

## Dick Packer



The city of Norwalk became home to one of the world's greatest soccer ambassadors in 1964.

That was the year Dick Packer moved to Rowayton, bringing with him a wealth of soccer experience and accolades at every level. Some 14 years later, in 1978, the two-time All-American from Penn State and U.S. Olympian hooked up with former New York Giants kicker Pete Gogolak, his good friend from Darien and another soccer enthusiast, to launch what has become a summer tradition that has continued for more than three decades.

The Packer-Gogolak Soccer Camp took the Norwalk-area by storm, and before long the duo opened camps in Philadelphia, New Jersey and New York, drawing hundreds of boys and girls ages 6 to 12.

In 1992, with the demands of his successful business in New York increasing, Gogolak stepped down as co-director, and the Packer-Gogolak Soccer Camp became the Packer Soccer Camp and Dick Packer has been the sole director for the past 17 summers. But the camp's motto, "Kicks for the fun of it," remained unchanged.

In fact, this past July, the popular youth camp celebrated its 32nd consecutive year with two weeks at Rowayton Elementary School, right in Packer's backyard (a third week was held in Darien). And the energetic and tireless 75-year-old Packer has no plans of slowing down.

But his soccer camp is only a small part of Packer's impressive background in a sport he has played since he was six. Born in Philadelphia and raised in

Bucks County, Pa., a small community right outside of Philly, he attended high school at George School in Newtown, Pa., from 1948-52, and scored 55 goals during his four-year varsity career. He was named to the All-Philadelphia Scholastic Team three straight years, and scored a goal in the annual All-Philadelphia vs. All-NY Scholastic Soccer game as a sophomore.

His high school exploits earned him a scholarship to Penn State where he played three years of varsity soccer (freshmen were ineligible to play varsity back then). It was during his years in Happy Valley that Packer truly carved his legacy as a scoring machine while cementing his place as one of the best players in the country.

A three-year starter, the center forward helped lead the Nittany Lions to back to back unbeaten seasons and the 1954 and '55 national championships while being named to the All-America soccer team both years.

As the senior captain of the 1955 title team, Packer established a new single-season scoring record with 24 goals, a Penn State mark that still stands some 54 years later. And amazingly, he did it in just nine games. Known as "Crazy Legs" to his teammates back then, Packer broke the previous record of 23 with a pair of goals in a 6-3 win over Temple that was played in four inches of snow.

As if that wasn't enough, Packer was also named captain of the South Team in the 1955 Senior Soccer Bowl in St. Petersburg, Fla., and scored three goals in the final.

Packer's 50 total points during that 9-0-0 season also remains a single-season record for the Nittany Lions, and his 53 career goals was another PSU record that stood for 40 years. It wasn't until Stuart Reid, a player from Belfast, Northern Ireland, recorded 56 goals from 1992-95, that Packer's long-standing mark was broken.

But Reid, who played four years, scored his 56 goals in 88 games. Packer was only allowed to play three years and scored 53 goals in just 24 games – seven as a sophomore, eight his junior year, and nine as a senior.

"Everything is relevant," the always humble Packer says.

The 8-0-0 team in 1954 and the '55 team that finished 9-0-0 are also the last two Penn State soccer teams to go unbeaten and win national titles. What's more, the 18 straight wins Packer and his teammates accumulated during their three years is yet another record that has stood the test of time.

But the best was yet to come for Packer. In 1956, he was selected to the U.S. Olympic soccer team for the Summer Games in Melbourne, Australia. A total of 16 players made Team USA – 15 professional players and one college player. That was Dick Packer. Forty years later, he carried the Olympic torch through the streets of Norwalk prior to the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta.

Packer went on to play professionally himself with the Philadelphia Uhrik Truckers, who he helped lead to consecutive American Soccer League championships in 1956 and '57, scoring two goals in one of the title games. He also played with the U.S. Armed Forces team in Germany from 1957-59 and with the Central Valet Professional Soccer Club while working in Washington, D.C., from 1959 to 1964, the year he moved to Norwalk.

A versatile athlete, Packer also played baseball and basketball in high school, and two years of baseball at Penn State. He's still active with the Rowayton paddle tennis team and the Roton Point Club tennis team.

And he is still a very big supporter of Penn State soccer, sponsoring a four-year scholarship, attending several home games a year, and even accompanying the team to Brazil on its spring tour this year.

He also serves on the Board of Directors of Haiti Lumiere de Demain (HLD), which stands for "Haiti's Light for Tomorrow," a non-profit organization one of the counselors at his camp founded to "kick out" illiteracy on his island. For the last two years, Packer, who has never received a nickel from his camps, has donated a portion of the proceeds to HLD, which distributes text books and solar energy flashlights so children with no electricity can read.

A father of two sons and four grandchildren, Packer has spent his business career in the hotel/travel industry and is currently a regional vice president for Maritz Travel, Inc. Packer and Joan Brusven reside in Rowayton.