**MOYES MEMORIES**

**The ‘ole announcer’ picks his favorite games**

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A recent request from Local Sports Journal columnist Mark Lewis grabbed my attention as he wanted his fellow contributors to this desperately needed website to list their top football games witnessed over the years.

I must put my thinking cap on and go off the top of my head to recall a few of my most thrilling encounters of King Football in our area. I am currently baking in the sultry heat down here in the Sunshine State and have no access to any of the old clippings.

Here’s hoping this septuagenarian’s recollections are mostly accurate as I give you my top picks accompanied by a thumbnail sketch of each memorable contest.

During my more than fifty years working for the media, first as a cub reporter for the ‘daily’ Muskegon Chronicle back in 1956, and the many years as a play-by-play announcer on the radio, I have been fortunate to have witnessed more than my fair share of ‘cliffhangers.’

To say that one game topped them all would be impossible --- so let’s begin with my games that tie for first place:

1971: Muskegon 20 Traverse City 18. Has it really been more than 40 years since this Class A ‘mythical state championship’ game was played? In the ensuing 41 years there has never been a game played in Muskegon County that topped the attendance for this game. It was No. 1 vs. No. 2 in the state during week seven in the pre playoff era and this game more than lived up to its billing.

After Traverse City took a lead into halftime the big play of the game was decided on a punt, albeit a short punt. Larry Sahosky picked off the short Trojan punt as the overanxious TC coverage team went sailing past, expecting the punt to travel a much farther distance. A surprised Sahosky caught the pigskin and rambled untouched deep into Traverse City territory, setting up the deciding touchdown in the victory. Two weeks later the Big Reds were unanimously crowned State Class A champs.

1985: Traverse City 22 Muskegon 21. The same two teams, but this time it was Traverse City that pulled a miracle out of a hat with a stunning last play of the game touchdown.

With less than a minute to go in the final quarter, Muskegon’s Donald Banks stepped in front of Traverse City receiver Joe Durocher and raced more than 90 yards for an apparent game-winning touchdown.

Traverse City returned the ensuing kickoff back to around its own 40-yard line and there was only time for one last desperation play. Trojan quarterback Chris Hathaway’s pass to Durocher about 10 yards downfield was complete.

As the Big Red secondary was ready to pounce on Durocher for the kill, the senior receiver calmly lateraled back to Tim Lautner on a set play, and the once deafening packed house at historic Hackley Stadium was eerily silent, futilely watching Lautner running untouched into the end zone. Surely legendary Trojan coach Jim Ooley would go for the conservative point after from placement to send the game into overtime.

But no, the crafty Ooley went for the two pointer and Hathaway this time completed the same pass play to Durocher that just moments earlier had been returned by Banks for the TD. Traverse would then go on to win their second-Class A state title.

1992: Reeths Puffer 21 Walled Lake Central 18. I will cover this game more thoroughly in a future Moyes’ Memories story this Fall but this was another dandy with another joyous ending for Muskegon prep fans.

The Rockets, coming off a shocking semi-final upset the previous week over heavily favored East Lansing, were less than sharp for about 47 of the 48 minutes of this state Class A championship game at the Pontiac Silverdome.

The Rockets had given up the football five times on turnovers and needed a last second ‘Hail Mary’ if they were to win their first, and only, state football title. Hall of Fame coach Pete Kutches called for a gadget play that perhaps fooled nobody ---- But it worked.

Rocket quarterback Jeff Zietlow took the ball from center and, after seemingly about a half dozen laterals, Zietlow ultimately ended up with the ball.

The Rocket quarterback stepped back and unloaded a heave downfield as far as he could throw in the general direction of Rocket end John Boersma.

Shockingly enough, Boersma was drawing just single coverage. The pass was deflected by the Walled Lake defense, but standing in the right place in the right time was rocket backfield ace Stacy Starr.

Starr was more than happy to catch this deflected pass and ramble into the end zone with just seconds left on the clock as the Rocket fans, (and my broadcasting sidekick Gene Young) went berserk.

2008: Muskegon 38 Davison 35: State D2 Semi-finals

Certainly, no top listing would be complete without mention of this classic. I doubt if I will ever see another comeback in my lifetime to match the implausible ending to this thriller.

Former Big Red coach, and now currently the head coach of the Ferris State University Bulldogs, Tony Annese, will never let me forget how I had started to congratulate the Big Reds on an outstanding season when they trailed by about four touchdowns in the final quarter.

I wasn’t the only one who thought the Big Red Season was ending. After the Big Reds had pulled off the improbable comeback, I was told by Annese a couple of days later of a moving story from a local minister who had left the game early, thinking that all was lost.

The minister was shocked when, while having dinner on the way home from East Lansing, he was informed by a late arriving Big Red fan that Muskegon had pulled off the impossible, recovering a couple of onside kicks and escaping with a victory.

The minister ditched his scheduled sermon to his congregation the following morning and gave a moving apology on how he had ‘quit’ on his beloved Big Reds and had learned a valuable lesson.

I really believe that when the Muskegon players had heard the text of this moving sermon, it inspired them the following week. No miracles were needed for the Big Reds as they pummeled Warren DeLaSalle in the finals to win their third state title during the Annese years.

The four above-mentioned games certainly topped my list but, in no uncertain order, here are some other dandies that I was so privileged to witness during my love affair working local high school sports over the years.

1954: North Muskegon 12 Manistee 12: North Muskegon was undefeated, time for one last play. NM’s brilliant running back Stan Guy goes 70 yards for a TD only to have the play nullified by a clipping penalty. Old time Norse fans (like me) are still wondering where was the clip?

1992: Montague 7 Pennfield 0: Montague shuts out the states’ all-time leading scoring team in a gigantic state semi-final upset.

2006: Muskegon 32 Detroit DeLaSalle 30: Rojo (Ronald Johnson) strips DeLaSalle’s Donald Fowler at the two-yard line as Muskegon wins the state D2 championship.

1950: Muskegon Heights 13 Muskegon 6: My first Big Red-Heights viewing, and it was a classic as I wrote in an earlier Moyes’ Memories story.

1995: Muskegon Catholic 13 Ravenna 8. The Mud Bowl! Ravenna’s punter goes to his knee to field a punt on the quagmire of Citizens Field and Muskegon Catholic nips Ravenna. MCC then breezes to the Class C title.

1988: Ravenna 33 St Ignace 20: This semi-final blowout victory over the states No. 1 ranked set the stage for a Bulldog dynasty for many years.

2001: Fruitport 42 East Grand Rapids 30: Over the next decade East Grand Rapids would lose less than a handful of games. The Trojans used this win to inspire them all the way to the state championship game before losing to one of this states’ most powerful all-time team: Farmington Hills Harrison and future MSU and NFL quarterback Drew Stanton.

1981: North Muskegon 9 Iron Mountain 7: Sam Parker’s closing moments field goal gives the Norse their only state semi-final victory and a trip to the Silverdome.

And my all-time upset:

1980: Muskegon 19 Muskegon Catholic 15: This scenario likely never happened before or will again: The Muskegon win would be their only victory on the entire season while the loss proved to be the only defeat incurred by the Crusaders 1980 Class B state championship squad.

There have been many other thrillers over the years as I’m sure our very knowledgeable group of fans will bring to my attention.

And in closing, a big hearty Thank You to the folks at localsportsjournal.com! They truly understand how important local sports are to our area and I, for one, can’t thank them enough. King football is about a month away and I am confident that this veteran crew will keep the tradition of local coverage at the top of our list.

*Shortly before the 2012 football season began, I lost a great friend and captain of the third team in Greater Muskegon History to be inducted into the Greater Muskegon Sports Hall of Fame.*

**Former NM Legend Don Bowen Passes Away**

**Moyes Memories**

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They were inseparable for life and will be interwoven into North Muskegon football lore forever.

The dynamic duo of Don Bowen and Moe Sikkenga has now passed on into eternity with the death yesterday (Thursday Aug 9) of former North Muskegon football sensation Don Bowen.

This twosome was the backbone of the North Muskegon Football teams of 1942&42, the third local sports team enshrined into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame back in 2000.

Seventy years have now passed since they romped all over the gridiron at the home of the Norsemen, but their state record of 15 straight games going undefeated, untied and unscored upon, is a record that has withstood the test of time for seven decades.

Bowen’s passing came less than a year after his best friend and teammate Sikkenga passed away last September.

As was true for many who lived during this turbulent era encompassing World War II, promising college careers, raising a family, or even pursuing a job had to take a back seat to the war effort.

Prior to enlisting into a branch of service to serve their country following high school graduation, Bowen and Sikkenga had more than rewarding careers as star athletes on the northside.

Although they dabbled in other sports while enrolled at North Muskegon High, it was in football where these two buddies really excelled.

Bowen was the star tailback and Sikkenga the quarterback during those days of yesteryear when teams primarily used the now practically defunct single wing system.

Sikkenga was not your prototypical quarterback, as he resembled a Sherman tank, unlike today’s tall and lean signal callers who stand upright in the pocket and throw over their defenders.

Bowen possessed the looks of a movie star, combined with the agility and strength of a gymnast. Endeared by his teammates, Bowen was an easy choice to be elected captain of the 1942 Norsemen powerhouse eleven.

Paired together, they were North Muskegon’s early version of Doc Blanchard and Glen Davis.

 And naturally, as it was true for many of those old Norsemen, they played on both sides of the line of scrimmage.

Under head coach Lyle McNitt, the 1941 Norsemen team emphasized defense while running off eight straight victories, with nary an opponent crossing the Norse goal line. Captain Bowen was a triple threat star for the Norse, and then some.

In an early season 19-0 whitewashing of Class B foe Reed City, Bowen beat the Coyotes with his passing, running and rock-solid defense. Bowen passed for 1 TD and raced 83 yards for another tally to lead the Norse.

In their season ending finale against rival Fremont Bowen secured the victory using his raw bone power. Embroiled in a scoreless tussle late in the game with the Packers, McNitt called on Bowen for seven straight carries before he willed his way into the end zone from one yard out for the game’s only touchdown to cap off the perfect season.

Outscoring their opponents 107-0 over the course of the 8-game schedule the Norsemen added an abundance of offensive wrinkles for the 1942 season.

My father Paul Moyes was the new coach for the Norse, and he quickly realized he had some awesome talent to work with for the upcoming season.

The Norsemen caught on quickly to their new system as exhibited with their season opening 33-0 rout of Grand Rapids Lee. Bowen quickly gave Norse followers some early thrills by scoring a couple of first quarter TDs, the latter from 93 yards away.

Don then passed the baton to his buddy Moe, who scored a pair of TDs in the second quarter, one on a never-before-seen double reverse play from 56 yards out.

