MOYES MEMORIES PUBLISHED STORIES

It was an easy call to write my first Moyes’ Memories story on Paul Bard. I was deeply moved while attending his funeral after he passed away from cancer in 2003. I had met Paul on numerous occasions as he was a first cousin to my wife Mary. Paul was so gracious to show me his enormous baseball card collection that he had accrued over the years. Bard was a very humble man and when I mentioned he should be in the Muskegon Area Hall of Fame he was vehement in stating that he was not remotely qualified to earn a berth in the hall. I, of course, disagreed and I have hopes long after his passing that the board of the MAHOF will seriously consider his induction.

**Here is my story of Paul Bard:**

Perhaps legendary basketball coach and author Claire Bee had Muskegon's Paul Bard in mind when he originated his classic literary sports hero, Chip Hilton, back in the late 1940's.

The similarities between Bard and Hilton are eerily similar. However, there was one major difference. Chip Hilton "began" his career following World War II. Bard's career, like many of his contemporaries, saw their athletic careers halted because of the Great War.

Although Hilton always seemed to win the "Big One," Bard just missed on a couple of occasions from also having a Hollywood type ending. After posting a great junior season for the 1940 Big Reds, Bard was poised to lead Muskegon to another mythical state football crown in 1941. Muskegon romped through their first four games, giving up nary a point before misfortune fell on Coach Leo Redmond's squad. Paul Bard suffered a broken wrist in a victory over Benton Harbor, and the Big Reds were never the same.

With their star player on the sidelines Muskegon lost two of their next four games. Broken wrist or not, Bard was determined to play in the season's final game against Muskegon Heights. After coaxing the team doctor to let him play Bard nearly single-handedly defeated the rival Tigers before another overflow crowd at Hackley Stadium.

With neither team able to run the ball coach Redmond turned to Bard to move the offense. A long 55-yard TD pass to Ray Carlson was called back due to a holding penalty or Muskegon would have had a commanding two-touchdown lead over the Heights. Bard pitched the pigskin for nearly two hundred yards, a statistic unheard back in the run conscious era of the early Forties.   
  
When basketball season rolled around Bard's heroics were almost even too surreal for Hollywood. Bard and his Big Reds moved all the way to the 1942 state finals (the last time Muskegon ever played for a state basketball championship). With but four seconds remaining at Michigan State's Jenison Fieldhouse the Big Reds trailed by two points and heavily favored Saginaw HAD THE BALL! Bard intercepted the inbound pass and fired a one hander from behind the mid court stripe that amazingly went in to send the game into overtime. Under today's rules Bard's clutch buzzer beater would have won the game as a three-point shot. A fairy-tail ending again eluded Bard and the Big Reds as Saginaw won in overtime.

Bard's play during the season and in the tournament placed him not only on the Detroit Free Press All-State team, but he was tabbed as the captain of the 1942 All State Dream team, symbolic of being named Mr. Basketball in the State of Michigan.

No such hard luck would befall Paul Bard on the baseball diamonds, however. Beginning with his first game during his junior year of 1941, when he no hit the Montague Wildcats, Bard would go on to have a high school baseball career that arguably was the best in state prep annals.

Thousands upon thousands of players have played the great game of baseball at the prep level in the state of Michigan. Sixty-one years after Paul Bard played his last game at Muskegon High his legacy has been restored. Miraculously enough Hall of Fame baseball coach Harry Potter's scorebook, found recently collecting dust in his daughter's (Ann Moore) attic, gives authenticity to Bard's achievements.

The Big Reds were a perfect 26 and 0 in 1941 & 42 and here is where Bard ranks in MHSAA history.

Career ERA (Earned Run Average): 0.76 No 3 All time.

Season (1942) ERA: 0.11 No 1 All Time.

Fewest walks Allowed in a Season: 5 in 1942 No. 1 All Time.

Fewest Wild Pitches Career: (0 in 120 innings) No. 1 All Time

Strikeouts in a Game: 20 No. 2 All time.

Assists by a Pitcher in a Game: 11 No. 1 All Time.

Bard also was the cleanup hitter for Muskegon and was a lofty slugger. In 1941 he posted a batting average of .524 and a slugging percentage of .881. For his two-year career (1940 batting stats are unavailable) Bard crushed the ball at a .439 clip. As a fielder Bard went through the two seasons without committing an error.

Bard followed his amazing high school career by posting very similar numbers while twirling in the very competitive Tri-State League. On Saturday, August 17, 1942, Bard hurled a 4-0 nine-inning shutout in a City League game.

In looking back this may have been a very poor decision on Bard's (or his coach's) part. Two days later a group of area Muskegon All Stars assembled to play the Detroit Tigers at Marsh Field. The Tigers absolutely "bombed" the outmatched area stars while only Paul Bard was able to slow down the heavy hitting Bengals. Pitching on but one day’s rest Bard allowed one run in his first inning of work and retired the side in order in his second and final inning pitched. What kind of impression might Bard have made on the Tiger brass if he was fully rested?

Bard enrolled at Western Michigan University in time for the fall football season of 1942. (Freshmen were eligible to play Varsity football in the War years.) The Broncos were coming off their first (and only) undefeated season from the 1941 campaign with many seasoned veterans returning. It took only a few short weeks before Western coaches did the unthinkable and replaced their veteran starting quarterback with Paul Bard.

With football being Bard's second-best sport at best, there can be little doubt that if Uncle Sam and his country didn't need his services during the War, Bard could very well have been the most decorated athlete in Western's history. But duty beckoned and in February 1943, less than a year after graduating from Muskegon High School, he entered the Armed Forces. Paul Bard served his country bravely, partaking in more than 35 combat sorties on the European front. Three years would elapse before Bard would ever again see the athletic playgrounds of America.

The War affected Bard as it did thousands of other brave Americans and certainly eroded his once mythical athletic abilities down to a mere mortal level. Former teammate and past MAHOF board member Ray Carlson had no doubts in Bard's abilities. "There is no question that World War II prevented Paul Bard from achieving his dream of being a Major League Baseball player." reminisced Carlson a few years back.

I remember how moved I was when I attended Paul Bard's funeral during the summer of 2003. It was a simple, but to me, a very inspirational tribute to a man who during his post-World War II life was known more as a successful schoolteacher, a youth football and baseball coach who would quietly go about his lifetime as a quintessential member of ‘The Greatest Generation.’ Paul Bard's successes on the athletic field even predated this ‘Ole Announcer's’ active days of following local sports.

His passing inspired me to visit our local library and peruse through microfilm of the Muskegon Chronicle to learn more about the athletic prowess of this former Muskegon star.

His funeral led me to thinking: "Does anybody know how great a man we are now laying to rest?" Now I know more about Paul Bard, and thankfully those of you who read this column, will feel the same way as I do.

Paul Bard was one of Muskegon's and America's finest.

The Bard name is still prominent in the Muskegon Area. Paul’s grandson Brandon is the current head coach of the Mona Shore baseball team while Paul is survived by his still spry 96-year-old bride Mary Ann.

*My next story recalled the early days of basketball, and particularly those antiquated gyms of yesteryear. The next story was from January of 2008:*

MOYES MEMORIES

**How the Game of Basketball Has Changed**

The game of basketball has changed immeasurably since this old hoopster tallied his first points while wearing the uniform of the North Muskegon JV team back in 1956. My basketball career could only go up following my freshman season of riding the pines more than a half century ago. My contribution to my JV teammates consisted of but one measly point, a free throw that I banked in off the wooden backboard in a forgettable game against the Hart Pirates.

What have perhaps changed the most over the years have been the venues. Also long gone are kneepads, short pants, the two-handed set shot, and the underhanded free throws, all associated with those old cracker box gymnasiums from the past.

Oh, how I remember some of those old cracker box antiquities that peppered our area in the 1940’s and 50’s. My least favorite venue was without a doubt at the old Scottville High School. They make postage stamps today bigger than the old Scottville gym. That gym was so tiny that the backboard at one end of this ‘splendid’ complex was affixed to the wall. Breakaway lay-ups could result in a nasty splat into a wall that was ‘protected’ by an inch-thick ugly grey wall cushion.

That was just one of the problems a visiting cager would face when the game started. The ceiling in this gym was only slightly higher than the ten-foot baskets. I’ll never forget my first two shots taken in my junior year in 1958. Neither shot ever reached the basket as my patented one hander’s hit the ceiling en route to what ‘surely’ would have been cinch two pointers. I’ll never forget the wonderful piece of advice I got from my coach as I forlornly looked to the bench. “Hey Moyes, just aim a little lower!” Gee, thanks coach!

I shouldn’t evoke so harshly on singling out only Scottville’s decrepit old gym. After all, my old alma mater’s gym in North Muskegon that featured fan shaped aluminum backboards wasn’t exactly another Madison Square Garden. Other ‘dandies’ in the days were numerous, but each possessed some character that is often lacking during our current era.

Quick now, name me the oldest gymnasium in our area that still is used for high school basketball games. Most people will be surprised when I say it is the Ray Cioe Gymnasium at Muskegon Catholic High School, first used for varsity basketball in 1955. However, the inaugural group of Crusader cagers had to pay their dues before moving into their current abode.

The first MCC class of 1954 was nothing but road warriors in their first year as a four-year school. The Green & Gold were riding a wave of unparallel accomplishment carried over from the previous year. Feeder schools St. Joseph & St. Mary’s ended the 1953 season with state finals appearances at MSU’s historic Jenison Fieldhouse.

Not only did the Crusaders have to play all their games away from the brand-new Crusader campus, but also coaches and players had to scramble to even find a practice facility. Recently I had a chance to chat with an early Crusader old-timer Dick Seymour. Dick is a brother of my former broadcasting partner George Seymour. “Many of our practices took place at the old CYO gym,” recalled Seymour. “It was not only small, but the floors had ripples and waves that made dribbling a basketball extremely difficult. Often, we would be practicing at one end while boxing legend Kenny Lane would be banging away at the punching bags at the other end. One day we may be at the CYO, and another day might find us practicing at the Salvation Army.”

The incredible success garnered by the 1954 Muskegon Heights state champs led to the erection of the CF Bolt gymnasium in time for the 1955-1956 season. Despite the dramatic increase in seating the CF Bolt complex still left many spectators locked out at the entrance as the Tigers routinely sold out many of their games. One doesn’t have to be an old timer like this reporter to remember the nuances at the Central Campus Stage gymnasium. When I was a youngster, I always viewed Muskegon’s b-ball facility as the cream of the crop.

It is nothing but a vacant lot now, but White Lake old-timers will surely remember the good times at the old Whitehall tannery. The gymnasium at the old tannery served for years as the site for all Whitehall, as well as Montague, varsity basketball games.

Shelby basketball fans have seen two new gymnasiums erected since Dave Whitsell first donned his Chuck Taylor canvas sneakers in the early 1950’s. The old Shelby gym featured a visiting locker room where one had to climb up some rickety stairs to change and shower after a tough game with the Tigers. There were bleachers on each side of the court that went about six rows deep while many of the Shelby students would sit on temporary bleachers erected on a stage at one end of building. Shelby’s old barn was an improvement over the Scottville beauty, but just barely.

There was one old-time player who had no quarrels with the old Shelby gymnasium, however. Montague’s 6’8 center Gerry Brown poured in 56 points in February of 1954 against the Shelby Tigers. Shelby sorely missed Whitsell, a future NFL great, who played very little due to an illness. Brown’s 56-point barrage still stands today as a Montague school record. Over the years Brown must have contemplated as to what “Could’ve.” Brown had a Shaquille O’Neil moment as he made just 8 of 22 free throws.

Another forgettable basketball ‘palace’ of the 1950’s was the home of the Coopersville Broncos. I had always thought that tile floors belonged in the kitchen or the basement, not used as a basketball surface as was the case in Coops town. It was better suited as an abode where 1953 Coopersville grad Del Shannon could practice with his guitar then serve as a basketball venue.

It didn’t take a great deal to make an impression on this old basketball buff back in the old days. I was always eager to make the trek to Fremont as the Packer gym had an attribute that was totally unheard of in my era: Glass backboards! Glass backboards were only seen on our 17” Motorola on Sunday afternoon while watching the NBA game of the week, usually from the Boston Garden.

By the time the middle 1960’s rolled around virtually all the gyms from the past couple of decades were but a distant memory. Virtually every school in this area had a new facility before we entered the decade of the 1970’s. The last school to erect a new facility was Muskegon High School, where the term “Fieldhouse’ would now replace the old ‘Gymnasium.’ It is hard to believe that the magnificent to this day Redmond-Potter Fieldhouse has now been with us since 1978.

Now only a handful of the gyms constructed in the late 1950’s and early 60’s exists today. And West Michigan Christian’s gym, used since the 1957-58 season, will soon be a distant memory. The Warriors are hopeful of moving into their new complex sometime before this year’s campaign draws to a close.

*Shortly after this story on the old gymnasiums I received a call from an ‘old timer’ who played in many of these facilities, Walter ‘Stretch’ Hansen. I was so intrigued by my conversation that I quickly accepted his request to visit him and his wife at their home in Twin Lakes where he generously shared many of his momentous and news clippings from his prep days at Hart High. Not only had I procured research for a story, but I had found a new friend.*

**Moyes’ Memories**

**Those old Hart Pirates from Yesteryear**

With the athletic teams from Hart currently experiencing another tough season, I thought it appropriate that I give some much-needed love to Hart. Many of our younger sports fans will probably find it difficult to believe that at one time the Pirates were an absolute sensation in basketball.

West Michigan Conference old-timers will certainly attest to Hart’s supremacy back in the 1940’s and early 1950’s. Beginning with the 1940 season and continuing through 1954 the Pirates captured eleven WMC championships. Included in this run was a pair of incredible winning streaks, a 32-game regular season effort from 1941 through 1943, and a lengthy stretch from 1952-54 where the Pirates strung together 29 straight wins in the formidable WMC.

Much of the credit for Hart’s success at the beginning of this magical run would go to local Hart dentist Henry Stevens. As a youth coach Dr. Stevens would tutor budding Pirate prospects before turning them over to High School coach Lawrence Decker. Buoyed with this head start from Stevens, Decker would fine-tune this group, beginning a dynasty that would last for the next fifteen years.

There was one big thorn in the Pirate’s side at the beginning of this incredible run ---- North Muskegon. Only a tough end of the season loss to NM in 1939 prevented the Pirates from winning yet another WMC crown.

Hart’s first contribution to the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame was Fred Stevens. Stevens, the first All-American baseball player at Western Michigan University would lead the Pirates to the WMC championship in 1940. Hart went 14-2, losing only one regular season game to archrival Shelby and a tournament battle with Grand Rapids Christian.

It was a trio of impressive sophomores who would make a huge impact on Hart’s good fortunes on the courts for the next three years. Walter Hansen, Stanley Kapulak, and Joe Mack would be the mainstays for the Pirate express from 1941 through 1943.

It was a rocky start for the youngsters as the 1940-41 season got underway however, as the jittery Pirates dropped their first three games of the season. From that point on, until this trio played their last games for the Pirates in 1943, Hart would compile an enviable regular season record of 51 wins against but two defeats.

After posting nine straight wins in 1941 the Pirates were dealt a stunning loss by their arch nemesis, North Muskegon, in district Class C play. The Pirates put together a perfect 15-0 season the following year before they were again shocked by a rugged North Muskegon team that finished the regular season with less than a .500 record. Ken Potter, and his nephew Don Bowen, stalwarts of a Norsemen football team that was undefeated, untied, and unscored upon, led NM to a 27-25 upset.

Known throughout West Michigan as the Hart ‘Skyscrapers’ the Pirates would only experience one bump in the road en route to another near perfect season in 1943. The Pirates would complete their year by nearly doubling the total scores versus their competition, amassing 741 points while limiting their opponents to 373.

The Pirates of ‘43’ were tall even for today’s standards. The lineup consisted of 6’6 Stan Kapulak, 6’6 Walter ‘Stretch’ Hansen, 6’2 Joe Mack, 6’1 Lyle Burmeister, and the only underclassmen on the starting five, 5’11 Stanley Riley.

The Pirates did survive one real scare in their third game of the season. Whitehall put up a great fight at the White Lake Tannery gymnasium before falling to the Pirates by one slim point, 30-29. With the game all knotted up at 29-29, a rare double foul was called in the final seconds of play on Hart’s Joe Mack and Whitehall guard Jim Bayne. Mack, father of future Mona Shores basketball coach Mike Mack, made good on his attempt while Bayne missed.

Much more serious misfortune would befall Bayne after he entered the armed services to fight for our country’s freedom in World War II. Bayne would give the ultimate sacrifice as he tragically lost his life in this most brutal of wars.

Now, back to that bump in the road. For those who were so kind to read my last column in this newspaper, emphasizing the old band box gymnasiums, one would not be surprised to find that Hart’s only loss on the season would take place in Scottville’s den of inequity.

Guided by first year coach Ivan Tillotson, Scottville rode the shoulders of burly George Hankwitz to a 31-25 upset victory over the heavily favored Pirates. Tillotson and Hankwitz would each father sons who would be charter members in the Mason County Sports Hall of Fame (Pete Tillotson and Mike Hankwitz).

And how would these two teams fare when they next faced each other in the last scheduled game of the 1943 season? Incredulously, talk about paybacks, Hart buried the Spartans by the score of 80 to 10! When I recently went to interview Stretch Hansen for this story, Hansen was very kind in his praise of the Scottville team. “In the first game, give credit to Scottville, they played great, and we couldn’t stop George Hankwitz,” said Hansen. “OK, I’ve played at Scottville, but how do you explain the 70-point blowout when you played again at Hart,” I asked of Hansen.

“For one thing, they didn’t have Hankwitz,” Hansen explained. “He had turned 20 years of age, making him ineligible, before we would again play Scottville and we had matured as a team.” A few days later these two teams matched up again in the district tournament with a slightly less angry Pirate team winning by a more conservative 30-point margin. As fate would dictate, the Hart Pirate team of 1943, arguably the school’s best in history, would win their next tournament game -- yet fail to advance.

World War II was cruel, not only on the battlefields, but also dealt hardships and personal sacrifices on the home front. After a convincing twenty-point victory in the district finals over Newaygo, the season was over, for not only Hart, but also all district champions throughout the entire state of Michigan. The school year of 1942-43 would prove to be the only year in which state championships were not held. Many items were carefully rationed to US citizens at this time, including gasoline where one could only purchase but three gallons a week!

One can only speculate as to what could have been for this Pirate powerhouse if a state basketball championship could have been staged in 1943.

“I’m almost sure we could have done it, said a modest Stretch Hansen”, nearly 66 years later. “We were really starting to score more, and we were controlling the boards. And then the season was just shut down,” mused a pondering Hansen.

On July 2nd, 1943, just a few weeks after commencement ceremonies were held at Hart High School, all four senior starters from this great Hart team, left home for Fort Custer in Battle Creek and induction into the armed service. An unknown and perhaps a deadly future awaited the Pirate foursome of Stretch Hansen, Stan Kapulak, Joe Mack, and Lyle Burmeister.

“We knew, we were going, and we all wanted to go together. It was our turn to go, and we couldn’t wait. It wasn’t just us, everybody wanted to go,” said Hansen.

What Hansen treasures most from this great team were not just the many victories but also “the everlasting friendships we developed with a lot of guys we played against. “For Hansen and Kapulak their skills nearly propelled these twin towers into the professional ranks. Kapulak would follow up his military career with a brief stint in the pro ranks with the Detroit Gems.

Hansen would play many years of semi-pro basketball following his service obligation. In a 1945 championship game matching the best of USA servicemen in Manila, Hansen had a game high 23 points. Stretch’s 4025 Signal Corp team was edged out by 2 points by a team that was led by Bob Davies, an All-America at Seton Hall who would go on to have a Hall of Fame career in the NBA.

The 84 years young Hansen is still active to this day in helping area basketball players develop their post skills. Hansen could be found daily during the basketball season trying to develop another “Stetch Hansen” at Holton High School.

*A teammate on that powerful Pirate team from the 1942-43 season, Joe Mack, is the father of former Mona Shores basketball coach Mike Mack, the current president of the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame. While residing in Traverse City I worked for many years with one other former Pirate ace, Lyle Burmiester. Tom Kendra mentioned earlier in this book that I had a penchant for writing stories that were much too long to fit into the printed edition, and certainly was spot on with my story on Hart’s basketball fortunes from many decades earlier as I quickly added a sequel to the original story:*

**Part 2**

Pirate success on the hardwoods did not diminish in the impending years following the 1943 season. Hart would sandwich a WMC championship in 1946 between Montague titles in 1944-45 and Whitehall in 1947. From 1948 through 1954 Hart would win outright every WMC championship but one. The exception was in 1951 when North Muskegon and Shelby would share honors.

Kenneth Swanson took over the head coaching duties in 1948. Pirate fortunes haven’t been the same since Swanson’s retirement following the 1954 season.

This author will always remember the pasting the Pirates delivered to my beloved Norsemen midway through the 1948 campaign. Perhaps seeking revenge on a pair of upset defeats earned by the Norse in the early 1940’s, coach Swanson’s sharpshooters put on a display that closely earmarked their 80-10 thrashing of Scottville in 1943.

The score at halftime at Hart’s state of the art for the era gymnasium read Hart 33 North Muskegon 0. Only a field goal with two minutes remaining by Dick Schalk got the Norsemen on the board as the third quarter ended with the Pirates on top 47-2. With subs from Hart swarming the floor for the final period the Norsemen were only able to net but nine points in a 59-9 loss to the Pirates.

Once again it was a one-point loss to Scottviile, at, of course, Scottville, that deprived Hart from running the table in the WMC. After winning their district, the Pirate’s 1948 season ended when they fell to an undefeated Grant team.

The Pirate team from 1949 made the deepest run in school history. Led by Pirate cage legend Ben Leisberg, Hart advanced all the way to the state semi-finals before falling short to the eventual state Class ‘C’ champs from Kalamazoo St. Augustine.

Included among Hart’s victims on their road to East Lansing was a 36-34 regional conquest of perennial power East Grand Rapids. Dick Curtis had a huge game for the victors with 17 points in the Pirate upset.

Leisburg, still revered today by Hart Old timers led the Pirates, as well as the WMC, in scoring. In a 55-38 route of Houghton Lake in the quarterfinals, Leisberg pumped in a school record 28 points, 21 in the first half to send the Pirates to the final four in East Lansing.

It took the eventual state champs from Kalamazoo St. Augustine to bring the storybook Pirate season to a close in a semi-final contest at Michigan State College.

Although weakened severely with key graduation personnel in 1950, the Pirates still had enough ammunition to win yet another WMC crown. Their hopes for another district title ended when a surprising Hesperia team upset Hart.

1951 would prove to be the only Ken Swanson coached team not to walk off with the winning trophy in the WMC. Shelby and North Muskegon would share the honors; the only conference title North Muskegon would earn between 1939 and 1959.

Yet another great Pirate team was the 1952 quintet. Basketball was never better for Pirate fans. Not only did the Varsity post a perfect 15-0 season but their Junior Varsity also spoiled Hart rooters by also going undefeated.

Making the move up to Class B the undefeated Pirates edged powerful Ludington 39-35 in a district first round match-up. The following season the Pete Tillotson led Orioles would advance all the way to the Class B championship game.

Hart was just over the limit in students to play in Class C and was forced to showcase their talents against much bigger Class B opponents. After defeating Fremont to win the district championship the Pirates headed to Mt. Pleasant to take on the Oilers at nearby Central Michigan University. Despite an incredibly frigid 2 for 28 shooting percentage from the field, the Pirates nearly pulled off an incredible comeback victory over Mt. Pleasant.

Inexplicably, the game only lasted 30 of the 32 minutes to further frustrate the Pirate comeback effort. The first two quarters were seven-minute periods instead of the regulation eight due to a faulty timing clock.

Coach Swanson made a protest to officials at the end of the half and again at the end of the game that saw Mt. Pleasant on the front end of a narrow 53-50 score. CMU officials placed a call to the MHSAA office in East Lansing but Hart’s plea to hard-crusted MHSAA director Charles Forsythe fell on deaf ears as Hart was denied playing an additional two minutes.

Hart continued their winning ways again in 1953. The Pirates earned the title by twice nipping my ole alma mater in close contests to win the crown. North Muskegon & Hart again met in the first round of the Class B districts with the Pirates again punishing the Norsemen with a slim 72-69 victory.

It looked like the Norse would prevail when Tom Arntz put the Norse in front 69-68 by cashing in a field goal with but 10 seconds left. However, Buzz Stevens, fouled with seconds remaining, coolly canned two free throws to again send a frustrated Norse team to the showers.

It took a great Ludington team, led by future U-M great Pete Tillotson, to end another great season for the Pirates in the district championship game. And how good was this Ludington team? The Orioles made it all the way to the Class B championship game where they placed second to St. Joseph.

The 1954 season would mark an end to the incredible 15-year run for Hart basketball. After copping their eleventh WMC title in 15 years the Pirates had another long streak come to an end. After handing North Muskegon many heart-breaking losses over a full decade it was payback time for the Norsemen at their cozy gymnasium.

After dropping twelve of their last thirteen games to the Pirates the Norsemen snapped Hart’s 29 game winning streak in the WMC with a convincing 84-69 victory. Walt Busker with 30 points, was joined in double figure scoring by Norse stalwarts, Tom Arntz, Gordon Odell and Dave Bliss.

One of Hart’s all-time great athletes led the way in a losing cause for the Pirates. Terry Mack, who would patrol center field in future years for the Western Michigan Broncos, had 25 points in a losing cause for the Pirates. In the first match up between these two rivals, Hart center Gary Tubbs tallied 35 points. In this rematch the Norse defense collapsed on the Pirate center and held him to nine points.

Only once over the next fifty-five years would the Pirates excite their proud community as they did from 1940-1954. A year after their archrivals from Shelby won back-to-back state titles in 1971-72, as well as break the Pirate record of 29 straight WMC wins, the Pirates would win a regional championship. Their season ended with a quarterfinal loss to Saginaw St. Stephens.

Hart faithful, who have struggled this year watching their girls and boys team go winless in conference play, wistfully hope that someday history will repeat, and the Hart Pirates will return to the top of the ladder in basketball.

*I always felt that it was my duty to pay tribute to a great athlete who is no longer with us. I well remember how often my late colleague, and good friend, Mart Tardani would often pen a story after one of our area’s finest had passed. The following is a story I wrote early into my Moyes’ Memories columns, a tribute to one of my boyhood idols, who later became a very dear friend. I was so proud and humbled to deliver a eulogy at Bill Duplissis’ funeral in 2009.*

**A Farwell to Bill Duplissis**

By Jim Moyes

It is with the deepest of regrets to learn the passing of my boyhood idol this past weekend with the death of Bill Duplissis. “Dupe’ was a phenomenal three sport star at North Muskegon from 1948-51 where he was instrumental in leading the Norsemen to many West Michigan Conference titles.

Early team photos of North Muskegon basketball squads first found Duplissis as the team manager where he developed the shooting skill that he would ultimately use to set NM scoring records. Duplissis was more than a record setting basketball player, however.

He capped his senior season at North Muskegon by leading his teams to conference championships in three sports. In the fall of 1951 Duplissis quarterbacked the Norsemen to the WMC championship in football. My father, Paul Moyes, was the coach of the Norsemen football and baseball teams during the Duplissis era.

Dad had to do a little cajoling with Dupe’s parents to obtain his services for his senior year. Fearful that their youngest son might have a serious knee injury, like Bill’s older brother Bob’s setback in 1946, Doctor and Libby Duplissis were hesitant to see their son play football.

Thankfully, for Norse followers, Bill became the quarterback, with explicit instructions from my father not to carry the ball. In 1951 the smooth shooting Duplissis would use his patented one-hand set shot to propel the Norsemen to a share of the West Michigan Conference basketball championship. It was in baseball, however, where Duplissis truly excelled. Bill was a four-year starter on the NM baseball team as a power-hitting catcher.

It was in 1949 when the Norsemen began a streak where they would win five consecutive West Michigan Conference baseball titles. The 1950 and 51 seasons would prove to be the best years in NM baseball history. The Norsemen of the early 1950’s did not have a schedule full of cupcakes to pad their stats. The Norse would go undefeated in the tough WMC conference in those two years with Duplissis the big gun.

In 1951 the Norsemen’s non-conference schedule included a couple of powerhouse teams in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights. The Norsemen defeated the Heights for the first time in school history, with their only defeats coming at the hands of Muskegon. Muskegon would cap their undefeated season in 1951 by winning the state baseball championship in Battle Creek.

In the first game of a double header against Scottville in 1951, Duplissis lashed out five hits, including three doubles and a triple. In the nightcap ‘Dupe’ traded in his catching equipment for a pitcher’s glove and proceeded to spin a one-hit shutout. As a catcher Duplissis had few peers in his era. I was fortunate to often serve as the batboy for the Norsemen at this time and I always was in awe of Bill’s strong throwing arm.

Recently I had a conversation with my boyhood idol, and I asked him: “did anybody ever steal a base on you.” With a sheepish proud grin Duplissis quickly replied: “Never.”

Bill has been in poor health for the past few years. However, he has served faithfully on the Board of Directors for the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame. Those of you who have visited the LC Walker Arena surely have admired the plaques and memorabilia honoring our inductees. Most of these displays can be attributed to the work of Bill Duplissis and his long-time buddy Marc Okkonen.

Last May I saw ‘Dupe’ shortly before I was to give out the Moyes Award at North Muskegon. And no, this award is certainly not named after this reporter, but after my father Paul and brother Tom, who played a much bigger role in NM sports history than I. Last spring the Norsemen baseball team was on a run that would propel them to the state semi-finals in baseball.

Bill was in attendance in support of a grandson who was a graduating 2008 senior at NMHS. I was so proud to acknowledge Bill’s presence to the audience. I was quick to point out that we are honored to have in attendance, in my humble opinion, NM’s all-time best baseball player.

I can remember when uniforms were issued prior to the Junior Varsity basketball season back in 1955. I asked for the jersey that had number 24 on the front and back. It was a little too baggy at the time for a then slender 5’0 JV baller. When the coach asked me why in the world would I want to wear this oversized jersey, my response was simple: “Because that was Dupey’s number?” I’ll miss ya Dupe, and thanks for the memories.

*As the 2009 basketball came to its conclusion it was now time to turn to the spring. For many years I had served as the PA announcer at many of our local track meets ranging from the Greater Muskegon Track Championships, WMC conference and others. I had kept track of as many school records for area athletes as possible. I had these records close at hand when I was on the call so I could inform the fans that he or she had just broken their school record. However, it intrigued me as to how many of those school records were still in existence over the years. Hence, the following story:*

**Bigger, Stronger, Faster**

By Jim Moyes ([jimmoyes@aol.com](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com))

Its old news that today’s athletes are bigger, stronger, and faster than the jocks that I grew up with back in the 1950’s. Recently I was browsing through an old program from the Notre Dame-Michigan State football game from the 1952 season and I was amazed at how small most of these gridders were from this era.

Not one backfield performer from either team tipped the scales above 200 pounds. The heaviest player on the field for The Fighting Irish was Art Hunter, who weighed at 221 pounds. Many of today’s teams have water boys bigger than Hunter.

The Spartans offensive line did not field a starter who weighed more than 205 pounds. Two of which had Muskegon connections, Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Famers Paul Dekker and Jim Neal. The ‘pony’ backfield Of Tommy Yewcik, Evan Slonek, Billy Wells and Don McAuliffe may not have measured up in the weight department with your average high school Junior Varsity team of today’s generation.

And this wasn’t a pair of sub-par teams by any stretch of the imagination. When these two football powers clashed at Michigan State’s Macklin Stadium in Mid-November of 1952, Notre Dame had lost but one game, while the Spartans were a perfect 7-0. Michigan State ‘College’ would finish the season as the NCAA football champions.

I guess what I am alluding to is how much bigger would those players have been if they had been exposed to today’s much-advanced training programs? Weight rooms from a half-century ago were a rare sight. My only image of weights I can remember from the 1950’s was an advertisement at the back of The Sporting News that featured a photo of muscle man Charles Atlas lifting a set of bar bells.

Many coaches from years back were concerned that lifting too many weights would make one muscle bound and take away one’s flexibility. Very little thought and planning went into a strict diet plan, and I will not bring up the dreaded ‘S’ word.

With all the advantages that our modern day’s athletes have over the Old-timers from yesteryear, then why in the world do we still have so many old-time track records in existence? Let’s review some of those marks from days of yore that still adorn those old track record boards that are affixed in local gymnasiums.

Two events that make up the sport of track and field clearly stand out, the long jump and shot put. There is one area high school mark that has survived for more than a century. And what an appropriate name for this record setter, -- Will Runner. At the 1908 University of Michigan Invitational, Runner was the states’ best in the discus, but it was his third-place finish in the broad jump (since renamed long jump in 1965) that deserves special mention.

Runner was credited with a jump of 21’7 “, the same distance accredited to Roger Hawkins of Detroit University School. Runner lost the coin flip and had to settle for third place. The second-place medal went to Hawkins with the distance inscribed on the back of the medal; a medal that is on display in the trophy case at is what is now Grosse Pointe University School. Until proven otherwise, this is the oldest record for a Michigan High School track event still standing.

Just seven miles to the north of Shelby, Swede Shogren’s near identical jump of 21’7 in 1928 has outlasted the many hundreds of athletes that have worn the red & white colors of Hart High School.

Whitehall has produced several great track stars over the years, but nobody has been able to top the 21’ 11 ½ effort of Osie Rostick back in 1952. It wasn’t until the start of the 21st century before Oakridge’s state long jump champion, Jeff Bowen, would break Rostick’s long-standing West Michigan Conference record from the early fifties.

Another former athlete with ‘hops’ from long ago who has a mark still emblazoned on his school’s record board is Ludington’s Junior Sielstra. Nary an Oriole has come close to removing Sielstra’s 22’ 11 ½ leap from 1951 from the record books. Sielstra was no one shot wonder, however, as he would win this event while competing for the University of Michigan at the 1955 Big Ten championships.

The best all time mark is this event, at least in this author’s opinion, is Mac Hunter’s prodigious leap of 23’ 3 back in 1958. Muskegon Catholic’s Corky Wilkins eclipsed the Muskegon Heights speedster’s mark by a scant quarter of an inch some 20 years later. Wilkins would be the first to tell you that he was aided by gale force winds at his back that exceeded 20 MPH. Hunter and Wilkins each had fine collegiate careers; Hunter at the U-M, while Wilkins was a swift 400-meter runner at MSU.

There is one other old-timer worth special mention. Fred Bouwman, although his record no longer stands as a Fremont school record, could lay claim as the best long jumper this area has ever produced. His 1942 jump of 21’7 lasted more than 60 years at Fremont.

In 1944 Bouwman won the Indoor & outdoor IC4A long jump event while competing for the US Naval Academy. He missed by less than two inches of winning the National AAU outdoors title. Bouwman leaped 23’ 11 ¼ in again winning the prestigious IC4A meet at Madison Square Garden in 1945.

I’ve briefly covered an event that requires speed to become most proficient in their event. Now let me discus an event that is associated with strength: the shot put.

Of the multitudes of great athletes that have performed here in the Muskegon area, it may come as a surprise to many that most of the old shot-put records have remained unscathed over the years.

No school can boast of tradition the likes of Muskegon High School. Yet Joel Boyden still holds the best mark posted by a Big Red, an effort of 57’0 that set a state Class A record back in 1954.

Nearly a half century has passed since Bill Swingle heaved the 12-pound ball 57’4 at the 1960 state Class A finals. Swingle, who would start at fullback for coach Ara Persegian’s highly rated Northwestern Wildcats in the early 1960’s, still sits atop the leader board at Grand Haven High School.

Yet another local school that has produced more than their fair share of outstanding athletes is Muskegon Catholic. Yet, Joe Connell still has the school record, a mark of 57’0 set back in 1969.

One mark that has fallen in recent years was Tom Johnson’s school record in the shot put at Muskegon Heights. At the 1948 state class A championships at Michigan State College, Johnson set an all-time state record with a throw of 54’4 ¾ inches.

Unfortunately for the former Green Bay Packer, his record would last but a few short minutes. Future Spartan All-American football star Bob Carey of Charlevoix, competing in the Class C finals, would surpass Johnson’s record by just three inches, a record that would stand until Boyden’s feat in 1954.

Long ago inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame, Johnson would not have his Muskegon Heights record fall until Corey Smith broke the 60-foot barrier in 1995.

Admittedly, interest in Track & Field has taken a big nose-dive in recent years, due in most part to the huge proliferation of spring sports. For many years Track & Field was the only sport offered by area high schools as a spring sport. Even baseball, our nation’s pastime, wasn’t offered as a spring sport at Muskegon High until 1937.

