Transcript of an Oral History Interview

with

Lalo Sanchez

July 23, 1975

Interviewer: Ramedo Saucedo

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Mr. Lalo Sanchez was born in Dallas, Texas and came to Minnesota after having served as a Military Policeman during World War II.

He discusses his involvement with soccer since early childhood to the present. He organized his first team in Minnesota in 1947. As coach of the Azteca Club, he has received many awards.

The Azteca Club has won a number of Championships and some of the players have gone on to play professional soccer.

In addition to the successes, he also discusses some of the difficulties in the sport.

This is a transcript of a tame-recorded interview edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH LALO SANCHEZ

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Interviewer: Ramedo Saucedo

SAUCEDO: This interview is being conducted as part of the Mexican American

Project for the Minnesota Historical Scolety on July 23, 1975. Senor

Sanchez, let's start off with the date and place of your birth. Where

were you born, and how many members of your family are there?

SANCHEZ: I come from a family of eleven boys and two girls. My birth place is in Dallas, Texas. I was born in Dallas and raised in Mexico to the age of fifteen years.

SAUCEDO: Did you attend school in Dallas?

SANCHEZ: No. Unfortunately, I was too old when I came from Mexico. I was fifteen, so I didn't attend school here in the United States at all.

SAUCEDO: Did you work in either Mexico or the United States?

SANCHEZ: Yes, I did work in Mexico. But not what you would call work. I came from a village where I tended the livestock of my grandmother and that's the work that I have done.

SAUCEDO: Are you married? Do you have any children?

SANCHEZ: No. I'm not married. Not at present. I have three children, two boys and a girl.

SAUCEDO: What are their names?

SANCHEZ: Rudolph, Leonardo and Sylvia.

SAUCEDO: How old are they?

SANCHEZ: Leonardo is 25, Rudolph is 28, my daughter is 30 years old.

SAUCEDO: Do you speak Spanish and if so did you learn it in Mexico? Do you go back to Mexico from time to time?

SANCHEZ: Yes, I do speak Spanish. I do go back to Mexico to visit my folks, where I have my uncles.

SAUCEDO: When did you get started in soccer, Senor Sanchez?

SANCHEZ: I have played soccer for as long as I can remember. I was six or seven years old, as soon as I could kick a ball. That's the only game we have in Mexico.

SAUCEDO: Did you play on any organized soccer teams in Mexico or in the United States before coming to Minnesota?

SANCHEZ: Oh, yes. I played in Mexico for a length of time. I have played in the United States before. For another length of time, I played semi-pro.

SAUCEDO: Can you mention some of the teams you've played for?

SANCHEZ: I have played for El Phonix in Dallas. Also in Dallas, I've played for Chensvolt. Right off, I don't remember many of the teams that I've played for, but I have played quite a bit of soccer.

SAUCEDO: When did you come to Minnesota?

SANCHEZ: I came to Minnesota right after World War II.

SAUCEDO: Do you remember why or how it was that you did come to Minnesota?

SANCHEZ: Yes. I was an M.P. during World War II, and I happened to come from San Antonio, on train, checking passes. We stayed two days in Minnesota. Back on the train, two days to San Antonio. I learned about the Twin Cities at that time. I really liked the Twin Cities and this is why I made it my home.

SAUCEDO: When was the first time you began thinking about organizing a soccer team here in Minnesota?

SANCHEZ: Well, there wasn't any soccer here when I arrived and I figured that Minnesota needed the sport. Not "needed" it, but it would be nice if we would have soccer here in Minnesota. So in 1947, I started a little playing with kids and it took me quite a while,/because kids in Minnesota didn't know very much about soccer. So, I just practiced with them, played with them on my own time and, from

- SANCHEZ: 1947 to 1969, I started working with boys. No, I take that back, in 1966 I started working with elderly boys. By elderly, I mean 18, 19, 20, up to 25 years old.
- SAUCEDO: Where did you train the boys? What field? What area? Was it in St. Paul?
- SANCHEZ: It was in St. Paul. I think you call it Navy Island or the Harriet Island. It is our home field now, Harriet Island.
- SAUCEDO: How did you go about getting these boys together?
- SANCHEZ: I started with mostly all Mexican boys from the West Side. I started with ed working with them. In fact, four of the boys who I started with are still with me. I have accomplished quite a bit within the six years that I've been working with these boys. I've played in the league of the Minnesota Soccer Association. I've played for the past three years now and we haven't to this day been beaten. We have won all championships, all classes, the Minnesota Cup, the Wilson Cup, the League Cup. We are the top club right now. We hope that in 1975 we'll win the championship again.
- SAUCEDO: What are the divisions in soccer in Minnesota and what division is your team in at the present time?
- SANCHEZ: I started off with the Third Division. There is a Third Division,

 Second Division, First Division and Major Division. Now, at the

 present, I'm in the Major Division. And we, right now, are trailing,

 by one point, the Corinthians of Minneapolis.
- SAUCEDO: You were State Champs in 1974. What type of record did you have at the time?
- SANCHEZ: We broke all kinds of records. We had the most goals scored in the year of 1974. In fact, we had 169 goals that we scored against other teams. We only had seven goals scored against us in the year of 1974.

