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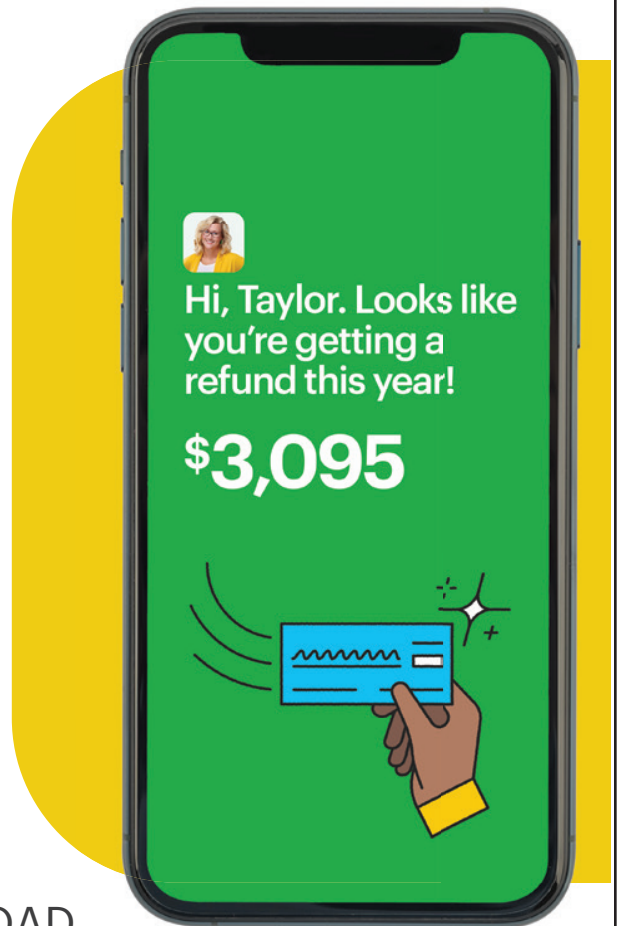
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# WELCOME

I once jokingly told Haywood County Sheriff Greg Christopher that, despite his work with rough-and-tumble individuals on a daily basis, that I, as sports editor, had the more dangerous job.

He agreed.

Covering one of the most heated football rivalries in the country isn't easy. On a weekly basis, my email and voicemail are filled with questions asking why Pisgah didn't get the top story in this past issue's sports section, or when the next Tuscola article was going to be posted.

It can be demanding at times, but I can't blame the football fanatics of Haywood County. After all, they have football in their veins, dating back well past the first meeting of Canton and Waynesville in 1922 to the very inception of the sport.

I can imagine when the first "pigskin" arrived in Haywood County; sometime around the turn of the 20th century, a boy from Canton and a boy from Waynesville challenged the other to a pickup game, and so it began.

When the time came to put together a special publication honoring the county's 100 years of football history, I felt a healthy level of fear. How was I going to cover 100 years of history in a 72-page magazine that appeases the Bears and the Mountaineers?

I couldn't.

But I assembled a team of writers and we tracked down as many former Bears and Mountaineers as we could in the time that we had.

We hope these stories spark an interest in the past — of teams like the 1960s Bears, or players like Waynesville's Fred Crawford — and the future of Haywood County football, like this year's senior players who speak up about what the 100th anniversary game means to them.

Haywood County should be proud of its football heritage, and proud that there are still two teams that hate each other enough on Friday night to burn outhouses and spraypaint Bear statues, but still respect each other enough on Saturday to get together at the diner for breakfast, or on Sunday at church.

It's a rivalry whose flame has always seemed to have been lit, with no threat of it being extinguished anytime soon, thanks to Pisgah Nation, and to Big T.

