

# *Fun While it Lasted*

Ingo Krieg is a Jacksonville-based engineer and bio fuel entrepreneur. When Krieg was three years old, his family escaped from the former East Germany and relocated to Rochester, New York. Nearly 30 years ago, the soccer fan and first-generation émigré made a brief foray into professional sports ownership.

In the fall of 1982, Krieg led a group of local investors that purchased the foundering Jacksonville Tea Men after the club ran aground in the North American Soccer League (NASL). Krieg ended up with the Tea Men after a string of ill-fated business deals to sell the club to Milwaukee, Charlotte and Detroit ownership groups failed. The last of these groups was led by Sonny Van Arnhem, owner of the Detroit Express, 1982 champions of the American Soccer League (ASL), a struggling second-division circuit whose financial troubles mirrored those of the NASL.

Krieg backed the Tea Men financially during their rather murky final two seasons of existence in 1983 and 1984, when the team played in the remote and unsettled lower divisions of the American professional soccer scene.

Ingo Krieg spoke with Fun While It Lasted on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 about his experience operating the Tea Men as a second division club.

*Interview begins after the jump*

**FWiL:**

Originally the Tea Men were sold to Sonny Van Arnem in late 1982, who planned to move the team to Detroit as a NASL club. How did you come to own the club instead of Van Arnem and decide to enter it in the American Soccer League?

**Krieg:**

Sonny never owned the Tea Men. He wanted to and he got a lot of free press and big pictures. Sonny and I visited in New York and then he came to Jacksonville for a group meeting. We had the impression he would organize the team office and the Jacksonville group would put up the bulk of the money. The group decided not to go forward with Sonny. The NASL had already disbanded\* and all that was left was the American Soccer League or the Major Indoor Soccer League. To keep soccer alive in Jacksonville, the ASL was the only choice for me. I enjoyed outdoor more than indoor.

*\*Ed. Note – Krieg's memory is incorrect here. The NASL had not disbanded in 1982, but it was shedding franchises rapidly. Regardless, Krieg's group seemingly did not find staying in the NASL to be viable.*

**FWiL:**

Almost all soccer teams lost money in that era. Aside from the financial considerations, did you enjoy owning the Tea Men and winning a championship with the team in your first year? Do you have any particular favorite memories of the team?

**Krieg:**

I enjoyed going into the locker room and letting the players know I was proud of their efforts and our goal would be to be the '83 champions. Taking the trophy away from Sonny who had won the championship in '82. Best of all.....the chance to play international. There is nothing like the excitement and goodwill fostered. A small seed of the World Cup. Another enjoyable moment was Youth Soccer Appreciation Night and the field was filled with teams from around the city. All the colors, the youth, the young champions. Our after game concert series helped and I enjoyed meeting some greats Dionne Warwick, Lou Rawls.....Jennifer Lopez would have been nice and she could have used the exposure then.....oh well.

**FWiL:**

You led the move to break away from the ASL and form the USL in early 1984. What was your experience like with the other ASL owners and what drove you to form a new league?

**Krieg:**

Bill Spears from the Dallas Americans and I were the lead people in the movement. Sad to not play the 50th year of ASL. Skeletons in closets, bickering by club owners.....why buy into something that needed a lot of change?

**FWiL :**

What ultimately led to the demise of the team after the 1984 United Soccer League season?

**Krieg:**

I ran out of money. The Mayor asked me to let Michael Jackson have the stadium for his world tour in '84\*. It was good for the city exposure but not for me having to relocate. I should have asked Jackson for 10% of the gate to cover my losses for moving eight games of the season to the baseball park. Not easy.

*\*Ed: actually the Jackson 5 Victory Tour.*

**FWiL:**

Have you ever considered investing in another professional sports team in the years since your Tea Men experience?

**Krieg:**

I have. Then I tell myself that I have been there and done that.