As a proud alumnus of North Muskegon, I would like to make obvious my NM prejudice by pointing out that Muskegon’s first baseball game resulted in an 8-0 defeat handed to them by my alma mater. Walt Bergen, who had a try out at Comiskey Park with the White Sox, hurled a two-hitter for the Norse with Bob Raddatz supplying the offensive punch with a pair of two-run doubles.

Perhaps some of the above-mentioned records might have since fallen by the wayside if our area athletes would have chosen track over another spring sport. Or-- maybe not. I suspect, however, if the old timers would have had the much-improved training methods enjoyed by our current youths, they may have put some of these records out of reach.

And should I point out some of the many sprint records that are still standing? Why don’t I leave this for another chapter of Moyes’ memories sometime down the road.

*There have been numerous changes made in the great game of football over the years. The most obvious change has been with the offense. Long gone is the old Single Wing formation, the tight T, and even the I formation has for the most part is now a thing of the past. Virtually all current teams now employ the ‘pistol’ formation, which can be proudly traced back to our own Tony Annese. Yet another major change in styles from yesteryear was the emergence of the soccer style kickers. This change is the major subject of this story from 2009:*

**Whatever happened to the old-style kickers?**

By Jim Moyes ([jimmoyes@aol.com](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com))

The great game of football has changed immeasurably over the years. I used to sit at our dining room table back in the 1940’s and observe my father diagram plays he thought might prove successful against his next opponent. My father, Paul Moyes, was the head football coach, first at Haslett, and later at North Muskegon until illness forced him to retire following the 1950 season.

This was an era when weight rooms were non-existent and coaching staffs, at best, had but one assistant coach. Missing were DVD films of your next opponent, spread formations, I formations, three hundred-pound linemen, artificial surfaces, glitzy scoreboards, and—the gist for this column, soccer style kickers.

One major change from then until now has resulted in a huge improvement in the kicking game. The emphasis on kicking has exploded since Pete Gogolak, a native of Hungary, burst upon the scene back in the 1960’s. Gogolak, while playing for Cornell, stunned the football traditionalists when he booted a 41-yard field goal using the side-winding style employed by all of today’s soccer style specialists.

Drafted by the Buffalo Bills of the American Football League, Gogolak was one of the first to bolt to the National Football League and was one of the prime factors in the merger between the two leagues. Signed by the New York Giants after the Giants had witnessed their struggling rookie kicker Bob Timberlake miss his thirteenth straight field goal attempt, the foreign-born Hungarian remains today the leading scorer in New York Giants history.

Ironically, Timberlake was signed after performing the kicking chores at the University of Michigan. When Mike Lantry was ‘wide right’ in the Big Ten championship clash versus Ohio State in 1974, never again would a kicker use the ‘old toe’s first’ style for the Wolverines.

Perhaps the only bright spot for our beleaguered Detroit Lions over recent years has been the kicking expertise of Jason Hansen. Arguably, none of the old-time Lions could hold a candle to Hanson in the kicking department. However, Hansen could not run like Doak Walker, tackle like Wayne Walker, nor block like Jim Martin. The Walkers and Martin not only carried out all the kicking duties but also were All Pro performers as position players.

It was a rarity when a kicker or punter did not play an additional position during the 1950’s. One of my favorite Lion players of all time was Yale Lary.

Not only did Lary take on all the punting duties during the golden era of Lion football, but Lary was also an All-Pro defensive back. Do you think Lary was given a double salary for his yeoman like duties? I think not!

There is now an award given out yearly to the nation’s outstanding college kicker. It is named after Lou “The Toe” Groza, a domineering kicker from the old Cleveland Browns. Groza is still the franchise leading all-time scorer for the Browns but what separates Groza from today’s kicker was his versatility. In addition to his legendary straight-ahead kicking skills, Brown was named All-Pro for six NFL seasons as an offensive tackle!

Often the outcome of the current era’s games is determined by last minute field goals by soccer style kickers who never see the playing field other than when a kick is called for. This was not the case in pre soccer style days from years ago.

Today’s soccer style kicking specialists have generally made conversions following a touchdown an automatic point. However, the making, or missing, of an extra point was often the deciding margin of a closely played game in the pre-Gogolak era.

What was a real rarity in the Pioneer Days of football was winning a game via a made kick. And how rare was it to make a field goal during the 1920’s and 30’s?

My research has found only three field goals made by Muskegon, or their opponent, from 1924 until possibly into the 1970’s, a span of approximately fifty years!

Two of those made field goals had a direct influence on Muskegon winning, or losing, a mythical state football championship. In November of 1925 the Big Reds were denied a perfect season in Leo Redmond’s first year at the helm when a Grand Rapids Union player by the last name of Parcasa (nobody seemingly had a first names in game write-ups from this era), drop-kicked a 29-yard field goal with only seconds left. This was the only score for the entire game as Muskegon fell to Union 3-0.

Redemption was made for coach Redmond a dozen years later when little Rudy Kolenic had a day he never forgot. Kolenic set the tone for a thrilling finish when he returned a punt 72 yards in the opening minutes of play against Kalamazoo Central.

This game was a battle that pitted two very evenly matched foes. The Kazoo Maroon Giants were led by versatile running back Neil Berry. Berry would later play six years for my beloved Detroit Tigers in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s as a utility infielder.

The game was knotted up at 13-13 when very late in the contest the Big Reds drive had stalled at the Kalamazoo 24-yard line. The Big Reds were faced with a major decision as they were looking at fourth and long and less then 30 seconds left to be played.

Center Charlie Johnson delivered a perfect snap to the Big Red holder, future World War II hero and Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Famer Ira Kepford. Kolenic did the rest, and his field goal attempt was perfect. The 16-13 victory kept the Big Reds undefeated, and they would finish the season as the State Class A Champs.

Can somebody tell me the next time Muskegon would make a field goal over the ensuing years? It may very well have not happened until as late as the 1980’s. More than 50 years’ after Kolenic’s heroics, a 37-yard field goal by the Big Red’s Rick Smith would prove to be the margin of victory in Muskegon’s 16-13 win at the 1989 state Class A state final game in the Pontiac Silverdome.

Today we take almost for granted that today’s ‘specialist’ kickers will add a point following a touchdown. But not always. Muskegon Big Red followers will long remember a trio of missed extra points that were very instrumental in winning, or losing, a state championship.

Two of those missed extra points proved costly. In my first-year broadcasting high school football on the local scene back in 1976 a missed extra point doomed the Big Reds. Muskegon was undefeated after their first five games when they faced Alpena in game number six at Hackley Stadium.

After regulation the game was tied at 7-7 and the Big Reds were entering their first overtime game in school history. Alpena scored first in OT and were successful on their point after try. John Brown raced around end on the very first play in overtime to draw Muskegon within one. The extra point attempt to send the game into another OT sailed wide and Muskegon, although finishing with a fine 8-1 record, was denied an opportunity to qualify for the playoffs. Muskegon fans would have to wait another nine years.

Fate was against the Big Reds again following an undefeated season in 1990. The defending Class A champs just needed to make their extra point in the first overtime against Saginaw to advance to the next round. The kick was missed, and Saginaw would go on to win against a Muskegon team that head coach Dave Taylor felt might have been his most talented.

On the plus side it looked mighty gloomy for the Big Reds in a Regional Championship game with Bay City Western in 2004. Muskegon had seen a 21-7 lead reduced to a single point when the home-town Bay City eleven scored a TD with little time remaining in the contest.

Momentum was surely on Bay City’s side, as overtime appeared all but certain. However, the normally reliable Bay City kicker missed the conversion and brought a sudden hush to the exuberant spectators. Following that miss the Big Reds would win the first of three state titles earned during the Tony Annese era.

For this ‘ole announcer’ my two favorite field goals were made years ago by a pair of classical style kickers. Dave Kaiser’s 41-yard field goal with seven seconds left gave Michigan State a 17-14 win over UCLA in the 1956 Rose Bowl.

On the home front I will never forget Sam Parker booting a field goal with just seconds left to send North Muskegon to their first, and only, appearance in the state football finals. After missing an earlier extra point, Parker more than atoned for his miss as his field goal gave my alma mater a breathtaking 9-7 win over Iron Mountain.

And what did Kaiser and Parker have in common with their field goal triumphs? They would be the only field goals made in their football careers.

**Moyes’s Memories**

**The ‘Ole Announcer’ Picks his all-Time Baseball Teams**

Most, if not all my old-time pals, can quickly point out as to what is their favorite sport. I have always enjoyed calling high school football and basketball games over the years, as well as working as the PA announcer at many of our local track meets.

However, baseball as always been at the top of this ole announcers list, and yet, in my forty plus years of broadcasting high school sports I am still wishfully hoping to call my first baseball game on the radio.

I, like most of my contemporaries, inherited my love for the national pastime from my father, Paul Moyes. Dad, a former starting third baseman for Michigan State College in the 1930’s, was the coach of the North Muskegon High School football and baseball teams while I was a youngster back in the 1940’s.

There was no bigger thrill for this wide-eyed youngster than being the bat boy for the Norsemen back in the era when all bats were made from wood, batting helmets were non-existent, and players would leave their gloves on the field during their time at bat.

I learned how to play the game in my early years from Dad, and then after he became ill, it was Little League guru Lyle Moran who helped me, along with hundreds of other Northside youths, in learning the ins and outs of this great game.

How fortunate I was in the early 1990’s to be asked by current Mona Shores baseball coach Walt Gawkowski to be his assistant while my son Paul was on the NM team. Although my son graduated from NM in 1993, I was thrilled to stay on as Walt’s assistant for many more years. I really thought when I first hooked up with Coach Gawkowski that I knew all there was to know about this great sport.

Was I mistaken! Sitting on the bench next to Walt was like learning the nuances of baseball all over again. How fortunate this city is to have a man like Walt Gawkowski teaching our youngsters to play the game the right way. My summers for the past few years have been spent in the Milwaukee area. My stepson keeps me close to baseball by having me serve as ‘The Don Zimmer’ of the Brookfield Bulldogs, a U11 little league team in which he serves as the manager. There is one thing that has remained unchanged over the years—my coaching salary.

I only wish our area baseball teams could have fared better over the years at the state level. Since the inception of a state tournament in 1971 to determine a baseball state champ, the Greater Muskegon area has only produced one state champion (West Michigan Christian in 1985) and six runner-up placings.

The big hitter on that 1985 Warrior team was a guy by the name of Dan Bylsma. Didn’t Bylsma also take part in another sport?

Meanwhile, since football state championships were inaugurated in 1975, the Greater Muskegon area has produced 23 state champions and 11 runners-up.

This does not mean that the Port City hasn’t produced its fair share of outstanding players. By far, the two most successful area players that have excelled in our National Pastime have been White Lake products. Separated by more than seventy years, former Montague product Ira Flagstad and current All Star centerfielder Nate McLouth from Whitehall top the listings.

Flagstad retired with a hefty career batting average of .290 while playing most of his 14 big league seasons with Detroit and the Boston Red Sox. And any player who follows the game at all knows the impact McLouth has made in recent years with the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Atlanta Braves.

Others who will be listed forever as former major league baseball players include Ludington’s Danny Claire; Grand Haven’s Frank Secory and Howard Bailey; former Muskegon Big Red teammates Jim Johnson and Ray Newman; and Muskegon’s Lefty Dobb. All these baseball Big Leaguers are worthy of a story but let’s save that for another time.

What I would like to share with our readers are a couple of All-Time baseball teams that I have put together from watching and reading about our area’s best diamond stars. Since I mainly grew up following the West Michigan Conference, I would like to give you my WMC all-time team as well as a Greater Muskegon squad. To get more players their proper due, players could only make one of the teams.

All Time West Michigan Conference Baseball:

INF: David Miller: Whitehall 2000 – Power-hitting 1B who starred at MSU. Hit longest HR ever at NM Field.

INF: Rob Beckman: Shelby 1966 --Played in the Detroit Tigers farm system after a great all-around career at Shelby.

INF: Tom Moyes: North Muskegon 1962 Ok-- He’s my brother but ask anybody who played with or against him in the early 60’s and they’ll agree.

INF: Kurt Huizenga: Whitehall 1994 -- Slick-fielding infielder who had a stellar career at Aquinas.

INF: Fred Stevens: Hart: 1940-- 1st All-American in baseball at WMU.

OF: Ira Flagstad: Montague c.1911-- 14 years ML outfielder with Tigers & Red Sox: 1202 hits, 40 HR, lifetime BA of .290

OF: (Capt.) Nate McLouth: Whitehall 2000-- ML All Star with Pittsburgh: Michigan HS player of the year in 2000.

OF: Terry Mack: Hart: 1954-- Fleet footed center fielder who was a great player at WMU: Still playing softball now in his seventies.

C: Bill Duplissis: North Muskegon: 1951-- Power-hitting catcher for NM’s greatest teams from 1948-51. Nobody ever stole a base on his rocket arm.

SP: Larry Williams: North Muskegon 1974-- 0.71 ERA at NM. Played AA ball with KC following a great career at CMU

SP: Chad Pleiness: Mason Co. Central 1998--Three Sport All Stater who played High A ball for Toronto.

SP: Link Mikkelson: Montague 1984-- Back-to-back no-hitters for Montague: Played many years in the minor leagues.

SP: Brian Wright: Ravenna: 1976-- Ace of Ravenna staff that went to the state finals his senior year. (0.71 ERA)

SP: Justin Visconti: North Muskegon: 1995-- Fire balling lefty led GRJC to National Championship as their MVP.

RP: Bob Cavanaugh: Oakridge 1982-- One of top relief pitchers of all time at CMU.

Special mention should go out for three modern day players who could move their way onto this team. The proud West Michigan Conference can boast of three players who are currently playing division one baseball.

DH: Jake McLouth: Whitehall: 2005 Just a masher of a hitter. Had a great year for the Wolverines.

OF: Nick Urban: Whitehall: 2005: Anybody who can make Big Ten player of the week as Urban did for the U-M has to be considered.

P: Troy Forton: North Muskegon: 2007: Posted a 2-2 record for Western Michigan with one of his wins coming against Michigan State.

Admittedly, I have devoted more of my time over the years following players in the West Michigan Conference but just for funs sake let’s put together an all-time team of Greater Muskegon diamond stars. As I pointed out from above, those who played in the WMC will be excluded.

Greater Muskegon All Time Baseball Team:

INF: Bob Ludwig: Muskegon

INF: Jack Weisenberger: Muskegon Heights

INF: Dave Winicki: Mona Shores

INF: Nick Bultema: West Michigan Christian

INF: Earl Morrall: Muskegon

OF: Frank Howell: Muskegon Heights

OF: (Capt.) Jim Johnson: Muskegon

OF: Fred Storck: Muskegon St. Marys

OF: Walt Gawkowski: Muskegon Catholic

DH: Dan Bylsma: West Michigan Christian

C: John Huizenga: Muskegon

P: Paul Bard: Muskegon

P: Jerry Eaton: Muskegon:

P: Howie Meloche: Muskegon Catholic

P: Duane Bickel: Orchard View

RP: Ray Newman: Muskegon

There you have it. Who did I miss? Let me know at [jimmoyes@aol.com](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com) and we’ll follow up with amendments in a future edition of Moyes’ memories.

*The next story is a little bit of odds and ends from our past*

**MOYES MEMORIES JULY 2009**

**Caught on the Fly**

As a baseball fanatic growing up back in the early 1950’s, media coverage was microscopic compared to what we currently experience in the 21st century. I grew up listening to the dulcet tones of Hall of Famer Harry Heilman, whether he was broadcasting Detroit Tiger games live from Briggs Stadium, or doing a ticker tape re-creation from a Detroit area studio.

There were no Fox Sports Detroits, ESPNs, XM radios, or an MLB TV package where we can now pick up virtually every major league game live, and, wonders of wonders, often in scintillating HD quality. It may be hard to believe at this time, but only a handful of my beloved Detroit Tiger games were aired on TV more than a half-century ago.

Ironically, many of those Tiger games would not be aired during prime time, but often during a weekday afternoon before very sparse crowds. Many years later I must come to grips and confess that I was less then truthful with a few of my elementary teachers.

It was simply uncanny how often I would become ‘very ill’, only on those rare weekday afternoons during April and May when a Tiger game would be televised. This mysterious ‘flu’ would then again rear its ugly head in early October when World Series games were played during weekday afternoons. Or maybe my teachers knew my real sickness was the desire I had to watch my beloved Tigers, or those October World Series games, on our 17-inch black and white Motorola TV set.

And like many of my contemporaries, I too collected those baseball cards from the early 1950’s that are worth a small fortune to today’s serious collectors. And yes, my mother also tossed my collection into the garbage can when she was less than satisfied with my behavior patterns.

In addition to my radio and TV baseball addiction I was a voracious reader of the Bible of Baseball publications, The Sporting News. Even at a very early age I would save my pennies from my job as a paperboy for the Muskegon Chronicle to buy a yearly subscription to this great paper. As soon as this baseball only publication reached my mailbox, school related homework took a backseat until I had finished reading The Sporting News from cover to cover.

One of my favorite sections of this paper would be a section titled Caught on the Fly. This was a column that had no by line. It was simply a potpourri of little ‘nuggets’ of baseball oddities randomly tossed together. Something similar is what I am going to portray for the readers of this ‘ol’ announcers column. Just a mix-match of sports related history that maybe many of you may, or may not, have known.

Let’s begin with an old time locally related football ‘nugget.’ Herb Spencer is a person who should not be soon forgotten by followers of North Muskegon and Montague football. Spencer, a running back for old Scottville High, broke the hearts of the Norsemen in 1942 when he scored the only TD given up by NM in two years.

Spencer’s 2-yard burst into the Norse end zone snapped NM’s consecutive undefeated, untied and unscored upon streak at 15 games, a state record that still stands today. In 1943 the Montague Wildcats nearly duplicated this same rare feat of holding all their opponents scoreless. The unbeaten Wildcats had but one TD scored against their defense in 1943. Again, it was Scottville who pulled the Stuart Cink spoiling act, and you guessed it; the touchdown was scored by none other than the same Herb Spencer.

Did you know that the late and great Sonny Grandelius, the Muskegon Heights football star who became Michigan States first running back to surpass the 1000-yard mark for rushing yards, first attended Purdue? And did you also know that Grandelius was a member of the Michigan State College boxing team?

Grand Haven native and Muskegon West Michigan Christian graduate Dan Bylsma has been all over the national spotlight following coaching the Pittsburgh Penguins to the NHL championship. But did you know that, as a freshman at WMC, Bylsma was the state Class D medalist in golf? Or that in Bylsma’s senior year as a hard-hitting batsman at Christian he once stroked three homers in a single game at historic Marsh Field?

I find it ironic that in the 60 years that basketball power West Michigan Christian has been in existence the Warriors have had only 4 head coaches. In this era of coaches continuously going through a revolving door this is a remarkable achievement. Most people know that Elmer Walcott and current head mentor Jim Goorman collectively combined for most of that total. John Vandenboesch was the first cage skipper back in the 1948-49 season while Eddie Heethuis also had a brief tenure at his alma mater.

Talk about a bad-shooting day! It’s hard to believe but the Heights Tigers were not always a basketball powerhouse. On Jan 13, 1922, the Tigers were destroyed by the Holland Dutchman 51 to 3. The Tigers were held without a field goal as all three points were scored from the free throw line. All high school games in 1922 were 10-minute quarters. And one shooter from each team shot all throws!

While perusing through some old Muskegon Chronicles some time ago, I came across an interesting photo from February 23, 1954. It was a team photo of the Greater Muskegon Junior High Championship basketball team at Muskegon Heights. On this team were many of the star performers from the back-to-back state Class A championship teams from 1956-57.

The team featured Muskegon Area Hall of Fame inductees Big Ed Burton and 2009 inductee Ossie McCarty. Willie McCarty, Pete Peliotes, Kennedy Howell and Ronnie Robinson, all regulars from arguably this area’s greatest ever high school team, were also members of this Jr. High club. Yet another Muskegon Area Hall of Famer was also a member of this squad, speedster Jerry Fitzpatrick. Providing a little ‘muscle’ was Frank Gawkowski, a future Central Michigan University football star.

Naturally this group of mega-stars won the Greater Muskegon Jr. High league crown with an 8-2 record. What mystifies me was how this team could have possible lost two games!

A final note for my colleagues on the Hall of Fame Board. If we are to ever induct a coach from the sport of track and field, then we need to look no further than current West Michigan Christian Athletic John Swinburne. While coaching at Oakridge Swinburne’s thinclads won every West Michigan Conference track title from 1971 through 1985, as well as five regional crowns. Has Oakridge even won one WMC championship since Swinburne left Oakridge?

I would like to conclude this column by thanking those that responded to my last column on baseball. I asked if there were others I may have forgotten and I received a number of e-mails with names of some very good players I could have included on my all-time area baseball teams. From the more recent era, WMC stalwarts such as Whitehall’s Josh Robart, Montague’s Matt Johnson and the Meinert brothers were brought to my attention.

And how about one my broadcasting colleagues, Joe Coletta. Joe was a part of that dynamic 1-2 duo with Brian Wright and that led Ravenna to the state finals in 1976. Years before he left his legacy as the long-time offensive coordinator for Oakridge football, Joe was a standout pitcher at the college level at Ferris State. Dave Melchart of Mason County Central had a nice run in pro ball. Two other players from Whitehall that I always respected were Bruce Finkbeiner and Jon Swenson.

One player that I inadvertently omitted from my all-time Greater Muskegon team was former Muskegon Catholic Central great Ron Janszyk. Ron had a very nice run in the 1960’s in the St. Louis Cardinals farm system.

Others who were mentioned by area fans were Paul Hoppa and Ryan Kane from Reeths Puffer, Tim Waggoner from Orchard View, Larry Maxwell from Muskegon and Terry Kirkpatrick and Kip Southland from Mona Shores.

It was not until I settled in Florida that I called my first baseball game on the radio in 2011.

*My following Moyes Memories was one of those stories that I felt was impossible to just fit into a single allotted story. Tom Kendra was kind enough to publish my story of the 1952 game that featured two of my all-time favorite football players, Jim Morse and Stan Guy over a two-week period in September of 2009. Here is part 1 of this memorable game from now more than 70 years ago:*

**MOYES MEMORIES: Jim Morse and Stan Guy**

**BY JIM MOYES (jimmoyes@aol.com)**

Perhaps many of the football enthusiasts who purchased Jay Vandervorde’s book devoted to Muskegon’s storied football history may have noticed my All-Time Greater Muskegon team depicted in Chapter one. Surely no one could have been surprised with my selections of Earl Morrall, Sonny Grandelius, and Jim Morse as part of my all- time backfield.

I’m curious, however, how many were taken aback with my pick to complete Muskegon’s All Time Backfield --- Stan Guy. To the old timers who had the good fortune to see Guy in action during his hey days in the 1950’s, they would most likely agree with this ‘ole announcer’: Stan Guy was Muskegon’s answer to Barry Sanders more than a half century ago.

Although Jim Morse and Earl Morrall would face one other as college stars, only once would any of my all-time backfield performers face one another in an actual high school game.

The game took place on November 14, 1952, pitting senior Jim Morse, and Muskegon St. Mary’s, vs. sophomore Stan Guy and the North Muskegon Norsemen. This long- awaited match up would be the last high school game, not only for Morse, but also for St. Mary’s High. In the fall of 1953 the combined schools from St. Mary’s, St. Joseph, and St. Jeans would form today’s Muskegon Catholic Central.

Morse would cap his brilliant senior season with 19 touchdowns, while for Guy, the pint-sized dynamo would continue to thrill North side fans for the next couple of years. Jim Morse would follow up his sensational junior season with a near facsimile in 1952.

Jim would cross the opponent’s goal line 38 times in but 17 games during his Junior and Senior seasons. Morse did it all for the Blue and Gray Irish. In addition to his obvious superior running skills, Morse was the punter, the passer, and the team’s leading defensive back. And as a kicker, Morse tacked on 34 extra points during this two-year stand to place him at the top of the leader board in the state scoring derby.

Expectations from north side fans were bleak at the start of the 1952 season as there were just a handful of veterans returning for first year head coach Dunc Lectka. Not even Lectka would have envisioned the impact a 5’5 140-pound newcomer, who had never played a game of organized football, would create for Norsemen followers.

Guy would quickly give Norse fans a preview of great things to come as he dashed for twelve touchdowns in his sophomore season, with only one of his gallops coming from inside the opponent’s fifteen-yard line.

The forecast in downtown Muskegon was much rosier for Coach Harold Popp’s St. Mary’s Irish and his veteran laden team. The return of Morse, of course, was a major reason for Irish optimism for the coming campaign. However, several other key lettermen would return from the St. Mary’s 1951 squad that lost but one game, a tightly contested 21-26 loss to Bay City St. Joseph.

Among the talented players for the 1952 St. Mary’s squad on hand to complement Morse were such backfield stalwarts as Bob Kurant, Don Silvis, Joe Horan and George Liddle. Headlining the returnees on the Irish forward wall was burly Mike Kanitz, as fine an end to ever grace the gridiron at what is now Kehren Stadium.

‘Big Mike’ would become an outstanding prep football coach where he would develop Traverse St. Francis into a football power. The coach’s son, Warren Popp, would occupy the other end position for the Irish. Pat Donovan, who would soon accompany Jim Morse at Notre Dame, anchored the middle of the Irish line from the center post.

The remaining positions on the line were more than capably handled by Captain Henry Meyers, Eugene Mason, Bob Coyne, and Mike Hanslits. It was this line that would carve out some gaping holes for Morse and his backfield mates.

The Norsemen were expected to have a lean year, with productivity from the forthcoming senior class providing virtually zero players for Coach Lectka. As the season played out only one senior would crack the NM starting lineup.

After the young Norsemen were jolted early in the season from a lopsided loss to the Ludington Orioles, the Norsemen exceeded all expectations by sweeping all their West Michigan conference foes enroute to three straight conference championships. The Norse would enter the eagerly awaited tilt with St. Mary’s with a surprising 7-1 record.

As expected, Coach Popp’s St. Mary’s gridders got off to a good start by disposing of their first five opponents with ease, including making amends for their only loss from the 1951 season with a victory over Bay City St. Joseph. Morse led the early onslaught by rushing for twelve TD’s: including four touchdown gallops in their season opener with Shelby and their future NFL star Dave Whitsell.

St Mary’s hopes for winning a mythical state Class C state title were erased on their sixth date of the season against Wyandotte Mt. Carmel. A victory appeared a near cinch for the Irish when late in the fourth quarter St. Mary’s was looking at 1sst and goal to goal at Mt. Carmel’s five-yard line, trailing 18-12.

However, dreams for that state title, and a perfect season, evaporated when the Irish fumbled the ball into enemy hands on their first play. Moments later a disconsolate band of St. Mary’s players trudged off the Catholic Central Field, an unhappy ending to the final home game played in Muskegon St. Mary’s gridiron history.

Just as coaches are prone to instill in today’s players the time worn cliché of playing them ‘one at a time’, it had clearly become obvious that St. Mary’s followers, as well as the sportswriters from our favorite hometown newspaper, were clearly looking ahead to the season ending clash between the Irish and the Norsemen.

Nearly the same fervor had been generated for the season ending battle from 1951, but record-breaking cold temperatures, accompanied by unwelcome heavy snowfall, forced local administrators to cancel the NM-St. Mary’s game. Why this game couldn’t have been played a few days down the road, after the weather cleared, remains a mystery to this football fan to this day.

While the Norsemen breezed into the big game on the heels of a six-game winning streak, the Irish hit yet another bump in the road in game number seven, losing to a solid Saginaw St. Peter & Paul squad. The Irish righted the ship the following week at Battle Creek St. Phillip as Jim Morse contributed to all the St. Mary’s scoring by rushing for four touchdowns and throwing a pair of TD strikes to Bob Kurant for two more tallies.

The Norsemen of coach Dunc Lectka were young and lacked the depth of their counterparts of the local parochial school. The thirteen players that saw action vs. St. Marys consisted of 1 freshman, three sophomores and eight juniors, with only one senior seeing game action.

What the Norsemen lacked in depth they made up for in talent. At one end the Norse featured rangy Tom Arntz, a four-sport star who would end his career at NM with the most letters earned in school history. Occupying the other end was sophomore Dave Bliss, a Norse regular in football, basketball, and baseball for three years.

The tackles were a strong suit for the Blue and Gold with juniors Walt Busker and Ed Stelle going both ways for the Norse. Busker would play at Dartmouth while Stelle would earn laurels two years down the road as Albion College’s most valuable freshman player.

Robert Weerstra, the only senior starter, teamed up at guard with junior Chuck Felt, while junior Allan Engstrom performed the chores at center. Leonard Green, who would play college football at Michigan Tech, was a solid quarterback while a quartet of underclassmen shared the ball carrying duties with sophomore Stan Guy.

Junior Scott Moore would team up with Guy during the 1952 and 1953 seasons to give the Norse their best backfield duo since Don Bowen and Moe Sikkenga led the Norsemen of the early 1940’s to 15-straight undefeated, as well as scoreless, games in a row. Sophomore Dick Schuiteman would be a Norse stalwart for three straight years while freshman Ron Simonelli would shore up the defense.

The two-year wait for these two smaller high school powers had drawn near and after much hype and pre-game hyperbole from the Muskegon Chronicle, the stage was set. The final game for Jim Morse and the St. Mary’s Irish, and the only match-up between these two schools finest football players was at hand.

*The second installment of this two-part series featuring Jim Morse and Stan Guy will soon follow in a forthcoming Chronicle edition*.

**And here is Part 2:**

**Part 2: Jim Morse & Stan Guy**

**By Jim Moyes ([jimmoyes@aol.com](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com))**

Part one of our latest installment of Moyes’ memories set the stage for the only game played featuring two of this area’s finest all-time football players, Jim Morse and Stan Guy. To add additional appeal for our story, it would not only be the last game for Jim Morse, but also the last football game played by St. Mary’s High.

Although this match up would be the final game for Stan Guy and the North Muskegon Norsemen in 1952, the next two years would prove to be a very exciting era in northside football history.

And just how skillful were these two all-time greats? Jim Morse and Stan Guy put up numbers that today’s statisticians would fawn over. Let’s begin with Morse.

A letter winner for St. Mary’s High in his freshmen year back in 1949, Morse established records that have withstood the test of time at what is now Muskegon Catholic Central High School.

Morse would follow a sophomore season, where he tallied twelve touchdowns, by notching nineteen more TDs in each of his next two seasons for the Irish of St. Mary’s. Toss on an additional 43 points for his extra points kicked from placement and Morse would end his career with 343 points, tops in local parochial school history.

This feat was accomplished over a span of but 26 games, long before additional games were added during our current playoff era. And did Morse pad his touchdown totals with those short goal line plunges into the end zone? Check out these stats:

For his career Morse ‘averaged’ nearly 27 yards on each of his touchdown romps. In his junior year of 1951 Jim darted and weaved his way over 666 yards in scoring his 19 touchdowns, averaging an astounding 35 yards for each TD recorded. Included among his long touchdown jaunts was a 104-yard return of a pass interception vs. Bay City St. Joseph. Some 58 years later this remains today as the longest touchdown in Greater Muskegon football history.

Stan Guy’s totals for his career were nearly a carbon copy of the talented Morse. Guy too found the opponent’s end zone a dozen times during his sophomore year, just a sample of the many exciting times that awaited Norsemen rooters.

After dashing through enemy defenses for 17 touchdowns in his junior year of 1953, Guy streaked for 25 more in his senior season. Stan’s 1954 totals were good for 150 points, tops in the entire state of Michigan. Even today’s computer equipped statisticians would be amazed at little Stan’s numbers.

The muscular built NM dynamo totaled nearly 1800 yards on his 54 career touchdowns, an amazing 33 yards average for each touchdown! Only three of his scores came from inside the fifteen-yard line!

Indian Summer gripped the Muskegon area on November 14, 1952, a stark contrast from the deplorable conditions from a year earlier. A brutal early winter snowstorm had forced the cancellation of the previous year’s season ending game.

Temperatures hovered in the middle fifties as St. Mary’s and North Muskegon awaited the eight o’clock kick off before the largest crowd in Norse history. Among the thousands of football fans in attendance, in addition to this old timer, was a young sixth grader at NMHS.

Nearly sixty years later Dave Taylor still remembers, not only the game, but also—THE SIGN. “I can still remember where I was when I first spotted the sign,” recalls the future Norsemen football star and Hall of Fame football coach for the Muskegon Big Reds. “I was sitting in the bleachers at the northwest end of the field when two guys approached my area holding up a sign. I couldn’t believe what that sign read: GUY WILL DIE!”

And did Stan Guy see that sign? When I asked Stan, this question a few short days ago he replied in a very solemn tone: “ I will never forget it.”

How fortunate I was to experience a recent afternoon lunch with Jim Morse and Stan Guy. It was amazing as we rehashed the game that took place nearly 57 years ago how clearly, they remembered that night, and how much praise and respect they had for one another.

Stan Guy was a nervous young sophomore, made decidedly more edgy after seeing the sign. “It wasn’t the wording of the sign that bothered me so much, but the picture of the coffin shook me up,” reminisced the former Norseman star.

“I was just a young sophomore, and I had never played against a team as big as St. Mary’s,” recalled Guy before placing his order for a perch sandwich. Although, thankfully, Guy didn’t die, that sign was somewhat prophetic as an injury did send the Norse superstar to the sidelines to stay early in the second half.

The game itself lived up to the hype and St. Mary’s superstar Jim Morse saved his best performance for his final act as a high school gridder. Morse did everything for the Irish on this perfect autumnal night for football except drive the team bus across the Causeway.

Morse had a hand in all the scoring for the Irish and they needed Jim at his best to defeat the pesky Norsemen. The talented NM defense keyed on containing Morse’s running game, but the future Notre Dame captain utilized all his assets to pin defeat on the home-town squad.

After three quarters had been played the Irish held a slim 14-13 lead over the hosts, the difference being a pair of made Jim Morse extra points coupled with a missed point after try by the Norse. The NM attempt was blocked by a young St. Mary’s freshman, Dick Seymour. Less than two years after this game Dick Seymour would see his sister, Leah Rae Seymour, exchange marital vows with his teammate Jim Morse.

For the record Morse passed to big Mike Kanitz for a pair of TD passes, ran for another score and put the final nail in that Norsemen coffin with a 55-yard punt return for the winning TD. According to my late colleague, Mart Tardani, who reported on this game for the Muskegon Chronicle, it was on this play that Guy, suffered his game, and season ending injury.

Just as North Muskegon was intent on stopping the running game of Jim Morse, St. Mary’s had a similar game plan to stop the diminutive Norsemen star Stan Guy. While Morse was more than a one-dimensional player, the same title could be applied to Guy. Stan set up the second Norse score with a long return of a Jim Morse punt.

With the locals leading 13 to 7 Guy intercepted a Morse pass and returned it deep into St. Mary’s territory. However, a Norse penalty on the play kept the ball in the possession of the Irish where, a few moments later, Morse delivered a TD pass to Kanitz to give St. Mary’s a lead they would never relinquish.

Morse ran, kicked, punted, passed (10-14 for 124 yards and 2 touchdowns) and delivered a big hit on Guy that was instrumental in making the final game in St. Mary’s history a 27-19 Irish victory. It would be the last high school game where Stan Guy would be on the losing end of a score, as the Norsemen would go undefeated over the next two years.

For second year head coach Harold Popp the victory was certainly bittersweet for the one-time graduate of Boys Town. Just a few days after coaching his Irish to perhaps their biggest win in school history, Popp was relieved of his duties as a St. Mary’s coach.

‘Rough Coaching’ was the reason given for Popp’s hasty dismissal, much to the surprise and disappointment of his star fullback Jim Morse. Morse strongly defended the coach at the team’s banquet. “Sure, Harold has been a rough coach, but football is a rough game. We wouldn’t have won half our games this season without him.”

Morse would go on to Notre Dame where he would have a fabulous career as a football star. Just days after Stan Guy capped his brilliant high school career (1954) with a win over Greenville; Morse took center stage on a much bigger platform as Notre Dame defeated USC 23-17. Morse ran for 179 yards, caught a pair of passes and scored 2 TDs.

In a 1955 game against the powerful USC Trojans Morse caught five passes from 1956 Heisman trophy winner Paul Hornung good for 208 yards. Morse’s per catch average of better than 41 yards per reception is still, to this day, an NCAA record.

While Morse was a standout athlete, excelling not only in football, but also basketball and baseball, Stan Guy was a one-man record board in track and field at North Muskegon,

In the spring of 1955 Guy broke a Greater Muskegon standard in the pole vault that lasted twenty-five years. Stan sailed over a cross bar set at twelve feet above ground, using a cumbersome steel pole, streaking down a cinder runway, before landing in a pit with only a pile of saw dust to cushion his fall.

Guy had a combination of speed and power in a body that would make an Olympic gymnast envious. At one time he was possessor of six school records in track and field at North Muskegon. For many years his name took up most of the space on NM’s record board. At one time he was the all-time Norse leader in the pole vault, long jump, 100-yard dash, the low hurdles, a member of the 880-relay team and the shot put.