The Norse more than doubled their previous years’ total by amassing 255 points on the campaign, but it was six points that they gave up that ended their record setting streak.

The Blue and Gold cruised to a comfortable 19-0 lead in a rare night game played in Ludington, against Scottville, when Don Bowen limped to the sidelines for a play or two to recover from a leg cramp. With Captain Bowen dejectedly looking on Scottville completed a long desperation pass, in what would have been Bowen’s area of coverage.

The streak ended when the Spartans scored in two plays from 1 yard out.

Their paths took a different turn shortly after graduating from North Muskegon in the spring of 1943. Bowen quickly enlisted in the Navy where he served in three theatres of war as a coxswain in the Navy, while Sikkenga signed up for the Army where he was a Tech Sergeant in battle torn Italy.

When the war mercifully ended Bowen and Sikkenga teamed up once again to see if they could fulfill their childhood dream and play football at Michigan State College.

Those dreams soured quickly however, when Sikkenga’s father suddenly passed away and he had to leave MSC to help his mother support the family back in his native Twin Lake home.

With his buddy no longer around, Bowen lost the competitive edge and likewise left the Spartan football team to pursue employment.

Or --- it’s very possible, the war sapped away some of his skills, as it did for many who served during this tumultuous era.

In June of 2000, Bowen, Sikkenga and nearly all the surviving members of that 1941-42 NMHS team met in downtown Muskegon where the entire team was enshrined into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame.

For many years following that honor it always gave me great pride, as the induction banquet’s emcee, to annually acknowledge Don & Moe as representatives of this deserving group. Only in the past couple of years, when their health had rapidly declined, did they miss this wonderful Muskegon sporting event.

After Moe Sikkenga passed away last September the sons and daughters of Moe made frequent trips to South Bend to visit with their friend Don Bowen whose health had also taken a turn for the worse.

“We looked upon Don Bowen like he was our uncle, “said Moe’s daughter in law Laura Sikkenga.

When this year’s Norse gridders take the field in a few days, fans and followers of North Muskegon football will surely notice a huge sign located in the north end zone at Fred Jacks Field. It honors this incredible group of American youngsters from this great generation whose legacy lives on in this tight northside community.

May Don, Moe and the rest of this inspiring Norsemen team always be remembered. Goodbye Don, and thanks for being a good friend and a great American.

*Here is the reunion story featuring Whitehall’s only undefeated team. From September of 2012.*

**WHITEHALL WILL HONOR SCHOOL’S UNDEFEATED TEAM**

**MEMORIES From Moyes**

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Whitehall has fielded a high school football team for close to a full century, but ironically enough, only one Viking team can boast of an undefeated season.

The unbeaten Vikings of 1962 will be honored at halftime of the Whitehall-North Muskegon game on September 14, commemorating the 50th anniversary of this special group.

And what a turnout it plans to be! Most of the surviving players, coaches, cheerleaders, band director, band members, and even the 96-year-old PA announcer from this era will be on hand to renew friendships and share stories from this Golden Era of Viking athletics.

“We have teammates coming into town from all over the states,” said former Viking lineman Frank Lundell, one of the organizers of the reunion. From Maine to California these Vikings from yesteryear will be introduced to the local fans after first getting together in the late afternoon at Pub 111 in downtown Whitehall.

Whitehall football began in 1921 under the coaching of Carl Gee and, fittingly, the school’s first ever victory was an 18-12 conquest of archrival Montague High School, in the first of more than 100 games that have since been played between these two neighbors.

Interest, as well as enrollment was miniscule in the White Lake Village in the early years, as Whitehall did not field a team from 1933-1940.

Football was resurrected after an 8-year hiatus in time for the 1941 campaign but survived for just this one season before the sport was dropped once again, resurfacing for good in 1944.

As a cub reporter covering North Muskegon athletics in the 1950’s, I can recall a Whitehall squad that fell just short of pulling off the perfect season.

The 1958 Vikings, featuring the battering ram ‘Bull’ Jordan, was a perfect 7-0 going into the traditional season ending battle with longtime adversary Montague. For several years these two cross-lake communities would sandwich a pair of games into a regular season schedule.

The season opener was a non-conference thriller that was won by the Vikings 19-14. However, the tables would be turned when the ‘Cats’ and Vikings squared off in front of an overflow crowd in the season finale.

Montague’s lone loss in 1958 was that opening defeat to Whitehall. A second victory for the Vikings would, not only clinch the first perfect season in Whitehall history, but also their first-ever WMC conference championship.

Montague dashed those Vikings hopes, emerging victorious by the slimmest of margins, 13-12, to win their fourth straight WMC title.

While roving the sidelines in 1957, I witnessed perhaps the strangest play I have seen in all my years covering high school football.

North Muskegon was hosting Whitehall when, late in the game, Norsemen halfback Bill McIntyre broke into the clear and was headed for an apparent touchdown.

But wait --- while McIntyre was racing down the sideline in front of the Viking bench, Whitehall reserve Jack Peterson, removed his parka and sneaked off the sidelines to tackle the startled McIntyre.

Game officials, after huddling together for a few moments, awarded North Muskegon a touchdown -- a game won by the Norsemen 19-18.

Appropriately, it will be North Muskegon that will be Whitehall’s opponent this Friday Night.

Local sports historians may recall that Whitehall and North Muskegon bolted from the West Michigan Conference at the start of the 1961-62 school year to join the Seaway Conference. The Norsemen would return to the WMC in 1966, but Whitehall would not return until 1985.

Playing an eight-game schedule, the Vikings of 1962 did suffer a little bump in the road en route to their undefeated season. After posting lopsided wins over Montague, Ravenna and Coopersville, the Vikings were held to a surprising 6-6 tie against former WMC foe Hart.

That deadlock still rankles former Whitehall defensive back, and one of the reunion organizers, Grant Belinger, to this day. “What a mess!”, recalled Belinger recently. To say that Belinger did not recall fondly the officials from that deadlocked affair would be a gross understatement.

“We had three touchdowns called back, ‘lamented the former Viking star, and our quarterback (Dick Grossenbacher) got thrown out of the game early,” a fact doubted by Grant’s brother, Viking star running back Jack Belinger.

Grossenbacher’s early exit from the game certainly didn’t tarnish his resume down the road. The former Whitehall signal caller would serve in the secret service as a personal bodyguard for President Richard Nixon.

One can only imagine the stories Dick could share with his Viking buddies from his years working at the White House.

The ‘62’ Vikes did bounce back nicely with wins over North Muskegon, Fremont, and Shelby to set up their final contest with Reeths Puffer.

RP was an impressive 6-1 heading into the campaign’s final game, with the winner to be crowned Seaway Champions. The Vikings capped their only undefeated season with a hard fought 21-14 victory over coach Gale Bolthouse’s Rockets.

Grossenbacher tallied a pair of rushing touchdowns and hooked up with fleet footed Viking halfback Jack Belinger on a 40-yard pass play for a third tally. Sophomore kicker Bruce Finkbeiner, who would also stand out as one the Red & White’s all-time baseball greats, was perfect on all three of his extra point attempts.

Finkbeiner’s three successful place kicks were the difference in the North Muskegon game as the Vikings, behind three touchdowns by Jack Belinger, nipped the Norse 21-19.

The undefeated Vikings were loaded with athletes who excelled, not only in football, but also in basketball, baseball and track.

The 1962-63 Viking basketball team would prove to be the most successful since the end of World War II. Coach Jerry Jacobson welcomed many of the football players to the hardwoods, including such All-Conference stalwarts as Jim Patterson and Tom Bloomberg.

This well-rounded group of athletes will not only be remembered as the only undefeated football team, but Coach Jerry Jacobson’s basketball squad would be the last Vikings team to win a regional championship and a berth in the state Class B quarterfinals.

Junior halfback Don Witt will make his second trip this past year from his residence in Arizona back to his old hometown to receive additional kudos. Witt, a state hurdles champion in 1964, is a charter member of the Whitehall Athletic Hall of Fame.

Four of the five coaches from the team of ‘62’ will be in attendance Friday, including the head coach Bob DeYoung. “He is still, today, placed very high on a pedestal by all us players,” fondly recalled Viking spokesman and retired Reeths Puffer administrator Frank Lundell.

“Coach DeYoung was an incredible leader and motivator” added Lundell. Now retired from Hope College, DeYoung will be appearing at the reunion along with three of his four former assistants.

DeYoung served but one glorious year at Whitehall before moving on, but his replacement the following year is well known to area sport fans. Only two years removed from leaving Western Michigan University, Dave Cooke would take over the head coaching duties from DeYoung, beginning an outstanding career that would last for decades.

Bob Mikkelson, who would later become head football coach at Hart, and long-time Whitehall coach Ron Bekius will also be on the sidelines this Friday sharing stories with their former Viking players.

“Organizing this reunion has been a pleasure and the response from teammates has been overwhelming,” gushed Grant Belinger.

Returning home and in attendance will be as many as 26 of the 31 players from that roster.

Committee members were quick to invite the all-important support group for this team and again, the response has been most impressive.

Several cheerleaders, who once wore those long billowy skirts that draped down to their ankles, will be on hand, as well as Stan Armstrong, the band director at Whitehall High in 1962, along with a few members from the marching band.

A very special guest on this occasion will be the man who called the action as the PA announcer fifty years ago. Now a sprightly 96 years of age, this reunion wouldn’t be complete without the appearance of one of Whitehall’s leading all time sports figures, Rex Funnell.

Prior to the 1961 football season, all Whitehall games were played at Funnell Field, named after Rex’s father Ray Funnell.

Only three-sport star Jim Patterson has passed away over the years, but his widow, Jamie Bloomberg Lloyd, a cheerleader for that Viking squad, and sister of defensive back Tom Bloomberg, will represent Patterson.

The gang will also undoubtedly have fond memories of their team manager during the reunion. Sylvester Sagin gave his life for this country while serving in Vietnam. His sister Chris Scott will represent Sylvester.

It may be many years before a Whitehall team will be able to post another undefeated season. With today’s playoff format, a team would have to post a perfect 14-0 record and win a state championship.

To be fair, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that Whitehall did produce a team that had a perfect regular season record. Coach Bruce Baxter’s 1998 Vikings, quarterbacked by Nate McLouth, had a perfect 9-0 mark before losing their opening game of the playoffs to a powerful Orchard View eleven.

The 1983 Vikings, whose defense gave up but 28 points for the entire season went 8-1, with their only loss a 3-0 shutout versus Spring Lake.

Lundell, Belinger, and the rest of the committee were indebted for the cooperation given from athletic director Greg Russell and current Viking coach Cliff Sandee to make this reunion a reality.

