

Sports Through The Decades

By: Samantha Ayers

Throughout the many years of Woodbridge's history, many things have changed, however, the people's love of sports persisted. From baseball to boxing, people have always enjoyed the thrill of the toss of a ball, the sweet taste of their team's victory, and the bitterness of defeat. However, the sports people relish have greatly varied. In the early and mid 1900's, boxing was adored, while, unlike today, football and basketball were virtually ignored. As time progressed in the 1900's, these previously ignored sports finally sought a major debut, as professional and semi-professional leagues began to form. Nevertheless, baseball was a prominent American favorite, and still is to this day. On a different note, Lou Creekmur, a 1944 Woodbridge High School Graduate, later sought fame in football, a very compelling achievement, as it was not one of the most popular and enforced sports of the country at his time. However, he was able to overcome these challenges and prevail, allowing him to become a major inspiration to both aspiring athletes and anyone who needs help overcoming a barrier, either physically or mentally.

In the early 1900's, boxing was a prevalent sport. Throughout the year, many fights were held, however, Woodbridge fighters weren't excelling. As stated in the December 3, 1926 issue of *The Woodbridge Leader*, "This has been a bad year for ring champions." Also, two fights in particular starred in this issue of *The Woodbridge Leader*, inclining on the fact that these fights could potentially be monumental. "Flowers meets Mickey Walker, once head of the welterweight class, in Chicago, tonight. Also, Latzo risks the title he won from Walker in a battle with Joe Simonich next Wednesday, in Newark, New Jersey."

As time progressed, basketball became a renown subject. Woodbridge players were very good, and more-often-than-not won a game. "With nineteen games posted on the win side

of the ledger and only eight games on the loss side, and by having defeated some of the better teams in Central Jersey, the Brookaiden basketball club claims the mythical championship of Woodbridge Township.” (Leader Journal, April 3, 1934 issue) This just goes to show that just because you aren’t the most famous thing in the world, you can still be successful and overcome any obstacle life throws at you.

Another sport that gained popularity was football. In the early 1900’s this disregarded sport was deemed “meaningless.” However, by the 1950’s, this sport was one of the most famous of its kind, again showing that you can overcome anything, as long as you put effort and passion into it. Eventually, football went from a sport that was only played in High Schools to having its own professional league (The National Football League) and other minor semi-professional leagues. In 1957, the Woodbridge High School had a game, as documented by the *Independent Leader*. “Barrons to entertain undefeated Plainfield team Sunday.” (Independent Leader, October, 10, 1957 issue).

The last sport I would like to touch upon is baseball. This “All-American” sport has been both played and adored for many decades, even before the 20th century began. Woodbridge, in particular, was very involved with this sport, as the township had multiple minor leagues, as well as high school teams. Not only did the township participate, they also won and fought well. As stated in *Independent Reader*, “With three wins in a row to their credit, the Barron Pigskin Toters take on their most formidable foes of the season tomorrow, when they line up against Coach Frank McCarthy’s Ramblers at the Carteret Stadium.” (Independent Leader, October 10, 1942 issue) we can infer that Woodbridge High School’s team was exceptionally well. Also, an early issue of *The Leader Journal*, even claims the mayor to participate! “When Mayor August F. Greiner tosses out the first ball this Sunday afternoon at the Grove Street diamond, William “Monk” Messick’s American Legion baseball team will officially open the 1934 diamond season

in Woodbridge township." (Leader Journal, April 3, 1934) inclines on the fact of how well the "American Legion" baseball league was to be honored by the mayor at the time. However, Woodbridge High School didn't have prodigies as students, meaning that they *did* lose some games. One such loss is recorded in *Woodbridge Independent*, and is plainly written in the headlines, "*Woodbridge High School loses to Crawford.*" (Woodbridge Independent, March 21, 1919)

Moving away from the broad concept of sports and their teams, I'd also like to instill upon you a few facts about football Hall of Fame legend Lou Creekmur. Born in Hopelawn, New Jersey, in 1927, Lou Creekmur always had an interest in football. By the time he was in school, he always stood out on the field. Eventually, after graduating from Woodbridge High School in 1944, he pursued his lifelong passions. The summer after his graduation, he enrolled at the College of William and Mary (in Virginia), and remained a student there until his graduation in 1949. However, his education was halted in 1948 due to a "*stint in the U.S army from 1945-1946.*" (Woodbridge Township Tour Map of Historic Sites brochure) Towards the end of his college life, he was drafted by the Detroit Lions and Philadelphia Eagles, but he decided to first finish his education. Thanks to this choice, he soon earned and received a Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education and a Master's degree in education. However, his college years soon ended, and in 1950, he played primarily as tackle and offensive guard for the Lions. Creekmur won the sacred All-Pro honors seven times, and played in eight pro-bowls (similar the the Super Bowl). Over the course of about 10 years, the Lions won three championships. He retired at the end of the 1959 season, and years later in 1996, was voted in the Nation Football League Hall of Fame. Although he died in 2009, Creekmur's success and honor continues moving onward to this day.

After searching through newspapers from nearly one hundred years ago and reading about famous athletes from our very own Woodbridge Township, I appreciate how accepting and intact the town is, and has been, with sports. By athletes such as Lou Creekmur, and common civilians living around the area, being so willing to give all sports a chance, I strongly believe that Woodbridge's connection with sports is a truly inspirational moral. For example, in the early years of the 1900's, football was never acknowledged, however today, it seems to always be the topic of conversation and debate. This same concept applies to basketball, especially since it is now offered in gym classes and is available for middle schoolers to be on an official school team. This research has also been an eye-opener for me, because as my eyes scrolled through the pages of newspapers, thoughts scrolled through my mind. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that any community can grow and change, but with this, many things can still remain the same.