

# Hats off to the captain, Stan Koziol

Wish I was in South Florida this weekend. Not to soak up much-needed sun, but to pay my respects to Stan “Stas” Koziol.

Stas was just 48 when he died March 3, less than two months after being diagnosed with leukemia. He was one of the best players in the storied history of Loyola University soccer, and the most ferocious leader I have ever encountered.

I do not say that lightly, having witnessed Ray Lewis lead the Baltimore Ravens to their first Super Bowl title and then Juan Dixon guide Maryland to its only NCAA basketball championship in the span of 15 months. Neither was the kind to back down from a challenge. Teammates modeled their example, just as the Loyola Greyhounds responded to Koziol.

A tireless midfielder, Koziol still holds the school record for assists and was an All-American in 1986 and '87, when Loyola reached the NCAA quarterfinals. In both tournaments, it upset the University of Virginia. The Cavaliers had the international players, the Greyhounds the grit, personified in Koziol, always one of the smallest men on the field.



Twenty years ago this spring, doing leg work for the first and only World Cup on American soil, I spent an afternoon in northern New Jersey, which had several starters on the U.S. team. It was Stas' turf, and he was my tour guide. We met at Evergreen, hopped in a rental car, flew up the Turnpike and the next thing you know, I am in a social club in Kearny, having a beer with the father of John Harkes, one of those UVA guys Stas took delight in beating.

In addition to a soccer pitch and Jersey, Koziol knew his way around Argentina, Puerto Rico, and especially Poland, his parents' homeland. He put his entrepreneurial skills to use as a telecom pioneer, first in Eastern Europe, where the business smarts he picked up at Loyola and his family's heritage were a winning combination.

“Our parents came over from southern Poland in the late 1950s,” said Joe Koziol, who was a year behind his brother at Loyola and was their top goal-scorer in that era. “Our Mom had been confirmed by Pope John Paul II. In Passaic (N.J.), we went to Polish school on weekends. Stas played professionally in Poland for two years. He married a girl from Poland.”

Margaret Koziol, her children, Nicole and Matthew, and their Uncle Joe will have plenty of support March 8, when Stas is laid to rest at St. Rose of Lima Church in Miami Shores, Fla. From Joe Barger and Chris Webbert to Jeff Nattans and Sam Mangione and coach Bill Sento, most of the men who united with Koziol at Loyola

will be there for him in Southern Florida this weekend.  
They would have gone to the moon for their captain.