It promises to be a most memorable weekend for these Vikings of yesteryear as a group dinner is also planned for the following evening at the White Lake Eagles.

Maybe somebody can get some inside info on the Watergate scandal from Dick Grossenbacher.

*The 2-part story detailing the improbable upset victories at the same site on the same day in 1992 ranks as one of my top memories of all-time:*

**Memories of Moyes**

**Montague & Reeths Puffer pull off stunning wins 20 years ago**

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While three of our area football teams prepare for this Saturday’s upcoming games, it brought back some fond memories of my most memorable semi-final weekend of all time.

With our local teams having reached the state finals an impressive thirty-five times over the years, so often we sometimes forget the path taken to reach the end of the road.

There is one semi-final afternoon that will stay with me forever --- the games that were played on this same weekend twenty years ago, November 21, 1992.

Unlike the unforgettable season of 2008 when it was no big surprise that all four of our semi-finalists won to reach the big finale, the 1992 season also had four teams still in the hunt, but those four teams were all decided underdogs.

Veteran head coach Glen Metcalf’s Muskegon Heights Tigers had to make the long trek to the Upper Peninsula where they fell to Ironwood. In his first trip to the semis, coach Steve Wilson’s Fruitport Trojans were defeated by Kenowa Hills.

That left it up to Montague and Reeths Puffer to pull off a victory, however both teams were given little hope to advance.

Muskegon Area fans were given a huge boost, much to this ole announcer’s delight, when the Michigan High School Athletic Association announced that both teams would play their semi-final game at the same site --- Houseman Field in nearby Grand Rapids.

The MHSAA coffers were spiked as a combined crowd of about 13,000 fans bundled up to witness the morning-afternoon doubleheader, most of these ticket holders from football crazed Muskegon.

Skies were gloomy and game day temperatures hovered just above the freezing point as fans filed into Houseman Field for the 11:00 AM kickoff.

That gloom would soon turn to bright sunshine for each of our local underdogs.

Reeths Puffer was coached by Pete Kutches, who a full decade earlier had guided Muskegon Catholic to a state Class B championship, his second state title and third state finals appearance in three years.

Fittingly enough, who should take over the MCC reigns after Kutches left MCC in 1984? --- None other than 1992 Montague coach Ken Diamond.

After a short stint as the Crusader Head Coach, Diamond left MCC to take over the Wildcat football program. The Diamond family has formed an everlasting bond with the White Lake community and school that Ken still faithfully serves as Athletic Director.

Although Reeths Puffer had experienced much success over the years, Montague, now a perennial playoff contender, had just about hit rock bottom.

I can still vividly recall a couple of decades earlier talking with some of my football cronies leading up to that day. “Wouldn’t it be great if we can get just one of these two teams to pull off the upset?” To think both teams could pull off victories was deemed most unlikely.

For Montague to advance all the way to the state finals had to be an impossible dream for coach Diamond. The coach, with the old fashion crew cut, was close to giving up coaching after difficult years in 1989 and 1990.

Montague had won only one game during that span, and the Cats one lone win was a narrow 8-6 squeaker over Hart, a team that has yet to reach the playoffs.

Diamond began righting the ship by bringing in former Fruitport head coach Tom Holden to serve as his assistant and started to mold a trio of standout sophomores to turn the program around--- Joel Smith, Ryan O’Connell and a curly headed sophomore quarterback, Pat Collins.

East Lansing and Battle Creek Pennfield were not only rated No. 1 in all the polls but were also defending state champions in their respective Class. East Lansing played a very tough regular season schedule, with only a slim 22-21 lost to Grand Ledge marring an otherwise perfect season,

The Trojans from the Capitol City area featured perhaps the top running back, not just in the state of Michigan, but also in the entire country in speedster Randy Kinder.

Montague’s opponent Pennfield – was riding the wave of a 27-game winning streak that included a state championship win over Negaunee in 1991. The Panthers had scored a then state record 605 points heading into their contest with the unbeaten Wildcats, averaging an implausible 60 points per game!

So heralded was the Pennfield running attack that they featured a pair of backs that each accumulated more than 1200 rushing yards, while a third runner also neared the 1000-yard mark.

Heading into their game with Montague the Pennfield ball carriers averaged more than 10 yards every time they carried the ball. But that certainly wouldn’t happen on this gray overcast day at chilly Houseman Field.

When asked how the Montague players liked their chances of pulling off the upset, 1992 quarterback and current Montague coach Pat Collins summed it up for his teammates: “Our coaches at that time gave us the confidence that we could win. Pennfield seniors came into that game never having lost a game. That was just old hat to them while we were just getting accustomed to winning games.”

This was a game straight out of the pages of typical Greater Muskegon football, a combined 6 passes were thrown in the entire game with but one completion. Half of those aerials ended up as interceptions by the opposing team.

Following a scoreless first half, that had to confound the Pennfield followers who had become accustomed to their point per minute offense, the game’s only score came during the third quarter.

The Montague defense, led by Montague defenders Dan Hildman, Rick Alvesteffer, Mike Moore and Joel Smith, stopped Pennfield deep into Wildcat territory at the 14-yard line.

On their first offensive possession of the third period, Montague would march to the games’ only touchdown.

With the Cats facing fourth down and one at their own 48, there was no way that Diamond wanted to turn the ball over to Pennfield’s vaunted offense.

Diamond called upon ace running back Joel Smith to give him the necessary yard and keep the drive moving. He got much more than a yard.

Joel Smith’s run would be etched forever in Montague football lore.

Smith slammed over left tackle behind the blocking of Dan Hildman and TP Johnson and was momentarily stopped for no gain. Then, with a determined second effort, Smith bounced into the open, slanted to the outside near the Pennfield sidelines, where the startled Panther bench could only look on helplessly as Smith scampered 52 yards down the sidelines for a Montague touchdown.

Incredibly enough, one who missed this epic run, was the coach himself, Ken Diamond. “I saw one of our guys jump and I was mad about it because I thought a penalty was coming,” Diamond expounded to Chronicle Sports Editor Cindy Fairfield following the game.

“So, when I turned around to say something to someone and looked back, Joel was already in the end zone.”

And thankfully for the Montague faithful, now all on their feet in jubilation, no flags were thrown on the play and the Cats were on top 7-0.

From that point on the game was decided by the unsung Montague defense, who three times in the second half thwarted Pennfield on three fourth down tries, including a fourth down stop less than a yard from the goal line by Mike Moore early in the fourth quarter.

When I asked Collins if this could have been the game that transformed Montague football, as we have known it for the past couple of decades, he replied: “I think so. We felt that our team broke some of the walls down but much of the credit has to go to coach Diamond and his staff. He gave Montague the same formula that has continued to this day.”

The Cats were headed to their first-ever state championship, but unfortunately for the Montague faithful, their first trip to the Silverdome would not be as successful as their state championship teams in 2008 and 09.

The Cats would fall to perennial state power Detroit DePorres in a hard-fought battle the following week.

“It was the motivation from that game that catapulted me to this mindset of having a dream of wanting someday to be a coach, and well ---- the rest is history, and those dreams did come true,” remarked Collins, now the popular and highly successful Montague coach.

When asked who would have been the bigger underdog: Montague against Pennfield in 1992 or Shelby vs. Ithaca in 2012, that hypothetical question initially drew a chuckle from the current Montague head coach.

Following a short pause Collins believes the Tigers match up well with the heavily favored Division 6 state champs, who like Pennfield, are riding the waves of a long winning streak.

“Ithaca is going to have their hands full with Shelby” said Collins, a team last years’ Montague team took to overtime before losing 22-19.

Ithaca has won 40 games in a row since their last defeat suffered in their state semi-final game in 2009. Any guesses who won that game? You guessed it: Montague, in a blowout --- 47-16,

Following Montague’s remarkable win over Pennfield in 1992, many of the ebullient Greater Muskegon faithful rushed to the warmth and comfort of nearby watering holes and restaurants to quench their thirst and appease their appetites before heading back once again to Houseman Field.

Many of our area football enthusiasts were engrossed in conversation lauding the showing from those underdogs from Montague. “You don’t suppose Reeths Puffer can do the same to East Lansing,” was a question often repeated between games of this remarkable doubleheader at this historic football venue near downtown GR.

*We’ll have part two of this remarkable doubleheader for you to read tomorrow.*

**Memories of Moyes**

**Montague & Reeths Puffer pull off stunning wins 20 years ago**

**jimmoyes@aol.com****,**

**Part 2**

Houseman Field was cleared of fans following Montague’s thrilling early afternoon thrilling upset victory over Battle Creek Pennfield.

Still energized by Montague’s victory, thousands of Muskegon area fans would soon pour back into Houseman to see if Reeths Puffer could do the same and upset the heavily favored East Lansing Trojans and earn a berth into their school’s first (and would prove to be their only) state title game.

The Rocket faithful were hopeful that coach Pete Kutches could spin some of the same magic he had earlier deployed at Muskegon Catholic when he was hired before the 1984 football season.

 The Rockets had failed to have a winning record in four of the five seasons before Kutches’ arrival, however winning would return quickly for the Green and White Rockets.

Kutches, best remembered in our area for his state championships earned in football, will also be remembered by this old timer as a great all-around athlete. So proficient was Kutches as an athlete that he was the center on his high school basketball team although he was only about 5’10 inches tall.

 Kutches was long ago inducted into the Upper Peninsula Hall of Fame for his football and basketball exploits at Escanaba St. Joseph before heading to the University of Wyoming where he starred in football for former Muskegon Catholic Coach Mike Corgan.

Kutches had a record at RP that must sound implausible to modern day followers of Reeths Puffer football. During his 11 years at the helm Kutches won 86 games while losing but 20, a winning percentage well over 80 percent.

It was an easy decision to induct Kutches into the prestigious Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame in 1996 after Pete retired from RP.

However, his career got off to somewhat rocky start in his first game as the Rocket head coach.

Following a narrow loss in their season opener at home against Mona Shores, my broadcasting partner at the time, the late George Seymour, looked at each other incredulously when a disgruntled parent approached a startled Kutches immediately following the game, clearly expressing his disappointment in his son’s playing time --- or lack thereof.

One could not have blamed Kutches in the least if he was having second thoughts about taking on the RP job. Kutches and the Rockets then lost their next game to his former school, MCC, but that would be the final game RP would lose in 1984 as the Rockets won their last seven games while sweeping all opponents in the Seaway Conference.

Kutches was a coach without an ego, a trait not always prevalent in today’s coaching world. One of his assistants (probably unpaid) was Hall of Fame coach Roger Cheviarini, who had Pete as his assistant coach at Muskegon and Muskegon Catholic Central. Following Chev’s retirement at Holland West Ottawa, Kutches coaxed his former mentor to join him at RP.