Yours,

**Tyler Auffhammer, sports editor**

*I'd like to thank the team at The Mountaineer — the editors, writers, design and layout and advertising teams — for their countless hours of hard work that helped create a magazine we believe pays tribute to a rivalry, and a legacy, that sometimes feels too big for words.*



Tyler Auffhammer

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Publisher: **Jonathan Key**

Sports Editor: **Tyler Auffhammer**

Ad design & layout:

**Amanda Adams**

**Kylie Frazier**

**Jack Snyder**

Advertising:

**Jan George**

**Lori Gilbert**

**Karl Miller**

Contributing writers:

**Robert Allen, Charles Allison, Mikell Clark-Webb,**

**Aarik Long, Peggy Manning, Andy Rhinehart,**

**Andrew Schnittker, Mike Schoeffel, Kayla Smith**

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# A GREAT AMERICAN RIVALRY CONTINUES



Diana Gates

The 2022-23 Tuscola Mountaineers football team

## BY TYLER AUFFHAMMER

The Oct. 14 football game between Pisgah and Tuscola marks the 100th anniversary of football in Haywood County.

The rivalry dates back to the very first meeting between Canton and Waynesville Township high schools in 1922, two schools that were consolidated in the 1960s into what later became Pisgah and Tuscola.

For the past 100 years, this rivalry has delighted and deflated its fans, been blowouts and no shows and everything in-between. In the end, it's a unique combination of heated rivals on Friday who see each other at the same diner Saturday morning.

No Bear or Mountie has ever failed to step up for his community. In return, the communities have taken on a level of passion that rivals just about any fanbase in the nation.

Head coaches Chris Brookshire, Tuscola, and Brett Chappell, Pisgah have the unique distinction of being the coaches for the 100th anniversary game. With that honor, however, comes high expectations.

## A burden and a torch

Chris Brookshire, in his third season at the helm, has a distinct honor among head football coaches at Tuscola: He's the only former Mountaineer to end up running the program.

"It's an honor to be the coach at Tuscola and be involved in Haywood County football. I take a lot of pride and honor in knowing that I'm the only former Tuscola football player to be the head



Russ Parker/Epic Photography

The 2022-23 Pisgah Bears football team

coach," he said.

But Brookshire understands the lineage he's been tasked with continuing, dating back to coaches like C.E. Weatherby, Bill Milner and, his own coach in high school, Doug Brooks.

"I wouldn't be in this situation if it hadn't been for all of those coaches before me," he said.

Brookshire said the Pisgah-Tuscola rivalry is unique.

"You probably can't find 10 or 15 in the whole U.S. that are like this. It's more than just bragging rights. It's such a source of pride for everyone in Haywood County, whether you live in Bethel or Fines Creek. There is no greater pride in knowing your team won," he said.

With the community pride and passion that surrounds the annual county clash, Brookshire said it ultimately falls to the players, for better or worse.

"These kids, on both sides, carry a burden and a torch," he said.

Brookshire has high expectations weighing over his head this time, too. Tuscola has lost nine-straight games to Pisgah.

"Obviously, you want to win that game. That's the beauty of sports in Haywood County. There is so much emphasis put on that game. The opportunity just gets bigger that its 100 years. We know there's going to be a lot of distinguished coaches and older players there. I hope that we represent our community well," he said. **Continues on page 6**



Diana Gates

Tuscola head coach Chris Brookshire



## PISGAH SENIOR PLAYERS

"Winning this game will bring it full circle for me because I've never lost to Tuscola and I don't plan on it. At the end of the day, it's whatever it takes." — **Logan Free, No. 2**

"It's a big deal that it's 100 years and I've had people in my family on both sides. It is personal because I used to be at Tuscola. I want to make this one count and I want to contribute what I can to this team." — **Jake Conner, No. 13**

"What this rivalry is about is our whole team coming together as one. With it being 100 years, that's a big milestone for this team and Tuscola. Let's make it 10." — **Nathan Simpkins, No. 19**

"I wear this No. 22 for Luther Dyer and I'm playing for him." — **Scott Lunsford, No. 22**

"This game is all about family because this team welcomed me with open arms." — **Luis Garcia, No. 54**

"I've never lost to them and I'm hoping to not lose to them my senior year." — **Nick Browning, No. 63**

"To grow up in this rivalry, to play in this rivalry and to get the 10th win this year are special." — **Caden Robinson, No. 25**

"This rivalry makes the county what it is: everybody is a part of it. It's a good atmosphere and we're here to win." — **Heath Ammons, No. 5**

