Moyes Memories

**How Times have Changed**

Thanks to some encouragement (persuasion might be a better word) from my friend Jason Goorman of the Local Sports Journal, maybe it’s time to resurrect the ‘Moyes’ Memories’ out of the mothballs.

During my recent conversation with Jason, I mentioned how radically times have changed with how news of the Sporting World is now transmitted to the public. I, as did many of my peers growing up in the 1950s, peddled newspapers for the Muskegon Chronicle. At one time I had a paper route in North Muskegon that consisted of around 100 customers. I do not believe there was even one house located on my route that didn’t receive a copy of our local paper.

 How times have changed.

Still holding on to my ‘old school’ habits, I may be the only house in our entire neighborhood here in Florida that has an actual printed newspaper delivered to their doorstep.

Although perhaps not a bad thing, most of the news during this current high-tech area is found on one’s computer and even on their phone. Gone are the days when I had to hand deliver a story that I wrote back in the 1950s to long time Muskegon Chronicle sports editor James Henderson. Today, one must merely hit the ‘send’ button on his computer and ‘presto’ your story is delivered.

With the (sad) demise of once receiving our local newspaper daily, it has been up to social media to spread the news of what’s taking place in our world. And, unless your name is Brody Rose or Cameron Martinez, how difficult it must be for today’s local athletes to put together a scrap book. Today’s youths might find this hard to believe, but 60 years ago you could even find game stories of Little League baseball games --- complete with box scores! Even a very average athlete, like me, had a scrapbook pieced together by my mother.

But there is good news!

My how the athletic fields of yesteryear have improved for the better. While working as a ‘string’ reporter for the Chronicle beginning in 1956, my first job was to cover football for the Norsemen of North Muskegon High. There were no comfy press boxes for me to scribble down my game notes. Instead, I roved the sidelines with my handy clipboard while hoping for dry skies.

The West Michigan Conference for many years, before the admittance of Oakridge and Ravenna into the league in the 1960s, consisted of six schools. Only Fred Jacks Field, the home of the Norsemen, remains in the same location from my early days as a reporter. Whitehall played their games on a field that served as both a baseball and football field before moving into their current facility. Shelby also had a multi-purpose facility where football was played in the Fall and baseball in the Spring. One odd ground rule they had in baseball was if one hit a ball into the stands in right field, it was deemed a ground rule double. While it was a short poke to right field it was just the opposite to left field on the Shelby field.

Just a few miles to the North the Hart Pirates played their football games at a location that was also used as a Fairgrounds before moving into their current location. To say that the current gridiron at Mason County Central (it was Scottville High back in the day) is an improvement let me repost a quote from the late Rex Funnell from an earlier Moyes’ Memories stories. When asked about Scottville, Funnell, who took part in the first game ever played in the WMC back in 1931, took little time in remembering the Spartan’s facilities: “Scottville just had a bad field.”

Montague can now boast of one of the nicest facilities for high school sports after leaving quaint but cozy Memorial field for Eldon Townsend stadium.

Nobody, but nobody, had a press box, and for several years, a scoreboard with a running clock was only on somebody’s wish list.

And all-weather services? That wasn’t even a pipe dream. Hopefully, we will soon see the day when all football fields will follow Holton High in making their facilities available for other sports (soccer and lacrosse come to mind) without turning their fields into a quagmire late in the season.

And how I love today’s high school fields that not only have the prescription turf, but their spacious press boxes. I must confess that in our final years covering football games on the radio, my longtime sidekick Gene Young and I would make our decision on what games we would cover, not only based on their importance, but if they had heat in the press box when the temperature would take a nose-dive late in the season.

Since I first began broadcasting football in 1968, I could list my favorite stadiums (and my least favorite) from more than 50 years, but why don’t I save those for a future Moyes’s Memories?

*Next up: Memories from the state high school basketball playoffs*:

**Those High School Playoffs**

February 24, 2018

Although many of the readers of the Local Sports Journal may find it difficult to believe that spring is near, one sure sign that balmier times lies ahead is the beginning of one of my favorite sports traditions —- the high school basketball playoffs.

This week mark’s an earlier start to the playoffs that traditionally begin in early March, but even though mother nature is still playing a cool trick outside, local gymnasiums hosting this week’s playoffs will surely be hotly contested.

The goal of every team beginning play this week is to make it to the final four in East Lansing, where memories will be made that will last a lifetime.

I first became ‘hooked’ as a fanatical follower of the MHSAA playoffs more than 70 years ago, when I followed my uncle’s team all the way to the state championship game back in 1947. When his Haslett High team lost in the state class D finals to Baroda, it began a tradition of making many a trip to these championships that finally ended when I left for the Sunshine State just a few years back.

One always has high hopes that his high school would make a long run that would ultimately find their way to Lansing, but that surely was not the case during my childhood days at North Muskegon High.

My early years found me having to follow local teams other than my school. My beloved Norseman went a full decade during my school years before they were able to win even one tournament game. To this day, after more than 80 years as a varsity sport, the Norseman have never made it past the quarterfinals.

With this season’s superlative regular season record of 19-1, will this be the year of the Norse?

The districts begin in earnest this week at several area sites, but there is no question as to my favorite tournament venue during my broadcasting days. How I loved those double, and even triple headers, of games that were contested at the spacious LC Walker arena from the early 1960’s into the 1980s.

Crowds that often topped out at better than 5,000 fans would witness some epic battles at ‘The Walkaaa’! Those Muskegon Heights - Muskegon matchups were always hotly contested, beginning with the first-Class A tournament classic back in 1960. The Big Reds of Sam Moore and Dave Nelson and company upset the No. 1 state ranked Tigers to capture the inaugural tournament contested at the historic arena.