These two great football minds, along with the rest of this dedicated staff, had a most daunting task ahead of them if they were going to pull off the upset over East Lansing.

It is doubtful if a Pete Kutches coached team ever went into a single game with lower expectations for victory, then their game with highly touted East Lansing. After all --- during his illustrious coaching career, Pete only lost 25 games!

It was certainly no secret to Kutches and his staff as to the key in beating East Lansing. Stop, or at least contain, Randy Kinder.

Mission Accomplished!

The East Lansing whiz was one of the fastest players ever to put on a football uniform in Michigan High School History. So fast was Kinder that the previous spring he nearly won a sprint triple at the Class A state track championships. Kinder won the 100 and 400-meter dashes and finished a scant one-hundredth of a second behind the first-place winner in the 200-meter dash.

I will never forget the play that Jeff Smith, the wily coach from East Lansing, pulled against South Lyon shortly before halftime in their shutout victory the preceding week.

With just seconds to go before halftime, the Trojans broke the huddle and lined up in the ‘victory formation’ where the quarterback normally takes a knee down after receiving the snap from center and heads for the locker room.

The Trojans took a leisure stroll up to the line of scrimmage and gave an academy award performance in lulling the South Lyon defense to sleep.

However, the quarterback took the snap and quickly pitched the pigskin back to the speedy Kinder. The future Notre Dame star and Green Bay Packer was long gone before the defenders could react and the touchdown sealed victory for the top ranked Trojans.

Kinder did have a couple of shining moments against the Rockets but Puffer had the real star ---- Stacey Starr. The 5’11 200-pound senior began a seven-day period that will not be soon forgotten in RP football history.

The two-way performer led all rushers on this typical gray late November afternoon by rushing for 193 yards on 22 carries, including a pair of second half touchdowns.

There was no break in the action for Starr when it was time for the Rocket defense to take the field. Starr’s main assignment, as a linebacker coming into the game, was to stop the seemingly unstoppable Kinder, who had rushed for more than 2200 yards on the season.

Kinder did break away for TD bursts of 69 and 61 yards on two of his 17 carries, but Starr and his mates held the Trojan ace to but 22 yards on his remaining 15 attempts.

The Rockets put it all together with a total team performance that has been unsurpassed in more than 50 years of Rocket football.

The Rockets rushed for 345 yards with DeMarceo Hill, who had totaled more than 1500 yards and 20 touchdowns during the season, adding an additional 95 yards.

Kutches might have disliked passing the football as much as Big Ten football icons Bo Schembechler and Woody Hayes, as RP quarterback Geoff Zietlow had completed a miniscule EIGHT passes in the ENTIRE season heading into the battle with East Lansing.

But it was Zietlow, who teamed up with RP end Scott Goudie, who came up with the games’ biggest play. With the contest all knotted up 22-22, with but seven minutes remaining in the game, the Rockets were faced with a daunting third and thirteen.

Zietlow threw a perfect pass to Goudie who caught the ball in full stride, and he was not brought down until tackled at the EL eighteen-yard line, a 56-yard gain, setting up the game winning touchdown and a date the following Friday afternoon to play Walled Lake Western in the state Class A championship game.

Although the Rockets put 28 points on the board, the Rocket defense played a major part in the victory. Hill was ‘held’ below his season rushing average, but it was DeMarkeo’s defensive interception in the first half that set up the first Rocket tally.

Many of the Rocket players played on both sides of the ball including Rocket rushers Starr, Hill, and blocking fullback Luke Bates. The guardian of the RP defensive line was one of the lightest of Rocket players, Ron Madison.

Madison might have been one of the smallest players suited up that afternoon on the Houseman gridiron but there can be little doubt that Madison was the ‘strongest.’ Madison, who overcame a childhood handicap that had him in a virtual body cast for months, would later set world records in power lifting.

It had been a long day for this ‘ole announcer’ from my comfortable perch in the Houseman Field Press Box but the performances this memorable chilly November afternoon by the Wildcats and Rockets had my adrenalin flowing.

When this Rocket team was honored earlier this season on Oct 5th, much of the attention was focused on their state championship miraculous last second’s win over Walled Lake Western.

However, that state championship game would have never taken place but for their upset win over East Lansing.

Certainly nothing can top 2008 when our proud area produced four state champions, but as far as semifinal action went over the years, the unlikely doubleheader sweeps by Montague and Reeths Puffer 20 years ago will stay with me forever.

*I was saddened to learn of the passing of Alex Karras in October of 2012. This kindled some fine memories I had with Karras and his one trip to Muskegon*:

**Memories of Moyes**

**When former Football All Pro and Movie Star Alex Karras Came to Muskegon**

**By Jim Moyes**

**jimmoyes@aol.com**

The recent passing of Detroit Lions gridiron legend Alex Karras conjured up my own memories from a couple of personal long-ago moments spent with the late football and movie star.

Muskegon old-timers may recall when the future ‘Webster’ of Blazing Saddles fame was in Muskegon years ago as a high school football player for Gary, (Indiana) Emerson High School.

Muskegon had left the Southwestern Conference the previous season, forcing the Big Reds to seek out of state opponents to fill their schedule. Emerson, along with LaPorte, Indiana and Mooseheart, Illinois was one of three teams from south of the border that filled out the 1953 schedule.

Muskegon won all three of those contests, with Emerson tasting defeat at Hackley Stadium by the score of 14-0. It was this game with Emerson that drew the attention of Karras during our first meeting some fifty years ago.

I can easily remember the exact day that I first met the former Lion legend. It was November 17, 1963, and I bumped into Karras at the Lindell AC Bar & Grill in downtown Detroit.

I know many would find this hard to believe, with the megabucks that today’s professional stars currently take home, but Karras was earning his keep as a bartender right during the NFL football season.

Karras, along with Green Bay Packer star Paul Hornung, were serving a one-year suspension from football for betting on their own team to win football games.

Karras was encouraged by his friend Jimmy Butsicaris to be a part owner of the Lindell AC, an offer he accepted, which led him to be working behind this Detroit Landmark on November 17th.

Fortunately for me, on the eve of my visit, the Lindell AC was unusually barren of customers and Karras spent many minutes with this sports nut, who the following day would be Private E-1 James Moyes of the US Army.

Alex was kind enough to spend many long moments enmeshed in conversation with this soon to be Army draftee. We spent a considerable amount of time reminiscing about a trip he made to Muskegon in 1953 as a member of the Gary Emerson Poets football team.

Karras remembered that visit as if it took place the previous weekend, rather than a full decade ago.

Karras, an All-Pro tackle for the Lions, served the role as a bruising running back for Emerson in a game won by the Big Reds in a game played in a driving rainstorm.

Longtime former Chronicle Sportswriter James F. Henderson summed up Karras’ role in the game as follows: “Only one Emerson back could gain consistently against the Muskegon forwards. He was a big fellow, Alex Karras, who dashed for short gains, and was responsible for almost all the offensive gains by the visitors. But he never threatened to break away.”

The Big Reds parlayed touchdowns by Norman Dagan and Dick Cooke in the second half as the Big Reds defeated Karras’ team 14-0.

In our meeting in Detroit, one of Karras’ initial comments to me was: Who in the hell was that big monster you had at tackle. He gave us fits all night long,” asked Alex.

When I quickly replied: “Joel Boyden” he said: “That’s him”.

Boyden was a hulk of a figure, especially for players that suited up some sixty years ago. Boyden was about 6’6 and weighed around 300 pounds, and to this day still holds the Muskegon High School shot put record of 57’0 feet.

Boyden did play some football at the University of Michigan, but he had more desire to be a lawyer than a football player. Years later the late Joel Boyden would serve as president of the Michigan Bar Association.

However, as a youngster growing up in North Muskegon, I was disappointed that Boyden didn’t play for my beloved Norsemen, as he resided in North Muskegon on the shores of Bear Lake. His sister Judy did attend NMHS where I remember her as an energetic cheerleader.

During my early teens, I had a paper route for the Muskegon Chronicle, and one of my customers included the Boyden household. I will forever remember one summer afternoon while delivering papers on my route when, right next to the Boyden house mailbox, I spotted Knute Rockne!

No, not the real Knute Rockne, but none other than the man who played Knute Rockne in the movies, Pat O’Brien!

Many years later I had the opportunity to interview Joel Boyden at halftime of a Muskegon Catholic-Grand Rapids Catholic football game, and I asked Joel did I really see Pat O’Brien? He said I sure did, as O’Brien and Joel’s father were great friends, as the Hollywood movie icon would often visit the Boyden’s over the years.

Getting back to my visit with Karras I was curious as to how this hulking figure behind the bar, who could undoubtedly tear me from limb to limb in seconds, escape the draft? Wouldn’t our country feel a great deal safer with the Alex Karras’ of the world in the armed forces then a scrawny Jim Moyes?

When I meekly posed this question to Karras, he quickly confided to me how he was exempt from the draft: “I flunked my eye test. Somebody had advised me that when I go in for my pre-draft-physical to make out like you’re as blind as a bat. And it worked.”

Our paths would cross again six years later.

I was serving my second year as a high school broadcaster for WTCM, a Traverse City station that also carried the Detroit Lions game on the radio. The station asked me if I would attend Media Day at the Lions training camp in Cranbrook and tape some promos with a few Lions players.

I was at one time a die-hard Lion Fan until the Lions traded Muskegon’s own Earl Morrall to the New York Giants in 1965. The trading of one of my childhood idols left a bitter taste in my mouth, a trait somewhat strengthened after getting less than a royal treatment from Lion personnel while at Cranbrook.

Traveling to Cranbrook with me on this assignment was Traverse City St. Francis head football coach Mike Kanitz, a former all-around high school sports star at Muskegon St. Mary’s. ‘Big Mike’ was a high school teammate of Jim Morse, captain of the Notre Dame team in 1956 that included the Heisman Trophy winner who served the same suspension as Karras ---Paul Hornung.

I recall that, in addition to many media personnel, there were also young kids hanging around seeking autographs from Lion players. The autograph seekers, believing that Mike had to be a member of their beloved Lions, often hounded Kanitz for his signature, who stood 6’3 and a muscular 230 pounds.

When it came time to confront a few Lion players to procure the promos, I was stunned when I discovered my batteries were dead in my tape recorder.

After getting many ‘tough luck’ comments from a few of the Lion Brass present Mike was kind enough to scurry nearby to find a store that sold my needed batteries.