"100 years is definitely special. To have grandparents and great-grandparents who played is bringing it full circle and continuing the Pisgah legacy." — **Dakota Sorrells, No. 72**



Diana Gates

A member of the U.S. Marine Corps performs the coin toss

## TUSCOLA SENIOR PLAYERS

"This game means a lot to me. I've been to every Tuscola-Pisgah game since I started walking. To be able to play in it in front of all of those fans means a lot." — **Will Ledbetter, No. 7**

"It means a lot to be in this game. It's a big time to shine, and it's the perfect time to be alive." — **Henry Sutton, No. 22**

"We're very excited to play in this game and we're ready to go. Tuscola Machine never breaks." — **Finn Patton, No. 42**

"This game means a lot to me because I'm the first in my family to ever play in it." — **Andy Brown, No. 44**

"We're a brotherhood. I know these boys always have my back no matter what I do. No matter, win or lose, I know they're always going to have me. The game means everything. We're all working hard. Winning is everything to us." — **Graham Simpson, No. 23**

"We all put so much on the line to play this game and we work our tails off." — **Ian Huskey, No. 40**

"I feel like we're all one family and we work so hard. We put in countless hours a week to play this one game. We're all ready to play." — **Dez Rodriguez, No. 3**

"My grandpa played in this game and he beat them, so I feel like I've got to show him something and beat them." — **Ian Barker, No. 52**

"Play hard, hit harder. Ain't no sissys in the hall of fame."

— **Riley Noland, No. 33**

"I've grown up with my family having a 'beat Pisgah' mindset and I'm hoping to carry on the tradition for my family." — **Zack Cabe, No. 15**

"I've been with these guys since middle school and I'm glad they took me in as one of theirs. It's a family and brotherhood."

— **Jourdyn Butler, No. 26**

"We've been one big family since 7th grade. We've all known our senior year was going to be one of the best years we've had. With all of us working like we have and putting in blood, sweat and tears everyday and going on Friday night and wearing out anybody we play against, it's just incredible. It puts icing on the cake that it's the 100th year."

— **James Propest, No. 11**

"No one in my family has ever beaten Pisgah and I'm hoping to break that streak this year." — **Austin Deal, No. 35**

"My family is from here and it's personal with a lot of people over there. We just want to win, especially with this team. I think we can do it this year." — **Jeff Benson, No. 2**

"It'll be the first time anyone in my family has played in this game, and to do it with my brothers makes it so much more special."

— **Jackson Roten, No. 6**

"No one else in my family has played and I didn't until this year. We've worked hard for months. This is a big game, and a lot is on our shoulders right now." — **Luke McHenry, No. 28**

"I had a grandpa play at Waynesville Township High School, so it's really special for me to carry on the lineage of a Tuscola football player. I'm ready to beat Pisgah." — **Cameron Caldwell, No. 74**

"I'm going to dedicate this game to my nana that passed away late last year because she never got to see me beat Pisgah."

— **Davis Ferguson, No. 58**

"I feel that this year will be the changing of Haywood County football with a win." — **Boone Williamson, No. 68**



Mikell Clark-Webb

Pisgah head coach Brett Chappell

## 'It's all about our kids'

Brett Chappell, meanwhile, enters his 10th season coaching the Black Bears of Pisgah. He said he's excited for the rivalry milestone.

"Just to be a part of it in general [is special], and then, each year, we're adding something different onto it," he said. "One hundred years of playing is something you get to say you're a part of."

In typical Chappell fashion, though, he's all about the game itself, and the players in the trenches.

"At the end of the day, it's all about our kids playing on the field. It's about getting them ready and prepared to go out and experience that," he said.

But he understands what it means to his guys, too, to be a part of such a historical community event.

"You talk about 100 years ago, when a lot of these kids' grandparents weren't alive. It adds to that mystique just a little bit. Being able to think about it out loud, it's going to be exciting. What a great experience to be a part of," he said.

## Great American rivalry

When Brookshire and Chappell lead their teams onto Doug Brooks Field at C.E. Weatherby Stadium Oct. 13, they'll be just about as much pomp and circumstance for a high school football game that the Great American Rivalry Series can bring.