The Tigers, featuring a towering front line of John Sanders, Paul Adams, and John Calloway, did bounce back the following year, where they would make it all the way to the State Class A championship game, before falling to Detroit Catholic Central in the first state MHSAA championships televised statewide.

Those Muskegon - Grand Haven district championship games at the Walker were memorable affairs. I’ll not soon forget the 1985 Reeths Puffer team, led by Mark Hughes, the future captain of the 1989 University of Michigan NCAA champions. The Rockets captured the district title at the LC Walker that would begin their longest run in school history, ending in the semi-finals at Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor.

My first fond memories of a local team(s) making their way to a state title game went back to 1953, when Muskegon St. Mary and Muskegon St. Joseph both played in the championship game. I was glued to the radio for both games, first disappointed that St. Mary’s lost in their Class C title game but was thrilled when St. Joseph upset Detroit All Saints in Class D to win the first state championship for a Muskegon area team since World War II.

After dominating area teams for many decades, Muskegon Heights and West Michigan Christian have now seen the Big Reds of Muskegon join the party.

If one is a basketball junky like this ‘ole announcer’, then one must be thrilled with the present three- day format where one can take in a combined 12 semi-finals and finals over a three-day span, all at the 14,000 plus capacity Breslin Sports Arena at MSU.

For several years, when the tournaments were held in the Lansing area, the semi-finals games were limited to Classes A & B schools held at old Jenison Fieldhouse. The Class C & D semis were scattered all over the Capitol City area, ranging from the Lansing Civic Center, Lansing Vocational School, and even the MSU IM building. There were also a few games in the 1940s that were contested in Jenison Fieldhouse, not in the main arena, but in an upstairs practice gymnasium.

There were a couple of occasions when my long-time radio partner, the late Gene Young and I, would broadcast an afternoon Class B game in Ann Arbor and then hurry back to East Lansing to broadcast a West Michigan Christian Class D semi-final contest. Thankfully, those mixed sites are a thing of the past.

Since my move to Florida nearly a decade ago, although I have not attended any state tournaments in person, I have stayed attentive to our local team’s progress through the Local Sports Journal, phone conversations with buddies still sequestered in the Port City, and of course, through the modern marvel of social media.

And when these great tournaments come to an end in three weeks, maybe the snow will have finally melted and hopefully your favorite team has brought home a trophy. Good luck to all!

*Sports across the entire country, and even the world were on hold due to the Covid Pandemic. With the Pandemic receding it was time once again to ratchet up those ‘Moyes Memories.’ Here is my wish list for High School Athletics as sports resume across our nation*:

Moyes’ Memories

By Jim Moyes

**Moyes’ Wish List for High School Athletics**

I have long been a fan of the Michigan High School Athletic Association, and I realize there are times when their hands are often tied behind their back with issues that go far beyond their control. Jack Robert did an awesome job during his tenure leading the MHSAA and Mark Uhl is currently doing superlative work while following in Robert’s footsteps. And let us not forget the outstanding work performed over the years before his recent retirement by a man I greatly respected in John Johnson, the longtime communications director.

However, if I could have a wish list, there are a just a handful of changes’ I would like for our high school athletes, knowing full well that many will never come to fruition.

Wish list number one, and it is far and away **NUMBER ONE**:

Make the state track & field finals, as well as cross country, a true state championship.

 As to why in the world the Upper Peninsula doesn’t compete in both state finals makes absolutely no sense. The UP currently takes part in just about all the sports with their peers south of the Mighty Mac bridge – why not track & field?

Before the Upper Peninsula conducted their first ‘official’ UP state championship in 1940, many of their athletes would make the long trek to the LP to test their talents against those from ‘down below’. A few of those that made the long journey, many years before the Mackinac Bridge was constructed in the late 1950s, became state champs. If Frank McCory, who won three State Titles in 1930 and 1931 could make the more than 500-mile journey from Ontonagon to Lansing more than 90 years ago, why can’t today’s UP athletes do the same today? How I would like to learn of McCory’s travels to Lansing and just how long it took this determined athlete to reach our state capitol well before today’s sleek highways were constructed.

I am fully aware that the MHSAA is in full support of my proposal, but the holdup is with UP school administrators. I feel it would be a simple solution to make the current UP state finals a regional final. For many years the UP conducted their finals a week prior to the LP finals and it would be an easy fix to revert to that schedule. Treat the UP as a regional and invite the top two or 3 place winners and those who would make the qualifying standard.

And speaking of track & field, if one would like to like to find out all one would ever need to know about the history of track & field in this great state, then one can purchase a third edition of “The Fleet Feet of Spring” authored by yours truly and Jeff Hollobaugh, the sports number one guru, by purchasing at Amazon.com using this link: [https://www.amazon.com/Fleet-Feet-Spring-Michigans-Championships/dp/1671699688/ref=sr\_1\_2?keywords=fleet+feet+of+spring&qid=1640017099&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Fleet-Feet-Spring-Michigans-Championships/dp/1671699688/ref%3Dsr_1_2?keywords=fleet+feet+of+spring&qid=1640017099&sr=8-2)

While we are currently in the middle of another exciting basketball season, I would like to expand the number of games played to 25. Adding a few more games would permit teams to schedule games over the Holiday season as well as keeping pace with schools from other states. This is one item on my wish list that I believe will become a reality in the very near future. Although a current limitation of 20 sounds a little low, back in the ‘ole announcers’ era of the 1950s the maximum number was but 15 contests.

There is very little in football that I would change as I believe the MHSAA has been the poster child for high school football across our great nation. There are always those minor tweaks to the guidelines seemingly every year, but Michigan remains as the frontrunner for playoff football. My only wish is that a team who is having difficulty with a schedule be permitted to travel as far away as the distance from the two farthest points in the state of Michigan. To travel from Ironwood to Temperance would be about 627 miles.

