

## Charlie Mitchell

Inducted January 27, 2012

Charlie Mitchell may be considered Oklahoma's first professional soccer player. The Paisley Scotland native arrived in Tulsa as the only player retained from the Team Hawaii squad that became the Tulsa Roughnecks. As most young Scottish lads, Charlie began playing the game at age 5 or 6 and then on a competitive high school team. By the age of 17, he signed a professional contract and played for St. Mirren F.C. In 1970, Charlie came to the United States to play in the North American Soccer League for the Rochester Lancers. For one year, Charlie joined the New York Cosmos before traveling to Hawaii in 1977.

Charlie played for the Roughnecks for one year but returned in 1980 to manage the team for two years and be a part of the largest soccer crowd (31,000) watching the Roughnecks defeat the New York Cosmos 2-1. After eleven years with the NASL, Charlie returned to Oklahoma to establish a soccer club and begin training Oklahoma youth in the skills necessary to compete at a regional and national level. In 1997 he established the Bixby Highlanders Futbol Club and became their Director of Coaching. Under his leadership the club has advanced teams to state championships and regional championships.

College coaching became Charlie's next role with Oklahoma soccer as he became the head coach for the Northeastern State University squad in 1995. His first season with the Redmen led them to an 18-2 season and the conference playoffs for the first time. He then started a women's program at the college and coached them as well.

During this time, Charlie did what so many of his soccer players in Europe do, opened a pub. It seemed to be a natural move, said Charlie. In 1981 Charlie Mitchells Restaurant and Pub opened with several Tulsa locations. Although those locations closed after years of success, Charlie has recently returned to the restaurant business with many of the same items on the menu as in the past.

While highly visible in the Tulsa area for his playing and coaching, much of his contribution to soccer in Oklahoma has remained low key. Developing soccer in Oklahoma has been of his since those early Roughneck days when he and the players would travel around the area giving away tickets and putting on clinics. Charlie continued that by volunteering many hours as a coach for the Olympic Development Program in Oklahoma as well as mentoring many young coaches.

Another trait of Charlie is to share the growth of soccer in Oklahoma with his former team mates on the Roughnecks and volunteers. "The most successful youth soccer programs all stem from towns that had professional teams." says Charlie. Soccer is competitive in Oklahoma because former players have stayed around and got involved in coaching. He also praises the moms and dads and volunteers for their contributions. None of the youth soccer would survive without them and they are not appreciated enough.

While professional soccer lured Charlie Mitchell to Oklahoma, it was Oklahoman's and their friendliness who kept him here and embraced his love and passion for the game of soccer.