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Dom Amore's Sunday Read: CT soccer icon to be celebrated; kudos to Karaban; golden stag vanishes



Bob Dikranian, who built a soccer tradition at Southern Connecticut, will be honored by the state's soccer community in May. (SCSU photo)



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When [Bob Dikranian](#) arrived at Southern Connecticut to start a men's soccer program, his greatest skill, his greatest resource, was an iron will.

"He put the players first, but he was tough," said [Ray Reid, who eventually succeeded Dikranian](#). "He was driven. And no one dared to question him. ... Guys wanted to come and play for him."

Reid, who was captain of some of Dikranian's great teams, remembers the team runs up a hill near campus with Dikranian pushing the pace in his old [Plymouth Duster](#). The guys in back had to pick it up or risk becoming a hood ornament.

Dikranian, who had played on elite amateur and semipro teams between Bridgeport and New York and was an All-American at the University of Bridgeport, started the program in 1966 and soon began attracting players from anywhere and everywhere to the New Haven campus. It happened by word of mouth.

"We treated the players well, we gave them our best," Dikranian said. "And the players, themselves, did the recruiting for me. I did my share, trying to make connections, but players like [Ronnie Basile](#), from Bayside High in New York, he brought his brother, and he brought a number of players of Haitian descent from New York. (Other players) brought players they knew from Long Island, Virginia, apparently they saw something we were doing and went out to their friends."

[So Armand "Bob" Dikranian](#) built a dynasty at SCSU, with a record of 227-94-31, leading the Owls to eight Division II Final Fours, six in a row between 1978-83, and winning the school's first national championship in 1987. After he retired, successors Reid (three) and [Tom Lang](#) (two) kept adding championships on what Dikranian had built.

"When I took over, the biggest thing was, I didn't want to let him down," said Reid, who went on to win a Division I title for UConn. "He embraced diversity long before anyone else. When I got to Southern in 1980, we were already a diverse team. He was a borderline genius when it came to getting players with different styles to play together. He had a saying on his wall: 'Let there be such one-ness that when one man smells an onion, everyone cries.'"

The Southern and state soccer community [will come together as one to honor Dikranian](#), 83, on May 21 at Aria in Prospect at 5:30 p.m., proceeds to go to the Armand Dikranian Fund to support the SCSU men's soccer program, now coached by another former [Owl player, Kevin Anderson](#).

As a young coach, Dikranian went to one of the first U.S. Soccer Federation coaching schools in 1971.

"It changed everything in the way of coaching philosophy, coaching methodology," Dikranian said. "It just gave us a new life and I built on that. That really propelled me. When we built the program and it was time for me to leave, I found the right person in Ray to continue. And the foundation was good, and Ray had to expand on it and had to work hard. Other schools were giving scholarships and we had no money, so Ray had to work hard, and Tommy Lang thereafter."

After stepping away as Southern's head coach, Dikranian, inducted into the [Connecticut Soccer Hall of Fame](#) in 1999, continued to teach and work in soccer at various levels with the Yale women's program, back at SCSU, at South Florida and his [Victory Soccer School in Connecticut](#). He was and is a guru of the game, but like all great coaches, it turned out to be all about people for him.

"Years ago, winning championships, it seemed like the greatest thing that happened," said Dikranian, who splits his time between Connecticut and Florida. "But what really hit home, when I went back to a Hall of Fame dinner when we honored the first championship team, I saw the young men that played for us doing so well, individuals from all places, functioning so well. That was most rewarding."

For tickets [and info about](#) the Dikranian celebration, go to southern.edu/dikranian.

More for your Sunday Read.

Alex Karaban: straight from the heart

[Alex Karaban](#) made the right decision in coming back to UConn. Why? Because he went with his heart. Staying another year in college probably won't help his NBA stock; even as he improved, he'll be a year older, which matters in that draft. It probably won't hurt his stock much, either, unless he gets injured. He'll be a second-round pick or undrafted free agent who will have to fight through the G League as others have.

So given that set of circumstances, why not just come back to UConn if he loves it, and his heart is still in it. [Karaban](#) will make money here and will be in a place he loves for as long as possible. It was a 50-50 call. If he made the decision for the right reasons, then it's the right decision.

Sunday short takes

*[Donovan Clingan](#) will be back in his hometown May 13 at 7 p.m., joining a panel as the Bristol Sports Hall of Fame presents "Seeking Success and Leaving a Legacy: An evening with sports and business icons." Clingan, off his rookie season with the Trail Blazers, will be joined at the Double Tree in Bristol by Malcolm Huckaby, former Boston College player and longtime ESPN college basketball analyst, and Jay Calnan, former Bristol Eastern athlete who has gone on to found a successful construction management firm. The event will benefit Boys and Girls Club of Bristol and the Main Street Community Foundations' Men's and Boys and Women and Girls funds. For tickets (\$20 for adults, \$5 for students) and information, go to the [Hall of Fame website \(bshof.org\)](http://bshof.org) or call 860-877-0403.

*UConn sophomore Alex Heard rose to the occasion at the Big East men's golf championship, starting the final round with a 2-stroke lead and firing a 68 to win going away, 11 under for 54 holes (71-66-68). Heard, from Boca Raton, Fla., is [headed for the NCAA Regional at Amherst, Va.](#), May 12-14 at Poplar Grove GC.

*In 2024-25, the [Wolf Pack had 19 lower-bowl sellouts](#) at the XL Center, drew 201,000 total, distributed the most paid tickets in franchise history, had highest average attendance in 14 years.

*Jon Plefka, a three-sport athlete at New Britain High and later women's basketball coach at Post, was introduced this week as the new [head coach at UMass Lowell](#). Plefka, successful at the Division II level at Auburn-Montgomery, played for Bob Knight at Texas Tech and worked as an assistant under Taj McWilliams-Franklin, the WNBA great, before taking over at Post and compiling a 69-33 record.

*On the subject of basketball coaches from the Hardware City, did Jalen Brunson save [Tom Thibodeau's](#) job with that [series-clinching shot for the Knicks?](#)

*Has Carlos Rodon done enough for Yankees fans to no longer consider him the worst pitcher on the planet? Looks pretty good from here.

*UConn women's tennis coach Glenn Marshall, who retired after 33 seasons, goes out with [Big East Coach of the Year honors](#). His Huskies won the regular season title.

*This early baseball season finds a few local guys on the cusp of breaking into the big leagues. Former CCSU slugger [TT Bowens has reached Triple A](#) in the Orioles' organization, homering three times in the early going for Norfolk. UConn's Anthony Prato (two homers in 38 at bats) and Patrick Winkel (two homers in first 16 at-bats) [homered back-to-back for the Twins' St. Paul affiliate](#) this week. [Jacob Wallace, reliever from UConn](#), has 12 strikeouts in 11 innings for Omaha, the Royals top affiliate.

*The [2025 Rockies](#) are poised to give the '24 White Sox a run for their money.

Last word

Couldn't help but notice, the majestic 12-point beast that has been watching over Dunkin' Park from the right field roof since day one — clearly visible even from the press box — mysteriously vanished this week. Rumors (started by me) quickly spread throughout the ballpark that the gold fiberglass icon was kidnapped, or perhaps went out to Hollywood to appear in stag films. Anything for a buck, they say. But we were [told The Hartford has done a "brand refresh"](#) and has replaced it with different signage, a subtly different logo, throughout The Dunk. The deer-ly departed is now safe on the company's campus, but we hear, may have lost its antlers in transit.

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