The only change I would make in baseball/softball would allow teams to play 2-5 games in a sunny climate much like the college teams do every spring. Many other state schools have allowed teams to travel south to play against teams from – for example Florida schools. This should only apply to baseball/softball because of the unpredictable weather experienced in March/April in Michigan. I am aware that schools from ‘poorer’ districts will struggle to raise funds during Spring Break but if a school like Shelby can do it, many others can do the same.

Overall, I would give the MHSAA an A+ as the administrator for high school sports. However, can’t I be just a little picky?

*How ironic that two former grads from Orchard View High School would meet as opposing coaches at the 2021 state football championships. Here is the story from November of 2021 before their clash at Ford Field in Detroit*:

Moyes’ Memories

By Jim Moyes

**A pair of Orchard View Grads square off for the state title**

Although the football fortunes at Orchard View have taken a sharp nose-dive in recent seasons, how ironic is it that two former Orchard View grads will battle it out for a state championship this weekend. Although Cardinal fans were obviously saddened without an OV team to cheer for this past season, they have a two-fold reason to cheer for a couple of their successful alums this weekend in Detroit.

The pair of proud Orchard View grads, Eric Shugars, OV Class of 1995, and the elder statesman of the duo, Dan Rohn, OV Class of 1989, will guide their teams into Ford Field Friday afternoon at 1:00 PM to play for a division 2 state championship. Rohn with the undefeated and top rated DeLaSalle Pilots, while Schugars brings the Traverse City Central Trojans to the state finals for the first time in 33 years dating back to the era of the legendary Jim Ooley.

 Rohn first began his heralded head coaching career, a journey that will eventually make him a surefire ‘lock’ for entrée into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame, by totally resurrecting an ailing program at Fremont High.

 **Dan Rohn was a miracle worker at Fremont**.

Before Rohn became the Fremont head coach in 1995, the Packers suffered through 12 consecutive losing seasons, including five years where they failed to win even one game. Rohn’s 11-year stint as mentor for Fremont was 51-34, an impressive mark when one looks at what has transpired in the Baby Food Capitol of the World since his departure. In the last seven years Fremont has produced a woeful record of but 4 wins and 57 losses.

After taking a year away from coaching in 2006, the former bruising fullback at OV high took his football coaching talents to Grand Rapids West Catholic where his accomplishments were off the charts. In his 9 years as head coach of the Falcons, Rohn compiled a record of 99-19 and capped off his final six years by taking his teams to the state finals five times, winning it all in four of those trips, including three titles in a row before leaving West Catholic following the 2015 season.

To give Friday’s D2 championship matchup yet another improbable twist, after Rohn left West Catholic, he worked two seasons as an assistant coach at Ferris State for Tony Annese. And who also was an assistant to Annese in Big Rapids? You guessed it – Eric’s Hall of Fame father, Jack Schugars!

Dan played his high school football for John Shillito, a coach who has stamped himself as one of Michigan’s all-time best high school coaches with more than 300 victories during a still active 40-year career. Shillito’s 1999 Cardinal team that reached the state finals racked up an amazing 774 points, still the most points scored in a single season in state history! This ‘ole announcer’ finds it hard to believe that a school that played for a state title 3 times in the last 26 years, and won it all in 2004, did not even field a varsity football team this past season.

I was fortunate to talk with Dan and Eric for this story, and I was so impressed with the respect they have, not only for their opposing teams, but the high regard they have for one another.

While talking with both coaches it was almost like they were talking about their own team as both described their opponents as very disciplined, well coached, and blue-collar players.

“I both played and then later coached against those Jack Schugar’s Oakridge teams, and I played my last game in high school against Oakridge” said Rohn. “We always ended our season during my high school days with a rivalry game against Oakridge. “

With Rohn as their two-way leader on the field back in 1988 the Cardinals topped Schugar’s Eagle team 21-12 and finished the season with a splendid 8-1 record. The following year with Rohn now taking his football talents to Grand Valley, where he played for current Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly, Oakridge turned the tables on the Cardinals with a convincing 45-0 victory.

“We really became good friends when we worked together at Ferris. Jack has always been great to me, and I have so much respect for Jack and the entire Shugars family. We text and talk to each other often. Jack even coached at my camp this past summer and he was terrific.”

When asked for his thoughts on his Friday afternoon opponent for all the marbles Dan had nothing but praise for Eric Schugars’ Trojans. “They’re not going to turn the ball over; they just are a really sound team. They remind me of the blue-collar kids from my days back in Muskegon. When you get to the state finals you want to play the best and we are going to be playing the best in Traverse City.”

If one could describe Rohn as a miracle worker at Fremont, perhaps the same could be said for Eric Schugars, who was still in grammar school at OV when Rohn was starring on the gridiron for the Cardinals.

After earning his degree from Western Michigan University, Eric patiently worked his way up the ladder as a teacher/coach beginning in 2002 at Traverse City. Schugars coached at nearly all the levels for the Trojans: Freshman football coach, JV coach, and served as the defensive coordinator for four years before taking over duties as the head football coach in 2015.

Schugars experienced success right out of the gate. The Trojans were 9-1 in in Eric’s first year, qualifying for the state playoffs in all 6 seasons Schugars has been at the helm. Traverse City Central had visions of returning to the state finals last year as they led Mona Shores by ten points at halftime. However, Brady Rose and the Sailors responded with a big second half to trip up the Trojans en route to their 2nd consecutive state championship with a win over Dan Rohn’s DeLaSalle Pilots.

Traverse City has their own Brady Rose impersonator in senior two-way standout Carson Bourdo. However, the superstar for the Trojans is quarterback/linebacker Josh Burnham, a Notre Dame commit and top-flight Mr. football candidate who is the best football player out of Traverse City Central since Mark Brammer.