After losing valuable time until Mike returned with the batteries, I did finally get a few generic promos from the likes of Lem Barney and Wayne Walker: “Hi, I’m Wayne Walker, listen to all the Lions games this year on WTCM.”

Then I spotted the most popular Lion of them all off to the side, No. 71, Alex Karras. I approached Alex with my tale of woe about the batteries, and he quickly consented to join me for an interview.

It was sometime later that I found out he had shunned all the more visible local TV and radio guys and, for some strange reason, only granted me an interview.

I thought it very odd at the time that I had a big crowd around me while I chatted with Alex, many peering over our shoulders with their own tape recorders extended.

I soon found out that Alex had a memory like an elephant. I was absolutely startled with Alex’s initial response when I asked Alex about his recollections of playing in Muskegon back in 1953. “Funny you should bring that up with you being from Muskegon,” said Karras.

I think we talked for about ten minutes or so, discussing everything under the sun except --- Lion football.

Following the talk with Karras I was so proud when Kanitz told me that it was really a great interview. I couldn’t wait to get back to Traverse and have the tape played on the air.

However, it never happened, as the staunchly conservative owner of the station was upset with comments Karras had made about Traverse City. Alex had mentioned during our taping that he was very interested in procuring some property in Traverse City, but he was very upset with the price. He mentioned the Realtor’s name and said: “This guy has a license to steal.”

Perhaps one of my proudest of broadcasting moments never hit the air, and the tape was lost forever.

However, I still have those great moments with Karras to cherish, and I will forever be grateful that he took a few moments of his valuable time to spend with a young budding reporter.

*It was about this time during 2013 that I became very grumpy had decided to air my complaints to our loyal readers. Here goes:*

**Moyes had a bad day**

**By Jim Moyes**

I must have fallen off on the wrong side of the bed this morning as I’m in a sour mood. I tossed and turned in my sleep last night thinking only of the multitude of quirks that totally bug me in the sporting world.

My grumpy mood started with a lousy dream I had last night; a dream that I was given the worse possible job in sports: a security guard that spends the entire game with his back to the play. And, as soon I peeked behind to see what all the noise was about, I was fired!

I’m in such a lousy frame of mind that I even dislike the singing hot dog vender at Comerica Park. Somebody please put a muzzle on that guy!

Every time I pick up the Tuesday edition of the USA Today, I want to just scream when I see their top 25 High School Basketball ratings. Why in the world do they include those basketball factories in their ratings?

Many of these basketball academies, disguised as high schools, have traveled more miles this year than Rand McNally.

Does anybody in their right mind think that Milan, Indiana high school (Hickory) would have won a state championship today going after the Oak Hill Academies and Findley Preps of the World?

Please USA Today--- rate only those schools that are genuine four-year institutions with students living in their immediate area.

I’m in such a sour mood that if I were made dictator of college and pro football the first thing I would do is ban the soccer style method of kicking. Make ‘em’ kick it straight on as they did back in the ‘good ole days.

I shudder to think that someday they will rename the Lou “The Toe” Groza award the Pete “The Sidewinder” Gogalak award, the guy who made the first soccer style field goal in the NFL.

How I loathe those people sitting in range of the TV cameras talking to friends on their smart phones and mugging for the cameras.

And that brings up one of my modern-day pet peeves: Going out to dinner with friends who spend more time checking their messages on their smart phones then talking with their guests. I would love to see restaurants with a sign that says: Please check all cell phones at the door before entering.

We need some creative end of the game celebrations, such as doing away with the dousing of coaches with the Gatorade bucket. Will somebody please think of something new – And the shaving cream in the face at post-game interviews is getting old as well.

And how about some fresh material for our athletes interviewed after the big game. I cringe when I hear an athlete, or coach, bellow out: “Nobody expected us to win.” --- Really --Nobody?

Today marks the official signing day for high school athletes to announce their college of choice, many of whom have already left their final semester of high school to enroll early in college. My mother always told me way-way back when ---that your most memorable years are those spent with your childhood pals in high school. And she was right!

I love sports talk radio, but I can’t listen for more than two minutes to a certain guy from GR, who undoubtedly will never get a Christmas card from the manager of the American League Champs --- Detroit Tigers skipper Jim Leyland

How I miss the TV duo of Al Kaline and George Kell. I always enjoyed listening to Van Patrick (The traffic is slowing in Oshkosh) and I dearly miss the classy radio duo of Ernie Harwell and Paul Carey. Us old-timers fondly recall the great Harry Heilman.

Did current Tiger announcer Rod Allen write the book on How to Play Baseball? This guy, who played a grand total of 31 Major League games, gives me the impression he believes he knows more about baseball then any man alive.

Nobody asked me but why can I cheer when somebody misplays a serve into the net in volleyball, butI would be asked to leave the premises if I did the same when one would do the same during a tennis match?

I truly love golf, but I hate their rules.

Ok – Maybe I never passed a Dale Carnegie course, but can somebody explain to me why golfers remove their caps before shaking hands at the end of an 18-hole match? In what other sport do they remove their hats – certainly not in baseball?

Clearly, the most unforgiving rules in sports occur in golf - I still cannot fathom why Roberto De Vecenzo was DQ’d at the 1968 Masters. Everybody in the world (except De Vecenzo) knew his score as millions watched on TV.

I still think of De Vecenzo every time they show a leader of a major golf tournament entering “The Recorders Tent” for fear he’ll post the wrong score before signing his life away on that card.

How about the guy this year that was penalized two shots, because a leaf moved while he was hitting his shot. It had nothing whosoever to do with his having a good or bad shot.

I could go on and on (Colby Beckstrom penalized two strokes because his caddy was kind enough to rake the sand trap when an opponent blasted out of the trap.) C’mon Man!

Why is it they show Tiger Woods taking every shot whether he is leading a tournament or 15 strokes behind? I remember in the ‘good ole days’ when they focused on the leaders.

I hate those headlines that: Joe Superstar HEADS this year’s group of Hall of Fame inductees at State U. This lousy headline must make the other inductees feel like they are playing second fiddle.

And while I’m still in this grumpy mood I would ban all baseball bats except those made from wood.

And how I’m irked when some of our umpires just can’t wait to call a balk on a pitcher who may not have done nothing more on the mound than twitch an eyebrow. The rule emphatically states that a balk is to be called only when a pitcher attempts to deceive a runner.

With all this said I’m confident I’ll sleep better after getting these feelings off my chest and hopefully be in a better mood tomorrow.

I hope your day is going better than mine.

*With track season in the middle of the 2013 season, I reflected to what I believed was the ‘Golden Era’ for girl’s track. This story is from May of 2013:*

**West Michigan Track Club Memories**

By Jim Moyes

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While a select few of our gal track & field athletes prepare for their final meet of this chilly 2013 season at Saturday’s state finals, I couldn’t help but reflect to what was unquestionably the ‘Golden Era’ for girl’s track--- more than 30 years ago.

This year’s running of the state track championship will mark the 40th anniversary of the first track & field championships for the girls.

While 6000 fans packed Michigan State's Ralph Young Field for the Boys Class A State Championship back in 1973, much smaller numbers would see history in the making down the road at East Lansing High School.

Competition at the state level in 1973 was an all-class affair with the first team title going to Lincoln Park. Skepticism certainly must have greeted the initial 366 competitors, representing 119 schools, as media coverage was limited to but a few short paragraphs in most newspapers, with summaries a scarcity.

The initial state title featured a star distance runner that is well known by area track fans. Clarkston High’s Sue Latter won the 440-yard dash in 57.1 and the 880-yard run in the fine time of 2:17.7.

Although many great distance runners have shown their talents at future girls' state meets, it is likely that very few will surpass the accomplishments of Latter. Latter would win the National Outdoor title in 1977 (2:03.8), and ten years later posted the fastest 1500-meter time by a Michigan athlete in state history with a time of 4:04.48.

Now Mrs. Ron Addison, (also a former world class runner) Sue would see her daughter Becca Addison win the first of her three state titles for Grand Haven beginning with the 2008 season.

It certainly didn’t take long for girl’s track to explode onto the local scene. For about a five-year span from 1977 until 1981, our area gal athletes set several records that have stood the test of time for more than three decades.

It was following an exciting 1978 season when I met then Muskegon High girls’ track coach Jim Kanaar at the inaugural running of a post-season track invitational, sponsored by the Detroit Free Press at Warren Fitzgerald High School.

Jim had brought a few of his own Muskegon Athletes to this meet while I was there with North Muskegon’s star track performer, shot put and discus standout Annette Bohach.

Jim and I were duly impressed with the talent representing our area at this meet, and we were in total agreement that some of these athletes should be exposed at prominent meets during the summer months.

The Free Press meet would lay the groundwork for the formation of the West Michigan Track Club, featuring, for the most part, area female track stars that would surpass our most optimistic of expectations over the next few years.

In 1978 the WMTC had just a skeleton crew of athletes, but with the success enjoyed by our local track stars, interest surged rapidly for the 1979 season.

Coach Dorothy Chiaverini’s Muskegon Catholic team was absolutely loaded with talent, from sprinters like fleet footed Sue Bordeaux to a sprinter/high jumper deluxe in Terri Johnson.

Coach Dot’s Crusaders would win three state titles, and placed second in yet another, from 1975 through 1978. North Muskegon had a powerhouse as well during this same span, winning three championships of their own from 1977 through 1980, with their only non- title occurring when MCC dropped from Class B to C in 1978.

Area talent wasn’t limited to Muskegon Catholic and North Muskegon athletes, however. To the North, our club featured a sprinter from the tiny school of Mason County Eastern --- Maria Shoup. Just to the west of her home in little Walhalla was a distance runner from Scottville who would set distance records that still stand today---Melanie Weaver.

Jim Kanaar and I were alerted to the attention of a young freshman from Mona Shores, who many felt would be a surefire sensation. And they were right!

Cathy Fitzpatrick, the daughter of the Muskegon area’s first Hall of Fame track sprinter, Jerry Fitzpatrick, would go on to have a track career that I feel should have her joining her dad in the MAHOF in the not-too-distant future.

With the likes of Bohach in the weight events, Fitzpatrick and North Muskegon’s Cindi Guy in the sprints, Shoup in the hurdles, and Weaver in the distance events, this group was talented in all disciplines of the sport.

If there was any one event where the WMTC was overloaded with talent, it had to be in the high jump. There was one meet that will stick with this old coach for years to come. And it occurred in of all places, the little town of Dowagiac in 1979.

Jim and I piled in a few gal athletes in each of our vans for the short trek to Southwestern Junior College for a very low- profile track meet. But what talent we had on that track that Saturday afternoon in mid-June of 1979!

