

Peoria Athletics in the 1960s

- In the 30s, 40s, and 50s the athletic teams at Peoria High School were successful with some championships but only on a sporadic basis. The reason was that they played big schools and small schools, as there weren't any organized classifications.
- The 1950s brought some changes in scheduling but the 1960s were when Peoria got classified into a conference and began playing schools much more their size and rivalries began.
- One big change was that girls were allowed to participate in archery and badminton and both teams attended the State Tournament as early as 1961. Peoria had some very good archers.
- The football program under Ray Mitokawa was a stable program with 7 or 8 wins almost every season. At the end of the 60s, there was a great rivalry with Agua Fria, where whoever won the game between these two schools advanced to the State Championship Bracket.
- The Panthers reached the finals twice during the 1960s in football. The first was in 1965. They won their conference by beating Agua Fria and then had to play the North Champion – Winslow, in Winslow in November. The only problem was that Winslow had a 50 game winning streak at home. They had not lost in 10 years in Winslow. Well, the Panthers made the 5-hour trip, as well as two student rooster buses, two parent buses, and a band bus. The final score Peoria 33 – Winslow 7 as 155-pound running back Larry Tate carried the ball over 30 times for 230 yards rushing. The defense shut the Bulldogs down and Peoria was on its way to play at ASU in the State Championship.
- In the State Championship, the Panthers played one of the best teams in Arizona football history. The Eloy team averaged over 220 pounds on the

offensive and defensive lines and had Art Malone and Paul Ray Powell in the backfield. Malone ran a 9.8 100 yard dash and went on to play at ASU and the Atlanta Falcons. Powell went on to play pro baseball with the Minnesota Twins. The Panthers held them to their lowest score of the season but were unable to win the game as they lost 27 -7.

- The second time the Panthers reached the State Championship was in 1968. After beating Agua Fria and winning their conference they played Snowflake at Glendale Community College and won 45-0. The team was lead by All-State quarterback Randy Holmes and running back Abby Romero. In the finals, they led at halftime but Coolidge rebounded in the second half and won the game by a score of 27 – 20.
- In basketball veteran coach Barry Arney had some fabulous teams in 1964,1965, 1968, and 1969. In 1964 the team was led by seniors John Rowenhorst, Fred Miller, Ralph Castro. David Murillo and Richard Gutierrez. The outstanding juniors were Ken Holmes and Buz Turner. The team compiled an 18-9 record and went on to the State Championship Tournament. In 1965 the team was 18-9 against one of the toughest schedules in the state. The Panthers weren't big but they could shoot and were led by Buz Turner, Jack Snyder, Jim Montoya, Ken Holmes, and Earl Donahue. Agua Fria had a front line that stood 6'8", 6'7", and 6'6" tall while the tallest Panther was 6'3". Every time they played Agua Fria it was a classic. The Panthers beat the Owls in the A North Tournament for the championship but lost to them in the State Tournament.
- In 1968 and 1969 The Panthers were led by All-State Basketball players Randy Holmes and Bill Thompson. Andy Heinz in 1968 was also an outstanding basketball player. In 1968 the Panthers won the conference but did not place in the state. In 1969 the Panthers were ranked as the number one team in the state for most of the year. They did reach the finals at Veterans Memorial Coliseum where they experienced their coldest shooting night of the season and lost to State Champion Dysart by two points.

- **The Panthers were competitive in other sports but the two dominant sports of the decade were football and basketball.**
- **Also important for the sports program was the beginning in 1967 of the wrestling program by Joe Hunter. In 1968 the Peoria Invitational occurred for the first time. It has been going for over 50 years.**