I first remember Eric Schugars as a member of the Orchard View basketball team that made its longest run ever in the MHSAA playoffs during the 1994-95 season. Eric averaged a a modest 5 points per game for Mike Henry’s Cardinals that captured the Class B Regional title with a thrilling two-point victory over Caledonia. Headlining that Cardinal team was Brian Montonnati who averaged more than 23 points per contest before embarking on an outstanding college career at Oklahoma State.

In my conversation with Eric Schugars, he quickly gave praise of his former Orchard View neighbor and DeLasalle opponent. “I was six years behind Dan in school, but I sure remember him as a great player at Orchard View. However, I best remember him when he was coaching in games against my Dad’s Oakridge teams.”

Just as he was on the sidelines at all his father’s state championship games, the same will hold true for this Friday’s big game. But this time it will be young Eric who will be calling the shots. “It’s just so good to have Dad with me at these games because this is what he loves best, just coaching these young kids.”

Earlier this week I had a chance to chat with one of my all-time favorite coaches – and people – in Jack Schugars. It’s no surprise for those that know Jack that he is still as excited about football as ever. When asked how excited he was to be on the sidelines with his son Eric at Ford Field Jack gushed: “Oh you bet I’m excited. I’ll be on the sidelines Friday with Eric, but this time I don’t have to deal with all the responsibilities.”

Eric is no stranger to being with his dad at a state championship game. “Eric was with me at all our state finals games, and this week will really be something special.” Understandably still saddened with the passing of his beloved wife Julie 15 months ago Jack mentioned that staying busy with football is the best possible therapy for him.

And what a busy but exciting week it will be for the elder Schugars. Twice a week Jack travels from his new digs up in Traverse City to work two practices each week with his great friend and head coach of the number one ranked team in Division 2 in college football, Tony Annese and the Ferris State Bulldogs. Following Friday’s game Jack will drive back to Big Rapids to coach on the sidelines in the D2 playoff game vs. rival Grand Valley State, the alma mater of ------Dan Rohn.

Ironically, Rohn was a senior at Orchard View when Traverse City last appeared in a state final, a 24-14 victory over Detroit Catholic Central before a crowd of nearly 26,000 fans, the third and final state championship earned by the Trojans during the legendary Jim Ooley era.

Although the Schugars-Rohn friendship will continue both before and after the game, once the game kicks off Eric and Dan mentioned the focus will be on winning the football game. Only when the clock reaches 0.00 at the game’s conclusion, and only then, will those friendships and respect will again be resumed. I can’t wait to watch on TV the hugs they will share at the game’s end.

For this ‘ole announcer’ who first began broadcasting in Traverse City before returning to Muskegon to cover players like Rohn and Schugars, it’s a win-win scenario. However, for the fans and alumni for Orchard View, it’s even a bigger win.

How proud Cardinal fans must be of these two OV grads!

MOYES MEMORIES

**Remembering local Cage Stars from the Past**

By Jim Moyes

For this ‘ole announcer’ I can’t think of a more exciting time for the world of Sports than what we experience in March during the Roundball Season.

Combine the three weeks of the NCAA tournament with the final three days in March for the high school finals in East Lansing --- it is just one great dose of adrenaline for this old-timer.

This year’s NCAA tournament is especially noteworthy as it conjures up Moyes’ Memories from past players whose names I called on the airwaves over the years with my long-time partner Gene Young.

Headlining this group would certainly be former Reeths Puffer star hoopster Matt Timme. How exciting it must be for Matt to see his son Drew become one of the best college performers in America while starring for one of the elite basketball institutions on this planet at Gonzaga.

Although many of the Bulldogs faithful were disappointed to see Gonzaga exit to Arkansas in the Sweet 16, it surely was not the fault of Drew. ‘All’ Drew did in his 3 games during the NCAA tourney was average 27 points per game, the most points scored in the first 3 games in the NCAA tournament.

I well remember the exploits of ‘papa’ Matt when he starred on the courts in the old Reeths Puffer gymnasium, first for legendary head coach Dan Wright, and following Wright’s retirement in 1990, playing for Andy Manning for his senior year. Matt put up monster numbers for the ‘Run & Gun’ Rockets during the 1990-91 season, averaging more than 25 points per game while ripping off nearly 18 rebounds every outing.

There was one game during his senior season of 1991 when I invited a very young assistant coach to be my halftime guess up in the Crow’s Nest, located high above the old RP court.

That assistant was Tom Izzo. While we were waiting for the commercial break to finish, I asked the young coach who he was interested in recruiting. Tom informed me that: “Jud (Heathcote) wanted me to take a look at Matt Timme.” NCAA rules at that time, and probably still enforced, were that a coach couldn’t talk about a possible recruit while on the air.

I’m sure Tom laments the fact that Jud didn’t woo the now elder Timme to East Lansing as who knows what the future might have been for the Timme household – AND MSU!

Unfortunately for the Spartan faithful, Matt took his talents to Dallas, Texas to play for Southern Methodist. Izzo made a big pitch in trying to lure Matt’s son Drew to East Lansing following his high school career at JJ Pearce High school in the Dallas suburb of Richardson, but he lost out to Mark Few and Gonzaga.

The Zags were eliminated from the tourney by a red-hot Arkansas squad where their star player also has ties to the Muskegon area. The Razorbacks best player on the floor in their upset win over Timme’s squad was J.D. Notae. The Arkansas star is now in his second season with the Razorbacks after playing his first two years at Jacksonville University.

And who was Notae’s head coach at Jacksonville? None other than former Whitehall grad Tony Jasick, who was the head man for the Dolphins during Notae’s Freshman and sophomore years of college from 2017-19.