And nowhere was this talent more in evidence than the high jump. Among our competitors were three girls who were state champions in this event, Terri Johnson, Rhoda Filius from Mona Shores and Fruitport’s Karla Link.

It was strictly no contest as all three of our gals cleared 5’8 or better that afternoon. It also might have been the day that Terri Johnson earned herself a scholarship to Alabama as she amazed the few track buffs in attendance by becoming the first girl in state history to clear 6’0 in the high jump, the same winning height for the boys in last weeks’ West Michigan Invitational.

Link, Filius, and Johnson would all earn track scholarships, with Johnson winning two outdoor high jump championships in 1981-82 at the prestigious Southeast Conference outdoor championships.

It has now been 36 years since Terri performed her magic at the MHSAA state finals, yet her mark of 5’9 in 1977 still stands today as the Class B/Div 3 state record.

Among the many highlights from this era was a National AAU event for high school athletes that took place in UCLA in 1981.

We were sending a rock-solid group of sprinters to this national meet, but the event that especially drew my interest was the 4x400 relay.

I must confess, however, that I had to perform a little skullduggery to even get our relay team entered in this event. While filling out the meet entry form, I was faced with a bit of a problem. When the application asked for our best time in the relay, I couldn’t come up with a mark, as we had never competed in this relay.

When I explained this to the meet director over a phone call, he was adamant that we had to have posted a time, and verifiable in a newspaper write-up.

I called a sportswriter friend at the Chronicle, and he graciously inserted a brief paragraph deep into the bowels of a daily paper with a fictitious time – and meet --- that never took place.

Then it was up to the gals to vindicate my little falsehood. And did they ever!

“You also lied to get me into the pentathlon,” Maria Shoup quickly added in a recent conversation. “I had never entered a pentathlon before in my life, but you thought I would be good in that event. Annette Bohach gave me a few tips in the shot put and I was able to take third place.”

On a few instances Jim & I would accommodate girls from outside our area that needed a club to compete for in their quest to procure a track scholarship.

Kanaar had befriended a coach from the Detroit area who had an athlete who needed a club. The girl was Kathi Harris, an 800-meter runner at Walled Lake Central High School.

Teamed up with Harris on our relay team were our two local speedsters in Maria Shoup and Cathy Fitzpatrick. We had another gal that was scheduled to take the long journey out to California but shortly before the meet, the girl came up lame.

To the rescue came a sprinter from Fruitport who was only scheduled to compete in the short sprints. Never had Cindy Hatt run a distance longer than 200 meters in a meet. On this day Cindy ran the race of her life, and this talented foursome shocked the heavily favored California competitors by winning the event.

“I anchored that relay and I don’t remember it even being close,” reflected Shoup. “Kathi Harris was really good, but she was the girl that kept trying to sneak out at night,” confessed Maria recently. “Cindy Haat ran her leg in about 58 seconds, and Cathy Fitzpatrick was just terrific.

I remember that the LA Flashettes finished seconds behind us. To beat the Los Angeles Flashettes, and be from little West Michigan was cool,” said Shoup.

“All six of the girls we took to this meet placed in this meet, including recent Fruitport Hall of Fame inductee Karla Link,” recalled Kanaar, who accompanied the gals on this long trip.

“Those girls earned their way out to California by working car washes and all that stuff, and all of the girls placed in the nationals and earned college scholarships.”

Shoup, Fitzpatrick, Link and Harris all would receive scholarships to Division I Universities. Fitzpatrick would be a successful sprinter at the University of Virgina. Shoup won many Mid-American titles while competing for Western Michigan University where she would eventually be inducted into their sports Hall of Fame.

And Harris amazed many, including this author, when at the age of 33; she would win the National Championship in the 800 meters in 1987, becoming the second female to break the two-minute barrier. Harris just missed a berth on our 1986 Olympic team when she placed fourth at the 1996 Olympic Trials

Whenever you get a chance to visit one of our local gymnasiums, look at the track record boards for the gals. You would be amazed at how many records from this era that have never been bettered.

Take the West Michigan Conference track championships for an example. Seven records from this era (1977-1980) still stand today. And there is little doubt that Annette Bohach would have the shot-put record if they had been using the 4-kilo iron ball in 1979.

Following her graduation from NMHS Bohach went to the National Jr. Championship at Indiana University and, in her only meet in her senior season using the 4-kilo ball; she WON the National Title and a berth on the USA team that faced Russia that summer. Her winning effort of 47’9 is seven feet better than the posted existing record.

The oldest record at the WMC Conference Meet is the 200-meter dash record set by Cindi Guy back in 1977. They did not run the 100-meter dash (they were still competing at the 100-yard distance), or I’m confident that Guy, the state champ in the 100-yard dash in 1980, would hold the metric record as well.

Of the many years I served as the PA announcer (Over 30), my most memorable moment at all these meets was Cathy Fitzpatrick’s performance in 1982.

More than 30 years has passed since that memorable day, yet Fitzpatrick still holds meet records, as well as the area’s all-time bests, in the 100, 200 and 400-meter dashes. Then, to add to her legacy, Cathy received the baton on the final leg of that meet’s 4x400, more than 30 yards from the race leader (many say further). With the crowd on its feet in absolute awe, Fitzpatrick made up the deficit and led her team to victory.

It looked like the sky was the limit for the Mona Shores comet. However, the following Monday, at the tail end of practice, Cathy strained a muscle in her leg that would leave her doubtful if she would be healthy enough to defend her state 100 yard-dash title at the upcoming state meet.

Not risking further damage to her leg, Mona Shores Coach Dan Hamilton scratched Cathy from the 100.

With very little training over the next few weeks leading up to the state meet, Cathy was able to qualify in the 200 and 400 meters with victories at the local regional qualifier.

In her heat of the 200-meter semifinals at the state final, Cathy won her heat with a time of 24.2 seconds, a record that stood as the state record for an amazing 24 years. Later that summer Cathy would improve her all time area best down to 23.9 while placing among the leaders at the AAU Nationals in Los Angeles.

For even further proof of the complete domination of this era, check out those City Track Records for the gals. Of the 13 events that were run from 1977-82, fully nine of those 13 records belong to the girls from the Golden Era.

And why were these female track stars so dominant in this period as opposed to today’s athletes? Certainly, a major factor contributing to their success was that the sport of track and field was often the only spring sport offered at many of the local schools.

For starters, Track & Field was the only spring sport for girls at Muskegon Catholic and North Muskegon. The proliferation of other spring sports has unquestionably reduced the numbers of those going out for track.

With Title IX still in its infancy from 1977-82, many of our local track stars were able to procure much needed track scholarships.

Bohach, who became the first area female track star inducted into the Muskegon Area Hall of Fame, won numerous Big Ten titles in the shot put, and twice made it into the finals in the USA Olympic Trials.

Weaver became a Big Ten Champion at the University of Michigan while Shoup was a stellar star at WMU. Both Shoup and Weaver have been inducted into the Ludington Area Sports Hall of Fame and Fitzpatrick should be a good choice to join Bohach in our local chapter as well.

When I informed Maria that I’m trying to push Cathy into our local hall of fame Maria said: “She’s not in the hall of fame down there? How could she not be in it? That’s ridiculous – She was terrific” gushed Shoup.

Jim Kanaar and I, together with many of other local track athletes put a lot of miles on those vans more than three decades ago. Included among those less than exotic destinations were places like Sterling, Illinois, Salem, Ohio and Manhattan, Kansas, just to name a few.

“We provided them the opportunity to go on and become good citizens and have a great college experience.” And they all went on and did exactly that,” remarked a proud Kanaar.

“Those were good times,” said Kanaar in closing.

Who knows what sports Fitzpatrick, Shoup, Bohach, Guy, Weaver, Johnson and others might have pursued if they had been available during their era? For this old coach anyway, I’m sure glad they were left with just track. They surely were very special.

*And indeed, Cathy Fitzpatrick was inducted into the MASHOF in 2015*.

*The year of 2013 was so memorable for this ‘ole announcer,’ capped by being inducted into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame. He is the following story that I wrote of this fabulous evening for The Local Sports Journal:*

MOYES MEMORIES:

**The 2013 Hall of Fame Induction Banquet**

There are not enough words in my limited vocabulary to thank all those who made this

year’s Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame Banquet one that I will never forget.

Although I have attended all but one of these ceremonies over the past 27 years, nothing can top the moment when the announcement comes that you’ve been tapped to be a part of this legendary group.

I always had a few butterflies fluttering in my system when I was called upon to emcee this banquet for 14 years, but a totally different amount of excitement gripped me on this very special evening when I received the distinguished service award.

The annual Sports Hall of Fame banquet is one night where one can wade through the pre banquet cocktail hour and once again meet so many of our sports icons who have contributed to our proud sports tradition.

Area Old-timers can compare this night to the days from the 1940’s and 50’s when annually there would be a huge sports banquet following the football season at the Muskegon Elks Club.

There were nearly 30 current Hall of Fame inductees on hand, as well as countless other loyal sports enthusiasts, friends and family to shake hands with and exchange gleeful hugs.

Following the well-prepared and delicious prime rib dinner at the Muskegon Country Club, the show got on the road by honoring our top male and field athletes of the year.

The Hall of Fame hit a grand slam home run with this year’s picks.

This great area may not have another female athlete like Grand Haven’s Abby Cole. Abby was arguably the top female athlete in the state in TWO SPORTS, volleyball and basketball!

 Like only Tom Kendra can, he portrayed this amazing super star for being much more than just a great athlete, but one who was so loved and respected by all her teammates and coaches.

Although Abby has announced she will play only volleyball at the University of Michigan beginning this Fall, don’t think for a minute that this classy superstar won’t be hounded by the UM girls’ basketball coach once the volleyball season ends.

I was fortunate to spend a few moments with Abby’s coach, Katie Kowalczyk, following the banquet. Katie kindled some fond memories for me when she brought up the name of her own high school coach at Caledonia, Paul Peterman, who she mentioned as being so instrumental in her brilliant career.

Peterman was an outstanding high school basketball player back in the 1970’s at Muskegon High School, as well as at Grand Valley University. Following his collegiate career, he took over the reigns as the girls’ basketball coach at Caledonia High School where one of his star players was Kowalczyk.

 How many recognize that Peterman was a member of the first group to be inducted into the Grand Valley Sports Hall of Fame in 1986?

Tragically, Paul Peterman passed away shortly into his career. “It hard to believe that this wonderful man was only 29 years old when he left us,” said Kowalczyk. “It would be great if Paul someday could be included in this Hall of Fame.”

Reed Hrynewicz from Mona Shores could also arguably be the top athlete in the state in his two sports of hockey and golf.

