

## Rob Ross



In a city that has produced its share of outstanding soccer goalies over the years, the name **ROBERT ROSS** sits right near the top of that impressive list.

Ross made his mark between the goal posts in high school at Brien McMahon and later in college at the University of Connecticut, contributing to the great success of both programs during his time there.

It was at Ponus Ridge Junior High School, however, where a 13-year-old Rob Ross began his soccer journey. Despite no prior experience in the sport, he went out for the team on a whim and it wasn't until the first day of practice that he decided to try his hand — literally both hands — as a goaltender.

And with that, an outstanding soccer career was born.

Junior HS was 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade back then and as an eighth grader in the fall of 1968, Rob helped Ponus win the city championship. Then after another outstanding season in the nets, he arrived at McMahon and by 11<sup>th</sup> grade had taken over as the Senators' starting goalie. After allowing just one goal in a season-debut win, Rob posted back-to-back shutout victories. Four more shutouts would follow during that 9-3-3 season, including a 1-0 win over Wethersfield in the opening round of the state tournament.

But it was during his senior season in the fall of 1973 that Ross established himself as one of the top goaltenders in the state. He allowed one or less goals in 14 of McMahon's 15 games with five shutouts and a microscopic 0.73 goals-against average. That impressive stat line helped the Senators go 9-2-4, capture the West Division title, and win a share of the FCIAC championship after tying rival Staples 1-1 in the conference final. Rob made nine saves in that title contest, including two very difficult stops in the closing minutes to preserve the tie.

Following his graduation in '74, Rob took his talents upstate to the University of Connecticut, right about the same time the Huskies' soccer program started to grow on a national level. After starting on the freshmen team, he became the backup varsity goalie his sophomore year. UConn advanced to the NCAA 'Sweet 16' that season and met rival Brown University in the New England Regional championship game when head coach Joe Morrone decided to make a surprise change in goal and start Ross. He rewarded his coach's trust in him by turning in an outstanding game as the two teams battled to a 1-1 tie in regulation and then play four scoreless 15-minute overtime periods before Brown finally won on penalty kicks in fading daylight in Storrs.

But that performance set the tone for the fall of '76 and a breakout junior season by the Norwalker. Rob took over as the starting goalie and was named All-Yankee Conference after posting a school-record 14 shutouts in 22 games to lead UConn to an 18-2-2 record, at the time tying the most wins in program history. His 11 goals allowed and 0.50 GAA that season were both second lowest in program history.

He was looking forward to an even better senior year, but sustained a serious neck injury early that 1977 campaign, which ended his season. He was able to redshirt the rest of that season and return for a fifth season in 1978, only to dislocate his shoulder in the season opener. He was sidelined for a month, but returned in time to lead the Huskies back to the NCAA tournament.

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Some 47 years after he played his final game, the name Robert Ross can still be found on several lines in the UConn soccer record book. Besides his single-season marks, Rob owns the career record for lowest goals-against-average with 0.35 from 1975-79, while his 14 goals allowed in a career is also No. 1, and he still has the fewest career losses

by any Huskie goaltender with three. His 19 career shutouts also rank in the top-10 all-time.

Saving the best for last, he added one more special UConn memory on June 11, 2012 when Norwalk's Robert Ross was inducted into the Fairfield County Sports Hall of Fame UConn Wing. ■