SAUCEDO: How many games did you play in 1974?

SANCHEZ: We played 39 games all together.

SAUCEDO: It's a good record. Have you noticed any growing interest in soccer since you came to Minnesota?

SANCHEZ: Oh yes, definately. I have noticed in schools; junior high schools, elementary schools, colleges, all over Minnesota, that soccer is just booming right now. As a referee I have gone all over Minnesota to referee colleges, high schools and junior high schools. You name it, and I have refereed there. I have noticed that soccer is growing a lot.

SAUCEDO: Have you had any sponsors? What are the difficulties in obtaining sponsors?

SANCHEZ: Well, believe it or not, I've been trying very, very hard to get a sponsor. One thing I have never had is a sponsor. We have tried,, throughout the Minnesota area, the Twin City area, to get a sponsor for us. So far, we haven't succeeded in getting support from anyone. I have done this on myoown. I have given my time. The little money that I can save I put right into my boys. It takes quite a few dollars to keep the boys going.

SAUCEDO: Have you taken your boys to other countries to play this game?

SANCHEZ: Oh, yes. I have taken my boys to Canada to play in the International tournament. We did very well there. In fact, we even won the Championship. "I think I have a real nice group of boys playing for the Azteca Soccer Club now.

SAUCEDO: You have a number of trophies, I noticed. Offall the trophies you have, which one gives you the most pride?

SANCHEZ: I'll take them one at a time. I have pride in all of them. Every trophy that I have has taken a lot of effort, a lot of work, a lot of sweat from my boys. I think that the most valuable trophy that

SANCHEZ: I have is the Minnesota Cup. In one more year, we can keep it forever. It's a traveling trophy for three years. Whoever wins it for three years straight will get to keep the trophy.

SAUCEDO: Congratulations. We certainly hope that it will come about. What type of boy should play soccer? What type of training, what type of discipline is necessary in order for a boy to get fully involved in the playing of soccer?

SANCHEZ: A young man has to feel the game. It's not like American football where you get hit and hit. Soccer is an art. You have to be able to think, to feel the ball as your own body. You cannot play soccer without feeling. A young man, when he becomes a soccer player, has to feel exactly what soccer is all about. It's an art, it's a game of finesse, it's a beautiful game. The only thing that you have to come up with is feeling. There's a lot of feeling behind soccer. I have trained young men and I have noticed that they've been playing beautifully now for the past six years. I have four of these boys, who are still with me. They are just beautiful players. I hope I can see more Mexican boys play this game throughout the Twin Cities.

SAUCEDO: Do you think we need a Little League on the West Side?

SANCHEZ: Oh, yes.

SAUCEDO: How many schools are currently involved in soccer? High schools for example?

SANCHEZ: Just about every high school around the Twin Cities right now is involved in soccer. I hope that our own school, Humboldt High School, will get involved also. Most of our Mexican people go there.

SAUCEDO: What do you think is necessary for involvement on the part of Humboldt High School?

SANCHEZ: Well, I'm afraid that they haven't got any coaches. They need coaches.

SANCHEZ: They need somebody with experience to go in there and start working with young kids. Let them learn, let them feel the game. With a coach, I think Humboldt High School can become one of the leading schools in soccer.

SAUCEDO: Does the Neighborhood House or Roosevelt Junior High School have any type of program for soccer?

SANCHEZ: No, they haven't / I hate to say it, but no, they haven't got one.

SAUCEDO: Lalo, you have a remarkable record in soccer. I know that everywhere you go, you represent the Mexican people. Your team certainly
is well representative of this fact. You've received a number of
awards in addition to the trophies. What awards have you received?

SANCHEZ: Well, I've received best coach of the year award. I have received six other trophies for the championship of your games. And also, for the best team of the year. Altogether, we have the best team in the Twin Cities.

SAUCEDO: Have any of your players gone on to play professional soccer?

SANCHEZ: Oh, yes.

SAUCEDO: Can you name some of those players and the teams they are with?

SANCHEZ: I have four already, out of my own team, who have turned professional.