And although we live in the perfect climate that has now produced some amazing hockey stars, it is amazing to me the number of great high school golfers this area has produced, despite not being able to play outdoors 12 months out of the year.

Boy standouts like Brandon Gielow, The Beckstrom Brothers, Andy Ruthkowski, and on the distaff side, Laura Kueney, and just this past year, North Muskegon’s Aya Johnson.

The induction of the 1994 Holton State Championship Volleyball team was a well-deserved honor.

Following the banquet, I was talking about this magnificent team with my daughter Kasey, as she had the ‘misfortune’ to have to play against this Red Devil squad while playing for North Muskegon.

“They were so good they would embarrass you.” Said Kasey.

Kasey recalled a moment of when she was a setter at NM; her hall of fame coach Karel Bailey wanted her to pay special attention to Holton super star Amy DeLong.

Kasey nodded her head but after DeLong made yet another back handed over the head perfect set from one side of the net to the other --- thought to herself (“There’s no way I’m ever going to be able to do that.”)

 Many of the area all-time great volleyball coaches, including Hall of Fame coach Karel Bailey, and Dan Potts, winners of many state volleyball titles, were unanimous in their opinion that this Holton team was a no-brainer to be the first volleyball team inducted into our Hall of Fame.

And what a moving moment it was when Josh Keur and his wife Jennifer Thornton Keur, a great player on that Holton team, lovingly embraced when it was noted that they are now the first husband-wife couple in the hall of fame.

I only saw Jack Sprague through the magic of television while he was dominating his sport of auto racing. Sprague’s accomplishments on the ovals of the racing circuit only add to our growing luster of this area’s enormous number of talented performers.

How ironic that the two Hall of Fame coaches with the most coaching victories, Jack Shugars in football, and Jim Goorman in basketball, never played the sport at the varsity level in high school.

This is not that unusual in the coaching fraternity as one might be surprised to know that Jim Leyland never played in the Major Leagues and Tony LaRussa and Dodger icon Walter Alston only had a cup of coffee.

Jim Goorman mentioned how honored he was to be a part of the same group currently in the Hall. I doubt if there is a single community of this same size in this entire great nation that can boast of the talent that has come out of here.

I always knew Jim Goorman was a baseball guy. (He once confessed to me it was always his favorite sport.) What an honor it was to have known and worked with this classy guy over the years. Jim gave a wonderful acceptance speech.

I now know how past inductees felt when I went up to give my speech. It was so fitting that my longtime sidekick, and longtime Hall of Fame president, Gene Young presented me into the Hall of Fame.

I was so moved following Gene’s emotional words, and the unbelievable reception I got from the large crowd in attendance, that I couldn’t read my notes.

One -- I left my cheater glasses back at my seat, and two --- my eyes had clouded up with tears of joy. But just like so many others, I could only speak from my heart.

However, I was appalled when I later looked at my notes, I had prepared to discover I had forgotten to mention some of those I wanted to thank that were in attendance.

Amongst those I forgot included former teammate Ron Simonelli, broadcasting partner in the booth Joe Coletta, the father son combination of Dave and Jeff Cooke, boyhood pal and basketball rival Dennis Potuznik and undoubtedly many more.

Even though I may still be down in Florida at this time next year, you can be sure that I will take the time to mark this date on my calendar. Let’s hope gas doesn’t cost five dollars a gallon (or more) when I begin my 1165-mile journey.

Thanks again Muskegon for this unforgettable Moyes Memory.

*Moyes Memories review the 2013 draft with a look back at the Golden Era of Muskegon baseball*:

**The Golden ERA of Baseball in Muskegon**

Memories of Moyes

The 2013 June Amateur Major League Baseball Draft has once again come and gone and, for what has been true for more than a decade, nary one Muskegon Area baseball player was selected of the 1218 players picked by major league baseball clubs.

That certainly wasn’t the case during the early years of the MLB draft.

If one were to only judge local talent based on the annual drafting of baseball talent, it is clear to see when the Golden Age of baseball in this area took place.

The Major League draft was first adopted back in 1965 when the Big-League hierarchy selected four of our area lads in that inaugural year. Nearly 50 years has passed since that first class of draftees, and this area has never had more than two names added to a draft listing in a single year.

Toss in two Muskegon diamond stars picked in 1966, and one who was signed by the Detroit Tigers in 1964, and one can clearly visualize the outstanding talent produced in our area nearly a half century ago.

The local who penned his signature on a contract in 1964 was the eccentric Ray Newman, signed as a free agent with the Tigers back in 1964. Newman would make it all the way to the big show where he played in the major leagues for three years from 1971-73.

That talented foursome drafted back in 1965 included John Sluka, Ron Jancek, John Huizenga, and Roger Hansen.

Following a sensational all-around high school career at Grand Haven High School, Sluka was picked in the 11th round in that first class in 1965.

 John can always brag to his grandchildren that he was the 220th player selected in the first year of the draft.

Six picks later the New York Mets selected a guy that had a decent MLB career, Hall of Famer and career strikeout leader, Nolan Ryan.

The St. Louis Cardinals in the 26th round took Jancek, a former Muskegon Catholic Central hurler.

The hard throwing southpaw was drafted out of Weber State College, one of many local athletes who followed (recruited might be a better word) by my longtime broadcasting partner, Weber State grad Gene Young.

Former Big Red catcher, and Western Michigan All-American, John Huizenga surprisingly had to wait until the 39th round before the Tigers finally called his name.

Although he never made it the Big Show, Huizenga did make it all the way to AAA ball, just one step from Tiger Stadium.

Huizenga did advance one level higher in the Tiger Minor League farm system then another catcher who was selected as a free agent with Newman in 1964--- current Tiger skipper Jim Leyland.

 It should be noted that Leyland was the catcher for his teammate Newman for Lakeland in 1964, while Huizenga had a brief stint in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, a roster that included Leyland and current Tiger coach Gene Lamont.

Newman’s high school teammate, and classmate at Muskegon High, Jim Johnson, fell all the way to the 36th round following an outstanding junior year at Western Michigan University.

Scouts recognized that Johnson was bent on making education his top priority, and he did not sign on the dotted line with Detroit but would complete his senior year at Western where he was drafted in the 3rd round by the San Francisco Giants the following year.

This would prove to be a sound move on the part of the future Superintendent of Schools at North Muskegon as he posted an unheard-of ERA of .054 in the spring of 1967 for the Broncos and sported a perfect 7-0 record.

Inducted into the Muskegon Area Hall of Fame in 1992, Johnson, more than 40 years after getting his degree from WMU, still holds the record for the Broncos in winning percentage (18-2 for .900 pct.) and the career leader in ERA at 1.34.

 Freshmen were not eligible to compete at the varsity level until 1970, or Johnson conceivably could also have walked away with Bronco career bests in wins and strikeouts.

We have had four Muskegon area players during the draft age that made it to the big leagues, and only Johnson was drafted anywhere near the early rounds.

In fact, Newman and Grand Haven’s Howard Bailey (1978) went undrafted, each signing as free agents.

And don’t you think that Nate McLouth was an absolute steal in the 2000 draft when he lasted until the 25th round?

There was one other Muskegon area resident who also made it the big leagues; John ‘Lefty’ Dobb had a cup of coffee for the Chicago White Sox way back in 1924.

Dobb’s brief two game stints for the ChiSox nearly 90 years ago is still a mystery to me, as well as long time Muskegon area baseball historian Marc Okkonen.

We can find no record that Dobb played even one game in the minor leagues. ‘Lefty’ Dobb remained an area resident until he passed away here in the port city in 1991 at the age of 89.

Dobb was one of the pioneer coaches in Little League baseball in Muskegon, where one of his ‘star’ pitchers was my long-time broadcasting sidekick --- Gene Young.

 Our four big league pitchers (Dobb, Johnson, Newman, and Bailey) shared one slightly unconventional trait ---they were all left-handed pitchers!

The 1960’s boasted not only of many talented individual players, but also produced some outstanding teams, including one team that is currently ensconced in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame.

John Sluka played a major role in Grand Haven’s 56 game winning streak in the early 1960’s, a state record that was not broken for 43 years, but the 11th round draft pick back in 1965 had plenty of support on that great Buccaneer nine.

Doug Vanderwall (yet another left-handed pitcher) won 31 straight games during his high school career, and was backed up by another flame throwing pitcher, Roger Wheeler.

Wheeler finished with a career ERA of a miniscule 1.10, including a perfect game thrown against North Muskegon in 1960.

If Grand Haven was the dominant high school team of this era, then surely Harry Potter’s Muskegon Big Reds were a very close second.

These two powerhouses from a half-century ago would meet in a game for the ages.

One would think it would be virtually impossible to pick out one game that would stand the test of time as the greatest game of them all.

But in this ‘ole sportscaster’s opinion, the answer is easy. The date is May 24, 1961, Muskegon vs. Grand Haven, in a game witnessed by more than 1000 fans at historic Marsh Field.

 The game was full of suspense, but none more so than the Muskegon half of the eleventh inning. The Big Reds loaded the bases with but one out.

The winning run to end the streak was on third base when hard-hitting Ross Recknagle came to the plate for the Big Reds.

Recknagle executed what he thought was a game winning bunt. Buccaneer first baseman Larry Kieft, however, was alert to the possibility of a squeeze play and quickly tossed the ball to catcher Bob Kent just in time for the force out at home.

Recknagle, in a moment he'll never forget, stopped a few steps toward first, raising his arms in celebration thinking that surely his bunt was the game winner.

 And it should have been.

But the base runner on third didn't get a good break for the plate and the alert Bob Kent fired to first to double up the surprised Recknagle and end the Big Red threat.

The stunned Big Reds saw Vic Geisler score the winning run in the next inning and Grand Haven had won the biggest game in their school's history, 7-6.

Vanderwall and Wheeler, were indeed a dynamite 1-2 pitching duo, but what the combination of Muskegon’s Ray Newman and Jim Johnson would accomplish was an absolute rarity in high school sports.

A few short years after leading Muskegon to a 23-1 record in their senior in 1963, these two high school classmates would achieve their dream of pitching in the major leagues.

During the summer months, many of these players would play for teams like the Muskegon Pepsis, a team so laden with talent that they won the state National Baseball Congress tourney back in 1967, upsetting a Grand Rapids Sullivan team that was loaded with retired major league baseball players.

But let’s save this team for another Moyes’ memory down the road.

It has now been an unfathomable 13 years since an MLB team drafted a Muskegon area player.

That player selected in the 25th round, Whitehall’s Nate McLouth, is having a banner year as the starting left fielder for the Baltimore Orioles.

Listed below are all the known players selected in the draft since 1965. Please e-mail me if I inadvertently omitted a local player. (\* = played in Major League.)

