



Jorge Tristani

Fifteen state championships. Fifteen. The number is so improbable, so far off the charts, that even Jorge Tristani can barely believe it. "It's absurd," he says. "But it was a joyride."

An architect by training and a coach by choice, Tristani built a wonderful flying machine called St. Pius X boys' soccer. From 1983 to 2007, the Sartans did loop-the-loops around their competition, establishing a standard of excellence, victories and titles that may never be approached, let alone broken. At the helm through it all was the quiet, reserved Tristani, who calmly guided St. Pius to victory after victory without much fanfare, but with plenty of precision.

A small, unimposing man, Tristani looks nothing like Vince Lombardi. But Tristani's inner drive set the stage for his players' triumph.

Example: At a time when 10:30 p.m. was the beginning of a long, lost evening for many high school kids, the coach imposed a curfew that stuck. "During soccer season, it's all about soccer," former Sartan Matt Lamb once told a reporter. "If there's a curfew, then you're in by curfew."

Nobody much cared about curfew or, for that matter, soccer in 1983, when Tristani, prompted by a St. Pius parent who'd liked his coaching methods in AYSO, interviewed with then-Sartans athletics director Ray Giannini about running the program. Tristani, then an architect who'd hoped to coach part-time, showed up dressed to the nines. Giannini, never one for formality, and a football coach to boot, gave him the job before Tristani ever took off his coat. The rest was victory. And history.

After winning his 15th title in November 2006, Tristani announced he would retire from coaching, though he remains at St. Pius as a Spanish, drafting and advanced placement art history teacher. He acknowledges the load had begun to weigh heavily on him toward the end. "The expectations are so high," he says, "that finishing third or fourth was beginning to seem like failure."

Tristani, 58, helped develop some of the best local talent the sport has seen, including Mike Strati and A.J. Herrera, among others. It's instructive to note that when Tristani took the helm at St. Pius, neither the program, nor the sport itself, got much attention. That's all changed now. Thousands watch the state tournament each fall, and a title in soccer means as much as a basketball, football or baseball championship. Jorge Tristani was in on the ground floor. But then, where else would an architect be?