games they won one game, tied one game and I can't remember what exactly happened with the other two," he says. "But they didn't even expect to get there so you see how they have improved."

The first soccer teams established in Canada had ethnic backgrounds, he says. While the ethnic names may remain the player roster is no longer tied to that ethnic group.

Mr. Tough isn't keen on seeing young children competing in a sport. We have far more six-year-olds in soccer than we have 16-year-olds, he says, and he feels it should be reversed. The way to do this, he says, is to concentrate on ability and skills while the players are young and let the competitive side wait until they are older. Making them compete before they are ready to do so turns them off the sport so that they drop out by the time they are ready to tolerate the strain of competition.

For the past couple of years Mr. Tough has been coaching a girls' soccer team. He admits that when he first came to Canada he shared the opinion of other Scots and northern Englishmen that girls had no business in the sport. When his team of PeeWee boys folded up from lack of interest on their part in 1978 he was asked by some girls if he would coach their team. He did so and took them on again this year. He has found that the girls draw more spectators than the boys do and seem to have more enthusiasm for their game than their male counterparts. He was non-committal to his team about plans for next year but told The Herald he will be back with the girls. In fact, he's even thinking about getting a school gym booked so the girls can practise and keep in shape all winter ready for next season.

SURPRISE TEAM

"That'll come as a surprise for the girls," he says. "I wouldn't commit myself when they asked me but you can say I'll be coaching them again next year."

He notes that soccer is a good sport for girls since it is relatively inexpensive, relatively injury free and relatively non-violent. It is something they can do year round if they get a facility and that should be a plus since there is little alternative activity for a girl during the winter.

"The boys have hockey but what do the girls have - unless they can get into basketball?"

His coaching and interest saw him join the Georgetown Youth Soccer Club executive late in 1976 and he became its president in 1977. He still holds the position as well as being president of the Peel-Halton Girls' Competitive League.

He was responsible for bringing the Mexican and West German teams to Georgetown last year to play local teams and had a big hand in the organizing of Sweden '79 along with Dave Kentner to bring Swedish teams to Georgetown for several games. He was also instrumental in forming the

Halton Hills Sports Council. Soccer fans will recognize Mr. Tough as a referee on occasion and he has wide experience in that area of the game as well. He qualified as a Scottish referee in 1952 and as an English one in 1971.

His own playing skills have not been neglected along the way. He formed the Ancient Mariners in 1978 and still plays with them. They are a team (with an average age of 40) aimed at giving some of the men who coach the young players a way to exercise, keep fit and have some fun.

"We wanted to show the younger players the type of soccer that was capable of being played and the sort of skills that could be developed," he says. "We were undefeated for a couple of years but

the younger teams like the Falcons (with an average age of 22) are catching up. I'm playing the best soccer of my career."

DOUR SCOT?

Although he has been accused of being a dour Scot with no sense of humour Mr. Tough sees himself as "basically a ham". He remembers a drama club to which he belonged when he was 18.

"When we did serious stuff people laughed," he chuckles. He was serious about his interest in the stage, however, and he did comedy and sang for a few years.

"There are a lot of social clubs in Britain," he explains, "so there is a lot of work for club performers. My wife and I earned a living from that. We both performed at first but

since she was better than I was I gradually took a back seat. I managed her career and arranged songs for her."

His wife made records and travelled extensively. His own interest in music was such that he brought his collection of 600 or so records with him to Canada even though he had to leave his books behind.

Mr. Tough has four children. The two eldest sons are working, one in Scotland and one in England and his daughter and youngest son live at home but hold down jobs.

"At one time my ambition was to have all of us together under one roof again," he says, "but that can't happen now. Malcolm got married in April. But I suppose I did make it for a few days while we were all there for the wedding."

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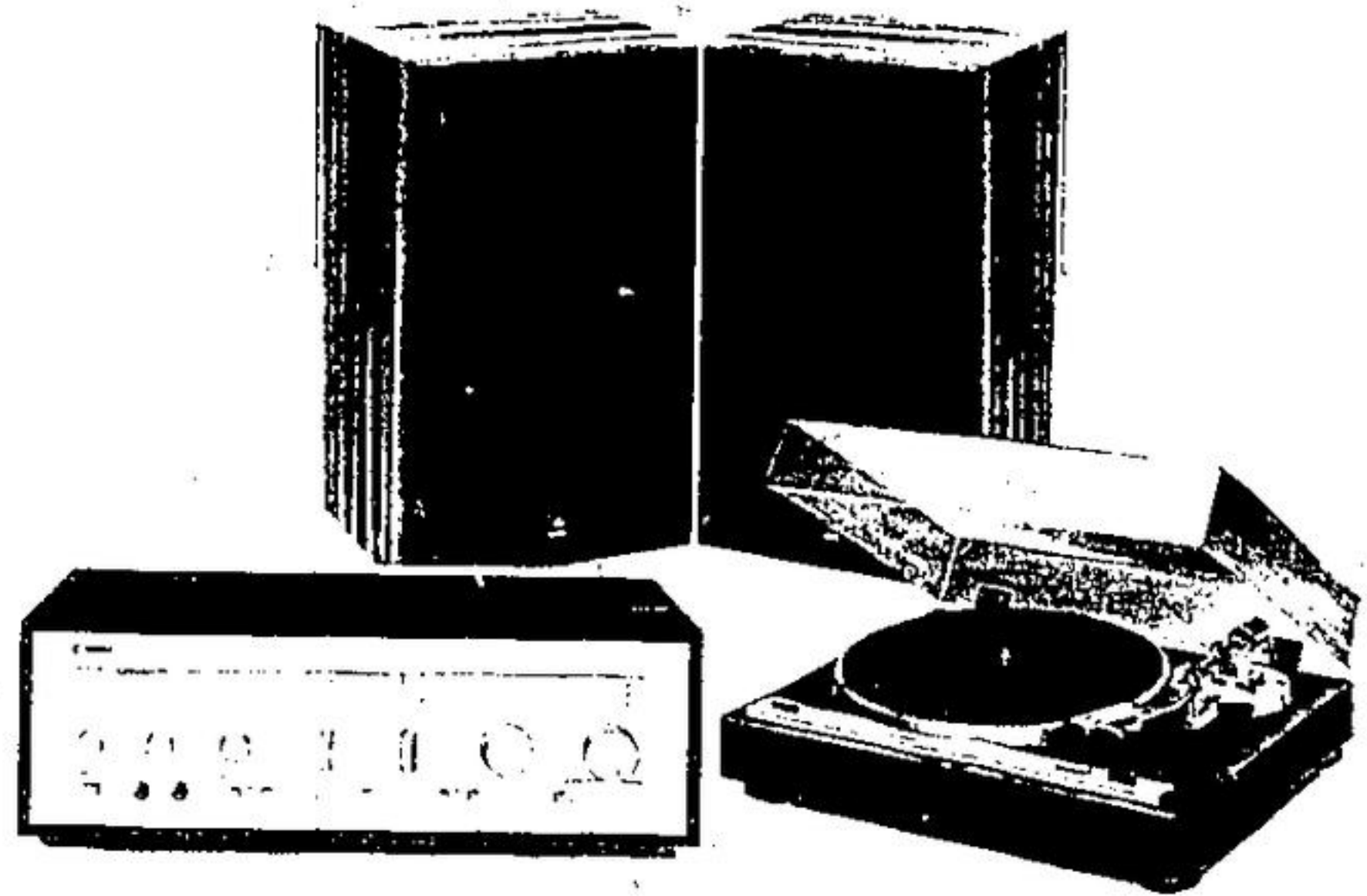
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