



SOUTH PHILLY Strikers Juan Cora, Mark Casasanto, Alex Hartzag and Joe Franchine are leading Roman Catholic to success on the soccer field.

Local Soccer Stars Shoot R. C. to Glory

It's been 12 years since Roman Catholic HS raised a banner that read "Catholic League Soccer Champions". That singular title in 1997 was the only time the boys based out of Broad & Vine Streets would call themselves the best in the Catholic League, arguably, the most physically demanding high-school soccer league in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

In its storied history of academics and athletics, it's hard to imagine that in almost 120 years of existence only one Cahillite team of "footballers" earned the right to be called champions.

If Coach Ray DeStephanis has his way, all that will soon be seen for just what it is: ancient history.

But DeStephanis, who arrived at Roman in February of 2007, knows he has big shoes to fill. The owner of that sole title in 1997 was legendary coach and his predecessor at the helm, Pat Cain.

"It's definitely been a challenge," DeStephanis said of his quest to turn the program around. "I know we are on the right track and you can see the program picking up steam each year."

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R.C. On Target

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DeStephanis, who came to Roman after a stint with Archbishop Wood as their Assistant Coach, has been able to generate interest in the school's soccer program almost by accident.

He said, "I married a South Philly girl and subsequently moved into the area." It is quite possible that the choice of

neighborhoods for the head coach just may benefit the Cahillites on the pitch for years to come. "Once I was established down here, all I heard about was the Strikers playing out of the South Philadelphia Soccer Club." After watching a couple of their club matches from the stands, DeStephanis came away impressed that he took a look at that year's incoming freshman class commitments and sure enough, there they were. No less than

11 players off of that talented team were headed to Broad & Vine. DeStephanis says of that day, "I really felt like the kid with a lot of Christmas gifts under the tree, almost like I hit the lottery."

After posting the best freshmen soccer record for the school in recent history last year, the soccer standouts are reaping dividends. Four of them have made the jump to the varsity squad and are adjusting very well. Mark

Casasanto has earned more minutes with each passing match because of his creativity and ability to spark a fire on the field. Joe Franchine is a bona fide fit at just about any position because he is extremely versatile and durable as a field player. Alex Hartzag and Juan Cora also held their own.

At the JV level, fellow South Philadelphians Steven Mastero and Kyle Guldner are team captains for season 2009.