And who should one day break Guy’s shot-put record. None other than the youngster who first spotted the ‘Guy Will Die’ sign, future Muskegon head football coach Dave Taylor.

Football scouts from major colleges did make the trip to North Muskegon to lure Guy to their university. I asked Stan a question that I assumed I had the answer as to why Guy didn’t pursue his football career to the next level.

I awkwardly asked Guy if it was due to his dislike for the textbooks as well as the thought that he couldn’t bear being without his high school sweetheart, Janet Woodhouse.

A very humble Guy surprised this reporter, and his friend Jim Morse, with his response. “Yes, you’re right about the first two, but really, I was just too damm small to play big time football.”

Jim Morse and Stan Guy have enjoyed watching their children, and now their grandchildren, have much athletic success over the years. It is well known that Jim’s son, Bobby Morse, following a fantastic football career, joins his dad to make up the only father-son duo in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame. Stan’s daughters, Shelly & Cindy Guy, led North Muskegon’s girls track team to three state championships from 1977 thru 1980. Unlike their proud Papa, the gals can still see their records still unsurpassed at NMHS.

They both have suffered some severe heartache over the years. Stan did indeed marry Janet Woodhouse shortly after graduating from high school, only to lose her to cancer many years ago. Jim and his bride of fifty-five years, the former Leah Rae Seymour, have had to deal for the last ten years with the passing of Jim Morse Jr.

There are some obvious major disadvantages as us old-timers head into the ‘golden years.’ However, I am so grateful that I was able to watch such former great athletes such as Jim Morse and Stan Guy display their athletic brilliance while in their prime. But more importantly, I am even more proud of having them as dear friends.

I will probably never forget the wonderful afternoon lunch I had with my two idols in researching this story. Although they were fierce rivals on the field many decades ago, the respect and camaraderie they had with one another years later at lunch was awesome. There are a couple of stories I would like to share that will always be cherished by your author.

I, as well as many of my peers from this era of the 1950s, was a paper boy carrier for the Muskegon Chronicle. One snowy day in the winter of 1954-55, I had completed my route and was walking home when a car pulled up along-side on Ruddiman Avenue about a mile from my house. There were two people in the car. On the passenger side was Stan Guy, while the driver was an older man who was a stranger to me. Stan had asked the driver to pull over so they could give this very cold paperboy a lift to his home. When I entered the car, Stan introduced me to the driver who just happened to be an assistant coach at Ohio State attempting to recruit Stan to play football for the Buckeyes. I was so awed by this kind gesture that I had forgot the name of that assistant coach.

Following his great career at Notre Dame Jim Morse was appointed as the General Manager at Wagoner Transportation, owned by my stepfather Harold ‘Red’ Wagoner.

Jim’s job at Wagoner was a stepping-stone to his incredibly successful career in the business field. On weekends Jim was the ‘voice’ of Notre Dame football. I was due to be discharged from the Army on November 18, 1965, just two days before the Irish and MSU were to play a football game in South Bend. I had just returned to the good ole USA from a tour in Vietnam and Jim was gracious enough to invite this ‘Spartan Fan’ to be his guest in the radio booth for the game. Unfortunately, I was dealt with a double whammy. I was delayed from leaving Vietnam by a couple of days and it would not be until the day of the game when I would be discharged from the service. It was also the first time that I would personally feel the effects of the discontent with the war in Vietnam. It would be my first experience facing those who voiced their displeasure as we were also limited to our base due to war protesters marching outside our compound. I was fortunate to find a barber shop open on our base that had a radio tuned into the big game. While listening to Jim call the action during the game, I knew I would be accused of losing my mind if I told the others listening to the broadcast with me that I was scheduled to be in this same booth with Jim.

*It was not too long after writing the 2-part story on the Morse-Guy game that I knew of another story that needed to be included as part of the Moyes Memories. While working as the PA announcer for decades at the West Michigan Conference Track Championships I would always announce the current records for each event. There was one record that lasted for years that I always referred to as the longest standing record for this meet – the long jump record of Osie Rostick. I also knew being a youngster during Rostick’s days as a Whitehall 2-sport star that there was more to this story – so much more that again we have another 2-part story:*

**Whitehall’s Osie Rostick**

By Jim Moyes

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For the past 30 years or so I have had the honor as serving as the PA announcer at the West Michigan Conference Track & Field championships. Just another one of my curious idiosyncrasies in life is my unabashed passion for statistics, namely sport stats.

And anybody who has taken the time to read any of my previous columns in this newspaper surely has noticed my partiality to local sports stars of years gone by. Until Jeff Bowen of Oakridge leaped 22’ 6 1/2 “at the 1999 WMC track & field championship, I never failed to mention the oldest record on the books, Osie Rostick’s long jump record set more than a half century ago.

As a youngster growing up in North Muskegon, I rarely missed a sporting event contested by the Norsemen, home or away. I vividly recalled the speed and grace of Rostick during my childhood days when he starred for Whitehall High. When Tom Kendra encouraged me to share my memories of local sports history my thoughts quickly turned to Osie Rostick.

Rostick began his junior year at Whitehall while residing in the Lakewood area, a home where the matriarch of the house was his sister. Rostick was intent on playing football for the Vikings in the fall of 1951, but he would have to make sacrifices that are nearly non-existent for today’s generation.

A few short years ago I was scheduled to work a city track championship at one of our local schools. I had the misfortune of arriving at the school’s site before the final bell would ring, signaling the end of another school day. There was one problem: there was no place to park! I muttered a few cuss words to myself wondering if there was anybody attending this high school that did NOT have a car.

Such luxuries were certainly not a common stance during the early 1950’s. I can count on one hand the number of my classmates who drove a car to school. Participating in after school activities for Rostick would prove to be a difficult task. Instead of climbing into his, or a classmate’s sleek automobile, Rostick would walk/run the seven miles back to his modest home in Lakewood.

A young Whitehall freshman took note of Rostick’s plight early into the football season of 1951. Entered Holmes Beausang, a neophyte member of the Vikings Junior Varsity football team, and the son of Dr. Carl Beausang, a prominent Whitehall dentist.

Long before the Tuohy family was immortalized in the recently released movie The Blind Side, a similar script was played out in Whitehall, Michigan.

“It wasn’t until I was in 9th grade and began football that I became a friend of Osie’s,” recalled Holmes Beausang recently. “It was then that I learned that he was taking the school bus home and then on game days he would have to run and walk back to school,” said Holmes.

“I informed my parents of Osie’s situation and Mom told me to invite Osie home on games days where I would broil a couple of steaks for us,” mused Beausang.

The Beausang family quickly took a liking to Rostick and a dinner invitation led to something much more permanent, acceptance into the Beausang household. “By the end of the year Osie was living with us during school days and then going home for the weekends.”

The social climate was vastly different across the USA some sixty years ago.

It was a rarity, even here in the Muskegon area, when African Americans and whites would socialize together outside the athletic arenas during the early 1950’s. The Beausang’s took a giant leap for healing racial injustice when they accepted the likeable Rostic as one of their own.

No longer having to endure the hardship of those endless daily jaunts back and forth from Lakewood helped Rostick develop into one of the greatest athletes in Whitehall history.

Rostick was a sensation in football and track for the Vikings. Rostick was a blazing fast halfback who earned first team all-conference honors in his junior year. Osie gave Whitehall fans a preview of his athletic talents when he scored four touchdowns against Frankfort in the first game of his sophomore season in 1950.

Inexplicably Rostick was left off the WMC honors team after enjoying another banner season on the gridiron in 1952.

Rostick, however, had some prominent company among those also left off the All-Conference team. Arguably, the 1952 season may have produced the three best backfield performers in WMC annals, and none made the WMC first team.

North Muskegon’s Stan Guy led the WMC in touchdowns and rushing yardage but was relegated to Honorable Mention Honors. The WMC’s most honored player in football history, future NFL all-star Dave Whitsell from Shelby joined Rostick on the second team.

It is Track and Field where Rostick left his most lasting legacy at Whitehall. The Vikings have become a domineering power in Track & Field in the West Michigan Conference for the last several years. However, for all the fleet performers that have worn the red and white colors of Whitehall High, no one has been able to erase Rostick’s fifty-eight-year-old record of 21’11 ½ inches in the long jump.

Rostick led the Vikings to their first of countless WMC track titles with a dominating performance at the 1952 conference championship meet. In addition to setting his WMC record of 21’8” in the broad jump, Osie won the 100 and 220-yard dashes and anchored the winning 880-yard relay team.

Whitehall then captured the regional title behind three first place finishes from Rostick before heading for the Class C state finals in East Lansing. The Vikings fell one-point shy of capturing the championship with Rostick playing a leading role.

Osie won the 100, anchored the 880-yard relay team to victory and took second in the 220-yard dash. Oddly enough Rostick did not earn a single point in his specialty, the broad jump, leading this reporter to ask why he failed to place when an even sub-par Rostick leap would have given the Vikings the two points needed for a state title.

One who fondly remembers Osie Rostick was classmate and former teammate Jim Allen. Allen was an outstanding middle-distance performer for the Vikings who won consecutive 880-yard state Class C championships in 1952 and 1953.

“Osie was a wonderful person who worked hard, was very dedicated and a real team player,” recalled Allen. “It was great seeing him at our last class reunion a few years back, but I have unfortunately since lost contact with Osie. I well remember the times when Osie was a guest at the Allen household during those years,” recalled Allen.

Despite Rostick’s high school athletic achievements, the opportunity to excel at the collegiate level were dim for Osie.

But thanks to the benevolence of the Beausangs, Rostick was given a rare opening for a young African American from his generation, a chance to get a college education. And how Rostick took full advantage of this rare opportunity! In addition, as well as diving headlong into his studies Rostic also tried out for the Augustana College varsity football team.

Osie not only made the team, but he exceeded even the rosiest of expectations during the fall of 1953. After failing to make the WMC all Conference 1st team in his senior year at Whitehall, less then 12 months later Rostick was named the MVP of the Augustana football team. He averaged an astounding 8.2 yards every time he carried the pigskin and led the entire conference in total yards.

Surely a bright future on the gridiron loomed ahead for Rostic. Unfortunately, Augustana College did not offer football scholarships. And no way was the humble Rostic going to ask the gracious Beausang to keep funding his college education.

Rostic instead opted for the military where he would serve his country for the next three years. After receiving his honorable discharge Osie took advantage of the GI bill and resumed his studies at Augustana. Football and sports now took a backseat to Rostick’s bigger goal: a degree from Augustana College.

According to Holmes Beausang Osie became an educator in the Detroit area and in recent years had gone into business for himself.

Rostick would never forget the kindness of the Beausang’s and how he was treated as family. Until Mrs. Geraldine Beausang passed away Osie Rostick would never fail to send her a card on Mother’s Day.

All efforts to contact Rostick to get his thoughts on his most interesting career have proved fruitless. I would be most appreciative if one of our readers that might know the whereabouts of Rostic would contact me though my e-mail address listed below.

I would be anxious to update this story on a future edition of Moyes’ Memories.

Oh, and one more thing. One of my possible contacts with an unlisted number was Osie’s son, Oscar BEAUSANG Rostick. There can be no better way to say thank you to the Beausangs.

*Sure enough, my pleas were answered, and I was able to reach Osie Rostick which led to the sequel to this story:*

**Osie Rostick Follow-up**

**By Jim Moyes**

[**jimmoyes@aol.com**](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com)

For those who read my last edition of Moyes’ Memories, highlighting the career of former Whitehall High athletic legend Osie Rostick, readers were left in the dark as to the whereabouts, and even the status of Rostick’s wellbeing.

Fortunately, contact has been made with Rostick, much to the delight of all the friends he made during his high school days at Whitehall High during the early 1950’s.

I felt confident while doing my research, as well as contacting former friends and teammates of Rostick, that surely somebody would have a number, or address, where Osie could have been reached. I kept putting off the release of this story while I waited for some word from Rostick.

Finally, my wife suggested that once this story has been released to the public then maybe one of our readers will know the whereabouts of Rostick. As usual, my wife was right.

Osie’s niece, Lydia Dawkins, still resides in the Muskegon area and started the ball rolling. It was Lydia’s mother who raised the young Rostick and brought Osie with her when they moved to Muskegon from Alabama, some sixty years ago.

Lydia quickly got on the phone and called Osie as well as Osie’s son, Oscar Beausang Rostick informing the now 76-year-old current Whitehall long jump record holder of the story.

Osie Rostick was the lone African American attending Whitehall High School during the early 1950’s, an era when racial harmony was far more difficult for men and women of Osie’s race then it is today.

My original story told of Rostick spending much of his final two years at Whitehall living with the Beausang family in Whitehall.

“They were like a miracle that happened to me,” exclaimed a grateful Rostick a few days ago. “They took me into their world and were just wonderful” remarked Osie.

“They would always let me drive their car to visit my family,’ reminisced Rostick. The whole city of Whitehall embraced me. I had a great time.”

Rostick’s experiences were not always a bed of roses during his interscholastic days in Whitehall. I remember when our class (class of 1953) took our senior trip to Washington D.C. At many restaurants I had to sit on the bus while my classmates had lunch or dinner on our trip. That was tough,” recalled Rostick.

I also discovered following my initial story that the Beausang household was home for other Whitehall students as well as Rostick, male and female.

Another Whitehall grad of 1953 that resided in the Beausang home with Rostick, Don Douglas, and the immediate Beausang family was Bob Allen, currently residing in Cumming, Georgia.

Here are a few excerpts from an e-mail I received from Allen just hours after the Rostick story was first released.

“My parents had moved back to our home state of Alabama in 1952, and Holmes Beausang was one of my good friends who knew that I wanted to graduate from Whitehall. I was involved in baseball and basketball so Holmes took it on himself to ask his parents if I could live with them for my senior year.

To say that Doc and Mrs. Beausang were wonderful to me would be an understatement.  They were like parents to Osie and me and I cherish the time that I spent there with them.  They influenced Osie and myself to join the Lutheran church that they attended and Osie and I both were baptized there in the church.” Wrote Allen.

Allen added: “The Beausangs were, indeed, wonderful people not only to Osie and me but to everyone that they met.  When I saw the movie, "The Blind Side" it brought back some great memories for me and made me think back to what they had done for Osie.  Osie, in my mind, could have been a great professional football player had he decided to pursue it as a career.”

Rostick received his discharge from the US Army just before the start of the spring semester at Augustana College. However, his athletic career ended abruptly when he pulled his Achilles tendon while working out with the college track team. “I was never able to run more than about 50 or 60 yards before the tendon would rear up, “recalled Rostick.

Rostick had other things on his mind when he returned to Augustana following two years in the Army. Not only did Rostick receive his degree from Augustana but also earned his Masters’ degree from Wayne State University.

Rostick, following his graduation from Augustana returned to Michigan to pursue work in the Grand Rapids area but found none. Grand Rapids’ loss was Detroit’s gain as Osie earned a rare teacher’s job for an African American of his era.

Now enjoying his retirement in the Motor City Area, Rostick works out daily and is still at the same weight when he wreaked havoc on the gridiron at Whitehall High. Will it take another fifty-eight years before somebody will finally erase Rostick’s long jump record from the Whitehall track record board?

Rostick might have been momentarily lost since he attended the 50th anniversary of his graduating class a few years back at Whitehall High but judging from all the e-mails and phone calls Osie has since received, he was surely never forgotten.

About a year after this story first appeared in the MC in 2010, Osie Rostick was inducted into the first Whitehall Sports Hall of Fame class in 2011. More than a decade has passed since the Rostic story, and his record still stands, more than 70 years after Rostic graduated from Whitehall High.

*When the 2009 season ended, I was asked to pen my thoughts in what would prove to be my final season for the ‘ole announcer’ broadcasting sporting events in his beloved hometown. I wrote this story before my wife Mary and I had decided to fully retire and join Mary’s son Jim, his wife Lanie and the two grandsons in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. Here is the story on that 2009 season that saw Montague post their second straight state championship:*

**MOYES’ MEMORIES - A wrap of the 2009 season**

We can now close the books on another very successful high school football campaign that came oh so close to matching last year’s surreal season. The Montague Wildcats were our ‘only’ state champion in 2009, but four other local teams can boast of at least being second best.

All roads had to lead through Muskegon as three eventual state champs had their toughest games against our area powers. If a hard luck trophy could be handed out, then surely it would have gone to first year Big Red coach Matt Koziak.

As my good friend from Traverse City, legendary football coach Jim Ooley often said: “You not only have to be good to be successful, but you have to be good and lucky,” Lady Luck was not kind to Koziak and his Big Reds. After losing three regular season games by a scant seven points, the Big Red’s bad luck carried over to the playoffs as they lost their district playoff championship by a single touchdown at Lowell.

Lowell would never again be tested during the playoffs en route to their division 2 state championship. After winning a pair of hard- fought victories on the road, Muskegon Catholic was denied a shot at defending their D8 crown in a hard fought 14-7 loss to Beal City.

Crusader faithful surely felt that the state title game was played at venerable Housemen Field in Grand Rapids as Beal City breezed to a state championship the following weekend. And only Muskegon Heights, and their explosive offense, tested eventual Division 5 champ Jackson Lumen Christi during the playoffs.

And Ravenna, --- well the Bulldogs just ran into a buzz saw when they squared off in the state semi-finals against powerful Traverse City St. Francis. Maybe they couldn’t catch a decent breath after an exhausting 77-49 win the previous week over Merrill.

If Ishpeming could have ‘borrowed’ one player from Dusty Fairfield’s Bulldogs then it very well could have been the Hematites, and not St. Francis, who would have squared off against the Bulldogs at Ferris State University.

That player surely would have been a skinny 145-pound sophomore-- Paulo Suarez. The foreign exchange student from Spain matched a state record in the Bulldogs high scoring affair with Merrill when he converted on all eleven of his point after touchdown conversions.

Ishpeming, following a last second tying touchdown against the Gladiators was forced to attempt an unsuccessful two-point conversion, when only one little point was needed to move onward.

My-- how the game has changed since these playoffs began in 1975. It has become abundantly clear that offenses have shot light years ahead of the defense. Points scored in a game have soared in recent years as new offensive formations have spread like a California brush fire.

Never did I envision when these playoffs began that I would call a game where a team would give up 49 points (Ravenna 77 Merrill 49) and still win by three TDs.

Low scoring games have virtually disappeared, except those played under adverse weather conditions, with scores often resembling totals one would see at basketball games. When Muskegon Heights strung together three undefeated seasons from 1933 through 1935, the most points Oakie Johnson Tiger’s allowed in a SEASON was 14 points!

Earlier this fall Ravenna scored 21 points on a North Muskegon team before the Norsemen even saw the ball on offense!

Many long-time school scoring records have fallen by the wayside.

As Willy Snead reminded me in a pre-game interview: “yes indeed, defense still wins championships, but offense sells tickets.”

This past season saw four of our twelve local teams amass more points than any other year in their school’s history. It will come as no surprise that Montague, with 598 points, would shatter their all-time mark. Not far behind was Ravenna’s tally of 580 tallies while the Heights Tigers easily surpassed their all-time best with 478 points.

Even the Sailors of Mona Shores joined the scoring parade, although their modest school scoring record of 288 far trails other Greater Muskegon schools.

Somebody is going to have to write a new book for this ‘ole announcer’ to keep track with current football terminology. The latest football jargon now includes such phrases as: the pistol, the spread, bubble screens, jet sweeps, gunners, a diamond formation and now the Wildcat formation, terms that sometimes spin this ole announcers head in attempting to keep up with today’s game.

My morning coffee colleague, Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame coach Roger Chiaverini, simplified the Wildcat formation a few mornings back. “The Wildcat is no different than when the Michigan Wolverine’s centered the ball back to Heisman Trophy winner Tom Harmon back in 1940.”

Bo Derek has nothing on the Muskegon area has our football powers can also boast of a ‘perfect ten.’ Since Muskegon defeated Orchard Lake St. Mary’s in the Division 2 state finals, our area gridders have won ten straight state titles without tasting defeat!

2009 will go down as the year of the quarterback. It has been well over 50 years since the Muskegon area had a quarterback start in Division 1 football (Muskegon Catholic’s Joe Dempsey, Wyoming). Two current area QB’s, Montague’s Cody Kater and Muskegon Height’s Willie Snead IV, are almost certain to play D1 football soon.

Oakridge Junior quarterback Jamie Potts could add to this list, but baseball appears, for now, to be the future sport of choice for this versatile performer.

This past season left this announcer with many pleasant memories: The early season North Muskegon-Montague shootout; the amazing kicking power of Matt DeJong; the poise of Cody Kater; The quick feet and powerful arm of Willie Snead IV; The ‘friendly exchange’ at the end of the Ravenna-Montague game with Dusty Fairfield and a substitute official who thought he wasn’t doing his job unless he called about a dozen penalties.

This leads to a great quote from my sidekick Gene Young, midway through the second quarter of a penalty marred game played during an October rainstorm: “These refs have dropped so many flags on this muddy field that they are going to have to send them to the laundry at halftime.”

I remember how we rooted for one of the real nice guys; Mona Shores coach Ken Rose to make the playoffs. And how I yearn for the day Hart brings back their glorious past.

And aren’t we spoiled here in our area to have such great showpieces for stadiums? The hospitality and warmth we feel in entering these stadiums is so much appreciated by our aging crew. What a great experience we had in covering the Montague-Sanford Meridian game in Holton.

I always get a boost every time I pass those creative roadside signs, hand crafted by the local high school fans, lining the roads on the way to Ford Field, and before Ford, the Pontiac Silverdome, a vast improvement over the old Burma Shave signs of years long gone bye.

So, it’s goodbye to another great football season for our local gridders. No other county, even close to the size of our area, can boast of 35 appearances in the prestigious state football finals. And our boys certainly take care of business; 24 state championships in those 35 games.

A final debt of gratitude goes to the many coaches, athletic directors, press box attendants, and especially the players and fans that made this season so special for our crew. And a final big congrats go out to the Montague Wildcats and their great coach Pat Collins for making it a perfect ten. Yes-- it was a very good year.

*With the 2009 football season come and gone my attention turned to basketball where I gave our readers my all-time top five for West Michigan Christian, Muskegon High and Muskegon Catholic.*

**Basketball Memories**

**By Jim Moyes**

[**jimmoyes@aol.com**](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com)

From far-far away, thanks to today’s modern technology, I have been able to follow this season’s winter’s adventures of our local basketball teams on the Internet. Along with a guaranteed frigid environment, one other fad that never seems to change here on the home front is the successes of Muskegon Heights and West Michigan Christian in basketball.

I must confess that I absconded from my beloved Muskegon Country to seek warmer climates just hours after the high school football season concluded. Although I certainly do not miss the brutal weather from the frozen north, I often find myself yearning to be back once again behind the microphone as it looks like it could be another banner year for our dynamic twosome in basketball.

Can some benevolent soul with deep pockets send me a round-trip ticket from Jacksonville to Muskegon so I can be present when these two perennial powers collide? Wouldn’t it be great if these two teams could meet at the venerable LC Walker arena and 5,000 fans could see local basketball at its best?

It has been 17 years since we’ve had a pair of teams play for a state championship in the same year, but history could repeat itself in 2010. Tiger and Warrior fans are fortunate to have such a pair of class guys as coaches in the ageless Jim Goorman for the Warriors and the youthful Keith Guy for the Heights.

And what a year for the Warriors to christen a new gymnasium! Let’s hope this season has a similar happy ending for WMC fans as they had in their inaugural year at the old gymnasium back in 1958. It was in 1958 that Ken Van Dyke and company gave legendary coach Elmer Walcott the first of his four state championships.

For the first nine years of Christian basketball Walcott and his Warriors did not have a gymnasium they could call home. Walcott was only too eager to accept an offer from another local school to take part in a scrimmage so his Warriors would at least have a place to sharpen their basketball skills.

I well remember as a gym rat at North Muskegon watching some of the Warriors of yesteryear regularly scrimmage the Norsemen of old. Two WMC old-timers whose skills I especially admired were Ken Krannitz and Wayne Vriesman.

Today you will find Grandpa Krannitz seated at a North Muskegon game while he proudly watches NM sophomore star Spencer Krannitz uphold the family excellence in basketball tradition.

Vriesman was a scoring machine that would be best remembered in life by Chicago fans as Harry Carey’s boss. For many years Vriesman was a corporate executive for WGN radio in the Windy City.

I hope not too many people object if I can give our readers my All-West Michigan Christian team from players I have observed for the past 61 years. Let’s begin with Ken VanDyke from that first state championship team in 1958. Van Dyke was a gifted athlete, a ferocious rebounder, and elbows that were has sharp as a pair of Ty Cobb spikes.

Ken’s brother, Wes VanDyke was ahead of his time when he donned the Warrior uniform in the 1960’s. At 6’6 Wes was a big man who would play guard at Division One Weber State University.

Dave Doorn was a dunking machine unmatched in Warrior history that led his 1979 and 1980 Warrior to the state finals before falling short to a pair of great Detroit East Catholic teams.

Randy Prince had skills that reminded many old time Warrior followers of Wes VanDyke. Prince, who like Doorn, left us all too soon, led a great Warrior team to an easy state Class D title in 1992.

Eight state titles in all for WMC but this list wouldn’t be complete without inclusion of a pair of modern-day Warrior stars. This year’s Green and White team has a chance to accomplish a basketball feat that has never been done in Greater Muskegon annals: Win three state championships in a row.

Evan Bruinsma and London Burris will long be remembered for their outstanding achievements at this basketball hot bed, but their fine work is far from finished.

And if I had to pick somebody to come off the bench and be a defensive stopper, then I would call on Ryan Arkema from the 1992 & 93 state finalists. There was never a challenge too big for Arkema to accept. I will never forget the 5’10 Arkema defending future 6’8 Iowa State standout Joe Modderman like Davey Crockett and his brethren defended the Alamo.

Arkema put the clamps on all his opponents just as Whitehall’s Gordy McLouth did to this old-timer back in the 1950’s. McLouth guarded me so close that I couldn’t breathe, let alone score!

I wouldn’t even begin to assemble my All-Time Muskegon Heights team for fear I would never forgive myself for omitting so many deserving players. Maybe I can talk my long-time broadcasting partner Gene Young, a former Tiger, to pick his team.

Rarely do Gene and I ever see eye to eye with one another but I’m sure we would both agree that the team’s first two players would have the last name of Burton.

It has been 31 years since the Tigers have won a state championship, but it certainly appears that this team has the talent, coupled with the leadership from Coach Guy, to break the drought.

And what a team those Tigers had in 1979! They had a great rebounder in Donnel Plummer, a jumping jack in Doug Burse, a dead-eye shooter in Robert Kitchen, a playmaker in Clayton Cochrane, an all- around athlete in Cedric Scott, and an energetic and talented coach in Lee Gilbert.

One everlasting memory from the Tiger title game from 1979 was Cedric Scott taking off from just inside the free throw line and throwing down a tomahawk dunk in the Heights victory over Saginaw Buena Vista.

The only other dunk that matched Scott’s jam was an unforgettable slam by Muskegon’s Pooh Kelly in 1985. Kelly leaped high off the floor in a district championship game against the Grand Haven Buccaneer to catch a pass that appeared to be well over Kelly’s head. Kelly not only made the one-handed grab but dunked the ball all in the same motion to send the huge crowd at the LC Walker in hysterics.

And speaking of Muskegon --- Here’s my all-time Big Red five:

I don’t know if there is anybody still alive who saw him play but you can’t ignore arguably the greatest athlete in this state’s history, U-M legend Benny Oosterbaan, from being on this team,

Muskegon area hall of famers Dave Nelson and Cal Tatum make this list along with ‘The Bird’: Sam Moore and shooting wizard Danyl Williams.

Renowned for their dominance in athletics in football let me put together my top five in Muskegon Catholic Central hoops history:

Topping this list would have to be scoring machine Bobby Dye. Dye still has the single game (46) and single season (501) record set back in 1971. A starter since his first game as a freshman back in December of 1954, Paul Comes can still be found following his favorite sport during our winter months.

Most Muskegon citizens know him as a top-notch attorney, but Dennis Potuznik was a great all-around player for the Crusaders from 1958-60. Only his desire to become a lawyer prevented Potuznik from getting a ring as a member of the Loyola Ramblers NCAA title winning team in the early 1960’s. Rounding out this five would be Joe LeMieux from the 1960’s and Thetetius Knight from the more recent era.

Send me your picks for your favorite school’s all-time team and maybe we can include them in a future edition of Moyes’ memories. In the meantime, lets wish all our teams the best of luck the rest of this season.

Meanwhile, it’s time for me to head back to the beach!

*I followed up the previous story with this memory of a few of our adventures covering basketball over the years:*

**Those Basketball Memories from Yesteryear**

**By Jim Moyes**

**(**[**jimmoyes@aol.com**](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com)**)**

We are about ready to embark on one of this sports nuts favorite time of the year – March Madness!

Unlike the football season, when the playoffs present us with one game a week, the first week of the district basketball tournament is a basketball junkies dream.

Until the MHSAA was forced to combine the girls and boys seasons you could attend a boys’ high school basketball playoff game seemingly every night, from Monday – Saturday.

Throughout much of the 1980’s the districts at the LC Walker arena would often begin with a Monday tripleheader. My good friend, the late Athletic Director at Muskegon High School, Larry Harp, did a masterful job in putting together this show. However, for one district tournament in the late 1980’s, Harp had a real dilemma: Too many games in just four nights.

This would pose little concern for the creative Muskegon AD. The first night he scheduled four games at The Walkaah! The first three games featured our local teams in action and made for a first for this ‘ole’ announcer’: three games to broadcast in one night!

Due to the luck of the draw, game number one, set to begin at 5:00 PM, showcased Reeths Puffer against Muskegon Heights. I knew this was going to be a long night, but never could I envision the first of those four games between Muskegon Heights & Reeths Puffer going four overtimes!

Coach Dan Wright’s Rockets defeated the perennially strong Tigers in what surely would be the earliest ever exit for the Heights from the tournament. The Tigers season was over before even dusk had settled over our Lake Michigan shoreline.

It was well after 10:00 PM before the final game of the evening got underway. And as the luck of the draw panned out, the teams that had to travel the farthest, Grandville and Jenison, played in the nightcap. (Please don’t ask me who won as I was soothing my throat with my favorite cold beverage across the street at the Tohado House.)

It was at these very same district tournaments back in 1968 when I first teamed up with my current longtime partner, Gene Young. We’ve called a multitude of exciting (and some not so exciting) games over the years while traveling many miles over some unfriendly highways.

Ironically, the first game that Gene & I covered ranks with one of the most exciting. It was the Class A district championship game in March of 1968 between Traverse City and the Muskegon Big Reds. Traverse had a pair of gifted players in 6’8 Tom Kozelko and 6’7 John Naymick.

Muskegon could boast of a super star in Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Famer Cal Tatum. This night, however, belonged to Kozelko as the silky-smooth future NBA performer scored 30 points – in the second half! – To lead TC to a double overtime win.

I always enjoyed the epic matchups during the 1980’s between Grand Haven and Muskegon.

Nobody could make a game last longer than GH coach Al Schaffer. And how Schaffer despised playing the Big Reds at the LC Walker Arena, as Muskegon always seemed to have the Buc’s number. I well remember Schaffer, following yet another tough loss to Muskegon, using the excuse that the Walker Arena had a background that was not conducive to good shooting.

The next night Pop Sims and his Grand Rapids Union team put more than 100 points on the board.

Here a few samples of some behind the scenes adventures for Jim & Gene:

Before the MHSAA made the Breslin Center on the campus of MSU their permanent home for all semi and final games, the semis were often held at multiple sites. On several occasions this area was fortunate to have teams (Heights & Reeths Puffer) play in the Class B semis held at the University of Michigan’s Crysler Arena, while the evening Class D semis would take place back in East Lansing.

How I loved old Jenison Fieldhouse! Count myself among the minority who still favor the old Jenison barn over the modern Breslin Student Event Center.

Gene and I would quickly pack up the equipment and make a beeline for MSU to carry (who else) a West Michigan Christian semi-final at night. In 1993 we added a third stop when the finals were held at the Palace in Auburn Hills. At no time where we were provided a police escort or had a company jet at our disposal.

However, there was a time when our friends in blue back home gave us a police escort in the Port City. After calling an early tourney game at the LC Walker Arena back in the middle 1980’s, we were scheduled to call a college regional final immediately afterwards that featured our local Muskegon Community College Lady Jayhawks.

Gene and I were beaming like little kids as we followed the flashing lights and wailing sirens from our men in blue. We made it to the Rode-Bartels gymnasium in plenty of time but, unfortunately, the Lady Jayhawks lost to a Junior College team from Indiana.

There were a couple of other times during our travels when the guardians of our highways --- but not for a police escort greeted us. Following a Class A district final held at Holland West Ottawa, Gene and I were in a hurry to quickly motor up to Holton to broadcast a Class D contest. According to a local State Police Patrolman, we were in too big of a hurry.

Thankfully we knew the understanding police officer and he sent us off with nothing more than a stern warning. The journey was well worth the effort as we watched an ending as implausible as any game in West Michigan Christian annals.

The Warriors, under veteran coach Jim Goorman, have won four state championships, and a trillion district titles, but none more improbable than their district win over the Pentwater Falcons. The Falcons led by one point with time running out on the Warriors.

The Falcons had Kurt Ter Haar pinned at center court with nowhere to go. In desperation, Ter Haar unleashed a left-handed hook shot (Kurt was right-handed) from center court that magically caromed in off the backboard and WMC captured yet another district title.

Three days later we were headed for a regional game in Cadillac when a representative from the local Sheriff’s patrol welcomed us near the outskirts of Hesperia. Fortunately, once again, the officer was a basketball fan, and I was given my second warning in less than a week.

My grandkids (as well as my wife) will find this hard to believe that I would ever be pulled over for speeding. Currently my duties consist of transporting the boys to their baseball games or practices and I am constantly derided for my deliberate driving.

I still have nightmares from a short trip to Kent City a few years back. After a very uneventful (with no speeding ticket) journey I was startled when I opened the back of my car to discover that I had left our broadcasting equipment back at my home.

Thanks to Yosef Johnson, my restaurant manager from my working days as proprietor of the Bear Lake Tavern, Johnson delivered our equipment, and we took to the airwaves just moments before tip-off.

Now, back to the Rode-Bartels gymnasium. Since Gene Gifford has left Muskegon Community College for Olivet, I guess the 60-year-old Gifford will excuse me for telling this story.

During his long, and most successful tenure at MCC, he also doubled as the school’s Athletic Director. All home games were played then, as now, at the Rode-Bartels gymnasium. During one of my pre-games interviews I inadvertently asked Gene who was Rode? He embarrassingly responded that he didn’t know. And I still do not know. Fortunately, he somehow still calls me a friend.

Enough of Moyes’ Memories for now as I hear my favorite song being played in the background --- The Star-Spangled Banner! Must be a game is about to start.

*There was a time when I was recording a TV show, that featured a few of the Muskegon Big Red Stars from the state championship team of 1951 when Earl Morrall threw me for a loop. When I mentioned that this was not Muskegon’s first state champion won in 1951 as the Big Reds also won the state crown in baseball, Earl brought up the story of their star pitcher Kurt Knutson. After we wrapped up the show, I knew there was another compelling story that had to be written.*

**KURT KNUTSON and the Big Reds State Champs of 1951**

**By Jim Moyes**

[**jimmoyes@aol.com**](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com)

It was a year that arguably remains at the top for Muskegon High School athletic excellence, but victories came fraught with tears of sorrow, while interspersed with moments of joy.

When the Big Red Football team of 1951 capped their season with a 26-6 victory over the Muskegon Heights Tigers, there was unbridled enjoyment when Harry Potter’s gridders were acclaimed as the mythical Class A state Champs.

However, it wasn’t the only state championship Muskegon High earned in 1951. Many of those same Big Red Football legends of yesteryear also played huge roles in leading Muskegon to the state Class A baseball crown in the spring of 1951, Coach Potter’s second state title in the same calendar year.

Muskegon overcame adversity to claim the state championship with their standout pitcher on the sidelines with an undisclosed illness, the severity of which was a mystery to his teammates and media.

OK, I know that the state did not officially sanction a state playoff for baseball until 1971. However, in 1951, the winner of a Memorial Day tournament in Battle Creek was recognized as champs by the Michigan High School Athletic Association.

This tournament pitted the winners of the four major Class A conferences in the state of Michigan in a two-day format. Teams invited included Flint Northern, winner of the Saginaw Valley, Monroe, top team of the Detroit Suburban area, and Battle Creek, champion of the Five-A conference.