Year Name Round High School

1965 John Sluka 11 Grand Haven

1965 Ron Jancek 26 Muskegon Catholic

1965 John Huizenga 39 Muskegon

1965 Roger Hansen 66 Muskegon

1966 Jim Johnson\* 36 Muskegon

1966 Terry Kirkpatrick 46 Mona Shores

1967 Jim Johnson\* 3 Muskegon

1968 Rod Beckman 9 Shelby

1971 Duane Bickel 21 Orchard View

1978 Howard Bailey\* FA Grand Haven

1979 Larry Williams 23 North Muskegon

1983 Matt Suida 9 Muskegon

1986 Bob Cavanaugh 29 Oakridge

1987 Kip Southland 44 Mona Shores

1991 Dennis Winicki 9 Mona Shores

1994 Stacey Chaipulo 35 Mona Shores

1995 Adam Bolthouse 41 Spring Lake

1997 Taco Wood 22 Muskegon

1999 Phillip Mixer 43 Muskegon

2000 Nate McLouth\* 25 Whitehall

*A lifelong Detroit Tiger fan, I traveled with three pals to Tiger Stadium for a Tiger Doubleheader vs. the Boston Red Sox in 1968, The Year of the Tiger. It was a game I’ll never forget, and neither did the late Gates Brown before he passed away shortly before this story:*

**Moyes Memories fondly remembers Gates Brown**

**By Jim Moyes**

**jimmoyes@aol.com**

The recent death of “The Gator”, Detroit Tiger pinch hitter extraordinaire Gates Brown conjured up some great memories for this ‘ole announcer.

Brown passed away last week at the age of 74 and his funeral was held in the gymnasium at his old high school in Crestline, Ohio, where he was eulogized by many past notable Tiger teammates, and close friends.

Included among those remembering their departed friend was his high school quarterback, whose last name may ring a bell to many of you ---- Harbaugh.

Jack Harbaugh, who had a couple of sons who roamed the sidelines in an incomprehensible moment as the head coaches in last year’s Super Bowl, was the quarterback of Brown’s high school football team.

The solemn crowd did enjoy a touch of levity during Harbaugh’s moving tribute to his star high school running back that erupted in laughter when Harbaugh recounted one scoring sequence from high school.

He got quite animated describing the 16-play drive. “All but the last play was either handoffs to Gates or passes to Gates, which got us to the cusp of the goal line,” recalled Harbaugh.

“Gator,” Harbaugh said in the huddle, “I think you’re tired. I can take it from here.”

Harbaugh called his own number at the 1: Quarter back sneak. Touchdown. “He was such a kind, loving guy,’ Harbaugh said, “He could laugh about it.”

Living virtually my entire lifetime a couple of hundred miles or more away from Detroit, prevented me from attending as many Tiger baseball games over the years as I would have liked, but there was one date that will remain with me forever.

It was a day like none other which Gates Brown would experience in his 13-year MLB career; all spent as a Detroit Tiger.

The date was August 11, 1968, and at the time I was living in Traverse City, where I had just completed my first-year broadcasting high school sports for radio station WTCM.

How we acquired tickets for this game has long been forgotten over the ensuing 45 years since the Tigers faced the defending American League champion Boston Red Sox in the doubleheader.

Nor could I have ever comprehended what the future held for my three travel companions from that day.

Making the long trek from Traverse City with me were Frank Majerle, Tom Kozelko, and John Naymick.

Who could have grasped at that time that a pair of Frank Majerle’s little three- and four-year-old gym rat sons would become basketball icons. ‘Little’ Dan Majerle would be a three-time NBA All Star while big brother Steve would lead Rockford to a high school Class A state championship as their head coach in 2003.

Kozelko and Naymick had just completed their high school basketball season for one of the top Trojan teams in school history. Kozelko would be the Mid-American Player of the year in both his junior and senior seasons at Toledo before playing three years in the NBA.

The 6’8 burly Naymick, whose father Mike Naymick pitched for the Cleveland Indians in the late 1930’s and early 1940s, was an outstanding three sport star at Traverse City. Many years later John would enjoy watching his nephew Drew Naymick help lead MSU to the final four as the Spartans all-time leading shot blocker.

Coincidentally, Naymick and Kozelko’s high school coach in 1968 was Wayne Hintz. Hintz had taken the coaching position at Traverse City after serving as the head coach at Alma College, where one of his star players was the hitting hero of the 1968 World Series, Jim Northrup.

After departing Traverse City near the break of dawn for the Motor City, hours later we finally settled into our seats, located about a half dozen rows up in the second deck along the first baseline, excellent seats at the historic ballpark on the corner of Michigan and Trumbull.

The day did not get off to a promising start for our beloved Tigers as the BoSox pummeled Tiger starter Earl Wilson for four first inning runs, knocking Wilson out of the box after facing but six Red Sox batsmen.

After Dalton Jones hit the second home run of the inning off Wilson, Tiger skipper Mayo Smith replaced Wilson with one-time Ohio State quarterback Joe Sparma. Fortunately, the Tiger bullpen completely shut down the Boston hitters over the next 13 innings.

Appropriately, the pitcher who replaced Sparma was Jon Warden, one of the former Tigers who gave a eulogy of Gator at last week’s funeral.

Fred Lasher and Don McMahon followed Warden to the mound before giving way to a Tiger pitcher who will be forever remembered by Tiger fans as the hero of the 1968 World Series Championship team.

Can you imagine any of today’s managers bringing in one of their starting rotation pitchers during a ball game to pitch not just one inning, but five innings in a regular season game?

 Calling upon Mickey Lolich would be comparable to Jim Leyland inserting Max Scherzer or Justin Verlander. It would never happen today.

The Tigers had a less than comfortable five and half games cushion over their closest challengers for the American League lead, in the last year before playoffs were added at the close of a regular season.

The Tigers kept chipping away at the Boston 4 run lead with single runs in four separate innings to eventually even the game at 4 runs apiece.

With the game headed for extra innings Smith called upon his portly lefthander Lolich to keep the hard-hitting BoSox at bay, exactly what the future donut impresario did, pitching five shutout innings as the game was extended into the fourteenth inning.

In the Tiger bottom half of the 14th the first two Tigers were retired by Red Sox relief pitcher Lee Stange. I quickly bolted from my seat, headed for the nearest rest room when I was quickly stopped in my tracks when I heard the PA announcer announce: “Now batting for Lolich, Gates Brown.”

I wasn’t the only one who stopped their movements toward the nearest restroom or concession stand when Brown’s number was called, as Brown had a penchant for the dramatics throughout this magical season.

Sure enough, the Gator delivered. I can still vividly picture his line drive that was headed towards the right field line. Would the drive stay fair, and if fair did it have enough height to clear the right field fence?

The answer was yes to both of those queries and the Tiger faithful of nearly 50,000 fans went berserk as the Gator had a game winning home run (No one called them Walk Off home runs in this era) and Mickey Lolich picked up a well-deserved victory.

There was still another game to play in this wonderful period of baseball when a Sunday doubleheader was standard fair. No way could the nightcap of this doubleheader top the dramatics from Game One --- But it did!

Gary Bell got the start for Boston in game two while Mayo Smith gave the start to a guy best remembered in Tiger lore as an ace relief pitcher, John Hiller.

The two starters dueled for six scoreless innings before Boston outfielder Reggie Smith broke up the shutout with a two-run homerun in the top of the seventh.

The Tigers rallied in the bottom of the eighth inning to tie the game on a two-run single off the bat of ‘Storman Norman’ Cash, driving in Mickey Stanley and Gates Brown, who was rewarded for his first game heroics with a rare start in left field, giving Willy Horton a well-deserved break.

Our sense of euphoria for yet another Tiger thrilling victory quickly took a nosedive as that man Reggie Smith belted his second home run of the game to drive Tiger reliever John Wyatt from the game and Mayo called upon Jon Warden.

But before the smoke had cleared Boston had plated a couple of insurance runs to give the visitors a seemingly safe 5-2 lead heading into the Tigers last bat.

I can yet remember our conversation the four of us had as the Tigers came to bat in the ninth inning. We all were satisfied that we had already witnessed one Tiger victory that day as well as that eighth inning comeback that tied the score just minutes earlier.

Defeat looked inevitable.

But this was 1968 --- and the rallying cry was “Lets Sock-em Tigers.”

Current Tiger radio broadcaster Jim Price started the inning off by drawing a walk. Things looked bleak for the Bengals when Wayne Comer, who had homered in the first game and was pinch hitting for the Tiger’s weak hitting shortstop Ray Oyler, flied out for the first out.

Smith called upon yet another pinch hitter when the regular Tiger catcher Bill Freehan hit for Warden. Freehan came through with a base hit and Boston’s Hall of Fame manager Dick Williams replaced his starter Bell with Bill Landis.

When Dick McAuliffe greeted Landis with a solid single to right to drive in Price, and move Freehan up to second, Tiger Stadium was now a madhouse.

Williams used the quick hook-on Landis and replaced the lefthander with Detroit born pitcher Jerry Stephenson. The first batter Stephenson faced was former Grand Rapids Ottawa Hills three-sport star Mickey Stanley.

Stanley made venerable Tiger Stadium rock even further with a base hit to center to drive in Freehan and send McAuliffe racing all the way to third.

With the tying run at third Hall of Fame outfielder Al Kaline came through with a single to right to drive in McAuliffe and the Tigers had come all the way back from the brink of defeat to tie up the game at 5 runs apiece.

And then up to the plate strode ‘The Gator.” Williams called for the bullpen yet again to summon eccentric left-hander pitcher Sparky Lyle to pitch to Brown.

With the winning run at third one must wonder why Williams even elected to pitch to Brown, but waiting on deck was Cash, swinging a hot bat with three hits already to his credit during the game.

Sure enough, Brown came through once again with what must be a rarity in baseball terminology today, two Walk Off Base Hits in the same day!

And John Warden, who was a speaker at Gates funeral along with Brown’s lifelong friend Willy Horton, picked up the win in his now departed friend’s best day ever in his major league career.

Many Tiger baseball pundits noted the doubleheader sweep as the turning point in the pennant-winning season for the Tigers. Detroit gained a full game and a half on their closest pursuers, the Baltimore Orioles, and all but crushed any Boston hopes for an AL repeat as they fell a hopeless 12 games behind our beloved Bengals.

I like to pride myself as being a somewhat reserved spectator over the years in watching athletic events. But that was certainly not the case on August 11, 1968.

It took me nearly a full week to regain my voice as my loud cheering on this date gave me the most serious case of laryngitis in my lifetime.

And it was “The Gator” who did it!