I've got one boy by the name of Lalo Del Mazo who is playing professionally. I have another boy by the name of Augustine Sanchez who's also playing professionally. Gilberto Almendarez is playing professionally, and another boy, in California, turned professional from my team.

SAUCEDO: Do anticipate professional soccer coming to the Twin Cities of the state of Minnesota in the near future?

SANCHEZ: Oh, definately. I know soccer is growing so much here in the state of Minnesota. I have seen all of these schools, high schools and colleges, and I know that professional soccer will be here in Minne-

SANCHEZ: sota. I would say within two years, maybe three years, we are going to be seeing professional soccer right here in the state of Minnesota.

SAUCEDO: Has Pele's playing, or getting Pele to come to the United States, increased the interest in soccer?

SANCHEZ: Oh, Pele has boomed soccer. He is bringing soccer alive here in the United States. The master himself, Pele, is going to put soccer on everybody's television.

SAUCEDO: Lalo, I know that the expenses are great in running a soccer team.

Can you elaborate and go into detail? What are some of the expenses?

Where is the money coming from since it's difficult in this day and age to find sponsors?

Well, the money has been coming out of my own pocket. The little SANCHEZ: money that I have saved through the years, I've been putting into my team. It takes quite a few dollars to keep a team going. For instance, insurance; once a year I have to put \$250 up just for insurance. Medications, first aid, these are things that I have to I know that a little medication doesn't sound like much but it totals up to a lot of money. The field; I have to mark the field I use four bags for marking. It comes to \$2.00 and some cents a bag. Refereeing: It takes \$30.00 per game to pay my referee. This means 38 games a year that I have to pay my referees. I also have a few other minor things that boys need, e.g. bandages, knee supports, and you name it. It runs into money. I'm sorry to say, but it seems like I'm running out of money now and I think that this team, the Aztecas, which has brought the Mexican American boys into light, is going to have to dissorve because of finances.

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SAUCEDO: Mr. Sanchez, have you or your team members ever been discriminated

SAUCEDO: against on the field or off the field?

SANCHEZ: Yes. I have been hurt quite a bit by the Association. The first three years of soccer, I challenged all teams and they accepted me very, very well.

SAUCEDO: What teams did you play on, for example?

SANCHEZ: Here in the state of Minnesota, I have played for the St. Paul Soccer Club, which consists of only German boys. They were D.P.s at the time of World War II. They were all coming from Germany. I played with them and they accepted me. I was a good player for them.

SAUCEDO: Is that the year you won the State Championship?

SANCHEZ: That's the year we won the Championship here in St. Paul and I was, well, considered one of the top players here in the state of Minnesota.

SAUCEDO: Did they have players on that team who were not born in the United States?

SANCHEZ: Oh, definately. Everyone of them was not born in the United States.

They were all European, everyone of them. Now that I have my own team, they have hurt me. They don't allow me to have more than two Mexican boys. They're doing this because we are a good team. We are winning. We are beating out every darn team that has been placed in front of us, and they're trying to get me one way or another.

SAUCEDO: When you say Mexican boys, are you referring to boys who were born in Mexico?

SANCHEZ: Yes, boys who were born in Mexico and who are still 18-19 years old and who are going to school. They come up to Minnesota and have a language barrier. They don't speak English very well, so they come to me. Since I know Spanish, they all want to join the team. Of

- SANCHEZ: course I'm going to say yes. But the Minnesota Association is allowing me only two guest players.
- SAUCEDO: Are there any rules with the Minnesota Soccer Association that make this restriction?
- SANCHEZ: There are no rules in the U.S.S.F. that limit players like this!

 There's no rule. The only rules are the ones that the Minnesota

 Association has come up with.
- SAUCEDO: When you say the U.S.S.F., what are you refering to?
- SANCHEZ: The United States Soccer Federation. The United States Soccer Federation has no ruling to limit players, regardless of who they are, what creed, or where they come from.
- SAUCEDO: And yet Minnesota imposes this restriction on you?
- SANCHEZ: Yes, they have. They have limited me to two players. I cannot have more than two guest players per year.
- SAUCEDO: Have you written to the United States Soccer Federation?
- SANCHEZ: I have written to the United States Soccer Federation asking them if it is legal for the Minnesota Soccer Association to limit me to two players. There is no ruling whatsoever to limit the players from another country.
- SAUCEDO: Mr. Sanchez, one of the reasons soccer has grown in popularity in Minnesota is because of excellent coaches and referees like yourself. Thank you for this interview and we wish you antremendous amount of luck and continued success with the boys you may be coaching in the future, as well as luck in your struggle for fairness intthe sport of soccer.