And just like Matt Timme, after being let go as the Dolphins head coach following the 2020-21 season, Jasick bolted for the Longhorn State where he serves as the assistant coach at Stephen F Austin. Matt Timme certainly has fond memories of SFA as he married Megan, a former tennis star for the Lumberjacks.

In the not-too-distant future perhaps we will see yet another player excels at the highest level in college basketball who had a parent star on the local hardwoods. Former Newaygo and Muskegon Community cager Jackie Thomas is the mother of Tyler Nickel, a recent signee with one of America’s blueblood basketball powers, the Tarheels of North Carolina.

In a state noted for such basketball legends as Allan Iverson and Moses Malone, Jackie’s 6’8 son Tyler will leave for North Carolina next Fall as the leading scorer in Virginia history, tallying a whopping 2909 points during his stellar high school career.

Although he saw limited duty during his college career, yet another offspring of a former local product also suited up during the current NCAA tourney. Brock Jancek was on the roster for Tennessee, who were eliminated in the second round of the tourney by Michigan, before incurring a season ending wrist injury in February.

Brock’s father John played for Mike Henry’s Orchard View Cardinals in the middle 1980’s before becoming an outstanding football coach. John was an assistant for Georgia’s NCAA champs this past fall but has since rejoined Brian Kelly, former Notre Dame coach as Kelly’s assistant at LSU.

By the way, we lost a couple of legends over the last few days in John Huizenga and Lee David. May they RIP.

*The following is a story that was always on the back of my mind for many years. Dean Rosenberg had a story, for better or for worse that needed to be told. Here is my story from May of 2022 shortly before the Greater Muskegon Track & Field Championships:*

**The Saga of Dean Rosenberg – Greatest Muskegon’s Longest Record Holder**

By Jim Moyes

It will soon be time for our local track athletes to set their sights on the upcoming Greater Muskegon Track & Field Championships, an event that has been one of the highlights for our area Track & Field performers since 1955.

Sixty- Seven years has passed since the first Greater Muskegon Track Championships were contested at two track facilities, neither of which are in existence today. In 1955, and repeated in 1956, the field events were contested at Hackley Stadium while the evening’s running events took place at Muskegon Catholic’s Kehren Stadium.

All records set back in the days when our local track stars competed on those antiquated cinder tracks have long fell by the wayside --- with one notable exception --- the mile run, or 1600 meter as today’s races are contested over the metric distance.

The record for the boys 1600 run is listed at 4:18.6, established by North Muskegon’s Dean Rosenberg on Orchard View’s cinder track way back in 1965. Rosenberg was a state champion miler for the Norse and later a highly successful cross-country and track star at Michigan State University.

However, all stories do not necessarily have a happy ending, and a happy ending was certainly not the case with Rosenberg.

It was apparent when Rosenberg first appeared in a NM track uniform in his freshman year in 1962 that he had a promising track future as a Norsemen. As a young student at NM, I well remember Don Berry as a very good miler at NMHS in 1956 & 1957. Berry, a former mile winner at the GMAC championships, always had his goal to set a NM track record that dated back to the 1947 school year. Berry often came agonizingly close to Bob Nelsons record time of 4:47.0 but fell short of besting Nelson’s record.

Rosenberg made short work of topping the mile mark as he easily bested Nelson’s record early into his freshman year for the Norse. He would quickly run much faster in the ensuing years.

By the time Rosenberg was a junior he was a state champion in the mile run. The rules for participation in track and field were far different than today’s more liberal options. In Rosenberg’s era, if one was to participate in the mile run, they were only eligible to partake in but one other race, none longer than 440 yards.

For much of his career Dean participated in the mile run and then would run anchor in the meet’s final race, the 4x440 relay. There was one time where Rosenberg made an exception, a dual meet in Whitehall when he skipped the mile for a onetime only race in the 880. Rosenberg easily won the event in 1:58.1, a time that would stand as a NM school record for 42 years!

From recent conversations I had with a handful of Dean’s former teammates and classmates in high school and college it was clear that Rosenberg was a very popular, well-liked, and top-notch athlete.

High school classmate Tom Austin well remembered Dean’s track exploits. “Dean and I were very close friends from elementary school on and were even roommates briefly at Michigan State. We were on the mile relay team at NM that I would describe as 3 guys with decent speed and didn't drop the baton much--and Dean Rosenberg.  We didn't lose much.  I recall one race where we presented Dean with a deficit of a hundred yards for his anchor leg and watched him nudge his startled competitor at the finish line--he just hated to lose, and almost never did.”

Dean began his senior year in early April by setting a new Class B Spartan Relays record for the mile by racing eight laps over the dusty indoor track at Jenison Fieldhouse in 4:29.4. A month later Dean would draw gasps from the large crowd at Orchard View with his still standing record setting Greater Muskegon win in the mile. In the many years to follow Dean would always mention to me how proud he was of his record and often expressed how surprised he was that it had yet to be broken.

Yet another of his childhood chums and teammate on the Northside was John Hutson, a retired Rear Admiral from the US Navy and former Judge Advocate of the Navy who twice spoke at recent Democratic National Conventions.

“He was one of my very best friends all through high school and college at MSU,” recalled Hutson. “I got a lot of memories.  One of the most vivid was at a spring track practice.  As seniors, Dean was, of course, our very best distance runner by...well, a mile.  He smoked everybody in the 440, 880, and mile.  But Dennis Wilder (long-time school record holder in the pole vault) and I thought we were our best 100 and 220 guys.  One day, for no apparent reason, Coach (Wes) Bunks put Dean in a 220-time trial.  He beat both me and Dennis by...well, a mile.  I was both humiliated and amazed.  The guy was an awesome runner. “

Rosenberg took his talents to MSU and was a star runner for both the Michigan State Cross-Country and Track teams. In his Junior season of 1968 Rosenberg lowered his best time in the mile down to 4:10 and placed a very respectable 4th at the Big Ten Championships.