Muskegon earned their trip to the cereal city by capturing the highly competitive Southwest Conference championship. And they accomplished this feat with their ace pitcher, not on the mound in Battle Creek, but being tested for an undisclosed illness many miles away at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

When a large influx of baseball players reported for tryouts in the spring of 1951, Harry Potter knew he was blessed with a ton of talent, including the ace of the pitching staff from 1950.

Kurt Knutson had a monster year in leading the Big Reds to a very respectable 9-2 record. The sixteen-year-old junior hurler shut out four foes during the 1950 season and posted a minuscule earned run average of 0.78.

Three of those shut outs came against some top-notch competition from this era. Knutson posted successive 1-0 masterpieces against the Holland Dutchman and the Benton Harbor Tigers before blanking archrival Muskegon Heights 5-0.

Only three teams Knutson faced during the 1950 campaign were able to score off the slender right-hander. A powerful North Muskegon squad could later boast of scoring a pair of runs off the Muskegon ace in dropping a 5-2 tilt to the Big Reds.

During this era the big rival for Muskegon in baseball was the Maroon Giants of Kalamazoo Central. Kalamazoo won their 38th straight victory over the Big Reds in front of a large crowd at historic Marsh Field. Knutson carried more than his share of the load for Muskegon, but the normally airtight defense of Muskegon allowed a pair of unearned runs to cross the plate in Kalamazoo’s 2-0 win.

What a collection of candidates greeted Coach Potter prior to the 1951 baseball season! Recently, I had a chance to reminisce with Jerry Eaton, one of the many galaxies of stars on this Big Red machine.

“Look at the great athletes we had on this team,” replied an awestruck Eaton. Certainly, the person most well-known was Big Red shortstop Earl Morrall. Morrall, who has long been overlooked for a place in the NFL Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, was a three-sport star at Muskegon High.

While everybody recalls Earl’s legendary exploits on the football field, Morrall was talented enough in baseball to become the regular shortstop for the Michigan State University baseball team.

All four members of the Big Red’s starting backfield in 1951 were also regulars on the baseball team.

Joining Morrall in the starting lineup were halfbacks Leland David and Bob Fairfield, while the bruising fullback on this Big Red team, Dick Fett, was also a regular. Five years ago, this Muskegon football squad of 1951 was inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of fame.

Genetics ran deep on this Big Red team. Lee David’s son years later would be a first-round draft pick for the Toronto Blue Jays. And the late Bob Fairfield’s son Dusty has become a legend as the longtime football coach at Ravenna.

“We had two exceptional catchers,” recalled Eaton. “How many teams can boast of having two great catchers on one team? It didn’t matter who Harry threw out there, Bob Soderholm and Dick Fett were just terrific players,” remarked the long time Big Red baseball coach.

Captain Jerry Stephens joined Morrall and David in the starting infield at second base with Bill Nyblade at first.

Fairfield was a hard-hitting left fielder while Tom Byrnes was a steady performer in right field. Patrolling center field was Bob Hill. “Hill was a great player,” remembered Eaton. “He could really hit and had great speed for an outfielder”

While Knutson was expected to be the mainstay on the pitching mound, Potter quickly recognized the potential talent of Eaton. The flame throwing right hander would sign a contract with the Detroit Tigers before returning to his alma mater to coach Muskegon’s baseball team for many years.

“I was a young sophomore in 1951, and Kurt Knutson took me under his wings,” said Eaton. “He was always talking baseball with me and certainly helped make me a better pitcher.”

For whatever reason there were a limited number of games scheduled in the 1940’s and 50’s as evidenced by the Big Reds 13-0 record, with only a season ending tie to cross town rival Muskegon Heights marring a perfect record. The game was called with the Big Reds batting in the 8th inning, with two runners on and nobody out, when a sudden storm quickly deluged Mona Lake Park.

There were no cupcakes on the 1951 Big Red Schedule. How disappointed was this author when the Big Reds twice defeated a North Muskegon team, the only losses suffered by the Norsemen who were coached by my father, Paul Moyes.

Coach Potter sent out his ace pitcher to battle the Heights in the first Southwest Conference game of the season. The Big Red bats were booming as Knutson granted the Tigers no earned runs in a convincing 10-3 victory.

A week later a gritty Knutson tossed a neat two hitter as the Big Reds disposed of the Holland Dutch 5 to 1. Unbeknownst to all but perhaps Kurt Knutson, there began some ominous signs that all was not well with the popular Muskegon pitcher.

Time and time again during my research for this story there were frequent game articles that depicted Knutson ‘wobbling’ or ‘stumbling’ around the mound. However, when the big game of the year rolled around, Coach Potter sent Kurt Knutson to the mound to face the mighty Maroon Giants of Kalamazoo Central.

Not only was the Southwest Conference Championship at stake, but also Kalamazoo, with a winning streak that had reached 46, was a definite threat to eclipse the state record of 55 held by Potter’s own Big Red powerhouses from the early 1940’s.

The Maroon Giants were aptly named, as not only had they become a dynasty in baseball, but Central had also won three consecutive Class A basketball championships. The big star on the basketball court, as well as the baseball diamond, was 6’6 first basemen Ron Jackson.

Jackson played parts of seven season in the major leagues, mostly with the Chicago White Sox, and would go down as Kalamazoo Central’s most heralded athlete until a guy by the name of Derrick Jeter appeared on the scene in the early 1990’s.

With the score knotted up at 2-2, with Kalamazoo batting in the third inning, Knutson stunned all those in attendance when he turned ill and began vomiting uncontrollably near the pitching mound. A very concerned Harry Potter replaced Kurt with his flame throwing sophomore standout Jerry Eaton. Eaton permitted Kalamazoo just two additional runs while the potent Big Red batsmen did the rest.

The big blow in Muskegon’s victory was a bases loaded triple by Bob Hill that provided some much-needed insurance runs for the victors. The Big Reds won convincingly, 8 to 4, and snapped the Kalamazoo winning streak.

The following week a courageous Knutson would pitch in his final game for the Big Reds in the team’s final conference game with Grand Haven. Knutson was far off form, but he somehow mustered enough stamina to pitch the Big Reds to a 9-4 win over the Bucs, clinching the conference championship and earning Muskegon a berth in the Battle Creek Invitational.

It would prove to be a bittersweet Memorial Day weekend for this Big Red Baseball squad. While Knutson headed to the Mayo Clinic for testing, the Big Reds were determined to “win this tournament for Kurt.”

And win it they did! Coach Potter surprised many Muskegon supporters when he sent out a young Sophomore by the name of Brad Hart to pitch the opener against Monroe. Hart pitched a gem, going all nine innings in a 2-1 Muskegon victory.

Monroe’s only run came at the expense of a disputed balk call against the inexperienced Hart. Muskegon trailed 1-0 going into the bottom of the seventh, and last, scheduled inning. Never known as a speedster in his Hall of Fame career, Earl Morrall used his legs, and not his fabled right arm, to send the game into extra innings.

Morrall singled, took second on the catcher’s wild throw, advanced to third on an infield out, and then tied the game on a clean theft of home. After Dick Fett led off the deciding ninth inning by being hit by a pitch, Morrall singled, and after Tommy Byrnes laid down a perfect sacrifice bunt, Fett raced home with the winning run when the pitcher threw wide to first base.

Jerry Eaton was ‘effectively wild’ in the championship game with Battle Creek. None of the Bearcats were digging in at the plate after Eaton hit a batsman and tossed three wild pitches as Muskegon fulfilled its pledge to “win this for Kurt” by defeating Battle Creek 5 to 3.

Many of these same Big Reds formed a team to play in the State American Legion tournament in late July. Muskegon swept through three opponents to win a prestigious zone tournament played at Marsh Field.

On July 29, 1951, just two months after Muskegon had won the Battle Creek Invitational, and recognized as the 1951 state champs, Kurt Knutson passed away, a victim of Leukemia.

That evening the players from the Muskegon Elks team were gathered at the local American Legion Post where the club’s victory was being celebrated. The celebration came to a crashing standstill when word was received that their beloved teammate had passed away. Many of Kurt’s fellow Big Reds wept unashamedly.

When I asked Eaton what kind of a person Kurt Knutson was, Jerry quickly burst out: “Oh my God! You’d want him for a brother!”

When they laid Kurt to rest on July 30th, 1951, among the pallbearers were Jerry Eaton and Earl Morrall. “At the funeral we were given identification bracelets in memory of Kurt,” recalled an emotional Eaton.

“I have worn that bracelet ever since his funeral,” said Eaton. “And I know Earl did the same for many years.”

Kurt Knutson was just 17 years old.

*I’ve been so fortunate to have so many great memories from my decades but one I’ll always cherish was my first MLB baseball game at Briggs Stadium in 1953: Here is my story from the Muskegon Chronicle on September 10, 2010:*

**Moyes Remember His First Major League Baseball Game**

Surely every American can pinpoint where they were when they learned of the most significant or traumatic events in American history.

Members of my parents’ generation had no trouble recalling exactly what they were doing when they first received word that our country was under attack at Pearl Harbor.

My contemporaries can vividly recall the instant they heard that President John F. Kennedy had been shot in Dallas in November of 1963. The same goes for the current generation when the planes struck the twin towers in New York City on 9/11 of 2001.

On a much brighter note, how many can recall their first major league baseball game?

If not baseball, it could also apply to the first major sporting event you witnessed.

But for this old sports nut, baseball was always my first love. Sure, we played all sports during my generation (the 1940s and 1950s), but nothing captured my interest like the American past time.

It is doubtful that many of today’s youths could recall anything about their first major-league game due to a plausible justification:  They were simply too young!

I was nearly a teenager before I would take in the electric atmosphere of a big-league ballpark. My own grandsons couldn’t begin to tell you anything about their first big league game. Living in Milwaukee, they had witnessed dozens of games before even stepping foot in elementary school.

It wasn’t quite that easy for those from my era. Perhaps the biggest deterrent was travel. There were no interstate highways like today. Until I-96 was constructed in the late 1950s, travel time from Muskegon to Detroit was nearly double what it is today.

Generally, it is good old dad who relishes in taking his boys to their first game. Unfortunately for me, my father developed a serious illness early in my childhood and driving to Detroit was not going to happen.

Like many of my childhood chums, when we weren’t playing ball on the sandlots of North Muskegon, we would be content to listen to the Tiger games on the radio — first with Harry Heilmann calling the action and, following Heilmann’s death in 1951, Van Patrick.

One day in July of 1953, my mother received a phone call from a family that was going to a Tiger game and inquired if her son Jim would be interested in tagging along. Christmas, indeed, had come early for me and it would be a big understatement to say that I was most jubilant in anticipation of attending my first major-league game.

The game took place on July 26, 1953, and it wasn’t just another routine Sunday. It was also the day that a cease-fire was declared in Korea, bringing the bitter conflict to a near standstill.

The kind gentleman that took me to this game was Ludevico Simonelli, a man I was meeting for the very first time. His son, Ron, was also part of our group. Ron Simonelli, a future teammate in the years ahead, was going into his sophomore year at North Muskegon and was an outstanding athlete.

To add to my good fortune, the Tigers opponent on this Sunday afternoon was none other than the New York Yankees, winners of the past four World Series. And just to double my fun, the game was a doubleheader!

I have no idea how many hours it took before we arrived at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, but I can remember how excited I was when I caught my first glimpse of beautiful Briggs Stadium. It was even more stunning than I imagined it to be while listening over the years to Harry and Van.

And our seats!

Mr. Simonelli was a blue-collar working man his entire life, but to me he seemed as influential as the CEO of General Motors.  There were nearly 50,000 fans packed into Briggs Stadium and somehow Mr. Simonelli had procured perfect seats in the lower deck between home plate and the Tigers’ third base dugout.

The Tigers couldn’t have been in a good mood for this doubleheader. The day before, the Tigers squandered a 10-1 lead and lost in 12 innings, 15-11. The pitchers had to be worn out as each team had more than 20 hits.

The Tigers came into Sunday’s festivities trailing the first place Yanks by ‘only’ 30 games yet still were one game above the lowly St. Louis Browns, who would pack their bags and move to Baltimore following the 1953 season.

The date of July 26, 1953, was an oppressively hot afternoon at ‘The Corner.’ How hot was it? So hot that umpire Bill McGowan was forced to quit the game because of the extreme heat. But for this keyed-up baseball crank, I was in such awe that the 95-degree temperature felt ideal for baseball.

The first major league home run I witnessed in person came off the bat of big Walt Dropo. The mammoth first sacker, who was the American League Rookie of the Year as a Boston Red Sox rookie in 1950, gave the Tigers an early 1-0 lead off Yankee southpaw Eddie Lopat.

The Tigers’ lead was all too brief as the Yankees responded in their next at-bat with a two-run home run from none other than Yankee icon Mickey Mantle.

Al Aber, obtained in mid-June in a major trade with the Cleveland Indians, was the starting pitcher for my Tigers in the opener of this twin bill. Aber, used primarily as a relief pitcher, lasted four innings against the powerful Yankees.

With the game tied at 3-3, Detroit manager Fred Hutchinson brought in a baby-faced rookie by the name of Bob Miller to face the mighty Yankees. It would prove to be a day that not only I would never forget, but also for Miller.

On June 20, Miller became the second bonus baby to ink a lucrative Tiger contract in 1953. Miller received a hefty $60,000 signing bonus from the Tiger brass, just one day after Detroit signed a skinny prospect from Baltimore for a much smaller sum of $35,000.

Less than one week after each had donned the famed Tiger uniform, Al Kaline and Bob Miller would make their big-league debuts in Philadelphia against Connie Mack’s Athletics. It was a short list of people who could lay claim to seeing Kaline, as well as Miller, make their first appearance in a major league game.

A mere 2,368 fans were on hand at antiquated Shibe Park in Philadelphia to witness this signature moment for Kaline and Miller.  Kaline, after replacing Jimmy Delsing in centerfield in the seventh inning, flew out to centerfielder Ed McGhee in the first plate appearance of his legendary major-league career.

Meanwhile, Tiger skipper Hutchinson, with his team already trailing the Athletics 5-0, felt free to send Miller to the mound. The 17-year-old southpaw from Berwyn, Ill., set the A’s down in order in the eighth inning, retiring former Muskegon Clipper Loren Babe for the final out.

After appearing in three games in mop-up scenarios, Miller was thrust into the pressure cooker vs. the Yankees with yours truly in attendance. With many of the 50,000 sweltering fans wondering just who this rookie was on the mound, Miller shut out New York’s finest for 3 1/3 innings.

After Miller gave up a pair of walks and a bunt single to load the bases in the eighth inning, Hutchinson, a former Tiger pitcher, called on Billy Hoeft to protect a 5-3 Detroit lead. Miller received a rousing ovation from the hometown fans as he proudly sauntered back to the Tiger dugout.

A pitcher of Hoeft’s stature being inserted into the game would not happen in our current baseball era. Hoeft was pitching on but one day’s rest after hurling a 5-1 complete-game victory over the Yankees on Friday night. The pride of Oshkosh, Wisc., and future 20-game winner for the Tigers in 1956, struck out the side and preserved the Tiger victory.

Naturally, this Tiger fan was delirious with joy. But the euphoria of seeing my Tigers defeat the mighty Yankees was short-lived following the break between games.

The soon-to-be World Champs for the fifth consecutive year flexed their muscles and just pummeled my beloved Tigers in the nightcap, 14-4. However, a few of the highlights from that game have stayed with me forever.

In the third inning of the second game, the Yankees’ fiery Billy Martin, who had homered in the first inning, walked and then was aggressively tagged out at home following a double by Phil Rizzuto. All hell then broke loose as Martin and Tiger catcher Matt Batts came up swinging. Unlike many of today’s superficial brawls, actual punches were thrown and landed by the two combatants.

In honor of this slugfest, I have a fantasy baseball team named after Matt Batts. What a great name for a baseball player — Matt Batts!

Father time has a strange way of clouding one’s memory, but to this day I have never seen a baseball hit harder than Mantle’s home run in Game 2. Mantle hit a shot off Dick Weik that hit the facing of the third deck — while still on its upward flight! This tape-measure home run by Mantle might have shook up Weik, as he ended the year with a ballooned ERA of 13.97. Weik would never win a game for the Tigers.

In the top of the seventh inning, that skinny kid from Baltimore would replace Delsing in centerfield. After five innings, the Tigers trailed 12-1 and I’m sure Mr. Simonelli was anxious to head back home to Muskegon. But we stayed around to the bitter end. And who made the final Tiger out in my very first major-league game?

You guessed it, the skinny kid in center field, Al Kaline. It would be only the fifth of more than 10,000 plate appearances of his brilliant career. As for the bonus baby Bob Miller?

Although he received a much larger signing bonus than Kaline, their major league careers took off in opposite directions. Miller’s victory over the mighty Yankees would be his only win during his rookie season and one of just six career victories.

As for Kaline, well, you know the rest. Little did we know at the time that years later Kaline’s plaque would hang on the wall at Cooperstown.

I’m equally certain that Mr. Simonelli never could have envisioned that 14 years down the road, this grateful author would be his son-in-law, and the loving grandfather of my three children.

Thanks for this unforgettable and precious moment, Ludevico.

*I would be remiss if I didn’t recognize the decade spent in Traverse City where I got my first start in the broadcasting industry. The following is a story I wrote for a fund- raising project in Traverse City and includes the close friendship I had with the late and great Trojan coach, Jim Ooley.*

**Traverse City Memories**

By Jim Moyes

It has been many years now since this lucky guy got to call the shots on WTCM radio some forty years ago… Memories that will stick with me for a lifetime.

Returning from the Vietnam conflict in late 1965 it was my good luck to begin work for my stepfather’s trucking company in Traverse City. I was fortunate to hook up with an independent basketball team in TC that was blessed with many great players. One of my teammates happened to be Mike Kanitz, a native of my hometown back in Muskegon who was the head football coach at St. Francis.

Long time Record-Eagle sports editor Ken Bell needed a stringer to report on Gladiator football games, on those Friday nights when both the Trojans and Gladiators would be in action. Kanitz recalled that I had served as a reporter covering high school sports for the Muskegon Chronicle in the 1950’s and recommended me for the job.

Thus, would begin a labor of love that would continue until I returned to my native Muskegon area in 1976. In 1967 WTCM was looking for a play-by-play announcer for the forthcoming basketball season. Encouraged by local businessman Bob Murchie, I accepted an invite by the station to audition for the job.

The Trojans had a terrific roundball team in the 1967-68 season, led by future NBA star Tom Kozelko and Big John Naymick. In this ole announcer’s opinion only some strange officiating in a regional final clash vs. eventual state champ Grand Rapids Ottawa Hills denied this team a shot at winning a state Class A championship.

I was able to ride the coattails of this team’s success and was then asked to cover football games in the Fall of 1968 for the Trojans, as well as Saturday night games for the Gladiators.

It was on a perfectly crisp fall evening in October of 1967 when I took in my first Trojan football game in legendary coach Jim Ooley’s first season as the head coach. During my prep days at North Muskegon high a crowd of from 1000-2000 fans was the norm. I was amazed when I took my seat at venerable Thirlby Field and just took in the atmosphere. It was an electric setting with the stands packed, and with a Trojan band that numbered more members than I had in my graduating class.

It was the quality of the competition that drew most of my attention, however. The Trojans opponent on this evening was Grand Rapids Central, featuring a running back by the name of Clarence Ellis. The Rams were highly ranked in the Class A rankings and Ellis would go on to have a great career as a running back for the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame.

It took me just a few short moments before I was quickly transformed into a passionate fan of Trojan football. Guiding that Trojan team at quarterback was pint-sized Jerry Fouch. On the receiving end of many of Fouch’s aerials on this unforgettable evening was a skinny end by the name of Steve Tuttle. For the next forty years, whenever I ran into Jerry Fouch, I would always bring up that magical passing combination of Fouch to Tuttle. Fouch, for many years the popular athletic director at East Grand Rapids High School, can now often be found on weekends toting the bags for his daughter Allison Fouch, a very successful player on the LPGA tour.

Jim Ooley’s first season as head coach for TC was a very successful 6-2-1 record. For those who braved the torrential rains will not soon forget the season ending tie to powerful Grand Rapids Catholic Central. The field at Houseman Field turned into an absolute quagmire. In a matter of a few moments the grass surface had turned into one big mud puddle. By midway through this contest nary a number was distinguishable. Neither team could move the ball and the game ended in a scoreless tie. It was this game that provoked the powers to be in Grand Rapids to install one of the state’s first artificial surfaces at Housemen Field.

I eagerly looked forward to my first football game I would broadcast in an exciting line of work that continues yet today in Muskegon. However, a week before this game I would join coach Ooley and a few of his close cohorts on a scouting trip to the upper reaches of the Upper Peninsula.

The Trojans would open the 1968 season with Sault Ste Marie. Although this would be the home opener for the Black & Gold, the Soo would already have two games completed. Prior to the advent of the playoffs beginning with the 1975 season, the Upper Peninsula would begin each season two weeks before the teams south of the Mighty Mac Bridge.

I quickly discovered following this scouting trip that a fun filled year, and many more would soon follow. Less than an hour into our venture up to the Soo, Coach Ooley was in dire need of satisfying one of his favorite passions, a desire to have dinner! One of our passengers on this trip was a gentleman by the name of Ham White. Ham grew up in Boyne City where he was a standout athlete who still owns some track records at his old school.

White was very familiar with the area and suggested that we stop at a restaurant just north of Charlevoix called The Argonne. On this Friday evening in early September the Argonne featured an all you can eat shrimp special. Huge plate loads of boiled, as well as fried shrimp were set in front of our group and Jim Ooley was ecstatic! Our server delivered the coach seconds & thirds and, well, -- you get the idea.

By the time Jim and the rest of our crew had finally left the Argonne, fully stuffed, we had lost track of the time. When we arrived at the Soo, the game we were to scout was at halftime. For the rest of Jim’s coaching career, he left the scouting to his Junior Varsity coaches.

A couple of weeks after this trip I told my wife about this fabulous all you can eat special up in Charlevoix. Two weeks earlier this special was priced at about $4.00 per person. After Ooley departed, the owners had to double the price of their shrimp special to partially recoup a portion of their loss.

A very good 1968 Trojan team struggled in their opener with the Blue Devils and limped off the field with a narrow 7-6 victory. This game would be the last football game played between these two schools until the start of the 21st century.

After the first six games of this 1968 season, it appeared to me that the Trojans could be headed toward an undefeated season. The long bus ride to Kalamazoo took their toll on the Trojans as Ooley’s gridders had to settle for a tie with Kalamazoo Hackett. In the season finale at Thirlby Field Grand Rapids Catholic Central quashed Trojan hopes for an undefeated season as the Trojans suffered their only season loss in a 9-6 defeat.

The next few years would fly by all too quickly for me, but not before I was able to enjoy many thrills supplied by Trojan and Gladiator teams of this era. Nineteen Seventy-One would have bittersweet memories for this announcer. The highlight of the season had to be the Muskegon-Traverse City clash on October 29th. Each team had steamrolled over their first six opponents, and all state polls had Traverse City and Muskegon ranked number one and two in the state. Surely the winner of this game would be crowned the mythical state champ.

I have since called many games at historic Hackley Field but never has a game between these arch-rivals had a bigger buildup then the battle in 1971. It was a perfect night for football in Muskegon. I vividly remember sitting in the empty stands at Hackley Stadium having a few words with Muskegon head coach Larry Harp a few hours before the highly anticipated kickoff. It was Harp’s first year as the head mentor for the Big Reds after having had a great run as the long time JV coach for his alma mater.

Both Harp and I just breathed in the atmosphere of this spectacle, enjoying the music played in the background by the Muskegon Big Red Marching Band as they rehearsed for that evening’s game. It was these few moments shared with coach Harp that would form a warm friendship between us that would last until Harp’s untimely death in 1992.

The game lived up to its much-ballyhooed hype and then some. More than 10,000 fans packed Historic Hackley Stadium creating an ambiance that closely resembled a college football Saturday crowd in East Lansing or Ann Arbor. The game turned on a Traverse City punt that was overrun by an overanxious punt coverage team for the Trojans. Muskegon’s Larry Sohasky fielded the short punt and returned it to the Trojan goal line to insure a narrow 20-18 victory for the hometown Big Reds.

This game served as a special significance in Jim Ooley’s fifth season of his Hall of Fame coaching career. Jim was certain that many of his Trojans were worn down by having to play both offense and defense for most of this game. Only in rare circumstances hereafter would Ooley ever play any of his players on both offense and defense.

The game was a win-win for me as my childhood chum was Harp’s assistant coach. Dave Taylor was perhaps my best childhood friend while growing up in North Muskegon and we graduated from high school together in 1959. After taking over the head coaching duties in 1983 Taylor and Ooley teams would continue this matchless rivalry that first began with Roger Cheverini back in 1967. And how these two powerhouses would dominate Michigan High School football over the next decade!

In a space of five years, beginning with the Trojans State Class A championship in 1985, Muskegon and Traverse City would each win a pair of state titles. You must remember how difficult this was in an era when only four state champions were crowned. The number of state champion teams would double in 1990.

Jim Ooley had many unforgettable wins over his magnificent career but if he had been pressed to name his most memorable game it surely would have been the 1985 regular season battle with Muskegon. Just as in 1971, each team was top ranked in the state after rolling to five straight wins. With the game all tied up, with less than a minute to be played in regulation, the Trojans were on a drive deep into Big Red Territory.

Chris Hathaway dropped back to pass and sought out his favorite receiver, Jeff Durocher. But just as Hathaway delivered the aerial Muskegon’s defensive back Donald Banks stepped in front of the startled Durocher and intercepted the pass. As the hometown fans at Muskegon’s Hackley stadium erupted in a deafening roar Banks galloped 95 yards to give the Big Reds an apparent victory.

Only a few seconds remained for a Trojan attempt to pull off a miracle victory and keep what now had to be dwindling hopes for a state championship. Following the Big Red kickoff, the Trojans took over possession at about their own 40-yard line. The wily Ooley ran one play, took his final timeout and called the play that will be long remembered by Trojan faithful.

Hathaway gunned a short pass down field that was gobbled up by the sure handed Durocher, who had come back to receive the pass on a buttonhook pattern. What the Big Red defensive backs failed to see was the speeding body of Doug Lautner rapidly approaching Durocher. Jeff pitched the ball back perfectly to Lautner and, while the huge Big Red partisan crowd looked on in complete shock, Doug raced untouched into the end zone.

The scoreboard showed Muskegon 21 Traverse City 20, and surely Jim Ooley would elect to kick the extra point and send the game into overtime. But Ooley rolled the dice and went for the two-point conversion that meant either victory or defeat for the undefeated Black & Gold. Ironically the ‘Big O’ went with the same pass pattern that Muskegon’s Banks had returned for a TD only moments before. This time the pass play from Hathaway to Durocher was executed perfectly and the Trojans had an implausible 22-21-comeback victory.

Somehow Jim Ooley had secured a tape recording of my broadcast of that game. By now I was the hometown announcer for the Muskegon Big Reds, and my loyalties had shifted from Traverse City to Muskegon. Many times, I was forced to listen to those agonizing (for me) final moments of this classic. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if Jim Ooley was listening to that tape moments before he would take his final breath.

The win insured Traverse City of home field advantage when the playoffs rolled around a few weeks later. In a game delayed more than an hour by a snowstorm, the Trojans won the rematch and would use that momentum to capture their second state title at the Pontiac Silverdome. Traverse City would win yet another state Class A title in 1988 while Taylor’s Big Reds would rule the roost in 1986 and 1989.

If I could hazard a guess as to what would have been Jim Ooley’s most disappointing moment as a Trojan coach, I would suspect it would have been the first-Class A state championship game ever held in the State of Michigan back in 1975. After winning ten straight victories during the regular season, including another one of those thrilling last second victories against Muskegon Catholic, the Trojans would take on Livonia Franklin for the State Championship.

This would be the only year where the state football finals would be played outdoors, and this title game would be played at Western Michigan University’s Waldo Stadium. Ooley was troubled with the short warm-up time allotted to both teams following the Class D game that preceded the Class A battle. The Trojans turned the ball over a very uncharacteristic four times and were upset by Livonia Franklin in the only state championship game a Jim Ooley team would lose.

His first of three state titles undoubtedly was his most improbable. The Trojans sneaked into the playoffs in 1978 with an 8-1 record, their only loss coming to Muskegon Catholic Central, a Class C school! The Trojans were huge underdogs when they took on heavily favored North Farmington at the Silverdome. How proud I was to see Jim Ooley presented with the state championship trophy with their stunning win over North Farmington, a trophy he firmly believed he should have brought home in 1975.

For this ole announcer there was just no better sports moment then to take in a Traverse City football game at Thirlby Field. A trip up those spiral stairs leading to the Press Box would often leave me gasping for breath. However, my reward when I finally reached the summit would be the absolute best seat in football. My adrenaline would flow quickly when the Trojans would take their customary pre-game walk from nearby Glen Loomis School. And always trailing the pack was the unforgettable figure of their beloved coach-- Jim Ooley.

When Ooley began his stroll down the sidelines, with his battered green baseball cap perched too tightly to his cranium, the chant from the student body would shout out: “Big O, Little O, L–E-Y. Ooley, Ooley is our guy!” The band would further pump up the nearly always-capacity crowd with a rousing rendition of the Trojan Fight Song and the fun would begin.

Nearly always during the Ooley years the game would end with yet another Trojan victory. And then it would be off to my favorite watering hole, Sleders Tavern, where a legion of Trojan faithful would review the game and eagerly await the appearance of their much-loved coach.

Coach Ooley loved the game of football almost as much he loved his wonderful wife Nancy and his children. And for Ooley, football was always in season. Out of the countless times when Jim and I would go out for a couple of cold beverages at a local watering hole, there was always one occurrence that was sure to crop up before our time together would end. It was inevitable that sometime during the evening Ooley would grab a napkin, remove a pen from his pocket, and would begin scribbling a whole bunch of X’s and O’s.

Always the first words out his mouth would be: “Do you think this play will work?” It didn’t matter if we were meeting in the middle of the football season or the middle of March, Ooley was always looking for an edge. Before we would head home our table would be littered with ink-stained napkins.

Jim was tireless in preparing for his next opponent. For countless hours he would study film to exploit a rival’s weakness. Inevitably, with the film room darkened, Ooley would often use this time to catch up on a quick catnap. There isn’t a one of Ooley’s former coaches who will not soon forget Jim’s first response when he would quickly awake from his brief nap: “Run that play back again,” as if he had never dozed off.

Jim’s knowledge of the game of football was second to none. I’ll never forget one of our Saturday excursions we took to East Lansing to take in a MSU football clash. Jim would sit in his seat, look at the offensive and defensive alignments and would tell me with uncanny accuracy what play a team would run.

It always amazed me when I would cover a Traverse City game following Jim’s retirement why he would not be asked to help spot for the Trojans from up in the press box. I recall Muskegon head coach Dave Taylor, who had the highest of respect for Coach Ooley as a coach and a close friend, always told Jim he was welcome to work in the Muskegon Press Box.

One defining moment that hastened my departure from Traverse City took place following the basketball season on 1973. WTCM manager Jack Walkmeyer came over to my house to inform me that the station was going to make a change. The station’s owner had elected to make his son the new voice of Traverse City Sports, a move that hurt me deeply. Jim Ooley always made me feel a part of the Trojan football program, even if it was just to be on the serving line at the pre-game meal at the Bogi Club.

When a career change opened for me back in my hometown of Muskegon, I quickly accepted a new challenge. I have been blessed with moving from one football crazed town to another when I moved south from Traverse City. Over the many years that followed my departure from the picturesque shores of Grand Traverse Bay in 1976, I have had the good fortune to broadcast 34 state championship football games played by Muskegon area teams.

But nothing can make me forget the many great thrills I had experienced while living in Traverse City for ten wonderful years. My two oldest children were born in Traverse City, each on a Friday night, while my youngest also had a Traverse City connection. On September 30, 1977, in Traverse City I had broadcast a Trojan victory over Muskegon Catholic. I quickly hurried over to Sleders to renew some old acquaintances. When I was asked to hang around for a little longer, I finally used some rare, good judgment and declined.

I informed my friend that my wife was expecting any time now and I had better head for Muskegon. Sure enough, just moments after reaching my home we were off to the hospital to deliver another Friday night baby. (Now Dr. Kasey M. Moyes).

There were so many classic games over the years but there was another dandy that clearly stood out.

It was game number five of the 1980 season, and the Trojans were having, for Traverse City, a sub-par season. The Trojans had dropped their last two games and were limping along with a 2-2 record when undefeated Mona Shores dropped into town.

The scoreboard at halftime read: Mona Shores 28 Traverse City 0. I was now beginning my fifth year of broadcasting Muskegon area football, and I had Mona Shores Athletic Director Jerry Fitzpatrick as my half time guest. Jerry was confident his Sailors were headed for a certain victory and began talking about their next game with Benton Harbor. I cautioned Jerry that there is still an entire half of football to be played so it may be a little early to put this game in the Mona Shores win column.

With less than a minute to play in the third quarter the Trojans still trailed 28-0, before a never-say-die Trojan team roared back to score 29 unanswered points in 13 minutes to pull off a thrilling 29-28 comeback victory.

Traverse City football was never about the individuals but the team. Only the great Mark Brammer had the good fortune to play in the NFL, and only a handful of former Trojans from my time in TC played Division 1 football. There were many who gave me many thrills while calling the action on WTCM. Certainly, one who stood out was Dave Whiteford. Dave, who saw a lot of action at the U of M, was a three-year starter from 1969-71 and was one of the last Jim Ooley players who went both ways. In addition to Brammer, Steve Rollo from the very early Jim Ooley years would play at Nebraska.

I vividly recall Dean Mack intercepting a pass on the far sideline at Muskegon’s Hackley Stadium in the late 1960’s and returning it all the way for the game’s lone TD in another thrilling Trojan victory over the Big Reds. I’ll long remember an undefeated Trojan team taking possession of the pigskin 95 yards from the goal line, out of time outs and with less than a minute to play against powerful Muskegon Catholic in 1975.

A frustrated Rick Walters, who had a great collegiate career at CMU, had dropped a pass out in the flat with less than 10 seconds to go in the game. It proved to be a break for the Trojans for Walters was well covered and would surely have been stopped short of the goal line. The incomplete pass gave the Trojans one more shot at victory. With time was running out Kim Tezak hit future MSU All-American end Mark Brammer for the winning touchdown, insuring a Trojan berth in the first state football playoffs.

I want to thank Dave Halachukas and all those responsible for giving me a bit part in this wonderful project. Dave was a quintessential case in point of a Jim Ooley developed football player, one who worked on his technique and quickness, despite not possessed with physical traits attributed to a Big Ten lineman. Many of Jim Ooley’s linemen he developed over the years rarely tipped the scales at more than 200 pounds.

Thank you--- Traverse City, for ten great years and establishing some lifelong friendships. May the tradition continue.

*Below is a follow story from the Fall of 2010 that appeared in the Muskegon Chronicle. I have deleted the parts of the story that were first written in the preceding story from above:*

**Muskegon- Traverse City Rivalry**

**By Jim Moyes (jimmoyes@aol.com)**

When great rivalries are brought up in coffee houses, local watering holes, or during one of the many sports talk shows that currently proliferate our airwaves, a few classic rivalries stand out:

In baseball it is the Yankees vs. the Red Sox. College football has many enmities, with the most heated here in the Midwest featuring Michigan vs. Ohio State--- at least in the pre-Rich/Rod days in Ann Arbor.

ESPN and Dick Vitale have force fed us sports junkies the college hoops rivalry along tobacco road when Duke meets North Carolina. I recall those heated NBA playoff matchups when Larry Bird and the Celtics would battle Ervin Johnson’s LA Lakers.

Much closer to home lets don’t minimize the magnitude stirred up when Calvin College and Hope meet in MIAA hoops each year.

For the old timers here in the Muskegon area nothing will ever top those years ago classic high school football games between Muskegon and Muskegon Heights that traditionally capped the local high football season. I am so thankful that my father let me experience that rivalry when he took me to the Big Reds-Tigers epic battle back in 1950.

There was one other more current rivalry that was a ‘can’t miss’ event when two powerhouses collided: The Traverse City Trojans vs. the Muskegon Big Reds!

Muskegon and Traverse City would meet on the gridiron every year from 1957 through the 1998 season, but for this ‘ole announcer’ the true rivalry took place from 1967-1991 when the TC Trojans were coached by the legendary Jim Ooley.

Beginning in 1968, when I began my less then glamorous broadcasting career, I was fortunate to call and observe most of these titanic battles from my two most favorite high school stadiums, venerable Thirlby Field in Traverse City and, naturally, historic Hackley Stadium.

My tenure during this era was a double-edged sword. From 1968 through the 1972 football season, I called the games for radio station WTCM in Traverse City. And what a view one had from the old press box at Thirlby Field! Sure, they had a track that circled the football field, much like most of today’s modern facilities, but the track was located BEHIND the grandstands.

