

Great Philly soccer teams: Ukrainian Nationals

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The Ukrainian Nationals, also known as “Tryzub” Philadelphia, played in the [American Soccer League](#) (ASL) from 1957 until 1970. Along the way they won six national championships, four U.S. Open Cups and two Lewis Cups. They won “the double” – the league championship and U.S. Open Cup – in 1961 and 1963. They won “the mini double” – the league championship and the league cup or Lewis Cup – in 1964.

Like so many teams in the history of soccer in Philadelphia, the Ukrainian Nationals’ beginnings can be traced to an ethnic social club. As the Philadelphia Ukrainians, they first took the field in 1950 and by 1956 had reached the finals of the National Amateur Cup, losing to [St. Louis Kutis S.C.](#) The Philadelphia Ukrainians decided to turn pro after that and joined the ASL for the 1957-58 season. For reasons that are at present unknown to me, the Philadelphia Ukrainians were suspended by the United States Soccer Football Association one week into the season. The Ukrainian Nationals were formed in their place, taking part of their name from the by now defunct [Philadelphia Nationals](#). They went on to finish second in the ASL their first season. During their time in the ASL they never finished lower than third.

The Ukrainian Nationals won their first ASL championship in 1961, having finished second the previous three seasons. They repeated as champions in 1962, 1963, and 1964, falling one title short of the ASL record set by the [Kearny Scots](#) between 1937 and 1941. They actually didn’t “lose” the title in 1965: for the 1964-65 season the team left the ASL to play in the Eastern Professional Soccer Conference (EPSC) where they finished third. The EPSC was a short-lived attempt to create a “super league” by combining teams from the ASL and the [German-American Soccer League](#). The Ukrainian Nationals returned to the ASL the next season, finishing third in the league.

Finishing second in the ASL in 1967, they were league champions again in 1968. They won their last ASL championship in 1970. *The Encyclopedia of American Soccer History* notes that, with the rise of the NASL at this time, the the Ukrainian Nationals “could lay claim to the mantle of being the last ASL team to be ranked first in the country.” During their time in the ASL they became the first U.S. team to have their home games televised. They also played a number of friendlies against foreign opposition including Manchester United, Dundee and Stuttgart.

The Ukrainian National’s success in the US Open Cup all came at the expense of Los Angeles-based clubs: in 1960 they beat the Los Angeles Kickers, in 1961 the Los Angeles Scots, in 1963 the Los Angeles Armenians and in 1966 Orange County. In 1964 they lost to the Kickers in a replay after a tied, overtime final. They had beaten the Kickers in overtime in 1960 – it took 420 minutes of soccer to decide the Cup winner in the 1960 and 1964 finals. The team’s two doubles in 1961 and 1963 were the last in U.S. soccer until D.C. United managed to win the double in 1996.



Alex Ely



Walt Chyzowych

Several notable players were on the Ukrainian Nationals roster during their time in the ASL including two Hall of Famers, [Alex Ely](#) and [Walt Chyzowych](#). Ely, who had been born in Sao Paolo, Brazil, had four caps with the U.S. team. After his playing career ended, Ely moved into coaching and spent time with the [Philadelphia Spartans](#), Archbishop Carroll High School and Swarthmore College. He continues to coach boys soccer in the Philadelphia area. Chyzowych, who had been born in the Ukraine, earned three caps with the U.S. team, also moved into coaching. He got his start with Philadelphia Textile, now known as Philadelphia University, soon after he graduated from Temple University, where he also played, was a two-time All American and where he set a team record for goals. Chyzowych was the Director of Coaching for the USSF from 1975 through 1981. In that capacity he coached the US Olympic team and Youth team. He was also the national team coach from 1976 until 1980 where he led the team in two ultimately unsuccessful World Cup qualifying campaigns. His biggest win as national team coach was a 2-0 victory over Hungary, which was the biggest upset victory for the U.S. since the win over England in the 1950 World Cup. After leaving the national team post Chyzowych went on to be head coach at Wake Forrester University. Chyzowych was also a soccer commentator on television and announced the 1977 Soccer Bowl, Pele's last professional game. Both Ely and Chyzowych were inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame in 1997.

After the 1970 season in the ASL, the Ukrainian Nationals moved to the German-American Soccer League. Through the 1970s the focus of the club began to shift toward amateur soccer and the development of a youth soccer program. In 1978 the club bought 39 acres of land in Horsham, just outside of Philadelphia, to build a soccer facility. 28 Teams between the ages of 8 and 19 now train and play there under the Ukrainian Nationals banner, continuing a 60 year soccer tradition. [Their Majors team continues to find success locally](#): 15 Pennsylvania State National Cups Tournament Championships, 11 United Soccer League Majors Division Championships and seven Inter-County League Majors Division Championships as of 2009.