I had a chance to talk to one of his Spartan teammates recently. Bill Wehrwein was a world class runner for the Spartans and a former American record holder in the indoor 600-yard dash who, coincidentally, married a North Muskegon graduate, Gigi Bradbury. “The three years I knew Dean at MSU I found him to be happy go lucky and a great teammate. I last saw him in 1969 after he graduated and was about the leave to attend a Merrill Lynch school to become a stockbroker.”

Over the years to follow things would begin to turn downhill for Rosenberg. Initially he became a very successful broker in Chicago but that wasn’t good enough for the former track star. “He became obsessed with becoming a film producer and that seems to be when things started to unravel,” said his longtime childhood friend Tom Austin.

“I once visited Dean in Chicago and it appeared to me that he was very successful,” recalled Austin. “He was living a lavish lifestyle and lived in a luxurious high-rise condo that had a marvelous view of both the Chicago skyline as well as Lake Michigan.”

Rosenberg later began to display eccentric behavior on his return trips back to the Port City. However, it’s probably better that we leave most of his unusual oddities left unsaid. We can only speculate what contributed to his bizarre personality and mental decline in his later years.

However, it had become clear to many of his former classmates that his penchant to become a movie producer and a politician were stepping-stones towards his peculiar behavior.

There was one instance that stood out to John Hutson. “I eventually lost contact with him, but I remember my parents telling me about a bizarre encounter when he ‘dropped in’ unannounced to ask them for a donation for some high-level political position he was running for.  I don't remember what it was, but it was way out of his league.  He was driven to their house in a chauffeur driven limo, which we later learned was rented and driven by a friend of his.  In my mind, his picture had fallen off the back of the piano.”

Bill Wehrwein recalled a similar story to Rosenberg knocking on the door of his wife’s parents seeking money to produce a movie. Rosenberg once contacted me asking if I would contribute a forward for a book that he was writing on his life’s story. I fully acquiesced knowing fully well that it probably was just a pipe dream, and the book would never become a reality.

When it had become clear that Dean was having mental issues, he unfortunately, began losing contacts with his close friends from years past.

In perhaps his last appearance in North Muskegon, Rosenberg offered his volunteer services to veteran North Muskegon Football Coach Dave Cooke.

“Dean showed up for practice one day (around 2000) and said he would like to help. I well-remembered Dean from his high school days and how hard he worked, and I just couldn’t say no. However, I eventually had to ask him to leave as he was clearly having some mental issues. He seemed a little destitute at the time and I don’t believe he even owned a car. The only time I saw him around town he was either riding a bike or just running.”

Shortly thereafter Dean left North Muskegon and apparently never returned.

I only personally witnessed Dean run once during his high school career, as I was serving in the Army during his Junior and Senior years at NMHS. While on leave from the Army, in a dual meet at Reeths Puffer, I couldn’t get over how smoothly he ran as it almost appeared that his feet barely grazed the ground on the cinder surface at RP. Shortly after I returned to my base in Fort Benning, Georgia I wrote Dean a congratulatory letter on his extraordinary exploits for my alma mater. In later years Dean always thanked me for that letter.

I was saddened to learn that Rosenberg had passed away around 2005 in Las Vegas. Dean’s passing was left with little fanfare, and an obituary has never been found of his passing. All his friends were clueless as to the details of his death and the cause of his mental condition that led up to his passing.

Personally, I just want to remember Dean, not for his mental decline, but for his bubbly personality and his incredible talents on the cinders. Maybe these remembrances of Dean Rosenberg can serve as the obituary that he deservedly earned. May Greater Muskegon’s longest record-holder Rest in Peace.

*We continue with my recap of the 2022 Track & Field championships where a couple of our schools brought home the team championship trophy:*

**2022 State Finals and Moyes Remembers Jerry Eaton**

I believe it is time to clean up some of my Moyes’ Memories before we get into the thick of the upcoming fall season. With summer quickly coming to an all-too soon rapid close, let’s take a quick peek of what transpired on the local scene since we welcomed those warm breezes that began in early June.

I was awed by the showing of our USA Track Stars at the recent World Championships held in Eugene, Oregon and I was likewise impressed with the showing by our own local track stars at the 2022 state track championships in early June. What stood out to me was how many of our athletes placed TEAM ahead of ME. The Hart and West Michigan Christian girls’ team each brought home the team championship trophy in their divisions, thanks to some individual stars putting aside personal gains in hopes of bringing home a team championship, rather than a personal pursuit of breaking a school, or even state records.

Thanks to today’s modern technology of live streaming I was able to watch much of the action that transpired in the Greater Grand Rapids area. After earlier running a leg on their state championship 4x800 meter relay team, an event when they crushed their nearest opponent by nearly 14 seconds, Hart senior Audrianna Enns and freshman Jessica Jazwinski placed 2nd and fourth in the 1600-meter run to give their Pirates team 13 valuable points. These two gals were completely exhausted following their event as both ran their race in under five-minutes, a time that was good enough to win in the first 29 years of the Class C finals.

One would have thought their day would be over – but not a chance. They both would return to the track shortly thereafter and would place 3rd & fourth in the 800, adding another 11 points to Hart’s team score. Jazwinski somehow had enough left in her tank to run the 3200-meter run where she finished second. When Audrianna Enns younger sister Alyson Enns placed 6th in this same event, Hart added 11 more points on their way to a commanding state championship winning total of 61 points, 24 more than their closest opponent.

Watching with immense pride from the stands were a couple of proud moms who were no strangers to winning state titles. How I enjoyed watching Cathy Ackley Enns run in the 1980s for Hart High. Before becoming a track and cross-country standout at Michigan State, Cathy won five state titles, three in the 800 and two in the 1600. And Jessica Jazwinski’s mother was no slouch on the track either. In 1997 Katie Clifford Jazwinski won both the 1600 and 3200 runs in Class B while a senior at Grand Rapids West Catholic.