This made for a lousy site to watch a track meet but a great place to view a football game. Traverse City ‘conveniently’ placed the visitors team bench on the press box side of the field, directly in front of a decidedly hostile home crowd.

Throughout the twenty-five-year span of the Jim Ooley era, the Big Reds were coached by three coaching legends: Roger Chiaverini, Larry Harp, and Dave Taylor. How fortunate was I to consider this coaching threesome as close friends. Sadly, with the recent passing of ‘Chev’ only Taylor is still with us.

What a thrill it was for this Muskegon area native to return to my hometown in 1969 to call my first of many games at Hackley Stadium. Did you ever wonder why Coach Chiaverini disliked passing the football? I can still vividly recall the only touchdown scored in the 7-0 Traverse City victory, an interception by the Trojan’s Dean Mack near midfield returned for the games only score.

Roger Chiaverini left Muskegon following the 1970 season to resurrect a once proud Muskegon Catholic program that had dropped nine straight to the Big Reds. Chev’s Crusaders took the state champs to the limit before falling just short in a 6-0 defensive skirmish.

After taking over the head coaching duties in 1983 Dave Taylor and Jim Ooley coached teams would continue this matchless rivalry that would dominate Michigan High School football over the next decade!

In a space of five years, beginning with the Trojans State Class A championship in 1985, Muskegon and Traverse City would each win a pair of state titles. You must remember how difficult this was in an era when only four state champions were crowned. The number of state champion teams would double in 1990.

Jim Ooley had many unforgettable wins over his magnificent career but if he had been pressed to name his most memorable game it surely would have been the 1985 regular season battle with Muskegon. Just as in 1971, each team was top ranked in the state after rolling to five straight wins. With the game tied at 14-14, and with less than a minute to be played in regulation, the Trojans were on a drive deep into Big Red Territory.

Chris Hathaway dropped back to pass and sought out his favorite receiver, Jeff Durocher. But just as Hathaway delivered the aerial, Muskegon’s defensive back Donald Banks stepped in front of the startled Durocher and intercepted the pass. As the hometown fans at Hackley stadium erupted in a deafening roar Banks galloped 95 yards to give the Big Reds an apparent victory.

Only a few seconds remained for a Trojan attempt to pull off a miracle victory. Following the Big Red kickoff Traverse City took over possession at about their 40-yard line. The wily Ooley ran one play, took his final timeout and called the play that will be long remembered by Trojan faithful.

Hathaway gunned a short pass down field that was gobbled up by the sure handed Durocher, who had come back to receive the pass on a buttonhook pattern. What the Big Red defensive backs failed to see was the speeding body of Doug Lautner rapidly approaching Durocher. Jeff pitched the ball back perfectly to Lautner and, while the huge Big Red partisan crowd looked on in complete shock, Doug raced untouched into the end zone.

The scoreboard showed Muskegon 21 Traverse City 20, and surely Jim Ooley would elect to kick the extra point and send the game into overtime. But Ooley rolled the dice and went for the two-point conversion that meant either victory or defeat for the undefeated Black & Gold. Ironically the ‘Big O’ went with the same pass pattern that Muskegon’s Banks had returned for a TD only moments before. This time the pass play from Hathaway to Durocher was executed perfectly and the Trojans had an implausible 22-21-comeback victory.

Somehow Jim Ooley had secured a tape recording of my broadcast of that game. In 1976 I had moved back to North Muskegon and became the hometown announcer for the Muskegon area. My loyalties had now shifted from Traverse City to Muskegon. Many times, I was forced by Ooley to listen to those agonizing (for me) final moments of this classic. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if the late Jim Ooley was listening to that tape moments before he took his final breath.

The win insured Traverse City of home field advantage when the playoffs rolled around a few weeks later. In a game delayed more than an hour by a snowstorm, the Trojans won the rematch and would use that momentum to capture their second state title at the Pontiac Silverdome. Traverse City would win yet another state Class A title in 1988 while Taylor’s Big Reds would rule the roost in 1986 and 1989.

More to this rivalry than the agonizing wins and losses was the incredible respect and friendships that formed over the years. Hordes of Big Red fans yearned for the trip North for these encounters that took place on the even numbered years.

Sometimes the fans would get a little too exuberant. I recall one instance following an exciting Traverse City-Muskegon game c.1970. I had arrived at Sleders’ Tavern to partake in our traditional postgame ritual of hoisting a ‘cold one’ or two when the bartender informed me, I was wanted on the phone.

The call was from a former classmate of mine from North Muskegon. My friend informed me that his riding companion to the game had a little ‘disagreement’ with one of Traverse City’s finest following the game and was currently a guest in the Traverse jail. Bail money was needed to release his friend, and I quickly obliged.

Former Big Red coach Dave Taylor well remembers these classic battles. “When we played Traverse City, it was called Traverse City week. I never had to fire the kids up to play Traverse,” recalled Taylor.

“There wasn’t a team we ever played that fired the kids up like the Traverse game. No kid that I ever coached ever missed a practice during Traverse City week. Every year it was our easiest week of practice.”

Traverse City likewise had the same respect for the Big Reds. Coach Ooley even had a play called ‘The Muskegon Reverse.” However, for the life of me, I can never recall Muskegon ever running a reverse against the Trojans.

Former TC lineman Dave Halachukas recalled those special games as well. “Coach Ooley always tried to impress upon us that every game was business as usual,” said Halachukas. “But when we played Muskegon, it was double business as usual.”

Many people feel this rivalry came to an end with the addition of a second public school in Traverse City. That may be a partial factor, but this author believes this rivalry began a downhill slide when Jim Ooley retired following the 1991 season.

After the Big Reds mauled the Trojans 47-14 in 1998, Traverse City promptly dropped Muskegon from their schedule.

A few years back I accompanied Dave Taylor to Traverse City to attend a football fundraiser. Taylor was one of the guest speakers and he had nothing but great praise and fond memories of this once great rivalry.

He pleaded with the current Trojan coach in attendance to renew this once great rivalry. His appeal fell on deaf ears, and the two schools have not faced each other in more than a decade.

Muskegon would remain a football powerhouse during the Tony Annese era and beyond, winning three more state titles, and qualifying for the football playoffs an amazing eleven straight years.

Meanwhile, the once mighty Trojans of Traverse City have failed to win more than six games in a single season and have failed to win a single playoff game since Ooley’s majestic reign ended back in 1991.

The rivalry ends--- But the memories will linger for a lifetime.

*Fortunately, for Traverse City Central followers, the football fortunes in Traverse City have made a resounding comeback, thanks in part to a Muskegon father/son duo. Eric Schugars, assisted by his Hall of Fame father Jack Schugars, guided Traverse City to the state finals in 2021 leading up to another Moyes’ Memories story that will appear later in this book****.***

*One of my favorite subjects for one of my columns was Bob “Bemo’ White. It was so much fun to sit down and have a long chat with Bob at his home on the Northside in attaining research for the following story from 2010****:***

**BOB WHITE**

**BY Jim Moyes**

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Although I was far too young to have witnessed the athletic excellence of Bob White in person, I had often been informed of this man’s feats over the years.

It was easy to look at the finely chiseled frame of White and visualize him as once being a former athlete. A few old timers had informed me that he once raced against the legendary Jesse Owens, but I quickly scoffed this off as just too much talk at the local watering hole.

But then I was looking at some old home movies taken by Lyle Moran many years ago and sure ‘nuff’, there was Bob White racing against Owens at Marsh Field.

Years later, while serving on the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame committee, I was rummaging through some old scrapbooks belonging to relatives of Steve Sieradski. An outstanding three-sport star in his day, Sieradski was being considered for induction into the MASHOF, for which he was an easy choice, and inducted back in 1991.

While pouring through these scrapbooks I couldn’t get over how often Bob White was featured as a star running back for the Big Reds. It was clearly apparent to me that Sieradski and White were as lethal as any 1-2 punch in Muskegon’s storied football history.

The clincher for me came from no less a football authority then Hall of Fame coach Roger Cheverini. When a recent early morning coffee klatch discussion turned up the name of Bob White, Cheverini shouted out: “He was as good a back as I’ve ever seen”, boasted ‘Chev’.

“I played with Jack Weisenberger, Gene Derricott, and against the likes of former Lion great Jug Girard in my freshman year at Michigan in 1945. White was elusive, powerful and quick” recalled Chev.

“I first saw Bob White at spring ball in 1946 after I had transferred to Western Michigan University. I played in the Detroit Public School League, but I hadn’t played against anybody like him.

The first time I went to tackle Bob White, I had him dead to rights,’ mused the Hall of Fame coach, “But he could lean his body at such an angle along with great speed and power, that when I went to tackle him he went flying past me and I dislocated my thumb” said Cheverini while shaking his head.

I, like many Port City residents, had come across White on many occasions over the years. Following his collegiate days White had earned the catchy moniker of ‘Bemo Bob’, an obvious reference to his work for the popular potato chip brand.

White would make his many rounds of restaurants, supermarkets, and yes, even those good ‘ole’ watering holes in Muskegon Country. White would always light up an establishment with his cheery disposition coupled with a smile that could make the grumpiest of people lighten up.

The very popular White serviced my former business, The Bear Lake Tavern for many of the nearly 30 years I was in business. I spent countless hours with the congenial White discussing everything seemingly under the sun, but never once did White ever mention that he was a former athlete.

Following my discussion with Cheverini I knew I had a story to share with our readers and began delving into the archives. I was shocked when I discovered that White exceeded even the loftiest of my expectations.

The year of 1942 was a memorable one in our area’s gridiron history. While the Big Reds raced to one of their many mythical state championships, North Muskegon extended their still standing state record of holding their opponents scoreless for fifteen consecutive games.

Game number one on the season was typical for Big Red followers. The Big Reds defeated a solid Flint Central team, featuring future Michigan State All-American and NFL great Lynn Chadnois, 14-7. As they did throughout their undefeated season Sieradski and White paved the way for a Big Red triumph, each tallying touchdowns in the hard-earned win.

White scored touchdowns in a variety of way for legendary coach Leo Redmond’s state champs. Bob returned a punt 45 yards in a victory over Grand Haven and intercepted a pass and returned it 54 yards vs. Holland. White tallied a pair of TDs in a convincing win against Benton Harbor and capped his season by rushing for over 100 yards in a traditionally fierce season finale against archrival Muskegon Heights.

White and Sieradski were unanimous picks for the post season All Southwest Conference eleven.

And how fast was Bob White? Fast enough to capture the 100-yard dash title in the very difficult Southwest Michigan Conference. Gas rationing and other war time stringent standards in 1943 led to cancellation of all MHSAA sponsored state tournaments, denying White a chance to challenge other sprinters outside the state’s west side.

Ironically, White and Sieradski, each of whom would compete many years of college, would share in a dubious distinction: They would both sit out a year due to scholastic ineligibility. For White, one failed class in the spring meant this supreme talent would sit out his senior year at Muskegon High.

Bob White received his diploma from Muskegon High at the mid-winter semester break in 1944 and immediately attempted to enter the armed forces. It was hard to believe but this finely tuned athlete unknowingly had a hernia problem, so severe that he was deemed 4F following his physical examination.

Weight rooms were virtually non-existent in White’s era, but Bob White had his own weight training program—hauling huge blocks of ice for Senecal Ice Company.

“I would haul those blocks of ice from about 6:00 AM until about 10:00 at night,” recalled White. This was White’s form of weight training that produced a body sculpted like a modern-day power lifter.

White was now more than eager to test his athletic skills at nearby Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. And what a year he would have during the 1945-46 school year at WMU!

College football had finally returned to a sense of normalcy as World War II had thankfully drawn to a welcome close. Freshmen were granted immediate eligibility, but nobody could have envisioned the year White was about to have at WMU.

In the very first game he played as a Bronco White sped 67 yards for a TD in Western’s season opener with Alma. WMU would play an abbreviated seven game schedule and White was the touchdown leader on the 1945-46 Western squad, that included a 22-yard TD gallop in a tight 21-20 win over Ohio U.

White capped his freshmen season in spectacular fashion by scoring on touchdown gallops of 30 and 39 yards in a victory over Wooster College.

Football would prove to be just a tune up for White’s next endeavor. It had been nearly two years since White was an unheralded performer on Muskegon’s basketball teams in the early 1940’s, nevertheless the versatile former ice hauler decided to give basketball a shot.

White was an instant success and quickly moved into a starting role for coach Buck Reed’s WMU Broncos. Western had a rigorous schedule lined up for the 45-46 season, including games with, St. Johns, Utah, Michigan, Northwestern, Marquette, and a great Bowling Green team that featured 6’11 Don Otten.

An early season game against powerful St. Johns set the tone for what would prove to be one of the most successful seasons in Bronco history.

Following a long train ride to New York City, a record crowd of 18,148 fans packed America’s most famous arena, Madison Square Garden. The majority were expecting to see Hall of Fame coach Joe Lapchick, future NBA great Max Zaslofsky and the highly favored St. John’s team make easy pickings of the little team from West Michigan.

Western coach Buck Reed was an early proponent of the fast break style offense; a style of play that suited the fleet footed Bob White to a tee.

The large throng was stunned when the Broncos took the heavily favored Redmen from St. Johns into overtime. White pumped in 12 points for the victors, including the decisive game winner in WMU’s 60-57 dramatic victory.

2,000 fans greeted the Broncos at the Central Depot when they arrived back in Kalamazoo the following afternoon. Players and head coach Buck Read, were hoisted on the shoulders of the exuberant WMU students.

A pregame story in the Mt. Pleasant newspaper before a mid-season Western-Central game summed up White’s extraordinary versatility.

“Local basketball fans will get to see a familiar face when the Chips meet the Broncos. His name is Robert White, first-string guard for the Western five. Remember, he was about the whole show when Western played the Chips in football this fall.”

The Broncos would finish the season against the toughest of opposition with a most successful record of 15 wins and seven losses.

Sadly, a plethora of injuries would virtually ground to a halt any future collegiate athletic exploits for the Muskegon lad. A variety of bumps in the road prevented White from ever again playing a full season at Western.

Veteran Detroit Free Press sportswriter Marshall Dann, in a late 1940’s preseason preview of the Western football season, portrayed White as a ‘brittle bones halfback’.

Expectations were high for White and the Broncos when the 1947 season kicked off. Western had joined the Mid-American conference and White nearly became the answer to a trivia question.

White came oh so close to marking a milestone in Bronco history. In their opening game of the season against Western Reserve White was stopped just two yards short of the goal line. Quarterback Hilton Foster scored on the next play, the first Western player to score a TD in Mid-American Conference play.

It was in this game that White received what would prove to be the first of several career-ending injuries. The game was played before classes started for the school year, prompting White to rehabilitate his broken leg back in his Muskegon home on Miner Avenue.

White gave it one last shot at Western at the start of the 1949 season. Pre-season prognostications had given White little chance of seeing major playing time.

But White gave his many former fans a quick glimpse of what ‘could have been’ when the season got under way.

Bob ran wild against Ripon in a season opening 47-0 win, scoring 2 TD’s, and had another long touchdown gallop called back. However, in the next game against Iowa State, White again broke his leg. His college career came to an end, and it was now time to begin his many productive years back home in Muskegon as “Bemo Bob”.

His best sales pitch as a potato chip salesman extraordinaire came in 1961, when he began courting a young lady by the name of Bernadine Vanderberg. To ensure that Bob never would forget their anniversary, they will celebrate their fiftieth year of marriage next June 3rd, the same day a still very active Bob White will turn 86 years old.

I asked the jovial White if he had any regrets or if he would change anything from yesteryear: “I regret not applying myself better in the classroom. It was real tough watching my teammates performing on the field my senior year in high school. That really hurt,” said White.

One small regret, but many great memories and accomplishments, all accompanied by a boatload of friends and admirers, by one of Muskegon all-time great athletes, ‘Bemo’ Bob White.

How fortunate I was to know this wonderful man for many years before he passed away at 94 years of age in 2019.

*I always felt that it was my duty to pay tribute to a great athlete who is no longer with us. I well remember how often my late colleague, and good friend, Mart Tardani would pen a story after one of our area’s finest had passed. Here is the story when I paid tribute to former Muskegon Heights basketball great Ron Robinson who left us back in 2010.*

**MOYES’ MEMORIES: Ron Robinson and the 1958 MUSKEGON HEIGHTS TIGERS**

**By Jim Moyes**

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They were reunited once again, the entire starting unit from the Muskegon Heights basketball team of 1958. They were there to pay their respects and say parting goodbyes to a departed teammate and dear friend --- Ron Robinson.

Look at the picture that accompanies this story! Could there have been a starting five in our area’s storied history that could match the accomplishments of this quintet?

From left to right there was Dan Wright (No. 40), a stellar all-around athlete who was an outstanding football performer at Colorado College. Dan’s roommate in college was Steve Sabol, regularly viewed on television as the host of NFL films.

Dan is perhaps best known around Greater Muskegon as the long time and very successful basketball coach for many years at Reeths Puffer. Dan had a very dry, but witty sense of humor, and while looking at the picture with his teammates following Robinson’s funeral, he quickly noticed a discrepancy in this photo.

“With the talent that surrounded me on this team, it was a rarity when I actually had the ball,” deadpanned Wright.

Trotting out on the floor next to Wright was Osie McCarty (No. 1). McCarty was a regular with Robinson on those back-to-back Heights state championship teams in 1956 and 1957.

Following an outstanding collegiate career as a running back at Arizona State University, Osie, and his good buddy Wright, would have many friendly battles as coaching adversaries on the hardwoods after McCarty became the Heights varsity basketball coach.

McCarty is a two-time inductee in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame, as a player on the Heights 1956 and 1957 teams and was inducted as an individual in 2008.

To the right of Robinson is Gene Young (No. 35) who is certainly no stranger to area sports fans. Most of our current generation will remember Gene as my longtime partner in the broadcasting booth, calling area football and basketball games for more than 30 years. Young was also an outstanding basketball player during his era.

Young, who has served for years as President of the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame, played his college ball for legendary NBA coach Dick Motta at Weber State University.

Yet another gifted all-around athlete on this Heights powerhouse was Floyd Cook (No. 44). Cook was not only a rebounding and scoring dynamo, but he was fast! How fast? Fast enough that while attending Western Michigan University he won the Mid-American Conference championship in 1962 in the 440-yard dash.

The multi-talented Cook entertained the large gathering honoring the life of Ron Robinson by playing a solo on the saxophone as a tribute to his lifelong friend.

And in the middle of this photo there is Ronnie Robinson (No. 43).

I first remember Ron back in 1952 as a tall, lean and bespectacled baseball player for a Little League team called Cash Coal. (Does anybody still use coal for heat?) Those were the days when one played as many sports as humanly possible. Specialization in sports was yet decades down the road.

Robinson, Young, Cook, McCarty, and Wright played sports in all three seasons, beginning with their Junior High Days in the early 1950’s. It was nearly impossible to find a team photo from early football, basketball and baseball teams that didn’t include this inseparable five.

And how good of a basketball player was Ronnie Robinson? Gene Young, who has watched hundreds of basketball games during his many years covering high school sports expressed his thoughts.

“If you had to name an all-time top five team you would have to include Ronnie,” Young offers.

Robinson made an immediate impact as a sophomore on the 1956 Tiger Class A state championship team. He would be content to play second fiddle for his first two varsity years alongside Ed Burton, perhaps this area’s greatest basketball player of all time.

Robinson was a steady, but quiet performer who scored in double figures in the Tigers state championship victory over Hamtramck in 1956. He improved mightily the following season as the Heights breezed to their second straight title with nary an opponent coming within ten points of this Hall of Fame team.

An emotional Ed Burton fondly remembered his lifelong friend and teammate in a recent conversation with this author. When I asked Ed what he best remembered about Ron Robinson he quickly responded: “Whew! ----- Just where do I start? He was just a perfect gentleman, a very friendly and loving person, and a great basketball player,” recalled the legendary ex-Tiger great whose No. 55 is retired and hangs on the wall in the current Tiger gym.

“We were very close since grade school and has we got older we became even closer” replied Burton, whose brother M.C. married Ronnie’s sister Ellen.

Following a pair of back-to-back State titles, the Heights had a huge bull’s-eye on their backs every time they took the court in 1958. Oakie Johnson’s Tigers were dealt a startling defeat on the Old Central Campus Stage in a Muskegon upset that snapped a long winning streak that went back three years.

Many old timers remember the 1958 state finals that featured Benton Harbor and Detroit Austin playing in the state finals. Future NBA greats Dave DeBusschere and Chet Walker were the headline performers, and rightly so.

But, certainly in 1958, Robinson could have been included in that elite group. During the middle to late 1950’s there was no better high school basketball rivalry then the Benton Harbor Downstate Tigers vs. the Muskegon Heights Upstate Tigers.

Gene Young remembers those battles. “In my junior year (1958-58 season) we beat Chet Walker twice, and Ronnie just handled him. Ronnie was just so smooth, and he had those inside moves and quickness,” reminisced Young.

The Tigers were on a collision course to play Benton Harbor for a third time in the semis, but Flint Central pulled the upset of the 1958 tournament and sent the Heights to the sidelines.

While playing for the Heights Robinson was called “Slim” by his teammates. He might have been called Slim, but he wasn’t slim on talent and had deceptive strength.

Robinson enrolled the following year at Western Michigan in a Freshman Class that would rank has one of the most talented Bronco classes of all time. Freshmen were not eligible for varsity competition at the Division 1 level during this era, so this talented group of recruits had to be content pummeling the varsity Bronco five in scrimmages.

In his first year of varsity competition (1960-61) Robinson led the Broncos in scoring (17.9 ppg.) and rebounding (10.2 ppg) while being selected to the 2nd team All Mid-American conference team.

The following year Robinson singed the nets to the tune of 19.6 points per game while again pulling down double figures in rebounds. The Broncos took on all comers including the 1960 and 61 NCAA champs from Cincinnati.

The Broncos in Robinson’s junior season pushed a Loyola team to the limit before losing 87-85 in overtime to a Rambler team that would follow Cincinnati as NCAA champs in 1963.

It would hardly happen to a player of Robinson’s ability today to fail in a classroom, but Robinson was declared academically ineligible to play for the Broncos in his senior season.

“That wouldn’t happen today,” decries Gene Young. “Today’s universities have tutors, mandatory study tables, and computers that constantly monitor a student athlete’s progress in the classroom. In Ronnie’s era the schools just let the athletes out on their own, and that was unfortunate,” said Young.

Although it’s been nearly fifty years since Ron Robinson departed WMU, his name is still etched in the Bronco record books. Robinson currently sits in sixth place all time in career scoring (18.7 pg) and rebounding (10.3 pg).

To put this in perspective former Shelby High and NBA great Paul Griffin is 8th in career rebounding average at WMU.

Ron then had a couple of brief flings playing semi-pro basketball, including a stint with our hometown Panthers before settling down to a family life where he worked nearly 30 years at Neway.

His Western Michigan teammate, as well as roommate, Earl McNeal eloquently stated in his eulogy “I was proud of Ronnie, not only as a great basketball player and loyal friend, but as a man who was married for 49 years and was an active father.”

The Heights starting five from 1958 were not the only ones among the large throng that paid their final respects to Ron Robinson this past Monday.

WMU teammates Earl McNeal and Sammy Key were present. Even the manager of those great Heights teams from that era, Paul VanOveran, traveled back to the Port City to say goodbye to his boyhood hero.

Of course, ‘Big Ed” was in attendance and making the trip all the way from Arizona was Ed’s Hall of Fame brother, Dr. M.C. Burton.

What battles that threesome had on that famed outdoor court on Baker Street! I remember playing on that court with Ron and his mates and, even though I was an outsider from North Muskegon, I was always treated warmly.

The players from Muskegon Heights could have been the poster child for tearing down those racial barriers from the Robinson era that were so prevalent in other areas of this country. They did not see color and established friendships that have lasted a lifetime.

They were always there for one another. Dan Wright remembers he was ill and a doubtful starter for an important tournament game in 1958. Ron Robinson spent an entire afternoon at Dan’s house telling Wright how important he was to the team and he just “had to get better. We need you,” implored a concerned Robinson.

For years they have stayed together attending reunions, lunches, dinners, ball games, and, sadly, funerals when one would lose a mother, father, or a loved one.

Monday, they came to say their final goo byes to one of their own, Ron Robinson—a superlative athlete, a devoted husband for 49 years to his beloved Ruby, a loyal and active father, as well as a very kind and humble man.

You know they will miss their friend “Slim.

*Sadly, as I insert Ronnie’s story more than a decade after his passing, only Floyd Cook is with us as of this writing. I miss them all dearly.*

*Thanks to the incredibly hard work and the hard-earned dollars poured into one of Muskegon’s iconic structures, Marsh Field remains more than a century later, our own Field of Dreams. Here is my story:*

**MOYES’ MEMORIES OF MARSH FIELD**

**By Jim Moyes**

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How good it is to see this Grand Ole Lady get a major face lift, thanks to the benevolence of a trio of true baseball lovers, Len Piasecki, Jim Grevel and Pete Gawkowski.

Every time I pass the corner of Laketon & Peck Street many fond recollections flow from this baseball junkie’s memory box. How awestruck I was when my father first took me to a Muskegon Clippers game back in the late 1940’s. I had yet to step forth into big league park, but it was unimaginable to this naïve toddler that Detroit’s Brigg’s Stadium could begin to surpass historic Marsh Field for its charm.

Unfortunately, my father might have had a little chauvinistic blood in his genes, as he never took me to see the famed Muskegon Lassies during their stay here in the Port City.

Some of those Clipper players of yesteryear are still vivid in my mind, as many would make it all the way to the Big Show. It’s odd, but I cannot remember seeing the most noted Clipper of them all (Elston Howard) during his brief stay in Muskegon.

One of the most treasured moments from my 30-year ownership of the Bear Lake Tavern would be the annual appearance of the ‘Squire of Spring Lake’ for a late lunch and fellowship at the BLT. Jack Tighe, who managed (and played) for the old Muskegon Reds in the early 1940’s, before managing my beloved Detroit Tigers, would spend hours at the ‘ole’ watering hole just talking baseball.

Tighe’s memory and ability to recall area players was astounding. My proudest moment was when Jack couldn’t remember the name of the hard throwing Clipper African American pitcher from the 1951 season. I had a friend for life when I told him that pitcher had to have been Frank Barnes.

We would reminisce about some of those legends of yesteryear, including some of my Clipper favorites such as Jim Greengrass, Loren Babe, and Nino Escalera. Tighe had a mind of a super scout as he could roll off names of local stars as easily as those he managed in the Big Leagues.

My first game as a player at Marsh Field came less than a year after the Clippers folded their tent and pro baseball would disappear forever from Marsh Field. It was early June in 1952, and it was played in a baseball atmosphere that would be unbelievable for today’s youths.

It was the first Little League game ever played in Greater Muskegon, and it attracted a crowd estimated at 800 persons. Snow fences were erected a few feet past the skin of the infield to closely resemble Little League distances for this era.

Can you imagine a Little League game today played with the fanfare that took place in June of 1952? Mayors, from North Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, and Roosevelt Park were present as Muskegon Mayor E.J. Quick addressed the crowd between games of this Little League Doubleheader.

League president Ray Castenholz thanked the sponsors and donors and all the many volunteers for their help in getting Little League started in Muskegon while Hall of Fame sportswriter James F. Henderson served as the emcee. And believe it or not, the massed bands from Muskegon and Muskegon Heights High Schools played the National Anthem prior to the first pitch!

I wish I could say my Little League debut was as successful as the ceremony. All I can remember about this game was that I was scared to death when I looked up at the enormous (to me) grandstand and saw all those people.

When I stepped into the batter’s box, I thought I saw the second coming of Bob Gibson on the mound. Instead, it was Walter McCrea who looked about seven feet tall and appeared to throw about 100 miles per hour. I don’t think I even hit a foul ball off McCrea and embarrassingly struck out in my two appearances at the plate.

Marsh Field was never again to see a Little League game played at the ole ballpark, but over the years there certainly have been no shortage of stars that have appeared on the scene.

The ‘Old Timers’ that will take the field today played ball well after the players from my generation. I remember the talent that the Home Furnace club from the middle 1950’s put on the field.

I marveled at the double play combination of Jack Bolema and Lee Saylor; the power and speed of Frank Howell; the grace of Jim Johnson while running down a deep fly ball; and the power pitching from flame throwers the likes of Jerry Eaton and Chuck Dobberstein, just to name a few.

I also recall that my generation had its own version of Les Gowell when a crafty right-hander by the name of Dick Newell toed the mound.

I notice where former Muskegon Catholic ace Rick Murray will be one of these ‘Old Timers’ that will be in action on this date. Although I didn’t have that many at bats against his father, I couldn’t hit Don Murray if I brought a canoe paddle with me to the plate.

My fondest wish for today’s combatants is that none of these former legends of yesteryear hits a swinging bunt down the third base line. You ‘gotta’ protect those tender hammies.

There have been many memorable moments at Marsh Field, and thanks to the efforts of Len, Jim and Pete there promises to be many more in the foreseeable future.

*The 2009 football season capped an end to an era after more than three decades of following out local gridders in action. Following the completion of the 2010 season I was asked to capture my thoughts on my ‘retirement’ from my beloved ‘Port City’ and point out some ditties from the past, including some memories of coach Roger Chiaverini, who had passed away just days before this column:*

**‘MOYES MEMORIES**

**What I’ll miss in football**

I find it hard to believe how quickly the 2010 regular season has flown by. To say that I have missed my first high school football season in more than 40 years would be a gross understatement.

But please don’t feel sorry for the ‘ole announcer.’ I have been kept very active transporting my grandchildren to various baseball venues throughout the state of Florida this past fall.

Thankfully, with the advent of today’s technology, I was able to keep track of Friday night football in the Muskegon area by listening to the game of the week games broadcast on the Internet by my former partners, Gene Young Joe Coletta, and Steve DePouw.

I’ve always considered Friday nights in West Michigan during the fall to be my favorite time of the year. Watching high school football on a crisp fall evening is just one of the many fixations I’ve not enjoyed in 2010.

In many ways I also experienced some of those same anxieties that players felt while awaiting the 7:00 PM kickoff. I can’t ever recall not getting pregame butterflies in my stomach prior to taking the air for any one of the hundreds of high school games I have been so fortunate to cover since beginning my long journey with the media in the fall of 1956.

I surely missed meeting with the coaches for a pre-game interview prior to our broadcasts. Only once in my more than 40 years of covering 40 years did a local coach fail to grant me a pre-game interview.

It was the near the end of the 1982 season and perhaps embittered Muskegon head coach Mike Cieslak had a premonition that it was going to be his last season at the helm.

For whatever reason, Cieslak tersely declined to be interviewed. When the powers to be fired Cieslak, shortly after Muskegon had gone through the worse three years in Big Red football history, there were certainly no tears spilled from this reporter when Muskegon Athletic Director Larry Harp handed Cieslak his walking papers and hired my long-time friend Dave Taylor.

It was also during the 1982 season when, due to technical difficulties, we failed to air a football game. Oddly enough, the only game on our broadcast schedule that we ever missed was Cieslak’s biggest win.

Brother Rice personnel assured my partner George Seymour and I that a phone line was available at the Saturday night game contested at Birmingham Seaholm High School. No phone line was anywhere near the stadium and faithful Big Red fans who did not take the long trek to the Detroit area were deprived of listening to a 26-13 Muskegon upset victory over heavily favored Birmingham Brother Rice.

With the recent addition of cell phones as a mandatory part of our culture, a missing phone line today would pose only a minor problem. There were only a few broadcasts where we had to revert to our trustee ‘smart phones’.

Perhaps the least likely venue where one could envision phone line problems would be spacious Ford Field in Motown. Just prior to taking the air before the start of the Division 5 state finals in 2008, John Johnson, MHSAA communications director, poked his head into our booth to inform our crew that all phone lines are inoperable at Ford Field.

As a precautionary measure my sidekick Gene Young would always bring his power adaptor with him so we could use his cell phone for just such an emergency. But who would have suspected it would be Ford Field where a major problem would appear?

For only the first game all year Gene left his power cord back in his hotel room. Neither Joe Coletta’s nor my phone was compatible with our board mixer. Gene’s cell worked just fine, but he only had enough battery power to survive but one half of the game.

Just when only one bar was showing on his battery indicator did John Johnson give us the welcome news that the phone lines had been restored, much to the relief of our broadcasting crew.

There was one other coach who I had to treat with kid gloves, but one who I had the deepest respect for his abilities to mold great football teams: the late and great Roger Chiaverini.

For much of my forty plus years of broadcasting I would generally interview the home team coach about an hour before kickoff. However, coach ‘Chev’ was so intense that I would interview him a day or two before a Chiaverini coached game.

Even then, things didn’t always go smoothly between ‘Chev’ and me. In 1978 Chiaverini’s Muskegon Catholic team was arguably the best local team in Muskegon County history not to make it to the state finals.

The Crusaders roared through the powerful Lake Michigan Conference with nary a defeat. Only a startling upset to Reeths Puffer and future Wisconsin and United Football League star Johnny Williams marred a perfect season.

The Crusaders 8-1 record against top-notch competition earned MCC a berth in the playoffs. MCC were prohibitive favorites against Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern in a regional match at a jam-packed Housemen Field in the furniture city.

But Chev had a premonition: His team was battered by costly injuries. I called Chev to ask when would be a good time for a taped interview before our Saturday broadcast? He told me: “Come out to the field Thursday night at 5:00 PM.”

I was at Kehren Stadium as requested at 5:00 PM sharp and I could see that practice wasn’t going well. ‘Chev’ began chewing seemingly everybody out-- Including me! ‘Chev’ and I must have provided a little levity to a fragile situation as we began arguing with one another, much to the surprise of the Crusader players who were undoubtedly enjoying our little confrontation.

The injury riddled Crusaders lost to the eventual state champs from Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern 14-12. So powerful were the Crusaders in 1978 that, included among their victims was Traverse City Central. ‘All’ the TC Trojans would accomplish in 1978 was win the state championship in CLASS A!

Roger and I quickly patched up our differences and we conducted our pre-game interview. We became very good friends over the years, and I really enjoyed those morning coffee klatches before Coach ‘Chev’ passed away a few weeks back.

Following Chiaverini’s retirement you could always find him at a Friday night football game, nearly always accompanied by his loving wife Dot. However, there was one night some time ago when the weather was so lousy that even Dot could not be persuaded to tag along with the Hall of Fame coach.

The game was at Orchard View, and it was raining cats & dogs, accompanied by near freezing temperatures. About halfway through our pregame show I noticed ‘Chev’ taking a seat in the stands.

I asked somebody to please get Chev and tell him to come to the press box under a bogus pretense of giving us a hand in the press box. I pointed out that if anybody had earned the right to watch that game in the comfort of a dry press box it was Roger Chiaverini.

We will all miss Coach ‘Chev’.

I also will miss arriving at historic Hackley stadium and listening to the fabled Muskegon Marching Band rehearsing. The Big Red marching band was easily my favorite, as their pre-game routine never got old over the years.

I’ll miss the class of the Oakridge band playing the opponents fight song prior to each game. I always appreciated the enthusiasm of the Eagle fans. No matter how early I would arrive at Erickson stadium there would always be several Oakridge fans waiting patiently for the gates to open at a home game.

I miss many of the volunteers who worked the press boxes. Probably the current worker who has worked the longest has been the guardian of the always-busy Hackley Stadium press box, Ray Wheeler.

Somehow Ray could always find room for all the media that covered Big Red games for the past half century. Nobody, outside of perhaps a traffic cop, heard more excuses on why they belonged in the working press box then Ray Wheeler.

I’ll always remember the professionalism of the late Russ Swanson – whose talents as a PA announcer were passed on to Brad Young. Until his retirement a few years ago Dave Covell was the only PA announcer in Muskegon Catholic’s storied football regime.

My many years covering football games have seen some incredible changes over the years, especially for those of us in the working media.

When I began covering football as a stringer for the Muskegon Chronicle back in 1956, press boxes in the West Michigan Conference were no bigger than a linen closet. I never once had the luxury of taking game notes in a press box at any of the old WMC football fields.

I really felt I reached the big time when I sat in a real press box for the first time in Ludington back in the late 1950’s and had a chance to sit next to and learn the ropes from Ludington Daily News Sports Editor Dick Derrick. Dick treated this teenage reporter like I was a seasoned pro, and I will be forever grateful for his kindness.

It never got old for me to take the long journey across the state to watch our Muskegon County teams battle for a state championship. Only in high school football could one enjoy reading signs encouraging their team on to victory. How I loved that good old high school spirit!

Our area has been fortunate to see one of our local schools play for a state title 35 times, unprecedented for a county with such a modest population. Unfortunately, 2010 was not one of those years.

However, with a tradition such as ours here in Muskegon County, a group of dedicated and skilled coaches, players with a burning desire to work hard, and the passionate spirit of our supporting fans, it will not be a long wait before we once again make that long trek across Interstate 96.

