

## Szanto leads Cougars to No.1

By Wanda Percival  
Of the Print

Clackamas Community College Soccer Coach Janos Szanto, a former member of the Hungarian national soccer team ended his career playing soccer when he chose to leave Hungary in 1971.

Growing up in Hungary where the main sport is soccer, Szanto said he began playing because, "That's what everyone was watching, that's what everyone was doing so I did it too." Szanto started out playing at seven years of age, but because nobody could afford a soccer ball they used rolled up socks bound in wire.

Hungary had seven teams categorized by ages. Szanto progressed from childhood until he was 18 years when he was told he would have a chance to play in the first league of the Hungarian National team. "It saved me from going into the army," Szanto related.

The government paid for Szanto's schooling and placed him in a job where, after four years, he became a certified surgical technician working in a hospital in Budapest.

Szanto worked at a hospital and attended school during the off season from soccer. "The team I was playing on sponsored everything and many times I didn't have to go to work for 3 or 4 months and they paid me," Szanto said. "About six months of every year I didn't even go close to the hospital." Szanto also received "calories" money to buy food because he practiced twice a day. "That was almost as much as my monthly

salary," Szanto added.

On the team he toured the Western countries until he was 24 years when the team was touring South America. From there they went on to Montreal. The team was under strict rules to not go out on their own because they didn't have individual passports. Szanto and a friend convinced their leader they didn't feel well so they shouldn't have to attend a banquet that night.

When the team left for the banquet Szanto and his friend left the hotel and ran all over town. Neither one speaking English, they ran all night, only to find themselves back in front

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of the hotel 10 hours later.

Not knowing what to do Szanto and a friend entered a store and talked to the clerk who became frightened and called the police.

"That's what we wanted," said Szanto. "The police came and took us to the station. They found someone who spoke Hungarian and when they realized what we wanted to do, they took us to the embassy. They put us in a quarantine for three or four weeks to check us out, then we obtained our release and came to the United States."

In 1978, Szanto became an American citizen and returned to Hungary to visit. Afraid of

something happening to him, he spoke with the Hungarian ambassador in Washington, D.C. They advised him to check in with the American Embassy in Hungary every 24 hours to let them know he was all right.

Szanto says that living in a communist country is hard to explain. "When I left in 1971 I knew I had given up everything I had; the place I was born, the place I had grown up," Szanto said.

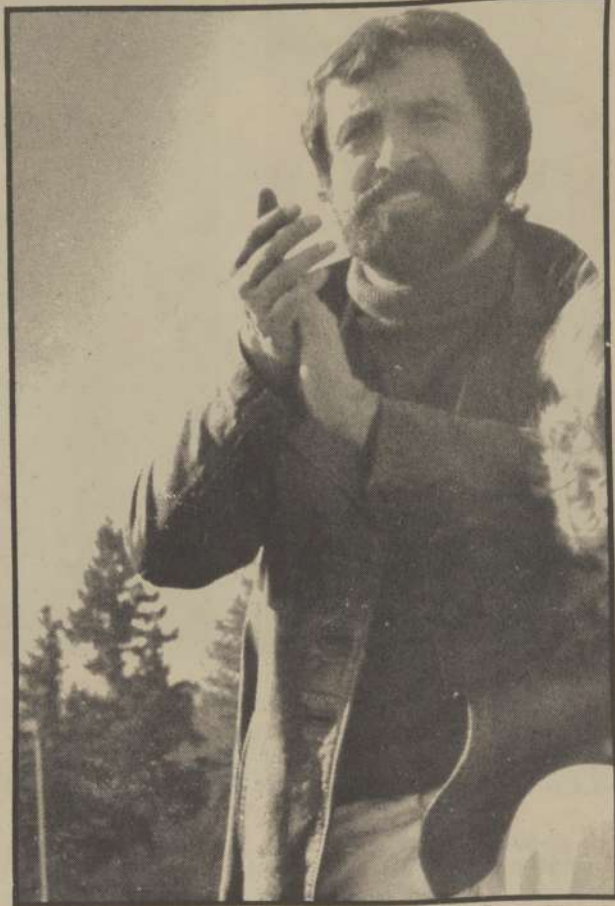
"When I decided I wasn't going back to Hungary I knew there was only two ways: I was going to like it or I was going to like it. There was no way back. It's something nobody can express."

"The communist system just doesn't work," Szanto said. "Since 1917, Hungary has been trying to operate as a communist country. I can tell you and I'm willing to argue with everybody that they don't have anything. They have nothing to show. They don't have food, they don't have clothes, nothing."

"If you said you didn't like the Hungarian president it is equal to 15 years in jail," Szanto added. "I was once in school where I had to stand up every day for one minute to praise our leader, and when he died we were ordered not to mention his name."

"It's nothing but dictatorship. Nobody can leave their country," he explained. "To leave it's got to be government-sponsored. Living in a communist country is ridiculous. I don't believe it's going to have to change over there."

"I'm really glad I'm here and proud to be American,"



Staff photo by Duane Hlersche

**APPLAUDING HIS TEAM, Coach Janos Szanto shows his appreciation Saturday against University of Oregon as they defeated them 9 to 0.**

Szanto said. "I'll do whatever I can for America. It's the best country in the world for me."

As a new American citizen Szanto went to work in a car dealership working his way up from lot boy to salesman. "I wanted to work in a hospital, but because of my English, I couldn't," said Szanto. In 1976 I established my own business called Classic Auto."

When Szanto was offered the coaching job at CCC he sold his business to his brother.

"I was searching for some kind of job that involved soccer," Szanto said. "Finally, a friend who knew Jim Roberts, dean of student services at the College told me they needed someone who was able to coach soccer so I took my chance. I came out here and fortunately got the job."

Since Szanto began coaching two years ago his team's lost only one game which was exhibition. "I believe this is where my success is," Szanto said.

To have a good team there's four very important things you need. You have to have a good defense, good mid-field, good offense and a good goalie. Soccer is a difficult game, it involves a lot of strategy. Everyone has to work together as a unit," Szanto said.

Szanto stresses mental attitude in soccer. "Before a game I repeat to my team that they are good, they are capable. I tell them they have 11 players on their team and we have 11 players on our team. Why can't we beat

them?"

There have been some attitude problems on the Cougar team, but Szanto questioned why the problems exist. "I think it comes from our team being new," he said. "They think they are so good, they don't come to practice. They'd have a good game on the weekend and Monday and Tuesday they don't show up."

"They said they were burned out from the weekend so I suspended them from a game. When we played against Mt. Hood we had 3 or 4 starters who sat out," he added.

"If they're not working together as a team, even if it's one player, it's better to get rid of them," Szanto added.

The team has since held a meeting to resolve the problems they were facing. "Everything is fine now," Szanto said.

"We're by far the best team in terms of scoring goals," said Szanto of his state champions. "In six games we scored 29 goals and gave up 2." That record has since changed to 38 goals in seven games. "We have very good defense and offense," Szanto said.

While Szanto would like to get back into hospital work he knows he'd have to get 3 or 4 years more schooling to catch up with what he missed in ten years. "But," he said, "if I have a chance to coach, I'll stay with coaching."

"I appreciate that I have had the privilege to coach over here," Szanto said. "I'm trying my best and so far, so good."



Staff photo by Duffy Coffman

**DODGING A BLOW, CCC Soccer player narrowly escapes a hit.**

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