Another total team player was West Michigan Christian track star, and winner of the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame Female Student Athlete of the Year, WMC’s Abby Vanderkooi. Abby was not only a state champ, but an outstanding recruiter. Abby could have run one or two events and selfishly just go for state records, but just like the gals from Hart, she put team ahead of me. Abby ran all four distance events during the state finals and contributed 31 of her team winning 52 points. Amazingly, after already have completed running a leg on the 2nd place 4x800 relay, the 1600 and the 800, she not only won her last race of the day, and the last of her incredible prep career, but she set a state D4 record in the two-mile!

Unlike Hart, who ran away from all opponents in winning the D3 title, WMC needed all of Abbys, and her teammates help in bringing home the first ever state championship won by the Lady Warriors. During the off-season Vanderkooi pleaded with a couple of her classmates to join the Warrior track team. And my how that worked out! Twins Maddie and Kyla Wiersma agreed to join Abby on this season’s Warrior track team. Maddie & Kyla placed in enough events to tally the remaining 21 points needed to hold off second place Mt. Pleasant Sacred Heart, just 4 points behind the Warriors.

The Hart & WMC state titles reminded the ‘Ole Announcer’ of a couple of other team state titles won thanks to some unselfish efforts by two area track greats. In 1986 Mason County’s Jeff Barnett put on a one-man show, winning all 4 distance events to lead Mason County Central to their only state title. Ten years later Jeff DeLong led Whitehall to their only Class B championship with a very unselfish effort. Delong passed numerous runners on his anchor leg of the 4x800 relay to move his Vikings team up to fourth place. Jeff than placed second in the 1600, an event he rarely ran during the track season, but did so in the state finals in a quest to win a state title for his school. DeLong, who would become one of the top 800-meter runners in the nation while running for CMU, surely would have won the 800 at the state meet in 1996 if he had not run the 1600, yet still was able to give Whitehall eight more valuable points with a second in the 800. However, Delong was not denied coming home with at least one first-place medal. In the final race of the day, Delong anchored Whitehall’s victorious 4x400 meter relay team to a victory to clinch the state championship.

And speaking of Hart – Can the Girls’ cross-country continue their dynasty and pull off a feat that has never been accomplished in MHSAA history? The Lady Pirates have won five state titles in a row. Can they make it six? If so, they would become the first team ever to win more than five straight titles?

Football season is just around the corner and another local school will have a state-of-the-art surface when the high-flying Sailors of Mona Shores take the field for their home opener. It should be just a matter of time when other schools will soon follow Holton, Oakridge, Grand Haven, Muskegon, Mona Shores and now Fruitport in having these all-weather fields that can be used not only for football, but other sports such as soccer, lacrosse, as well as marching bands practicing their trade without the worry of ruining the fields. My former alma mater North Muskegon has received a boatload of money from a State Grant to improve their facilities. My fervent hope if they will take that money and follow the schools named above in installing an all-weather surface and everybody can be happy. I shudder to think that they are considering moving a 102-year-old baseball field, that arguably may be the best diamond in the entire area, miles away from their current location.

On a more somber note, I was saddened to learn of the passing of former Muskegon High legend Jerry Eaton. Current Muskegon High followers may find it hard to believe but Muskegon High, who didn’t win a single baseball game this season, once were state champs in baseball. Back in 1951, well before they began having the current MHSAA playoffs, four of the best teams in the state of Michigan were invited to play for what the MHSAA recognized as the State Championship. This tournament pitted the winners of the four major Class A conferences in the state of Michigan in a two-day format. Teams invited included Flint Northern, winner of the Saginaw Valley, Monroe, top team of the Detroit Suburban area, and Battle Creek, champion of the Five-A conference. And who was the winning pitcher in their 5-3 victory over Battle Creeks Central to win the state championship? None other than a flame throwing sophomore by the name of Jerry Eaton.

Eaton was signed right out of high school by the Detroit Tigers and played a couple of years in the Tigers Farm system, including one year in Palatka, Florida where one of his teammates was the late Howie Meloche. A sore arm curtailed Jerry’s ambition of playing of playing in the Major Leagues, but he did return to West Michigan where he started earning his degree at Western Michigan. Sore arm and all, Jerry would continue to play during the summers in the City League here in Muskegon. Although saddled with a sore arm, my good friend and former teammate Jerry Johnson said in a recent quote that Eaton “was the hardest throwing pitcher he ever faced.”

Several years ago, I submitted in one of my Moyes’ Memories stories my all-time Greater Muskegon team. I selected Eaton as one of my pitchers on my five-man pitching staff. His Palatka teammate Meloche was also one of the five, along with Paul Bard, Duane Bickel, and Ray Newman.

In a parting word before the summer ends and our prep athletes begin preparation for their fall sports, it should be noted that Record crowds flocked to Marsh Field to enjoy the Muskegon Clippers at historic Marsh Field. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the Gawkowski clan and their dedicated staff, this 102-year-old ballpark is Muskegon’s ‘Field of Dreams’ and it never looked better.

*Another of our Muskegon athletic greats passed on, here is my tribute story on former Big Red Gene Visscher, shortly after he left us in 2022.*

**Former Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Famer Gene Visscher passes away at 81**

By Jim Moyes

Yet another great one has left us as former Muskegon Big Red and Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Famer Gene Visscher passed away at the age of 81 on Saturday, August 6, 2022, from complications from a fall and other health issues. The former basketball star at Weber State University, and Division I head basketball coach at both his alma mater and Northern Arizona, was inducted into our local sports hall of Fame in 1995, one year after his induction into Weber State’s Sports Hall of Fame.