And don’t forget to set up those signs!

*One of my favorite subjects over the years for these stories was a former teammate of mine at North Muskegon – Sam Hughes. Sam was arguably the most humble and nicest man I ever met during my schoolboy days in North Muskegon. And what an athlete! Here is my story on this great man that was published in the Muskegon Chronicle in January of 2011:*

**SAM HUGHES**

**By Jim Moyes**

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I have been so fortunate to witness some great athletes from the Muskegon area perform over the years. Many continued their athletic and academic careers at the next level, and, for a fortunate chosen few, even beyond.

There was one very special person, however, who grew up years too soon and never had the opportunity to display his skills after high school.

His name was Sam Hughes, and I was privileged to have known Sam as a classmate, teammate, and friend.

Sam is well known by many as the father of Mark Hughes, captain of the 1989 NCAA basketball champions from the University of Michigan. However, I best recall Sam has a very shy, humble, and extremely well-liked individual blessed with extraordinary athletic ability.

All of Sam’s children were outstanding athletes at Reeths Puffer High in the 1970’s and 80s, but Sam could boast of one title that none of his offspring earned: a state championship!

The record books will show that Sam Hughes was the 1958 Class B state track & field champion in the high jump, as well as a second-place finisher in the 440-yard dash.

Sam was a year ahead of me at North Muskegon High but as a Junior I was assigned a seat next to Sam in one of my favorite classes: Speech.

When I am fortunate to speak in front of a group, I often think of my speech teacher, Mrs. Noel. It might have been the only class where this misguided teenager listened to his teacher.

Virtually everyone at North Muskegon High was aware of Hughes’ skills in track and field. In 1957 Sam became the first performer in Greater Muskegon Track & Field history to clear the six-foot barrier while winning the high jump at the 1957 Greater Muskegon Track & Field Championships.

Sam was much more than just a standout in track, but very few knew how skilled he was at basketball. Unfortunately, Hughes did not try out for the basketball team at North Muskegon in any of his four years at NMHS.

Many of the students at NM in the 1950s resided in what is now the Reeths Puffer School District. Following a quick lunch at noon hour Hughes would then often take part in a friendly intramural session of basketball before heading off to his next class.

The 1957-58-basketball season had already started when I observed Sam playing hoops with a few of his classmates following lunch. I was amazed at what Hughes could accomplish at these sessions, even though Hughes would be playing ball in his stocking feet!

While sitting next to Sam during one of our speech classes I asked him why he hadn’t gone out for our basketball team. Sam’s answer was one that shouldn’t have surprised me. While I lived right across the street from the high school, Sam resided miles away on Cora Avenue, just off Russell Road.

Hughes, as did all his teammates, did not have any means of transportation, and nobody in their right mind could be expected to walk from school to his home from miles away, especially during our Michigan winters.

I went to coach Robert Morris and informed him that the best basketball player in school is playing during lunch hour and would be a big help for our fledgling team.

It was plain to see that Sam had all the talents, including amazing jumping skills. However, the one resource he did not have was a car. I certainly couldn’t help as, not only did I not have a car, but I also didn’t even have a driver’s license until I turned eighteen. It took coach Morris just a quick peek at one of those noon hour sessions before he offered Hughes a spot on the NM basketball team. Often it was the coach who would give Sam a ride home following those after school practices, or one of his teammates who had use of the family automobile.

“At first I had to walk home,” recalled Sam in our conversation earlier this week. “Me and my buddy Charlie Owens would always walk and run back home after track practice,” recalled Hughes.

“It didn’t seem so bad back then, it was no big deal,” replied a jocular Hughes.

“Once in a while my dad or Charley’s Dad would pick us up but most of the time we got home on our own. Often, we would stop at Homes Drug Store on the way home and get ourselves some chili --- that was some good chili --- Charley and I still talk about that all the time,” said Sam.

Despite his transportation woes Sam quickly made his way into the starting lineup. With the addition of the lanky Hughes the Norsemen, never confused as a basketball powerhouse, finished a very respectable 10-7 during the 1957-58 season.

This ‘Ole’ announcer will not soon forget Hughes leading the Norsemen to a huge upset victory over a heavily favored Zeeland Chix squad on Zeeland’s home court in the 1958 Class B district tournament.

Sam had extraordinary leaping ability. When racing in for a layup he would sky high above the rim and just drop, not slam dunk the ball, for that would be showing up the opponent, something the modest Hughes would never do.

Our Norsemen had seen a once comfortable lead evaporate to but a single point with the clock winding down. Zeeland had the ball, down by only one point, when Sam made THE play.

Sam informed me after the game that he had noticed Zeeland run a certain play the entire game and just knew it was coming again. Sam stole the ball and soared high into the air and gently dropped the ball in the hoop to insure our district win.

Sam Hughes’ career as a Norsemen basketball player was all too short but he was a one-man gang in track & field.

In his junior year Hughes was a virtual unknown when he upset the field in winning the high jump at the third-ever Greater Muskegon Meet.

The following week Hughes set a conference and NM school record in the high jump at the 1957 West Michigan Conference meet. Sam won three events in the WMC meet (100-220-HJ) and after running in qualifying heats placed a tired third in the long jump.

Hughes won three events (all meet records) in an interleague dual between the WMC and the Ken-New-Wa conferences and took a close third in the 100.

Sam closed out his senior year by winning the State Class B Championship in the high jump.

A year had passed before I would once again meet up with Sam Hughes. It was in the spring of the year in 1959 when I took a recruiting trip to Central Michigan University. I was encouraged by the Athletic Department at CMU to bring along Sam Hughes.

I borrowed our family car, picked up Sam and headed for Mt. Pleasant. I was one who never lacked for self-confidence (OK --- I was cocky) and I was certain that the CMU basketball coach was going to give this 5’8 basketball player a huge sales pitch.

It wasn’t but a few minutes into this meeting with the basketball and track staff at CMU that I realized that it wasn’t Jim Moyes they were seeking to enroll at CMU --- it was Sam Hughes!

It was a gorgeous early spring afternoon on the CMU campus, and it so happened that CMU was hosting Eastern Michigan University in a dual track meet. Each team boasted of some exceptional talent with the star attraction being EMU’s future Olympic Gold Medal winning hurdler, Hayes Jones.

Sam and I ventured over to the high jump competition. The bar was at 6’3, a modest height for today’s standards, but an impressive height in the pre-Fosbury flop era.

When the event concluded, with nobody clearing the bar at 6’3, one of the CMU assistant coaches asked Sam if he would like to try.

Sam removed his shoes, and while attired in his street clothes, easily cleared the bar in his stocking feet, much to the amazement of all who were still at the high jump site.

Unfortunately for CMU staffers, it was I, and not Sam Hughes, who enrolled the following fall at Central. “They offered me a partial scholarship, but my family certainly couldn’t afford to make up the difference,” recalled Hughes.

Nobody will ever convince this author that there wasn’t an unwritten ‘quota’ rule during this era that limited the number of African Americans on college, and to some degree, even professional sports teams.

Central Michigan University was no exception. The football team featured but one black athlete, a sensational running back by the name of Walter Beach. Beach was the only player from that team to play in the National Football League.

The CMU basketball team likewise had but one black, and he was a star in two sports. Carl Williams was not only a regular on the basketball team but earned his scholarship money by also being the star hurdler on the track team.

Sam Hughes’ athletic career was over. In October of 1959 he married his beloved Wilda and Sam became a hard-working wage earner at a local foundry while raising five children.

Sam would see his son with the same first name set a school record in the high jump, a record that still stands today. Tim Hughes was also a skilled basketball player as was their daughter Karen. Carol, the youngest of the Hughes family, also was a stellar athlete at RPHS.

At Reeths Puffer High School Sam & Wilda’s youngest son Mark had grown to 6’8 and had a body that was suited for the rigors of the Big Ten.

College Recruiters invaded the modest Reeth Puffer gymnasium in droves but when I would bring up Mark’s incredible basketball skills to Sam & Wilda, they were always most proud of his academic achievements.

Unfortunately, only Wilda was in Seattle in early April of 1989 to witness her son cutting down the nets following the UM title winning game over Seton Hall. Sam Hughes was back home in Muskegon doing what he always thought was right for his family, putting in a days’ work at his job at Campbell Wyatt and Cannon.

The humble Hughes attempted to soften those thoughts in our conversation. “It wasn’t only that I didn’t want to miss work, I just plain didn’t like to fly.” His dislike of flying went out the window when he later flew to Europe to pay a visit to Mark.

Quinn Barry, now coaching at Central Lake, recently spoke with me about his lifelong friend and teammate’s dad while growing up in the Reeths Puffer District. “I remember that Mark’s Dad would never miss a day of work, even if it meant missing watching Mark play in person on basketball’s biggest stage: The Final Four,” said Barry.

“That’s right, Dad would never miss work”, said his son Mark while visiting his family here in Muskegon earlier this week. Mark, now a scout for the New York Knicks of the NBA, was quick with his praise in lauding his father.

“I can’t say enough good things about Dad, he was always the rock of our family,” gushed Mark. “Dad is a great example of what a father should be like, and I was so fortunate to always have him around.”

How proud Sam and Wilda Hughes were when their son Mark was inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame in 2004.

The legacy of the Hughes family carried on long after Mark left his niche on his illustrious career. Sam’s grandson, daughter Karen’s son JR Wallace, also had an amazing career.

When JR scored his final two points in a district semi-final in 1999, he had tallied his 1334th career point, surpassing the Reeths Puffer school record held by his Uncle Mark.

And whom did he score these two points against? None other than Zeeland High, the same school that Grandpa Hughes exhibited his heroics against some forty years earlier.

Sam Hughes’ grandson would earn a basketball scholarship, leading his college team in assists and steals during his senior season of 2002-03. JR Wallace was the point guard on his college team that would have the most victories (25) in the universities’ history.

And where did JR Wallace go to college?

Thankfully, times have long since changed for the better across this great country, as young JR received a full ride scholarship to the same school that wanted his grandfather four decades earlier ---- Central Michigan University.

As Sam and Wilda approach their 52nd wedding anniversary, they can take great pride in their children and grandchildren’s success in the academic, as well as the athletic and business world.

Although he never had the same opportunities of the younger Hughes family connections, all would agree with Mark Hughes: “Dad was the rock of our family.”

*Next up, A story of perhaps the oddest ending to a Muskegon Area basketball tournament game in history written in February of 2011:*

**Sudden Death Game of 1948**

**By Jim Moyes**

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There have been a few zany finishes on the local high school basketball scene over the years. Last second shots, made or missed, creating instant euphoria for the victors, or--- resulting in a crushing defeat for the losers.

The scoreboard operator quickly posts the score, with the winning team obviously always having the greatest number of points on the board. But no finish in local annals could have experienced a more bizarre ending then a contest fought by a couple of fierce rivals more than sixty years ago.

When the final buzzer had sounded, the team with the highest point total was NOT deemed the winner of the game.

This game was not your ordinary run of the mill regular season match that would one day be eventually forgotten. No, this game would be contested during the high school basketball tournament, with the foes being one of our area’s most storied rivals, the Muskegon Big Reds vs. the Muskegon Heights Tigers.

Heights had won the two previous matches between these two combatants during the regular season and Tiger players were confident of adding yet another victory over the Big Reds.

The action took place on March 12, 1948, at the Class A regional in Kalamazoo with Muskegon deemed the eventual winner 43 to 40.

Making this a bitterer pill to swallow for the Heights cagers was that Oakie Johnson’s squad led throughout the contest. The Heights led 10-6 at the end of the first quarter, 15-11 at the half, and enjoyed a seemingly comfortable 31-24 advantage over the Big Reds heading into the final stanza.

Not until Muskegon center Chuck Meetsma bucketed a field goal with 15 seconds left in regulation did Muskegon force a tie with the Tigers at 38-all.

For Meetsma, his only field goal of the game, could not have come at a more opportune time.

And then the drama would build as the first overtime got underway. Each team played with extreme caution in the first three- minute overtime period with the net result being but two free throws converted by each team.

One of those free throws would begin the first barrage of controversy that had purists scrambling to find an elusive rulebook.

During this low scoring first overtime period a double foul was called by one of the two much-maligned officials working this game. Stan Yonker, the Big Red’s leading scorer in this game with 15 points, was a part of the double foul.

For Yonker, it was his fifth personal foul, marking disqualification from the game. Coach Johnson argued that the hot shooting Yonker should not be permitted to shoot the all-important foul shot (There were no 1-1’s or two shots for each foul committed after the tenth team foul per rules of today)

The officials were baffled determining if Yonker, or as Heights Coach Johnson insisted, that a sub be allowed to shoot the free throw. After a lengthy delay Yonker was allowed to shoot the foul shot, and with nerves of steel, Stan sank his all-important two-handed underhanded charity toss to force a second overtime.

Whether Yonkers should have been permitted to shoot that critical foul shot was never made clear in the game day story or any follow-up columns. And to be perfectly honest, I have no idea what should have been the correct ruling from this era.

Jack Rademaker was inserted into the Muskegon lineup to replace Yonker and gave Muskegon its first lead of the evening when he canned a free throw. (Again no 1-1 for this era of the 1940’s).

Again, it was the opportunistic Rademaker who was the man of the hour when the newspaper account of this game penned: “Rademaker tossed a basket over his shoulder to decide the game at 43-40.” (Would this ‘toss’ possibly be the forerunner to what we know today as a hook shot?)

Play continued and the Heights made a furious comeback. Jerry Jacobson, Bill Caughey and Harold Hansen all made baskets to give the Heights an apparent 46-43 win when the three-minute second overtime period had ended, sending Heights players and their fans into a frenzy of joy!

But wait! Participants, coaches, fans, and most importantly, the officials working the game were not aware of a new “Sudden Death” two-point ruling.

There was one highly interested spectator amongst the crowd who was aware of the new ruling, long time official and Muskegon High School public address announcer for many decades, Nelson Volz.

‘Nellie’ sauntered down from his seat in the crowd, with his trusty rule book in his pocket, and quickly caught the attention of tournament manager Herbert W. (Buck) Read.

With a rulebook now in hand Read studied the section in the book pertaining to the new rule: “When a second overtime is needed, the ‘sudden death’ ruling goes into effect. By that rule the first team that gains an advantage of two or more points automatically becomes the winner.”

This ruling, if properly enforced, should have given Muskegon the victory after Rademaker canned his ‘hook shot’, giving Muskegon a three-point lead. For Rademaker, it would be his only points scored during this incredible battle.

In hopes that this ruling was inaccurate, Height’s administrators frantically tried to contact longtime Michigan High School Athletic Director Charles Forsythe.

Nellie Volz’s rulebook was correct, and the appeal was denied, making the trip back to the Heights a very long ride home.

Gerald (Jerry) Jacobson, one of the star players for the Heights well remembers this controversial battle some sixty years later.

“I will never forget that game”, recalled Jacobson from his Whitehall residence recently.

Jacobson, and Coach Oakie Johnson’s son Bob Johnson, led the Tigers in scoring with eleven points and it was Jacobson who netted a couple of free throws shortly before Meetsma made his game tying two-pointer that sent the game into its first overtime session.

“We were in the locker celebrating what we thought was a win when Buck Read came in and told us Muskegon had won the game because they had scored the first two points”, responded the former Tiger great.

It was an end to a season that was unlike any the Heights football teams from this era would experience. Many of these same Tiger basketball players were members of the recent football team that capped an incredible three-year undefeated run of 27 consecutive football victories.

Included among the Heights regulars that participated in this epic basketball game were Frank Howell and Tom Johnson, inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame many years ago. As a matter of record both Johnson (with 10 points) and Howell (6 pts) fouled out of this contest.

The burly Johnson and the speedy Howell would be future teammates on the University of Michigan football teams in the ensuing years coached, ironically, by former Muskegon High School legend Bennie Oosterbaan.

Although none of the players from Muskegon High made the Muskegon Area Hall of Fame, the Big Red basketball coach from 1948, Tom McShannock would be inducted in 1997. It goes without saying that Heights Coach Oakie Johnson was a part of the inaugural MAHOF class back in 1987.

Yet another Hall of Famer, who unwittingly played a huge part in the Big Red victory, would also make the MAHOF in 1994 as a Distinguished Award inductee. That would be the man who had the foresight to bring his basketball rulebook with him to Kalamazoo, --- Nelson Volz.

Although I was not a part of the Muskegon area hoops fans that made the trek to Kalamazoo for this sudden death thriller, there were a pair of other sudden death classics that will long be remembered by this author.

The 1956 state finals produced several milestones in MHSAA history. Eight years after losing that sudden death skirmish against the rival Big Reds, many of those same Tiger rooters were on hand at MSU’s Jenison Fieldhouse to witness Stephenson High School from the Upper Peninsula defeat Detroit St. Andrews 73-71 in the Class B championship game.

This basketball junkie will not soon forget Stephenson’s ‘Marvelous Mel’ Peterson banking in a 10-foot bank shot just to the right of the basket to give Stephenson a two-point lead and a ‘sudden death’ victory over their Motor City opponent.

It would prove to be the only game in MHSAA state finals history to be decided by sudden death. The 1956 season would also prove to be the only year in which three state champions were crowned from the Upper Peninsula.

Muskegon Heights fans at MSU in 1956, would not only see their beloved Tigers capture their second championship in three years, but Oakie Johnson would send out the first starting five in MHSAA history comprised solely of Africa American players.

My final viewing of a sudden death game was hardly a euphoric experience. Just days after our North Muskegon basketball team defeated Montague and their superstar center Charley Townsend, to win our first West Michigan conference championship since 1939, the Norse were dealt a similar fate experienced by the 1948 Heights Tigers.

By this time the rules for overtime games were clearly understood by teams and officials in attendance at the sold-out North Muskegon gymnasium, hosts for the 1959 Class B district tournament.

An exhilarating crescendo of cheers erupted from the Norse followers after I made a buzzer beater two pointer (a very lucky shot to be truthful) to send the Norsemen and the Ken-New-Wa champions from Coopersville into sudden death.

I now have deep compassion for those who were on the losing side of one of those rare ‘sudden death’ encounters. I too, experienced the quick roller coaster transition from unbridled delight to searing agony in a matter of seconds.

After one of my teammate’s shot just narrowly missed winning this district tilt, a rival Coopersville Bronco banked in a shot eerily like the shot made at MSU by Marvelous Mel Peterson.

My high school basketball career ended in much the same fashion Jerry Jacobson and the Heights Tigers ended many of their careers some eleven years earlier.

I now had to painfully watch the remainder of the district games as a paying customer. Coopersville’s double overtime victory over my Norsemen team might have taken a physical toll on many of the Bronco stalwarts. The Broncos were denied a district title.

And who should capture the 1959 Class B district tournament? None other than the Whitehall Vikings, coached by Jerry Jacobson, at least partially easing those painful memories evoked a decade earlier.

Jacobson coached for 35 very productive years at Whitehall High School and had more than his share of memorable wins and losses. However, the 1948 ‘sudden death’ game against Muskegon will live in his memoirs forever.

*Thoughts on the changes in basketball I’ve experienced over the years us the subject of the following story:*

**Times have changed in Basketball**

Another basketball season has ended for our area hoopsters, and to the surprise of nobody, the last two Muskegon area teams standing were the West Michigan Christian Warriors and the Tigers of Muskegon Heights.

One would have to roll back the clock to 1985 when a Muskegon County team other than WMC and the Heights was in the final four.

There is very little ‘March Madness’ for high school basketball in my newly adopted home state of sunny Florida, as the regular season was wrapped up by mid-February.

I spent many a night in the nearly empty gyms here in Florida watching my oldest grandson play for the Ponte Vedra basketball team this past season.

Although the talent in Florida is comparable with the cagers from my home state of Michigan, the crowds are miniscule from those I remember from my good ole days back home.

And my how the game has changed over the more than sixty years that I have been following the sport of basketball.

A multitude of rules changes have taken place, numerous structural variances to the playing surfaces, as well as a few other little quirks that I will add throughout this current Moyes’ Memories story.

In an earlier story I mentioned those old ‘cracker box’ gymnasiums that were commonplace back in the 1940’s and 50’s. Virtually all those antiquities have died a slow death and have been replaced with floors that are the standard 94x50’

Two players from the past played significant roles in vastly changing this great game: Wilt Chamberlain and Lew Alcindor.

Any ideas as to when the current three seconds in the paint rule was initiated? This rule was adapted in time for the start of the 1954-55 high school season and could be renamed “The Chamberlain rule.”

Chamberlain was a seven-foot phenom out of Overbrook High School in Philadelphia who was practically unstoppable in his era. Dubbed forever as ‘Wilt the Stilt,’ the very athletic Chamberlain would camp out as close as possible near the basket, patiently awaiting the lob pass from a teammate that he would quickly dunk into the ten-foot basket.

There was a three second rule that was hidden deep in the rule book in the mid 1930’s but this infraction was rarely enforced until Chamberlain arrived on the scene.

Not only was Chamberlain instrumental in getting a three second rule put into effect, but the width of the free throw lane was doubled from six feet to twelve feet.

Some years later an innovative basketball buff decided to paint this 12x15’ area, thus the term: “He’s in the paint” was created.

Prior to this widening of the lane, talented centers from yesteryear would camp out in that narrow area and often have huge scoring nights by utilizing a short hook shot.

A classic example that old-time basketball fans can relate to would be a scoring frenzy from Montague’s Gerry Brown on February 19, 1954. The 6’8 Wildcat center netted 56 points to set a still standing Montague school record at Shelby’s old cracker box gymnasium.

Montague fans could argue that it was Gerry Brown, and not Chamberlain, who hastened rules makers to rewrite the book.

A premier center from this early era was George Mikan from the old Minneapolis Lakers. Mikan, who wore number 99, was an unstoppable hook-shooting demon for many years before defensive stoppers such as Bill Russell joined the NBA.

I bring up Mikan’s number 99, as there is a player on my grandson’s travel baseball team who has the same number. I call him ‘Mikan’, but this youngster has absolutely no knowledge of the great George Mikan.

Lew Alcindor (now renamed Kareem Abdul Jabbar) was a well-publicized high school sensation from the streets of New York. Basketball purists during the 1960’s were appalled at the way Alcindor was dominating the game with his constant dunking of the basketball.

The rules makers banned dunking from the high school and college game beginning with the 1967-68 season before, thankfully, legalizing the dunk shot in 1976.

Although Chamberlain first popularized the art of dunking, the first ‘undersized’ slammer that I recall was a former MSU Spartan named Johnny Green.

I was always energized with a MSU designed out of bounds play for Green. Spartan guard Jack Quiggle would inbound the ball from behind the basket by lobbing the ball over the glass backboard to Green.

‘Jumpin’ Johnny would sky high in the air to snare the pass and then slam it through the hoop, a feat that would never fail to elicit a deafening roar of approval from a packed Jenison Fieldhouse.

Many of the other changes that I have noticed over the years have very little impact on one’s performance on the court.

It was little more than twenty years ago when today’s cagers would step on the court attired in shorts that today’s players wouldn’t be caught dead wearing in front of their peers.

It was the legendary Michael Jordan who first adorned today’s modern-day shorts that often hang down to one’s knees, and then later popularized at the collegiate level by the infamous ‘Fab Five at Michigan.

However, even this staunch sports conservative approves today’s longer version over those dainty pants from yesteryear.

Hey! Whatever happened to those old kneepads that were so fashionable back in the 1940’s and 50’s?

When I played, I felt almost naked if I didn’t don those ugly kneepads. I suppose they were useful when one dove on the floor chasing a loose ball, but--- in looking back I now know they were totally useless.

Seldom do you see a player, either from today’s era, or from yesteryear, incurring a floor burn.

There is another tradition from days of yore that has sadly fallen by the wayside --- The Pep Assembly!

How of us old time players looked forward to those rousing assemblies before the big game with ‘Ole Montague High’ and our other close rivals.

I suppose this exciting ritual was disbanded with the proliferation of many additional sports. When this old-timer played basketball back in the 1950’s, boys’ basketball was the one and only sport offered during those long and dark winter months.

About a decade or so back in time, my long-time radio partner Gene Young and I were just into our post-game wrap up of an area basketball game when we suddenly became aware of a new, but perhaps disturbing trend, a craze that inexplicably continues to this day:

Kids do not shower after a game!

I cannot ever recall playing in a contest in which we never showered after the game. There is no way I would ever want to hop aboard a team bus full of sweaty basketball players after a hard-fought game in Scottville.

Nor did we take those long bus rides from North Muskegon to Scottville listening to our favorite rock artists on our MP3 players. In the 1940’s and 50’s I Pods and Smart Phones were many decades from being invented. We would occupy our time by talking to our teammates to and from the big game.

Another basketball season has ended for our area high school teams, and those uniforms (hopefully washed) have been put away, ready to be passed on to next years’ group of cagers.

With an unprecedented total of four county teams advancing all the way to the regional finals, let’s hope the Class of 2012 will be as successful as this year’s class.

It was with a heavy heart that I wrote this story in tribute to my long-time friend and great athlete from days long past, Jack Mavis from May of 2011:

**Moyes remembers Jack Mavis**

**By Jim Moyes**

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The writings of the late Mart Tardani, one of my early colleagues from the Muskegon Chronicle, most inspired this sports nut to begin my monthly columns depicting local memories from yesteryear.

In addition to Mart’s outstanding work with contemporary sports reporting, Tardani would often inform his many readers when a local star athlete from days gone by would pass away,

Sadly, now it is my time to pay tribute to a departed teammate, and very close friend for many years, Jack Mavis.

Mavis passed away April 23rd in Florida at age 74 after losing his battle with several health issues, but, just as he did on the ball fields in Muskegon, he would not depart this world before putting up a typically valiant Jack Mavis fight.

I was so fortunate while growing up in North Muskegon to be raised in a neighborhood where young and old got along so well. I was about four years younger than many of my boyhood neighbors, but despite our age differences, I was treated as an equal and regularly invited to take part in our block side sporting events.

And what great athletes grew up around the high school in North Muskegon in the late 1940’s! My immediate next-door neighbor was Gordon Odell, who still stands alone with the highest season scoring average in Norse basketball annals.

Two doors down from Odell was Tom Stribley, a three-sport star at North Muskegon who would later serve as the long-time athletic director and baseball coach at Orchard View.

Dave Bliss, another three-sport star for the Norsemen was another neighbor who would always be a part of those neighborhood pickup games. All were classmates, teammates, and lifelong friends with their buddy Jack Mavis.

Jack was a late developer as far as his athletic abilities were concerned. It wasn’t until the pint-sized Mavis reached his senior year in high school back in 1955 before he would be big enough to compete successfully at the high school level.

At 5’8, and maybe 150 pounds, there was a point in time back in the early 1960’s when Jack Mavis was one of the standout baseball and basketball players in the Muskegon area,

So impressed were the administrators at Muskegon Business College that they recruited Mavis, to not only play for their fledgling basketball program, but they also installed him as the coach, making Mavis perhaps the only collegiate basketball player to be paid for coaching, as well as play in college games.

Mavis’s role during his senior season at North Muskegon was primarily as a playmaker, getting the ball to NM’s prolific scoring machine, Gordy Odell. I well remember the game late in the 1955 season at arch-rival Hart when the Pirates put a clamp around Odell, only to see Mavis respond with a career high 26 points.

Over the next decade Mavis had improved his game to where he had become the go to guy and was the leading scorer during the winter recreation leagues.

I thought I was a hot shot basketball player during my high school days, but Norse coach Robert Morris found a way to bring me down to reality. During my varsity seasons on the Northside in the late 1950’s Morris would often set up a scrimmage with NMHS alumni that always included Jack.

And did I get a lesson from Mavis! Jack would absolutely dominate me, but he would never do so to belittle or embarrass this old-time hoopster. Instead, he was always a constant source of encouragement that certainly helped to improve my game.

There was one Jack Mavis signature move that I would never forget. It was a move that I passed along to my grandson Jackson as recently as this past basketball season.

Mavis had an uncanny knack of racing down the floor at breakneck speed with a much taller opponent perhaps a step or so back in hot pursuit.

Just when it appeared that Jack would go in for a left-handed lay-up, with his shot surely to be blocked by his taller opponent, Mavis would suddenly put on the breaks, and his opponent would go flying by in total embarrassment.

I watched with unabashed pride as my grandson Jackson, a freshman on the Ponte Vedra High School varsity basketball team, duplicate this play against a rival team this past winter.

I was ready to uncharacteristically erupt from my seat and roar with approval as Jackson executed the Mavis ‘move’ to perfection--- except ---- he missed the dog gone lay-up!

A few years back current North Muskegon varsity baseball coach Warren Kent invited me to list my all-time Norsemen baseball team for his website. It was an easy call for me to write down Jack Mavis as my all-time NM center fielder.

“When a ball was hit out to center field I could relax, as it was generally an out” recalled his lifelong friend and City League baseball coach Tom Stribley.

I recall a game back in 1959 when our North Muskegon City team played a game vs. Zeeland at Holland’s Municipal stadium. Our pitcher for this game, Dick Schuiteman, served up a fat pitch to Zeeland slugger Whitey Whitaveen that was just crushed into dead center field.

At the crack of the bat the fleet Mavis bolted for the deepest part of the ballpark.

There was a flagpole situated in deep center field and just when Mavis thought the ball would be coming back down to earth, he used his left arm to grab the flagpole.

While spinning like a top around this flagpole Jack lifted his glove hand up in the air and made the catch that has lived with me for a lifetime.

Mavis played several years of City League baseball during the mid 1950’s and 1960’s. He was much more than just a fielder and was always at or near the top for the league hitters in batting average.

In 1964 Mavis compiled a .412 batting average, second only to his teammate and former Western Michigan University standout John Croak in the West Michigan Baseball League.

It was during this 1964 season that Mavis experienced his proudest moment with his North Muskegon nine. Mavis was in centerfield when the NM Drewrys team defeated the Muskegon Inter-City champion Pepsis 7-3 in a post-season battle of league champions.

The following year Mavis did win the WMBL batting championship with a .378 mark.

Physically, Jack left a mark on my now very old physique that is a constant reminder to me on an hourly basis. While playing midget football some sixty years ago I made a poor decision and tried to tackle Mavis during one of our games.

I had this awful habit of sticking out my tongue during a key moment of a game. Just as I went to tackle Jack -- his leg, my jaw, and my tongue, sticking out of my mouth, crashed together at the same time.

Blood flowed freely from this youngster’s mouth and to this day there remains a notch in my tongue that has never healed, a memento of my futile attempt to tackle Jack Mavis.

Jack married Charlene Johnson, a classmate of mine from the NM Class of 1959. Jack and Charlene were a perfect fit for one another and celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary last summer by taking an Alaskan Cruise.

I have been so fortunate to know Jack as a teammate and friend for nearly 70 years. His zest for life, his incredible sense of humor, and his overwhelming desire to succeed on the playing fields was contagious.

We will all miss ‘Mave’.

*Although perhaps not the number of the numerous changes as in basketball over the years, an earlier story on changes in basketball led to the following story on the great game of baseball written in July of 2011:*

**Moyes’ Memories and how the game of baseball has changed.**

**By Jim Moyes**

[**jimmoyes@aol.com**](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com)

No matter the generation one is a part of over the years, it seems that most baseball fanatics believe the period of their adolescence was the best.

Even during the heyday of Tyrus Raymond Cobb, the forerunners from the so-called Dead-Ball era hailed the caliber of play in the late 19th century as a superior brand of baseball.

The ‘Roaring Twenties’ saw the old timers belittling the majestic powers of Base Ruth and yearning for the small ball era epitomized by the Georgia Peach.

This trend has continued to this day and, although I too ache for the ‘good old days’, there can be little doubt that the American Pastime has witnessed many changes since I played youth baseball.

The modern-day pundits can point out some major improvements from my bygone era, beginning with the current ‘Fields of Dreams.’

Unlike today’s fields that are complete with underground sprinkling, grass that is mowed on a regular basis, and infields that are now covered with the highest quality of turf, most of our games were played on sandlots with no supervision.

As a youngster growing up in the 1940s, I vividly recall playing on a vacant lot located at the SE corner of Vanderwerp & Moulton Ave. in my North Muskegon neighborhood--- where you were always guaranteed a BAD HOP.

Not only have there been major improvements with our current facilities, but also today’s equipment is light years ahead of our tattered baseball paraphernalia.

Many of today’s youngsters have their own personal bat (or two). We generally had one community bat, and when that piece of lumber got cracked, a couple layers of black electrical tape would patch things up in a jiffy.

Our bats were made strictly from good old fashion American Wood, with the only two suppliers that I can recall were Louisville Sluggers or an Adirondack model bat. Thankfully, the rules makers at the high school and collegiate level are slowly but surely moving away from those lethal aluminum bats and returning to wood.

The same modus operandi held true for the baseballs. We often had but one baseball and, before that ball would finally meet its untimely death, it too, would be christened with that good ole black electrical tape.

Kids today have their own personal ball bags with wheels, that store their wooden bat, their metal bat, a couple of gloves, their home and away uniform tops, batting gloves, their smart phone, liters of bottled water and sports drinks, and on occasion, a buffet dinner packed by Mom.

No bottled water for us ---- as we were fortunate, when we could, to find a water spigot with a hose attached that was shared by all. As far as sunflower seeds? ---- Forget it.

And never during our era did any of our parents poke their heads in the dugout to inquire if ‘Little Johnny’ was thirsty.

Equipment from 60 years ago was limited to one five fingered glove that barely covered the circumference of our hand, that we would slide onto the handlebars of our Schwinn bicycles.

Players nowadays wouldn’t be caught dead in the batter’s box without a pair of batting gloves.

Today’s players stride to the play with very little fear of being ‘beaned’ with an errant fastball. The batsmen of today are almost as well equipped today as a modern-day hockey goalie.

Before stepping into the batter’s box, one has already fastened on his shin protector, tugged on a thick elbow pad and donned a heavy duty-batting helmet with earflaps for maximum protection.

During the early years of little league baseball in Greater Muskegon, the only protection we had was a flimsy red plastic insert that fit inside our cap.

There are a few nuances commonplace with today’s players that irk me to some degree. Why are sunglasses placed backward atop one’s cap? What possible use do they serve? Earlier this past season I noticed my grandson had his sunglasses placed backwards on his cap at a night game!

And one doubles my displeasure when they put their caps on backwards!

What on earth happened to infield chatter during a game? We were always spewing out constant words of encouragement to our pitcher.

As far as flat bill caps --- I hate them! I think of those flat bill caps as ‘The Curse of Dontrelle Willis!’

However, I must confess that I like the current trend of having the uniform pant legs extended to their shoe tops.

Even some of those classic rules that have been with us since the days of Alexander Cartwright have been tampered with.

There were no ‘designated hitters prior to the 1970’s and who on earth came up with ‘Courtesy Runners’ for pitchers and catchers at the high school level and below?

The intent of this ‘rule’ was to speed up the game. However, high school and travel team coaches who simply insert a speed burner into the lineup to steal a base have distorted the spirit of this rule.

Case in point: At one point near the end of our baseball season here in Florida our regular catcher for Ponte Vedra High School was leading our team in runs scored--- yet he had physically never crossed the plate.

Pitch counts were taboo in my day! I couldn’t fathom my former North Muskegon skipper Tom Stribley strolling to the mound to inform our pitching ace Ron Simonelli that he had reached the 100-pitch mark and would have to take a seat on the pines.

And never did I ever recall Ron Simonelli ever experiencing a sore arm!

On the plus side today’s youths are much better trained then players from my generation. Weight training once was taboo for fear one would lose a great deal of flexibility.

Our little league manager, Lyle Moran, was adamant that one should never go swimming on game day. I was so obedient that I was even fearful of taking a bath the day of a game.

It’s no wonder that Gillette razor blades, a major sponsor of MLB baseball back in the 1950’s has now taken on a much lesser role. That little jingle of “Look Sharp, Feel Sharp, and Be Sharp” is obviously not applicable to many of today’s players.

Many of today’s players appear as if they just came over from the House of David. Somehow, I just cannot visualize some of my boyhood idols such as Al Kaline, Bobby Richardson, Mickey Mantle or Stan ‘The Man’ Musial sporting beards when they strode to the plate.

I don’t know what a rarer sighting is today: ---- seeing a clean-shaven player, or observing one of today’s hitters choking up on a bat.

Whether one likes or dislikes the changes with our National Pastime over the years, we can all agree on one thing--- Baseball remains the greatest game in the world. Let’s PLAY BALL!

*Although town ball has basically gone the way of phone booths and land-line phones, your author remembers those days well as told in the following story from August of 2011:*

**Town Ball – Now a Distant Memory**

**Moyes’ Memories**

**By Jim Moyes** [**jimmoyes@aol.com**](mailto:jimmoyes@aol.com)

The great game of baseball has lost little (if any) of its appeal over the years. Here in Muskegon, thanks to the leadership of Len Piasecki, Jim Grevel, and Pete Gawkowski, quality baseball can still be seen on a near daily basis at historic Marsh Field.