Visscher had an outstanding career as one of this area’s all-time best at the round ball game, but to say Gene was a late bloomer would be a huge understatement. Visscher was a plodding b-ball player for the 1957-58 Big Reds where he spent much of his time of the bench.

One of Visscher’s teammates from his Big Red days was 1958 grad Dave Cooke, long time area coach for many years. Cooke remembers Visscher as a fast-growing youngster who quickly outgrew his clothes. “Gene grew up in a family where he had four sisters,” recalled Cooke. “He played very little basketball until about his 11th grade year at Muskegon High. Our coach at the time was Lloyd Hartman and he asked Gene to go out for basketball simply because he was the biggest kid in school. He did come out for basketball his junior year, but he was very raw. He was much better his senior year and although he didn’t start, he would see action as a reserve. What I do remember was that Gene was the first kid we had on the team who could dunk a basketball. Although dunking was illegal at the time Gene could dunk in practice,” recalled Cooke.

A decision to volunteer his service in the US Army shortly after graduating from Muskegon High would prove to be one a good one for the gangly 6’6 Visscher. A three-year stint in the service was where he attained the skills that would propel him into a future basketball star. A now physically fully developed athlete, who drew zero college feelers following his Big Red High School days, Visscher enrolled at Muskegon Community College. Visscher quickly became a star for the Jayhawks and thanks to the prodding of his very good friend Gene Young, Visscher followed Young to Weber State where he would have two years of eligibility.

Before making the journey to the Rocky Mountains, Visscher would not make the journey alone. Joining Gene back to Provo, Utah would be his recent bride, and high school sweetheart, the former Barb Heneveld.

Playing for legendary coach Dick Motta, Visscher was an immediate success for the Wildcats. He averaged 18.4 points per game as a junior while pulling down 11.3 rebounds. It got even better in his final season. Visscher tallied more than 21 points per game for Weber State. More than a half century has gone by since Visscher left Weber State but his 14.3 rebounds per game during the 1965-66 campaign still stands second in school history. Visscher’s presence was so significant that he led Motta’s Wildcats to conference championships in both of his years on the hardwoods and twice was selected to the All Big-Big Sky first team.

Following his playing days at Weber State Gene shunned a possible spot in the NBA after being drafted by the Baltimore Bullets to pursue his passion of a coaching career. He was immediately chosen in his hometown of Muskegon as the head coach of the Muskegon Community College Jayhawks, where he was assisted by our great friend Gene Young, the same guy who recruited him to Weber State. Muskegon Panther fans may well recall his basketball skills from those days of yore on his return back to the Port City.

After a year at MCC Visscher returned to Weber State where he served as an assistant coach for three years. He was appointed head coach at Weber State in 1971 after Weber State coach Phil Johnson left to accept a head coaching position in the NBA. Visscher’s team were Big Sky champions in each of his first two seasons and advanced into the NCAA tournament each season. In 1972 Weber State won their first NCAA tournament game with a first round 91-64 trouncing of Hawaii before being ousted in their next game by the eventual NCAA champs from UCLA.

Visscher would coach three and a half years for the Wildcats where he posted an overall record of 58 wins against 38 losses. I saw Weber State play one game under Visscher’s tenure, and it was one I’ll not soon forget. I was visiting out in California in the Los Angeles area in December of 1974 when I noticed that Weber State was scheduled to play a game at nearby Long Beach State in a Holiday tournament. Gene set me up with a pass to the game and I was just thrilled to have a seat in the stands. But no! Gene said you’re not sitting in the stands, but I was going to sit with him ON THE BENCH!

It was during the action of this game with Loyola Marymount where I first became aware of how stressful a job it was to be a big-time college coach. I believe I spent most of the time on the bench attempting to keep Gene from getting a technical foul. Fortunately, Weber State won the game by a narrow three points, and I was so happy for my good friend Gene. Gene stepped away from coaching Weber State shortly thereafter to return to Michigan but the urge to get back into coaching got him back into the game.

Visscher served a year as an assistant for the University of Wyoming and followed up as the head coach at Northern Arizona for a couple of years before taking a much less stressful position as a teacher and athletic director in Charlotte, Michigan. Visscher was much sought after for his basketball knowledge and spent many of his later years as an advisor to many in all levels of basketball. One of his opponents during his days at Weber State was the University of Montana, coached by Jud Heathcote. During his first two years as the head coach at Weber State Visscher won three of his four games against the future MSU coaching legend. After Visscher took up residence at nearby Charlotte it was easy for the two former foes to become good friends. Visscher became a fixture at numerous MSU practices, first during the Heathcote era, and later when a guy by the name of Tom Izzo took over the Spartan head coaching duties.

Visscher also was called upon to help with former West Michigan Christian prep standout Ed Douma after Douma became the head coach at Hillsdale. There were also others who sought Visscher’s advice.

Among the many who have been saddened with his passing was his longtime friend Gene Gifford. “Gene was a mentor for me over the years,” said Gifford. “He would come to many of my practices during my coaching days at both Olivet and Aquinas College and I would always seek his advice from his incredible knowledge and passion for the game. He would even pass along many drills that I could use including a rebounding drill that I found so useful.”

Gifford, who was a ball boy for those Panther teams from yesteryear, recently spoke with Visscher when an area coaching position became available. Gifford was asked to take the job but before accepting he needed somebody he respected and admired for advice before he took the job. After talks with Visscher and family, Gene Gifford will return to Muskegon Community College and will once again take over a previous position he once held for 25 years, the head basketball coach for the Jayhawks.

Eugene Charles Visscher is survived by his wife of 58 years Barb, as well as son Jerry and daughter Traci and will be sorely missed by many friends, coaches, players, students and one very old announcer.