However, an old baseball custom has sadly fallen by the wayside over the years --- Town Ball.

From the turn of the twentieth century, until the 1960’s, virtually every little ‘burg’ that had a dot on the map boasted of a town team.

Many of these villages would play one another on Sunday afternoons, where many of its citizens would congregate following morning church services. And what better way to spend one’s day respite from a six-day workweek then taking in a ball game?

Baseball on Sunday afternoons was prevalent across the Muskegon area for more than a half a century.

My hometown of North Muskegon had a town team from the early 1920’s through the middle 1960’s. I was fortunate to jump on board the bandwagon at the tail end of the Town Ball era.

What is now known as James B. Johnson field was first used by old-timers on the north side as early as 1920.

This Northside diamond had a feature that was a rarity for most of those town team playing fields during this era, an enclosed ballpark. If one was to hit a round tripper back in the old days, it would have to be an inside the park homerun as an outfield fence was a rare site.

A classic example of a unique bygone ballpark would be the old ball grounds up in Shelby. The Shelby field also doubled as the high school football field that created some unique ground rules.

If a ball was hit into the right field grandstand, the batter was awarded just a ground rule double, as those outfield seats were only about 250 feet from home plate.

Just the opposite was true in left field. I well remember a game from more than 50 years ago. My NM team was playing Shelby and our slugging outfielder, Gordon Odell, hit a towering deep fly ball to left field.

The veteran Shelby left fielder was aware of Odell’s power. In a moment that could have served as a scene for the baseball movie ‘The Field of Dreams’, Odell’s blast sailed over the goal post at the far end of the field and into a nearby cornfield, only to caught for a routine out.

The roster of Shelby players had a mixture of veterans and youths that was typical for a town team, ranging from high school players to veterans into their forties and perhaps even older.

Among the veteran Shelby players that pop up into this old-timer’s mind included Lawrence Beckman, Marv Omness, Larry Gowell, and the unforgettable Hub Foster.

Foster was a pop bellied old timer that may have been pushing fifty, or beyond, but was the Shelby star pitcher. I recall our Norsemen were just chomping at the bit to get into the batter’s box to tee off against Hub.

Foster had two speeds: slow and slower, but often the visiting batsmen would go back to their bench just shaking their heads in frustration against the wily veteran’s knuckleball offerings.

Montague was another village that always had a town team, dating back to the turn of the century. From the 1930’s until well into the 1960’s Montague’s team was organized and managed by George Parker, but everybody in Montague simply knew him as ‘ole’ Jacque.

The spirit of Town Ball in this area, however, may have been best epitomized in Whitehall. My research has shown games were played regularly on Sunday afternoons in Whitehall since the early 1900s.

For thirty-five years, or more, local Whitehall barber Ray Funnell kept the White Lake faithful fully entertained with a baseball team.

Although this veteran local entrepreneur operated a barbershop emporium on Colby Street since 1912, it was clear to all that baseball was his top avocation.

Until Funnel passed away in 1970, he was a fixture at the old baseball grounds in Whitehall, a field that for 70 years has fittingly bore his name.

Old Funnell Field certainly had its share of amenities that were atypical for a town ball community.

Recently I had a conversation with a former Whitehall player who was well familiar with baseball as played in the White Lake area over the years.

Rex Funnell, ninety-five years young, and the son of Whitehall baseball icon Ray Funnell, fondly recalls this golden age of baseball.

“Dad would bring in out of town teams from Grand Rapids to Benton Harbor to play our team on Sundays” reminisced Rex. “Dad, with help from my mother, would keep the field in top shape.”

Ray Funnell got a lot of assistance from his family as wife Rebecca would operate the concession stand located behind the bleachers, while one would often see Ray’s mother sweeping out the dugouts.

Shortly after Rex Funnell got out of the service in the mid nineteen forties, he formed a partnership with his father at their barbershop on Colby Street in 1947.

Ray Funnell began his original barber business back in 1912, but it was in baseball that he is best remembered by this old-time baseball buff.

As early as 1909 Funnell began organizing a town team in the White Lake area, producing some top-notch teams for this era.

Back on September 26, 1921, North Muskegon beat Muskegon Piston Ring for the County “championship”, but Funnell’s Whitehall team also claimed a share of the title as the two teams split a pair of games during the season.

Whitehall challenged North Muskegon to a three-game matchup to determine a true county champion, and a double header was arranged to begin competition at Muskegon’s Marsh Field on Oct 3rd.

The Norsemen accepted this challenge but were none too happy with a ‘ringer’ inserted into the Whitehall lineup. The ‘ringer’ was none other than former Montague schoolboy performer Ira Flagstead, who had just completed the regular season for the Detroit Tigers.

Flagstead was a catcher during his early years while performing for the Montague Independents but soon was made into an outfielder by the Bengals.

Flagstead, although hitting for a very respectable .305 average during the 1921 season, was unfortunate in trying to earn playing time with an outfield that could arguably go down as the greatest in major league history.

Tiger player/manager Ty Cobb was flanked in center field by another Hall of Famer, Harry Heilman in right, and Bobby Veach in left field.

Cobb hit a sparkling .384 on the season but was denied his 13th batting title by his teammate Heilman, a future Tiger radio broadcaster, who posted a league leading mark of .389.

Veach cranked out over 200 hits on the season and posted an enviable average of .338.

The Tigers completed their regular season on October 2nd and Flagstead made a beeline to the Port City where he was more than welcomed the next day by Ray Funnell and his longtime White Lake friends.

Flagstead was the difference maker as he got three key hits in an 8-1 pounding of the disgruntled North Muskegon team. The second game was rained out after two innings were completed and the bitter Norsemen refused to play Whitehall again because of Flagstead’s presence.

Can you imagine current Atlanta Braves manager Freddy Gonzalez giving the green light to Nate McClouth to return home to his hometown of Whitehall some ninety years later and OK Nate to catch a double header at Marsh Field?

Flagstead wasn’t the only player to play for Funnell that would make it to the big leagues. John ‘Lefty’ Dobb also had his moments in the Big Show.

Dobb and Al Kaline were members of that very small fraternity of players who played in the Big Leagues without playing a day in the Minor Leagues.

But unlike Kaline, who played in 2834 games as a major leaguer, Dobb would play in only 2 games.

Dobb, who had the impossible task of turning Gene Young into a successful pitcher while managing a local little league team in the early 1950s, became the first player from Central Michigan University to play in the Major Leagues.

Declining all offers to play minor league baseball, Dobb was content to stay at home in the Muskegon area where he was the ace pitcher on several local teams for many years.

Prior to joining Funnell’s Whitehall club in the early 1930s, Dobb won 20 games as the ace pitcher for the Muskegon Reds.

Oddly enough, when Dobb made his pitching debut in an eighth inning mop of role with the Chicago White Sox on August 13th, 1924, against the Boston Red Sox, none other than Ira Flagstead was the leadoff hitter for Boston.

There have been many pleasant memories from the many games won and lost at Funnell Field but there was one very unsettling moment from a game played in the 1950’s, never to be forgotten by this author and Rex Funnell.

Whitehall was playing a typical Sunday afternoon game against an all-African American team from either Grand Rapids or Muskegon.

The visitors Benny Chambers hit a line drive into the right center field gap. Whitehall’s outstanding centerfield Randy Lorenz made a strong throw to third base as Chambers tried for a three-base hit.

A huge howl of pain shot out from Chambers has he made the hard slide into third base, dislocating his ankle so badly that his foot was turned a full 180 degrees in the opposite direction.

Rex Funnell, as well as many of the Whitehall players headed to third to provide whatever assistance possible for Chambers.

“I remember kneeling next to Benny and tried to settle him down. It was horrible! I went on to know Benny well. I went up to see him in the nursing home up here in Whitehall shortly before he died.”

“I know how he felt for I broke my leg years earlier sliding into second base at Marsh Field. Jimmy White and Ollie Anderson helped me off the field and took me to the hospital,” said Funnell.

Many years after this tragic moment I was playing in a Sunday afternoon game for my North Muskegon team against a Muskegon Independent team managed by Benny Chambers.

Chambers had some outstanding players on his team, including Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Famer Frank Howell, Thurm Galliton, and a young hard throwing left-handed pitcher by the name of Ray Newman, who would make it to the major leagues.

After one of these games, I was curious as why Benny Chambers always played with a pronounced limp. When he began informing us it was due to an unfortunate injury in Whitehall from years ago --- I blurted out: “It was you!”

I’m sure Benny was surprised that I was in attendance on the day a promising baseball career was cut short.

Certainly, the good far outweighed the bad over the years. I’m sure Ray Funnell would have been pleased to see that today’s quality of baseball in Whitehall remains at a very high standard.

It has now been more than a century since the grand old man of Whitehall baseball began his love affair with the National Pastime in the White Lake area.

Funnell Field is still very much in use today, composed of softball fields and tennis courts. “There is also a nice stone tribute to my dad, thanks in large part to Norm Ullman. The field looks real good right now,” said a very proud Rex Funnell.

A couple of decades after Ray Funnell had passed away, a dedicated father, who stroked many a line drive hit on this famed field while playing for Whitehall High, could often be seen hitting countless fungoes to his very young son on the wide expanse of Funnell field.

Rick McLouth’s son Nate, who spent many an afternoon shagging those long fly balls, would eventually become a Major-League All-Star outfielder. Ray Funnell would have been proud.

*Muskegon and Muskegon Heights were going play a game that would rekindle many memories from a former rivalry that was often the number one sports attraction of the year in Greater Muskegon for many years. Here is my take from this rivalry, and my memories from the game I attended between these two schools from 1950 that was published in September 0f 2011:*

**The Rivalry Game from 1950**

It stood alone for many years as the Muskegon area’s most popular sporting event, the annual season ending football game between the Muskegon Big Reds and the Muskegon Heights Tigers.

Following a hiatus of 35 years, Saturday’s game will certainly kindle the memories for many old-time lovers of high school football.

Although this annual clash was viewed by thousands of Port City followers since the 1920’s, this long- time football enthusiast was able to enjoy but one of these monumental battles.

However, I certainly picked a good one, as were most of these games, especially during the Oakie Johnson and Redmond-Potter era.

The game I attended took place 61 years ago, but I can remember this game as if it was played last week. It was Armistice Day, November 11th, 1950, and for only the second time in 28 years the game was contested at Phillips Field.

It was not uncommon for the winner of this game, to not only establish local bragging rights for a year, but also the winner would often be crowned state mythical champion.

It was the exception, rather than the rule, when the winner of this finale would not be crowned Southwest Michigan Conference Champions, and that would be the case again in 1950.

The buildup for these games was enormous, with pre-game articles and team photos present for days in advance of the big clash. Local Chronicle sportswriters Jim Henderson and Tom Fallon would have pre-game stories daily the week of the big game.

One must keep in mind that the Big Reds and Tigers were the only Muskegon County Schools with a Class A status. North Muskegon and Muskegon St. Mary’s, two much smaller schools, were the only other Greater Muskegon schools that offered football in 1950.

St. Mary’s, with an impressive 7-1 record in 1950, placed sixth in the final Class C polls, while the Norsemen would be crowned West Michigan Conference Champions.

Both schools had completed their season on November 3rd, providing an opportunity for this young football fan to experience this amazing football atmosphere.

My father, Paul Moyes, was the head football coach at North Muskegon and was invited to attend this game as the halftime guest on radio for station WKNK (later WTRU).

Little did I know at the time that this would be my dad’s final year as a coach for the Norsemen, stunning my brother and I at the December NM football banquet with the news of his illness.

The play-by-play announcer for this game was former Muskegon Heights great and spinning fullback for the University of Michigan Wolverines, Jack Weisenberger.

Never in my wildest youthful imagination did I think that someday in the distant future it would be this reporter who would be calling games from the second story of the old Heights High School overlooking Phillips Field.

Muskegon High was a much bigger school than the Heights when this rivalry began back in 1922. The powerful big Reds under the direction of Francis Jacks and Leo Redmond won nine of the first ten games, with only a 6-6 tie in 1930 preventing the Big Reds from having a clean slate.

Good fortune came to Muskegon Heights with the hiring of Oscar (Oakie) Johnson in 1927. Johnson had the misfortune to play his first game in this heated rivalry against arguably the greatest team in this area’s proud football history.

Johnson’s Tigers were embarrassed by the unfathomable margin of 89-0 to a Big Red Machine that would become the first team ever to be inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame.

Following this debacle Oakie pledged to his Tiger followers that this would never happen again, and true to his word, it didn’t.

Beginning with the first of four straight victories in 1932, Johnson’s Tigers would win 11 games, lose 6 and have one tie leading up to this 1950 match-up.

The Big Reds, with future MSU All-American Jim Neal in their lineup, stopped a Heights four game winning streak in 1949, with a 20-7 victory over their archrivals.

Only a season opening loss to Grand Rapids Catholic kept the Big Reds from having an undefeated record leading into the game with Johnson’s Tigers. The Tiger also dropped an early season non-conference game with GR Catholic and had only one SWC loss to Kalamazoo Central.

Emotions were always sky high the week of this rivalry and with the Southwest Conference championship at stake, little additional incentive was needed to fire up each team.

However, the Tigers had additional motivation for this game. They were determined to win this game for their classmate, pal, and avid Heights’s fan Tom Dick.

Just days before the big game, on his 18th birthday, Tom Dick lost his leg in a hunting accident. Ray Gauthtier, an All-Southwest Conference Guard for the Tigers, vowed “that we just can’t let Tom down.

While spending the Heights-Muskegon week in a Mercy Hospital room overlooking Muskegon High School, Tom thought not only of his amputated leg, but also of his Tiger team and the big game that lay ahead.

“Tom was my lifelong buddy said Ray Gauthier. We grew up together and he had the courage of a Lion. He was just a great guy” recalled Gauther in a recent conversation with this reporter.

“You can win it Tom told his mates, “Who regularly visited Dick during the week. The best possible therapy his buddies could give their ailing buddy was a victory over the Big Reds. He would not be disappointed.

Nearly 9000 frozen fans were in attendance for a game that was played on a field layered with snow, very typical conditions for a November day in West Michigan. The game was so heated and exciting that I can never recall ever feeling cold.

Media scribes had Muskegon a decided favorite to win their second straight game over the Heights, but the Tigers obviously were not intimidated with these ominous predictions.

The Tigers were outweighed in the trenches by up to 30 pounds per player, but after but a few minutes of hard-hitting action it was quickly apparent the little Tigers had a decided edge in speed.

The first half was a typical defensive battle between these two longtime foes, as it appeared that both teams would go into their warm locker rooms at halftime with a scoreless first half.

With two minutes to go in the second quarter, Muskegon’s Dick Fett punted out to the Muskegon 48-yard line. Moments later diminutive James ‘Stonewall’ Jackson used his entire 5’3 frame to loft a desperation pass downfield in the direction of Tiger end Dick Gauthier.

Gauthier brought the Tiger faithful to their feet with a spectacular catch at the Big Red six-yard line. Three-line plunges by Paul Bailey could only move the ball to the Big Red one-yard line as Big Red fans screamed for Muskegon’s defense to “Hold that Line.”

On fourth down, junior quarterback Doug Murray notched his only yard of the game as he sneaked over from the one-yard line behind the blocking of Bob Marion, Ray Gauthier, Ken Essenberg, Tom Baldwin and Gordon Johnson. Muskegon’s Charles Eberbach blocked the point after try, but the Heights were on the board at 6-0.

A frustrated Muskegon offense failed to move the ball after receiving the second half kickoff and Fett punted to midfield. Heights All Southwestern Conference fullback Don Ghezzi then went to work for the Tigers.

Captain Ghezzi plunged for huge chunks of hard-earned yardage and single handedly took his team all the way down to the Muskegon two-yard line. While Ghezzi took a well-earned breather, Bailey scored the final Heights touchdown from the two. Cal Jeter’s point after try was good and the Heights led 13-0.

A determined Muskegon team fought back and for the rest of the game the undersized Heights team desperately staved off numerous Big Red drives.

On the Big Reds first possession following Bailey’s TD, Muskegon quarterback Earl Morrall threw a perfect strike to Red Scarff at the Heights 30-yard line, Scarff did the rest and raced into the end zone to complete a 50-yard pass play that gave Muskegon fans a chance to roar.

Twice Muskegon moved deep into Tiger territory in the fourth quarter only to be stopped by a frenetic Tiger defense on both occasions. Murray of the victors made the first big defensive play as he intercepted a Morrall pass at the Tiger 15-yard line.

Shortly before the final whistle blew, Dick Gauthier recovered an Earl Morrall fumble as Heights fans and Tom Dick, listening to the game on the radio from Mercy Hospital, began to celebrate.

“Muskegon was a very good team, recalled Gauthier. “I could tell from that game that they were going to be very good the next year.

Back then we had leather helmets, and no facemasks or knee guards. But that’s how we went about our business.”

Gauthier was the pulling guard for Oakie’s mighty mites along the line of scrimmage. Ray tipped the scales at a miniscule for the modern era player of but 140 pounds, but what he lacked in size, he and his teammates made up for in heart and speed.

“Oakie, being a great coach and a master at football, devised a scheme where when I had one of the 240 pounders across from me, we would cross block. I would shoot across and ‘Bush’ and Baldwin would come across and polish them off.” Recalled Gauthier.

“We had an eleventh grader as a quarterback in Doug Murray who had a real good game and Muskegon also had a Junior quarterback in Earl Morrall.” (Pronounced More Rall by Gauthier and his Muskegon contemporaries from the era.)

“He wasn’t too bad said Gauthier,” with a classic tongue in cheek response.

The following day a group of victorious Muskegon Heights gridders arrived at Mercy Hospital to visit their pal, Tom Dick. Captain Dick Ghezzi, Ray Gauthier, Bernie Winicki, Doug Murray, Ken Essenberg and Ken Norden shoved a box toward the surprised youngster in the bed.

Out of the box came an autographed football. The score stood out boldly on its side --- Muskegon Heights 13, Muskegon 6. The ailing Tom Dick could hardly blurt out thanks, but his eyes carried a far more eloquent expression of appreciation.

“Tom had a sister, who kind of caught my eye, said a light-hearted Ray Gauthier. So much so that we recently celebrated our 56th wedding anniversary.”

*The following is my story from September of 2011 on Frank Sodini. Sodini would work at his small-town barber sharp until retiring in 2014, two years before he passed away in 2016.*

**Frank Sodini**

**Still Going Strong at 86**

**Moyes’ Memories**

**By Jim Moyes**

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While many people (like this reporter) opt for an early retirement when one reaches the age of 65, or even lower, former North Muskegon standout athlete Frank Sodini is still going strong at 86.

Most of Frank’s current customers at his barbershop on the north side are much too young to recall his exploits on the athletic fields, but this ole reporter first learned of Frank and his North Muskegon buddies’ incredible talents from my father.

Frank was a part of the Norsemen’s version of the Four Horsemen, a two-year starting halfback on North Muskegon’s greatest team--- The undefeated, untied and unscored upon Norsemen of 1941 and 1942.

For fifteen straight games, enroute to back-to-back undefeated seasons, the Norsemen coached by Lyle McNitt in 1941, and then Paul Moyes in 1942, permitted nary an opponent to tally a single point on this team.

The Norsemen achieved Hall of Fame status with their induction into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame in 2000, only the second area football team to be so honored.

This mark has stood the test of time as a MHSAA record for nearly 70 years, and with today’s heavy emphasis on offense, their record could last for another 70 seasons.

Sadly, the surviving members of this Norsemen backfield has been cut in half with the passing last week of their star quarterback, Raymond (Moe) Sikkenga.

‘Moe’ teamed up in the backfield with Don Postema, Don Bowen, and Sodini, a foursome that terrorized their opponents during this improbable run.

While Bowen, Sikkenga, and Postema did most of the damage statistic wise, many of their touchdown gallops came from running behind the lead blocking of the diminutive, but gritty, Sodini.

“I always thought of myself as the Norse version of Forest Evashevski,” joked Sodini. Evashevski, the longtime former football coach at the University of Iowa, was immortalized as the lead blocker for University of Michigan legend Tom Harmon in the early 1940s.

Sodini and his pals didn’t record this streak against a bunch of cupcake opponents. North Muskegon in 1941-42 was a small Class C school that at the time was only in its 7th year of existence.

The Norse opponents in the early 1940’s included much bigger schools like East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Lee, Manistee, Reed City and Fremont, as well as their West Michigan Conference rivals from Montague, Hart, Shelby and Scottville.

Following this past Saturday’s funeral of his beloved teammate, Sodini still looked back in awe in remembering Sikkenga.

“If not for Moe that streak would not have lasted vary long,” said Sodini. There was one play that Frank can remember as if it happened yesterday.

“It was in our junior year back in ‘41’ and we were playing Shelby. Shelby was at about their own 20-yard line, and it was fourth down. They caught us by surprise and threw a pass that sailed about 10 yards over my head. A Shelby receiver who was well in the clear caught it.

Moe was only about 5’8 and weighed nearly 200 pounds but my how he could run,” said Sodini. “Moe caught him from behind deep in our territory and it served as a wake-up call for our defense.

They never did score,” related a proud Sodini and the Norse won a hard fought 6-0 battle.

Seemingly, all good things come to an end, and Scottville halted the scoreless streak six games into the 1942 season in a rare night game played in nearby Ludington.

“Coach Moyes had just inserted some subs into the game as we were leading 26 to 0. They threw a long pass where Don Bowen normally would have been playing, and the receiver was not stopped until he got to about the two-yard line. Paul (Coach Moyes) put back in the regulars, but they scored on fourth down,” Sodini reminisced.

I still thought we stopped him (Scottville’s Herb Spencer) at the goal line, reflected Sodini nearly 70 years later. “Of course, that was just a little prejudice from our side.”

“Oh man, you would have thought we lost that sucker. We were a sad bunch walking off that field, even though we won,” recalled the likeable longtime barber.

Over the years while doing research on this game it has often been written that North Muskegon lost this game, when in fact, it was another lopsided Norsemen victory.

Although Frank Sodini was more than content with his role on the football team as a blocking back for Bowen and Sikkenga, he took a backseat to nobody during the baseball season.

Sodini stamped himself as a standout catcher on the NM baseball team in his three seasons as a Norse regular.

The modest Sodini could boast to his loyal barbershop customers that he owns a couple of firsts in NM’s long and proud baseball history. In the Norsemen’s season opening spanking of Whitehall in the spring of 1943, Sodini became the first NM player to smash out four hits in a single game.

When Virgil Wilkes spun a 4-0 no hitter over the Hart Pirates it was Sodini who was calling the pitches from his catcher’s position. Wilkes’ gem was not only the first no-hitter in North Muskegon’s history; it was also the first in West Michigan Conference annals as well.

“Hart really had some outstanding athletes during my era,” recalled Sodini. “I especially remember guys like Walter ‘Stretch’ Hansen and Frank Kapulak, who were three sport stars that stood 6’6” tall.”

The only two baseball defeats incurred by the Norse in 1943 were to a pair of standout teams. The Muskegon Big Reds made the Norsemen their 31st straight victim in a row (The streak would extend to 55) with a 7-1 win over Sodini and his mates, while Muskegon Heights edged the Norse 4-1.

Heights threw their standout ace Jack Weisenberger at the Norse in the Tigers victory. The hard hitting Sodini spoiled the future University of Michigan greats shut out effort by scoring the lone NM run after belting a long triple.

Graduation would soon follow after Sodini’s baseball season ended. And for Frank, as well as many of his generation, a sports career, as well as a higher education, would take a back seat for a much more important goal, serving his country in World War II.

As did all his North Muskegon teammates, Frank entered the service shortly after graduation in 1943. He faithfully served in the 3rd Army, 14th Armored Division, 47th tank battalion.

It was shortly after Frank’s unit landed in Marseille, France that Frank would be introduced to a trade that would then last a most memorable lifetime.

“After we landed in Marseille a captain came over and asked if any of you guys ever cut hair and I hollered out: that’s a piece of cake. That might have saved me from getting killed as I was a barber until the war was over,” said a relieved Sodini.

Following his honorable discharge from the service after World War II Frank, along with his brother Pete, worked at Continental in Muskegon.

“I didn’t like the idea of working in a factory for the rest of my life, said Sodini “so one day while working in the shop I said to my brother: “C’mon Pete, let’s get out of here and go to barber school.

We went to Detroit for six months back in June of 1948 and we graduated from barber school.”

For many years Frank and his brother Pete would work at Central Barber shop in midtown Muskegon, and the brother’s Sodini filled a role for years like the father son barber shop duo of Ray and Rex Funnell in Whitehall.

Frank’s brother Pete will be long remembered by Reeths Puffer faithful, not only for his barbering skills, but also for his contributions to Rocket baseball. A few years back Reeths Puffer honored the late Pete Sodini by naming the high school baseball field in his honor.

Frank’s first wife Margaret, who he married in 1948, passed away eighteen years ago. Frank found a new companion when he married his current wife Shirley 15 years ago.

“My first wife and Shirley were very good friends. Shirley’s first husband passed away only three months following Margaret’s death. During those tough times we got to know each other so well that we got married. It has worked out just super for the both of us,” replied a contented Sodini.

Frank is so thankful that he had the good fortune to raise two sons and two daughters over his very productive lifetime. “They have all done well.”

A few short years ago I stopped into Frank’s north side barbershop for a little trim. After Frank delivered me another one of his perfect haircuts I asked for the cost.

I had been getting my hair cut at that time in the Milwaukee area and I was amazed at his low price.

My initial reaction was that Frank was giving me an old pal’s discount when he told me the cost. I said to Frank: “Really, what do you charge for a cut? As soon as I blurted out that statement, I was getting some dagger like looks from a pair of Frank’s steady customers awaiting their turn in the chair.

I’m not going to delve that price for fear that Frank would be inundated with new customers, prompting an “early” retirement.

When asked why he continues to work after more than 60 years at his trade Frank was quick to reply: “I am so lucky to have a place like this with so many friends, you know. That’s what it all about, really. I don’t call them customers anymore, they’re my friends,” said a sincere Sodini.

How lucky we are to have Frank still active, and what better place where one can share stories then in one of America’s most traditional venues, the local barbershop.

*With the 2011 baseball season now complete, I had a chance to chat with our area’s most successful baseball player of all-time:*

**NATE MCLOUTH**

**BY Jim Moyes**

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In my more than fifty years of covering area high school sports I’ve had a number of ‘favorites’, and certainly one that ranks near, or at the top, is former Whitehall great Nate McLouth.

I was a ‘highly paid’ assistant baseball coach under Walt Gawkowski at North Muskegon when I first viewed McLouth in a Whitehall uniform as a pint-size freshman shortstop back in 1997.

Surprisingly enough, our Norsemen nipped Nate’s Vikings 6-5, but it would be the last time McLouth would ever taste defeat at the hands of the Norsemen.

And what a team Whitehall and head coach Warren Zweigel had during the McLouth era! Over the final three years that McLouth and his mates took the field; our Norsemen never had a game go the full seven innings against this powerhouse.

For six straight games my beloved Norsemen were ‘mercy ruled’ from 1998-2000, with all six games ending with Whitehall holding a ten run or more lead.

I recently asked McLouth, who has now played in more that 1300 professional baseball games, if he still recalls his high school days.

“Oh yea, Oh heck yea! I remember it all back in high school. They were just good memories. You create memories all the way from Little League up to the big leagues.

I know we played North Muskegon tough during those years but the game I most remember is the one we lost 6-5. It was at the North Muskegon field, and I think they used that home field advantage and the pitching of Charley Cihak to beat us,” McLouth clearly recalls.

During his brilliant prep career Nate was a three-sport star, a feat that is fast becoming a rarity in today’s prep world. And who says you can’t excel on both the athletic field and in the classroom? Nate carried a GPA during his high school career that ranked near the top of his class.

During a recent conversation I had with McLouth, I asked Nate if he had any regrets on playing sports other than baseball.

“Gosh, in looking back, that was some of the most fun times I ever had in my life, playing sports other than just baseball. I wouldn’t trade those memories for anything.

Too many athletes are often pressured by coaches to play their sport year around. I think it’s important to play any sport you want to play in high school and then go from there” encouraged McLouth.

This year marks the 50th year Whitehall has been a member of the West Michigan Conference. Only twice have the Vikings won outright the conference football championship --- 1998 and 1999, both squads quarterbacked by Nate McLouth.

While waiting for the snow to clear so he could get out on the baseball field, Nate found time to serve as an outstanding point guard and defensive stopper on the late Mike Rowen’s Viking basketball teams.

Shortly after being named the state’s baseball player of the year, Nate was drafted in the 25th round by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

It was an easy call for the Muskegon area Hall of Fame board to select Nate as the area’s outstanding student athlete award winner in 2000.

Immediately after graduating from Whitehall High Nate traveled to baseball mad Cincinnati to play in an elite prep summer league. It was here where McLouth proved to the Pittsburgh top brass that he could hit 90mph plus fastballs.

“That was my first exposure outside the state of Michigan. The competition in Cincinnati was so good that were some other guys in the league that were drafted too, recalled McLouth.” “There were a lot of scouts around and that probably had a lot to do with me signing.”

Pittsburgh quickly realized that they had a ‘steal’ in the 2000 draft and promptly dangled a hefty hunk of change in front of Nate.

McClouth’s decision to sign with the Pirates was a realization of one long time goal ---- to play professional baseball --- but his signing deprived him of another ambition: playing for the University of Michigan Wolverines and earning his college degree.

Instead of enjoying a life as a full-time student in picturesque Ann Arbor, Nate would spend his next four years playing pro ball in less than exotic places like Hickory, North Carolina, Lynchburg, Virginia, and Altoona, Pennsylvania.

“I was really looking forward to going to the University of Michigan and it was a hard decision.

But it was one that came down to, ----once the money became good enough --- but you would hate to say it was based on money.

The Pirates had assured me they would include a college scholarship if things didn’t work out. That kind of made my decision much easier, plus I really wanted to get a wood bat in my hands, said McLouth.”

After spending much of 2005 tuning up for the major leagues at Triple A Indianapolis, Nate was called up to the Big Leagues to stay, fulfilling a dream unobtainable for all but a chosen few.

Up to this point 2008 has remained the high point in McLouth’s highly productive baseball career.

How many people realize how close Nate came to winning the Most Valuable Player award at the 2008 All Star game at old Yankee Stadium?

Ernie Harwell has always referred to baseball as a game of inches. But in Nate’s case, it was a mere fraction of an inch.

After throwing out the potential winning run at home plate with a perfect strike to LA Dodger catcher Russell Martin, McLouth, in his last at bat, sent a drive to deep right field that I felt certain was heading for the right field seats at jam packed Yankee Stadium.

Unfortunately, Nate belted that pitch just barely off the sweet spot on his trademark hickory bat and was caught by the right fielder just short of sailing into the seats for what would have been the go ahead run.

It has been well documented that Nate has had to battle more than his share of injuries for the past couple of years.

Incoming 2011 Atlanta Braves skipper Freddy Gonzalez had always liked Nate McLouth, and after experiencing a solid spring training season, Nate was expected to be a fixture for the Braves in center field.

When he was healthy Nate produced some unforgettable feats this past season. Years from now Nate can boast to his grandchildren that he reached base safely an unheard of eight straight times in a double-header sweep of the Milwaukee Braves on May 4th.

What most people didn’t know, even those as close to Nate as his parents, was that Nate suffered a mysterious injury as early as the second game of the season.

After first going on the disabled list with an oblique problem, Nate incurred yet another setback, when it was discovered that he had been playing nearly the entire season with a sports hernia, a problem that required surgery in early August.

When I asked the obvious question about his road to full recovery McLouth replied: “I’m getting better. I’m not totally 100 per cent yet but I’m working out hard here at the University of Tennessee with a physical therapist.

I’ll be ready to go shortly and be as healthy as I’ve been in a couple of years when I go to spring training. I feel good now and I’m just working to get myself back to full speed.” added McLouth.

Nate and his wife, the former Lindsay Rolen, married in February of 2009, recently moved to Lindsay’s hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee

“By moving to Knoxville I’m going to be able to get outside to get my work in, which will be nice, but we are keeping our house in Grand Rapids so we can be close to my friends and family.

Nate is quick to credit much of his success to his parents, Rick and Pam McLouth.

“My parents were such a great influence and supportive of me, as well as my two brothers Jake and Christopher. I don’t think through all the Little League, Junior High and High School years that they missed one of our games.

I probably didn’t realize it at that time, but in looking back it was nice to have that support and still have that support from parents who really care.

My brothers have moved to other things besides sports, and my parents support them with the same enthusiasm that they support me.”

Nate is thrilled that his younger brothers Christoper and Jake both graduated from the UM. “They have their degrees, and they have gone way beyond what I have done in education. I’m proud of them for that, and my parents are also very proud of them,” gushed McLouth.

“Dad was always supportive of me, but he never once forced me to do anything baseball related.

But whenever I wanted to go out and take a few swings and have him hit me a few ground balls, flyballs, or simply play catch, he never once turned me down. And that’s so important for Dads to be there for their kids,” said McLouth.

Nate’s father Rick, an outstanding baseball player for Whitehall a few decades back, has similar values as that of the subject of one of my previous Moyes Memories features, Sam Hughes.

“Other than Holidays and a family vacation here and there, I literally cannot ever remember my dad taking a day off from work when I was growing up. Just being who he was, his work ethic really rubbed off on me,” replied a grateful son.

Nate has always shunned the limelight. He has without fanfare contributed countless hours promoting community services, donated money generously to many programs at his beloved Whitehall High and has been readily visible in public service announcements at all his stops.

But what makes Nate McLouth the happiest is just playing baseball and spending time with his family and new bride Lindsay, who Nate first met as a youngster many years ago.

Nate informed me that he is now a free agent and will now await offers from major league teams.

As far as where Nate will play next year, it is too early to tell. “I really have an open mind and I’m just looking for a good opportunity, and to just get a chance to reestablish myself, “said a confident McLouth.

This ‘ole’ reporter believes that some lucky team next spring is going to see a healthy Nate McLouth, like the former Pirate All Star that patrolled center field in 2008 with gold glove ability.

I asked if Nate had any idea what he would like to do when the inevitable day comes when he will have to hang up his spikes.

“I really haven’t, I’ve been fortunate and blessed enough and have done well financially, so hopefully I’ll be able to do what I want to do when I retire.”

Nate, displaying the same confidence he had while performing his magic in Whitehall quickly added: “I feel I still have a number of years left in baseball.”

However, if physical misfortune should once again rear its ugly head, Nate McLouth can look back at some amazing accomplishments in the sporting world.

He has fulfilled a dream that many thousands of youngsters (like me) never came close to fulfilling, putting on a big-league uniform.

And I agree with Nate. He will have many more productive years in baseball, and those memories will continue to grow.

*Here is a sequel to McLouth’s great career with this story I wrote a year later:*

**WHITEHALL’S NATE McLOUTH IS ENJOYING BALTIMORE’S RUN TO THE POST SEASON**

**MEMORIES OF MOYES**

**Jimmoyes@aol.com**

During the midst of the ‘Hot Stove League’ late last Fall I had the pleasure of interviewing one of my favorite Greater Muskegon athletes from yesteryear, Whitehall’s Nate McLouth.

There is no question that I am biased when it comes to extolling the virtues of one of our favorite sons, as my earlier story on McLouth was brimming with confidence for Nate making a nice comeback in 2012.

My optimism has certainly been vindicated, but not before McLouth has had to undergo a few unsettling setbacks.

Nate had been on a roller coaster ride since that incredible season in 2008 when he was an All-Star centerfielder for the Pittsburgh Pirates. But a flurry of some nagging, and even a few major injuries, sapped some of those skills that saw McLouth win a Gold Glove award and lead the National League in doubles in 2008.

Pittsburgh fans, and even a few of his outspoken teammates, were aghast when McLouth was traded to Atlanta in late May of 2009.

Nate was kind enough to take a break from his hectic schedule Saturday morning to give this ‘ole announcer’ a call prior to Baltimore’s game with the Boston Red Sox. My how times have changed over the past few months for McLouth, and fortunately, it is all-positive.

“Well, first of all, it’s worked out pretty good,” began McLouth. “Faith has always played a big part in our family. Sometimes you get tested in life, and sometimes it can make you better and make you stronger.”

When I asked Nate if he ever questioned his abilities after the Pirates let him go Nate was quick to answer: “I never doubted my abilities, but I did wonder if I’d ever find them again.”

Contrary to many negative reports Nate did have several highlight moments during his injured skewed tenure with the Braves.

Fortunately, I was in the house to witness one of his shining moments.

On July 24, 2009, while spending the weekend with my grandsons and family in Milwaukee, we attended the Braves game that evening with the local Brewers. Nate blasted a homerun deep into the right field seats that night and my Grandson Jackson and I returned the following night as guests of the McLouth family.

Nate also had a pair of hits in that contest and was gracious enough to pick up our dinner tab later that evening.

After my grandson broke a bone in his growth plate while pitching for his high school’s JV team in Ponte Vedra, Florida, Jackson received a “Keep the Chin up” text from Nate.

The Orioles are in Boston this weekend for an all-important series with the struggling Red Sox.

I asked McLouth if he remembered his first-ever at bat in Boston at historic Fenway Park. “I’ll never forget that” Nate quickly answered.

It was a rainy night on June 19, 2009, in Boston and neither team had taken batting practice. Nate McLouth was the leadoff hitter for the Atlanta Braves. On the FIRST PITCH THAT HE EVER SAW at tradition rich Fenway Park, Nate bashed a HOMERUN into the right field seats off Red Sox pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka.

Nate further elaborated to me his thoughts on playing in Fenway:

“What a neat place this is to play.” gushed Nate. “Yesterday when I was walking down the tunnel to the dugout I was thinking of all the players (Cobb, Ruth, Williams, Foxx, Yastrzemski, Grove, Mantle, DiMaggio, Kaline…) that have made this same walk---it is pretty special.”

McLouth certainly has been on a zigzag path since the end of the 2011 baseball season.

Understandably, Atlanta was not going to gamble and resign Nate to a lucrative contract for his upcoming option year, paving the way for the former Whitehall star to return to Pittsburgh.

Nate was confident that he was finally going to be 100 per cent healthy for this coming season, after undergoing surgery to repair a troublesome sports hernia that first flared up at the beginning of the 2011 campaign.

The humble McLouth is not the sort to burn any bridges, but after a robust spring training, where he batted close to a .400 clip, I was certain Nate would be a fixture in the Pirates’ outfield.

Much to my chagrin, The Pirates and their second-year manager Clint Hurdle, elected to go with a youth movement, a decision that virtually buried McLouth deep on the bench.

When I said to Nate-- I didn’t want to insert his inactivity with the Pirates into my story he quickly said: “That’s OK. That was definitely part of it (slump). I knew coming in that I wasn’t going to be an everyday player, but I did think that after having a good spring training that I would get a little playing time.

But it didn’t work out that way, but things do have a way of working out. I knew that if I continued working out, and just enjoy what you do, then I could get another opportunity.”

I know that many of my faithful Tiger fans like to bash current manager Jim Leyland, but Leyland never lets one of his players rust away on the bench. (Well ---maybe Ryan Raburn)

Hurdle, who was born in nearby Big Rapids, was adamant in his decision to ride the rapids with rookie outfielders Alex Presley and Jose Tabata.

Presley has a local tie to our area as the nephew of former North Muskegon resident Katherine Allen Kelley. Katherine was the brother of my former neighbor in NM, and lifelong Yankee aficionado, Avery Allen, a great basketball star at North Muskegon back in 1953.

Presley and Tabata were ultimately sent down to the Pirates AAA affiliate in Indianapolis to refine their skills.

McLouth, meanwhile, had received his release from the impatient Pirate brass on May 31 and returned to his new hometown of Knoxville to spend time with his wife Lindsay, and to ponder his future in baseball.

Less than a week after his release, McLouth received a new lease on life, when he was signed by the Baltimore Orioles and assigned to their Triple A affiliate in Norfolk, Virginia.

“I really enjoyed my time in Norfolk,” said McLouth who unleashed a display of power that harkened back to his days at Whitehall High School where he hit 16 home runs in his senior season and was named the state’s high school player of the year.

“It got me back to having fun, playing and remembering that baseball is fun to play and not work.”

McLouth had 10 homeruns in his short stay with the Tide and earned a Minor League player of the week award before his recent return to the Big Show.

After a quick start to this season the Pirates are now floundering while the Orioles have turned the city of Baltimore upside down. Camden Yards had become about as quiet as the reading room at the Hackley Library until the resurgence of the Birds.

Much of the credit for Baltimore’s new-found success must go to our own Nate McLouth.

When asked how exciting it was to be in a pennant chase, Nate responded: “It’s great! I didn’t know a lot about Baltimore before I got here but what a great sports city! The crowds that we’ve had --- well it’s like a Saturday afternoon football college crowd. It’s been a blast and we’ve been playing well, and we’ve been playing well on the road,” replied a very happy McLouth.

Nate has helped the Orioles cause, not only with timely hitting, but also with defensive play that has made him a virtual regular on the highlight portion of ESPN’s Baseball Tonight.

The normally plodding Orioles have also been energized with Nate’s rediscovered base stealing abilities that has seen him steal 9 bases in his 44 games. McLouth stole a still standing state record of 180 bases for coach Warren Zweigel’s Vikings from 1997-2000.

Who would have ever believed that the Orioles would be challenging those very affluent Yankees for the East Division title? Certainly not my misguided thinking northside buddy Charley Taylor, a lifetime Yankee zealot.

Before Nate left for the ballpark for a 1:00 PM start with the Red Sox I remarked to Nate how much his current manager, Buck Showalter, reminded me of Walt Gawkowski, the current head baseball coach at Mona Shores.

I was fortunate to work, as Gawkowski’s assistant, for many years at North Muskegon where Walt had that stoic persona that hid his dry sense of humor.

Nate agreed. “Yes. That’s exactly how he (Showalter) is said Nate. He has a very calming effect on players. Whether we’re on a hot streak or were struggling a bit he still has that same calming effect in the dugout.”

It is very clear that Nate is now hitting with so much confidence, but when asked if he made any changes, even if only a subtle change to his hitting approach, Nate replied: “No ---- he paused, not really to be honest with you. Mechanically, I just went back to being aggressive, but not overly aggressive, and just having fun in the box.”

We concluded our conversation by talking about one of Nate’s favorite topics --- Muskegon area football. When past baseball seasons have concluded Nate, a former outstanding quarterback for the only two Whitehall WMC championship football teams in 1998&1999, Nate could often be seen supporting our area teams from the stands.

Although he was disappointed with Whitehall’s recent loss to NM, he was pleased that Mona Shores is having a good run, and not at all surprised about the Big Red’s success this year on the gridiron.

Fortunately, for Nate, his return to West Michigan may have to wait as Baltimore makes a big push to play postseason baseball this year for the first time in 15 years.

How proud we are of Nate McLouth!

*The ‘ole announcer’ rolled out his favorite memories from the 35 state finals played by our area teams from 1980-2009. This from the Muskegon Chronicle in November of 2011:*

**We still have those State Finals Football Memories**

**By Jim Moyes**

**Jim Moyes @aol.com**

After an unprecedented dominance during the first decade of the 21st century, Greater Muskegon football is now in a tailspin, hopefully for only the briefest period.

From 2000-2009 Muskegon County sent 15 teams to the state football finals, winning a whopping 12 of those games, including the last ten in a row.

One would have to go back more than 25 years when one of our area’s football juggernauts would go two straight years’ without playing for a state championship.

For now, we will just have to settle for memories, ‘cuz’ all we have left, for this year anyway, are those state final memories.

Fortunately, we have compiled many remembrances, as our Muskegon County teams have played in an astounding thirty-five state championship games.

Here are some of my favorite players and plays from this reporter who was fortunate to have covered them all as a local broadcaster.

**Most dramatic play**:

Geoff Zietlow to Stacey Starr --Reeths Puffer vs. Walled Lake Western in 1992.

Perhaps MSU coach Mark Dantonio named his game winning ‘Hail Mary’ play against Wisconsin “The Rocket” after the Reeths Puffer ‘Rockets’ game winning desperation toss in the waning seconds of the Class A title game nearly twenty years ago.

Trailing 18-14, and with time for only one last play or two, RP coach Pete Kutches called for a flea flicker that, after seemingly several handoffs, the ball eventually reverted into the hands of quarterback Geoff Zietlow.

Zietlow hurled a pass some 50 yards airborne in the direction of John Boersma and Stacey Starr.

The ball was deflected, eerily like the recent MSU-Wisconsin version, into the hands of an alert Stacey Starr, who raced the remaining few yards into pay dirt for a Rocket victory.

The staff of the Michigan High School Athletic Association was certainly impressed with this play as the photo sequences once hung on the walls at the MHSAA offices in East Lansing.

**Most impressive offensive Individual performance**:

DJ Ritz, Oakridge 2005 vs. a heavily favored Jackson Lumen Cristi team, rated by some as the best team in any division.

Ritz put on a one-man show by rushing for 239 yards and 4 TDs in the second half to shock the confident JLC faithful.

**Most impressive defensive performance individual:**

Jason Hannett, Muskegon 2008. The charismatic two-way performer was dominant in the Big Red’s convincing 34-14 defeat of Warren DeLaSalle in capturing the D2 title.

**Most impressive defensive performance team:**

Muskegon 1986. The Big Red front defensive line was anything but big.

Coach Dave Taylor’s ‘smurfs’ held heavily favored Sterling Heights Stevenson scoreless while the defense tallied all the Big Red points to win their first of five state championships.

**Most impressive offensive performance by a team:**

Muskegon Catholic 2008: In a total 40-0 domination of perennial UP power Crystal Falls Forest Park, Muskegon Catholic, noted forever for their defensive prowess, totaled 523 offensive yards, 488 on rushing attempts, including an 85-yard TD gallop by Major Metcalf.

So talented was this Crusader powerhouse, that many prep football fans, this reporter included, thought this Mike Holmes coached team could have won a state championship in a number of higher divisions.

**Best play in the clutch**:

Ronald Johnson, Muskegon 2006: With just seconds remaining in the Division 2 state title game, Warren DeLaSalle’s Donald Fowler was headed for an apparent game winning touchdown when he was stripped of the ball by Muskegon’s ‘All Everything’ Ronald Johnson.

The ball was recovered in the end zone by the Big Reds and, thanks to Rojo’s clutch play, Muskegon eked out a 32-30 pulsating victory for their fourth state title.

**Best pass play: (other than the above-mentioned RP miracle pass):**

Montague’s Cody Kater pass and run to Anthony Root in 2008 for a state record 98 yards.

Montague’s opponent, Leslie, had just scored and Blackhawk fans sensed a momentum shift until Kater got Pat Collin’s team out of a deep hole and turned the tide with this record-breaking effort.

**Best Sack:**

Reggie Moore, Muskegon, 1986.

With Muskegon and Sterling Heights Stevenson locked up in a scoreless battle at the 1986 Class A championship, 135-pound Big Red defensive end Reggie Moore sacked Stevenson’s quarterback in the end zone for a safety in what would prove to be the margin of victory in the 10-0 shutout win.

**Best interception**:

Mario Hoffman, Muskegon 1986.

Again, it was in this same 1986 game with Stevenson.

The score was a too close for comfort, 2-0 lead for Muskegon when, late in the second half, Mario Huffman stepped in front of a Stevenson receiver and returned the intercepted pass all the way to paydirt for a clinching Big Red touchdown.

**Best impressive defensive hit**:

Brian Johnson, Muskegon Catholic 2006.

With time running out late in the first half at Ford Field, Johnson a sophomore linebacker, and grandson of Hall of Fame coach Pete Kutches, delivered a crunching hit on the Grass Lake running back that drew a loud roar of ‘oohs and aahs’ from the crowd.

The ball was jarred loosed and picked up and returned into the end zone, virtually assuring another MCC state title as the Crusaders romped over Grass Lake 35-7 in the D7 final.

**Biggest upset win(s) in finals by local team**:

I must give this a two-way tie for first shared by Ravenna’s last state title in 2003 vs. Saginaw Nouvel, and Oakridge’s jarring upset of Jackson Lumen Cristi in 2005.

Future Hall of Fame coach Dusty Fairfield implemented a gutsy defensive scheme to shut down Nouvel’s All State Quarterback in a low scoring 16-14 Bulldog upset victory.

Fairfield blitzed on virtually every play to frustrate heavily favored Nouvel.

I remember having a conversation with Oakridge offensive coordinator Joe Coletta a day or two before Oakridge would face the heavily favored Lumen Cristi team in 2005.

When I asked the straightforward Coletta for an honest answer if his Eagles really had a chance to pull off the upset, Coletta gave a confident--- “YES.”

Joe was right as Oakridge, behind the running of JD Ritz, scored an unfathomable 42 points in a 42-28 win.

**Most costly penalty**:

1988 Ravenna vs. Detroit DePorres (Delay of game)

Why this penalty has stayed with me for more than 20 years is beyond me, but this strange call still has this ‘ole’ announcer puzzled to this day.

Ravenna was driving midway through the fourth quarter and was inside the DePorres red zone. Dusty’s first state finalist team was looking at a 2nd and five when out of the blue the back judge threw the flag and called the Bulldogs guilty of delay of the game.

With today’s rule this infraction never would have happened.

What was unusual was that officials used the 25 second play clock at Central Michigan University in Ravenna’s semi-final win over St. Ignace and the Bulldogs never came close to a delay of game penalty.

The seemingly ‘innocent’ five-yard walk off forced the Bulldogs to discard their ‘smash mouth’ running offense and they never did score in a hard-fought loss to this DePorres powerhouse.

**Most costly non-penalty**:

The final play in the 1986 Class C state final game between Muskegon Catholic and Detroit Country Day.

Country Day had the ball deep in Crusader territory needing a touchdown for victory.

With the game’s final pass hanging in the air, the clock at the Pontiac Silverdome displayed nothing but zero’s when the Country Day receiver caught the pass for the game winner.

Crusader fans were irate that an offensive pass interference call was not called on the receiver. I think the only two people in the entire Silverdome that did not witness the apparent infraction in the end zone were the official and I.

This ‘dummy’ had taken a quick peek at the scoreboard to see if time had expired and I completely missed the non-call.

I’m sure other fans have their state final memories that will differ or add to my Moyes’s Memories.

Let’s just hope we don’t have to wait much longer so we can have some future state football final memories.

*In late 2011 I traveled to nearby Daytona Beach to watch the Muskegon Area’s top Women’s golfer in action against some of our nation’s best golfers. I came away with this story on Laura Kueny:*

**Jim Moyes remembers the Golfing Kuenys, both past and present.**

**jimmoyes@aol.com**

For this Moyes’ Memories column, I can mix a little bit of the young with the old as it pertains to the golfing Kueny family.

It was an easy call for me to take the short jaunt down Interstate 95 last weekend to Daytona Beach to catch what is arguably the most tension packed week of the year for aspiring professional golfers --- the dreaded Q school.

Although area golfing phenom Laura Kueny fell just a bit short of earning that coveted LPGA players card, the experience she garnered in her first appearance in this tension packed golfing meatgrinder will provide her with invaluable experience as she looks ahead to what could very well be a rosy golfing future.

Years before Laura burst upon the golfing world, I was well familiar with many of the Kueny brethren.

Laura’s father Jim, who I always kidded about his basketball record at our alma mater at North Muskegon High, has been a driving force behind Laura’s success.

Jim Kueny, who served for years as the golf pro at Lincoln Golf Club, was the starting point guard on North Muskegon’s ‘perfect’ basketball team back in 1976-77-- or should I say imperfect.

The Norsemen from 35 years ago won nary a game, but in fairness to Jim and his mates they were nowhere near as bad as their lousy record.

The foundation of that 0-20 team were a couple of freshman, John Nedeau and Bruce Baty, who four years later would team up with current NM AD and basketball coach Jeff Cooke and others to win the first West Michigan Conference Championship since this old author was playing roundball for the Norse back in 1959.

Laura’s older sister, Nicole, made her niche at Whitehall a decade ago has a blazing fast sprinter on the Viking girl’s track team.

I well remember Nicole running a leg on Whitehall’s victorious 800-meter relay team, setting a WMC conference record that still stands today.

However, my first remembrance of the Kueny family was of the patriarch of this very successful clan, Grandfather Ken Kueny.

I resided back in the 1940’s just a few doors down from the Kueny household on Mills Avenue, located about a Laura Kueny 4 iron shot away from North Muskegon High School.

I was barely potty trained when I caught the first glimpse of Grandpa Kueny on the gridiron at what is now known as Fred Jacks Field on the Northside.

Standing 5’4, and weighing maybe 125 pounds, Ken Kueny was a bundle of dynamite as a sophomore fullback for the Norsemen football team of 1943, coached by my father Paul Moyes.

Ken would not only serve as the starting fullback for three years on the Norsemen football teams, but the pint size dynamo was also a starting guard for the NM basketball team in the winter months, a Spud Webb of his era, minus ‘The Hops.’

It was without question however, that it was on the golf course where Grandpa Kueny would make his biggest impact.

His silky-smooth golf swing has allowed him to shoot his age many countless times over the years.

Ken’s mother Ann, a great grandmother to Laura and sister Nicole, was a fixture for many years on the northside as the City Clerk in North Muskegon.

So highly respected was great grandma, who passed away in 2005 at 100 years of age, that each year during the senior’s honors assembly at North Muskegon High there is an award named in her honor.

It wasn’t until this weekend, until I walked the links with the Kueny family and close friends, had I ever seen young Laura exhibit her amazing talents and power on the golf course.

Unlike many of her fellow golfers, weaned in a private southern school whose sole purpose is to churn out professional golfers, Laura enjoyed a complete youthful experience while growing up in the Whitehall area.

As a four-year starter on the Lady Vikings basketball team, Laura was good enough to make the Muskegon Chronicle All Area team.

It was round three during this five-day grueling golfing marathon when I got my first opportunity to see Laura Kueny on the links.

Laura was playing the very challenging Legends course at the LPGA site in Daytona Beach, and these elite lady golfers certainly weren’t teeing up the ball from the ‘Red Tees.’

The first hole was a 373-yard par four with a narrow fairway cut through the woods, and I was anxiously awaiting Laura to pull out a driver for her first shot of the day,

Instead, this diminutive, amazing athlete pulled out a three wood for her initial tee shot.

This long-time golfing hacker was amazed when she drilled her 3-wood 230 yards right down the center, leaving her about 144 yards to the green. Her 8 iron second shot found the middle of the green where she made a routine two putt for her par.

It wasn’t until she reached the eighth hole before she would pull her driver out of her bag, adorned with the large patriotic letters -- USA.

“This is a very tight course and doesn’t play to Laura’s strength, which is her length off the tee,” explained Laura’s proud pappy Jim while accompanying this reporter around the course.

Throughout her round on this very breezy December day, she would routinely blast her drives 250 plus yards into the heavy Florida air, where the soft fairways would prevent any favorable forward rolls.

Laura’s final round score of 74 was only 4 shots off from the best round of the day on this challenging course, played by 139 of the best players in the world.

My old bones were aching by the time we reached hole No. 16, a perilous looking par 3 that produced the first log jam of golfers we ran into during the entire round.

Two groups playing in front of Laura were still waiting to attack this 195-yard hole, where one had to hit over an unforgiving swamp to a postage size green, positioned on top of perhaps the only hill anywhere near Daytona Beach.

I limped ahead of the playing groups to a vantage point near the green and asked one of the many volunteer marshals as to the cause for the delay.

He pointed out to me that “I don’t think there has been a birdie made on this hole all day” ---- until Laura’s threesome played this terrifying looking hole.

I gasped when Laura approached her tee shot with an ‘iron’ in her hand, and then confidently drilled her shot safely on the green, perhaps only 15’ to the right of the pin.

Her playing partners likewise found their tee shots hitting this ominous looking green, and they both made their putts for the first two birdies earned on the day at No. 16.

Unfortunately for Laura, her putt just missed by a fraction to the left of the cup and she had to ‘settle’ for a par.

While Laura was walking to the next tee, I summoned up the courage to ask her my first question of the day. “What club did you use off the tee?”

Laura replied: “I hit a four iron,” with the confident expression like it was no big deal.

I don’t know if she knew how totally impressed, I was that she could hit a four iron 195 yards into the wind with that kind of pinpoint accuracy.

After completing her round Laura was gracious enough to accompany this old geezer from the 18th tee to near the upscale clubhouse. I then bombarded her with a few questions before heading back to my home in nearby Ponte Vedra Beach.

“How does playing in the Q school compare with the competition from one of your past tour events”, I inquired of the personable former Whitehall Viking.

“There is so much more pressure here. There was even more pressure just to survive the previous two qualifiers to compete here in Daytona,” replied Kueny.

Although Laura did not get that treasured LPGA card, insuring the top 20 scorers competing at the ‘Q’ school entrance into all LPGA big money events, she has qualified for the Futures Tour that begins next spring by advancing to these finals.

“I feel so fortunate to be able to do what I love, --- play golf for a living,” said the humble lady pro. “I also am so glad to have the support of my loving family.

It’s also great to have my grandparents here today as they have also played a huge role in my life,” said the grateful Kueny.

“And please be sure to mention how good it was to have Olivia Jordan Higgins as my caddie here in Daytona Beach.

I met Olivia, who is from the Channel Islands in the United Kingdom, when we were both playing on the future’s tour and we became really good friends,” mentioned Laura.

“I hope to pay her back and caddy for Olivia when she plays in Spain next month,” said Laura.

“Then it’s off to Orlando at the end of January for the PGA show and I would like to remain in Florida to play and practice golf.”

Laura Kueny is right on the cusp of taking a big step in accomplishing her lifetime dream of becoming a regular on the LPGA tour.

When asked what she must improve upon to take that next step up the ladder she instantly responded: “It’s my attitude. This game is so mental, and I can’t let a bad shot get into my head.”

I told her I was proud of the way she kept her composure on the course, not getting too upbeat when she made a great shot, nor getting too down on herself when one those tantalizing putts would just miss dropping down into the cup.

Laura has a great opportunity to become the second gal with northside connections to make a big splash on the professional golf tour.

Ken Kueny’s North Muskegon schoolmate Sally Sessions had an outstanding professional golfing career and was the first area female to be inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame.

It seems a foregone conclusion that Ken’s granddaughter is headed in the same direction.

*Laura Kueny was inducted into the Michigan State University Hall of Fame in 2024*

*The following story laments of changes, both good and bad, as well as the difficulties coaches now experience coaching their sport, especially focusing on football****:*** *From December of 2011*

**MOYES MEMORIEs**

**The ‘Ole Announcer’ Lauds our Area Coaches and More**

Sports, has many of us old timers have known it, has changed immeasurably over the years. Many of the changes have been good, and other changes, well--- I can simply do without.

The emphasis utilized in our current, state of the art, weight rooms has added power and speed on the gridiron.

The point of emphasis in basketball has changed to where dunking is now more popular than a long- range jump shot.

In the springtime today’s athletes have the added advantage of running on lightning-fast all-weather tracks, a vast improvement from those loosely embedded cinder tracks from yesteryear.

Showboating on the fields of play has taken a total flip-flop in the post era of ESPN.

How I yearn for the old days when players, after making a big play, would act like they’ve been there and done that and simply handed the ball to the nearest official.

Yes --- there has been several changes since I began calling shots from the press box back in the 1950’s, but perhaps most noticeable to this old-timer has been the changes in the coaching profession.

While browsing through this year’s excellent Muskegon Chronicle pre-season high school football special, I was thunderstruck at the sudden changes within the coaching fraternity here in Muskegon.

This now dwindling group of veterans took another hit recently when popular veteran Fruitport head coach Steve Wilson announced his retirement last month after 23 years on the Trojan sidelines.

Many variables have been tossed around as to why this area has done so well over the years but certainly one can reflect at all the outstanding coaches that have guided our local gridders over the years.

It can be no coincidence that the local schools that have had the most success over the years have been those who have had stability and longevity with their football coaches.

Before his retirement a year ago Jack Schugars served as the head coach at Oakridge High School for more than 30 years.

Unless a still somewhat youthful Mike Holmes decides to stick around for a few more years, it is extremely unlikely that we will again see coaches stay at one institution for 30 years.

Perhaps the single most factors contributing to the shortened coaching span of late has been the enormous demand on one’s time to be successful.

‘” It certainly has changed over the years since I first started” said Jack Schugars in a recent phone conversation.

“I even had time to teach Driver’s Ed, and we would be in the weight room maybe only a couple nights a week” recalled the Hall of Fame coach.

‘Seven on seven camps weren’t legal back then. We were only allowed to work with three players at a time but now there is just a tremendous demand on your time.”

This is true not only in football but for most of the sports that are currently offered to our prep athletes.

And each coach understandably feels that their sport is the most important sport at his/her school.

Prior to the advent of the current playoff system back in 1975, a standard football season consisted of a maximum of nine games with players not reporting to practice until after Labor Day.

Currently, if one is to make a run at a state title, an additional five weeks are asked of a coach with no financial rewards for post-season success.

I didn’t even have to ask Schugars about the compensation he and his staff earned during those many long playoffs runs. “Wages for your time certainly weren’t appropriate, that’s for sure,” emphasized the areas all time winning coach.

“We did not get paid for any of the extra time we put into the program, be it the playoffs or with either of our winter or summer weight training programs.”

Throughout the so-called ‘off season’ a coach is occupied nearly 365 days --- going to passing camps, seven-man camps, quarterback camps, lineman camps, coaching clinics as well has those endless daily sessions overseeing the weight room.

There is rarely a day off during the season for these devotees of their sport, as those former Saturday and Sunday days of well-earned leisure are now spent pouring over game films for endless hours. In addition to the enormous amount of time today’s coaches devote to their programs, there are other compelling sacrifices one must sometimes endure to stay on the job.

Not the least of which is often missing many of their sons/daughters athletic or extra-curricular activities.

It hurt my long-time boyhood buddy Dave Taylor enormously that he seldom was ever to see his son Jeff excel on the field as a linebacker at Mona Shores.

Tony Annese certainly missed watching his son perform at quarterback for Whitehall on those Friday nights when the Big Reds and Whitehall were playing at the same time.

An early contributor to future Hall of Fame coach Dusty Fairfield’s retirement at Ravenna was to devote more time taking part in his three daughter’s activities.

While guiding the Muskegon Heights Tigers for many years Glen Metcalf missed out on many nights when his two sons excelled in sports at North Muskegon.

It is now a rarity for a coach to be involved in more than one sport.

What do legendary local coaches Jack Schugars, Dusty Fairfield, Jim Goorman, and Mike Holmes (who have won a combined total of 19 State championships), all have in common? They all served at one time as the head baseball coach at their respective schools.

Many years ago, it was not all that uncommon for one to coach three major sports during a school year, a near impossibility today.

When my father, Paul Moyes, moved to North Muskegon in 1942, he served as the head coach of the varsity football, basketball and baseball teams, and somehow also found time to mentor the JV basketball team as well.

Likewise, Dad’s predecessor, Lyle McNitt coached these same sports at NMHS.

Somehow Dad would even find time to chaperone many of those Friday night dances after a big home football or basketball game.

Coaching three sports wasn’t just confined to smaller prep institutions like North Muskegon, but the same was true at Muskegon and Muskegon Heights.

Beginning as far back as the 1920’s Muskegon High’s Francis Jacks, followed by Muskegon Hall of Fame coaches Leo Redmond and Tom McShannock, would stay involved coaching three sports during the entire school year.

I may need some help from our knowledgeable readers but is it possible that legendary Muskegon Heights Hall of Fame coach Oscar ‘Oakie’ Johnson, who retired nearly fifty years ago, was the last local coach to head three sports?

One highly successful coach came close. While guiding Muskegon High to three state football championships at Muskegon High, Tony Annese somehow found time, although not in the same year, to serve as a Big Red varsity track coach, as well as mentoring Whitehall’s boys and girls basketball teams.

Let’s hope Ferris State Athletic Director Perk Weisenberger, son of Muskegon Heights and U-M legend Jack Wiesenberger, gives Annese a justly earned shot at resurrecting the Ferris football program.

After winning four state football championships three years ago there has been a revolving door of new coaches at many of our local schools. Jack Schugars has earned himself a well-deserved retirement and Tony Annese has also been justly rewarded with a shot at coaching at the next level.

This now leaves Muskegon Catholic’s Mike Holmes and Montague’s Pat Collins as the two survivors from those championship teams.

Hopefully a new group of coaches can withstand the rigors of today’s standards, stay around long enough to see their programs grow and improve, and keep our incomparable standards of tradition rich football alive into the near future.

*Sure enough, just days after my prejudicial plea for Ferris State’s AD to hire Tony Annese, my hopes were realized. Which leads us to this story on this amazing coaching legend that was first printed in the Local Sports Journal and repeated in the Ferris State newspaper:*

# **New Coach Tony Annese Featured in Article**

Note: The article below on new Ferris State head football coach Tony Annese was featured Saturday (Dec. 31) in the weekly "Moyes' Memories" column by Jim Moyes, a longtime announcer in the Muskegon area who now authors the weekly column for the Muskegon Chronicle.    
  
**By Jim Moyes**  
  
How delighted I was, although not the least bit surprised, that Ferris State University recently appointed former Muskegon coach **Tony Annese** as their head football coach.

Annese has been a big winner at all his stops on his journey to Big Rapids, but his decade spent here in Muskegon was off the charts.

I must confess, however, that when Annese was first announced by Muskegon as the head coach, I was a little apprehensive.

I was concerned as to how often he had changed coaching jobs, moving from Montrose to Ann Arbor Pioneer and then to Jenison before eventually landing here in Muskegon for the start of the 2000 football season.

Would his veer offense work in Muskegon?

**A rough start**

The night Muskegon High honored Annese's predecessor, Dave Taylor, the Big Reds fumbled about a dozen times in an unexpected loss to visiting Midland.

Annese had no difficulty at all recalling that debacle.

"My wife was in the stands and the moment that I got home, and I can remember this like it was yesterday, she said: 'Boy were the fans all over you,'" Annese recalled his wife, Christine, telling him.

"I said to Chrissie: 'You know what, if I was sitting in the stands I would have been screaming as well.' We fumbled I believe 11 times and turned it over about seven."

It certainly didn't take long for Annese to win over all of those Big Red skeptics.

Immediately after the 'fumble-itis' game with Midland, the Big Reds quickly picked up Annese's complex veer offense and rattled off six wins in a row before losing a tough 14-7 playoff game at Grandville.

"We had a lot of talent in that season, but we had to go through some growing pains to get better," Annese said.

**Rapid improvement**

I remember writing Annese a letter at the end of his initial season here, first thanking him for all the cooperation he gave me in making my broadcast preparation so much easier, but most of all to confess how wrong I was about my first impression.

It took but a few brief meetings in his modest office at the Redmond Potter gymnasium before I quickly recognized that the Muskegon administration had found the perfect replacement for Taylor.

This past season was just another ho-hum undefeated season for the wily Annese as he posted a perfect 11-0 mark at Grand Rapids Community College, while burning up a lot of lights on the scoreboard at their home turf at Houseman Field.

Undefeated seasons went hand in hand with Tony's football resume, as his Montrose Rams teams ran the table an implausible six straight times in the regular season during his time there.

After taking Ann Arbor Pioneer to the playoffs two straight years, Annese moved back to football-friendly West Michigan as the head football coach at Jenison.

Not exactly known as a football powerhouse, Tony would win a conference championship in the powerful OK Red, as well as guiding the Wildcats into the playoffs in each of his three years there.

**Zack takes notice**

It was during his tenure at Jenison that Annese caught the eye of Muskegon High School Principal and football fanatic Arlyn Zack, a former quarterback some 50 years ago at Ravenna.

For about three years, Taylor had informed Zack that he wanted to retire from his coaching duties after a Hall of Fame career.

Every year Zack pleaded with Taylor, ironically, a former two-time captain at Ferris State, to hang around for "just one more year" until they found a capable replacement.

After watching Jenison's offensive juggernaut score 39 points on a vaunted Muskegon defense, Zack knew who he wanted for the job, and after much cajoling and boasting about Muskegon's football tradition, the persistent Zack finally had his man.

"I approached Tony after the last game that we played Jenison in 2009 and I upset a whole bunch of our group that traveled to many of the away games in a motor home," Zack recalled. "I met Tony when he came off the field and I told him I wanted to talk to him after the playoffs."

Following this rather lengthy meeting with Annese, by the time Zack finally returned to the motor home he found a busload of disgruntled and extremely thirsty cohorts anxious to leave Jenison.

The group quickly quizzed Zack as to his delay in returning to the motor home.

"Well, I'll tell you what I was doing, I was making my first legal approach to the guy I wanted to hire as our next football coach," Zack said.

In a recent conversation with Zack, the now retired principal was ebullient in his praise of his prized coach.

"Everybody knows that the man is good, but until you actually work with the man on an everyday basis can you understand how good," Zack said. "The man has one of the most magnetic personalities around, some would call that charismatic, I call it magnetic."

**Working his magic**

Overall, Annese has won 83 percent of his games as a head coach.

Playing against the stiffest of competition, Annese's Big Reds were 92-15. He went a perfect 14-0 three times over that span, producing three state titles.

Granted, Annese was blessed with some outstanding talent, but I don't see a whole flock of former Big Reds playing on Sundays. His strength was turning good talent into a great team.

To me, Annese was much more than a football coach. He was a father figure, a big brother, a diligent teacher, a master psychologist and, when necessary, a stern disciplinarian.

He knew when an overconfident or lackadaisical player had to be brought down or when a player needed to be coddled to build his confidence.

But perhaps most important, Annese earned the respect of all his players.

**Behind the scenes**

Annese never forgot the proud Muskegon High tradition and even embellished it.

Unknown to all but a few, Annese's Big Reds were frequent visitors to the late Ed Wittkopp, a former Muskegon player left paralyzed following a football injury incurred some 50 years ago at Hackley Stadium.

I recall calling Annese a few years back informing him that there was an impromptu 80th birthday get-together for Roger Chiaverini at a local restaurant. I inquired if he could get away from his busy duties to say hello.

In just a matter of a few minutes, there was Tony Annese walking into the restaurant to congratulate and thank Chev on his birthday.

The scene was far different than the first meeting between the two coaching legends.

Annese spent the first year of his coaching career as an assistant football and basketball coach at Muskegon Catholic. At that time, Chiaverini was the head football coach at Holland West Ottawa and was less than enamored the following year when West Ottawa hired Annese to be a part of his football program.

Never one to mince words, Chev's first words directed at Annese were very much to the point: "I just want you to know that I did not want you."

Chev sure had a nose for talent as his first choice was current Muskegon Catholic coach Mike Holmes, who worked in the classroom right next to Annese at MCC.

Much to everybody's satisfaction, both Holmes and Annese have had brilliant coaching careers.

It was Annese's idea to honor Chiaverini and Taylor prior to a Big Red home football game shortly before Chev passed away.

I spent many hours with Annese in his Redmond-Potter office over the course of his nine years at Muskegon, when a frequent visitor was Hall of Fame coach Jack Schugars.

You couldn't find two guys who are more polar opposites than Schugars and Annese, but my how they had respect for each other as coaches, and they became the best of friends.

Always looking to take advantage of any edge he could obtain, Annese coaxed his coaching colleague Schugars to assist him at GRCC as the team chaplain.

When asked if he will invite Schugars to join him at Ferris Annese quickly said: "Absolutely."

**Another turnaround job**

Annese has been a proven winner at all his steps up the ladder.

Grand Rapids Community College was a woeful 7-11 before Tony's arrival in the Raiders' camp.

To go from 7-11 to 30-4 is ridiculously good. His ability to put points on the board is incredible as his Raiders' teams led the JUCO ranks in scoring all three years.

I asked Annese what he gained most during his three years coaching at the junior college level.

"It was in recruiting and developing a relationship with the coaches here in the state of Michigan," Annese said. "We wanted the high school coaches to know we are going to take care of their kids, try to make them become successful, bring them into a great city and develop a system to suit our personnel."

Annese currently is on a hectic pace against the clock.

"I haven't even had the time yet to figure out just how many scholarships I have for this year's recruiting class," Annese said. "We need to put Ferris on the map as recruits are the lifeblood to success. I can't imagine that local talents like Toney Davis, Dominique Maybanks and Will Gardner would rather go to Wayne State instead of Ferris State."

With that statement, you know that Annese will make recruiting in this fertile football area a high priority and will use his connections with high school coaches from Sault Ste. Marie to Key West.

"The most welcome change I will have at Ferris is not having a revolving door of players," said Annese, comparing the jobs at GRCC and Ferris. "Instead of having a player for one or two years, I will be able to work with kids four and possibly five years."

When asked if he would take flight from his Grand Rapids-area home and move to Big Rapids, Annese informed me that his wife and youngest son will remain in the Grand Rapids area while the other three Annese children remain in college.

He has already found himself a roommate in Big Rapids when school opens next fall, his daughter Allie, who will be a junior next year at Ferris.

"She probably doesn't want her dad with her during her school years, but I will probably just crash with Allie in an apartment," Annese joked.

The old cliché is defense wins championships, but offense sells tickets. Annese's teams have done both, so ticket sales, as well as wins, are sure to skyrocket in Bulldog country.

It didn't take this old announcer long to jump on the Tony Annese bandwagon. And it won't take long for Ferris State backers and alumni to do the same.

Where do I buy a season ticket?

*What Annese has accomplished since this story was published a decade earlier is off the charts incredibly good.*