Only 73 schools nationwide were chosen to be a part of the 2022 Series, and the Pisgah-Tuscola game was one of only three rivalry games in North Carolina.

The Series covers well-known rivalries like Midland Legacy and Permian high schools in Texas, and Mater Dei and St. John Bosco high schools in California.

Just to put Haywood County's rivalry into perspective, this is the 12th time the Series will cover the Pisgah-Tuscola game.

Scott Bridegam is the Series' COO, and said the unique re-

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spect between Pisgah and Tuscola was one thing that attracted the Series to the game. He noted that Pisgah is technically the home team, but the game will be played at Tuscola's field.

"You have [Pisgah], that's been hit by flooding and they're gonna be the home team. Their rival [Tuscola] has offered up its stadium. That speaks volumes about the communities," he said.

"That's the cool thing about your rivalry. On the gridiron, on the night of the game, they don't hate each other, they respect each other. What a great way to personify that," Bridegam added.

Bridegam said the fanbase, especially, has a nationwide reputation.

"The fanbase for both schools is very passionate and really is the definition of what a high school football rivalry really is," he said. "It's something both schools and the communities around both schools look forward to each year."

Those fans annually pack the house at C.E. Weatherby or Pisgah Memorial Stadium, sometimes in excess of 10,000.

Bridegam said the county clash is the third most attended rivalry in the country among teams the Series covers.

And that's not a passion that stops at the gates.

"If I were to put a tweet out that said, 'What's the best rivalry in the country?' The Tuscola-Pisgah fan base would have the most engagement," Bridegam said.

Bridegam has attended one Pisgah-Tuscola game before, but since it's the 100th year game, he'll be in attendance to

present a trophy to the winning team, a medal to the game's MVP and a scholarship.

The Great American Rivalry Series mission is to celebrate these rivalries and give them the big-game feel they deserve.

The Series awards each school a scholar-athlete award to the senior football player with highest academic standing, which is sponsored by the U.S. Marine Corps.

"Two Marines will be honorary team captains for the coin toss, and the head referee will use a commemorative coin," Bridegam said.

Throughout the game, Bridegam and company will get the fans excited.

"We throw a lot of T-shirts, and we run a chin-up challenge," he said. The school with the most chin-ups gets a chin-up trophy presented to their cheerleading team.

Despite the "circus" that surrounds many high-interest football games, Bridegam knows it's all about the action on the gridiron. And when the Bears and Mounties square off, it's always a close contest.

In the 11 games the Series has covered, they've all been pretty closely contested. Six have been decided by one score, and two by one point.

"It seems every year, you can't count the other team out.... It's always exciting to do it," he said. "The game is great without us.... We just try to celebrate it."

Pisgah "hosts" Tuscola at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 14, at C.E. Weatherby Stadium in Waynesville.

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# Three generations of Mountaineers: Davis family

BY TYLER AUFHAMMER

Steve Davis, a 1966 graduate of Waynesville Township High School, was 5-years old the very first time he saw the football team take on Canton.

"I never forgot it and always wanted to do it. That was my dream. No one in my family had ever played football," he said.

He looked up to the players who played under legendary coach C.E. Weatherby and recognized the magnitude of the rivalry between the two schools.

"It was a religion," he said. "People grew up really strong rivals but with good sportsmanship. Most of the adults worked at one of the plants and knew each other. People would lose their whole paycheck betting on a game."

## First foray into football

Steve Davis started playing youth football when he was 10-years old and eventually earned his spot on the Waynesville team as a quarterback.

Earning his spot would take more than showing up. That right of passage took place at football camp at Camp Adventure at Lake Junaluska each summer. Steve Davis was one of 11 sophomores taken to camp that year.

"After a day or two of regular workouts, we had our first contact. We had these little dummy pads that you held in front of you. The sophomores had to hold them and the upperclassmen said they weren't going to hit us hard, and we believed them. The first time they came out, they knocked us flat," he said.

But the sophomores had decided they weren't going to lay down.

"A couple of us got up and threw the pads over to the sidelines. They tried to initiate us and we fought them back," he said.

Seniors made the sophomores carry everything from their helmets to jockstraps, and the attempts to initiate the sophomores got even more intense as the week went on: logs were thrown through the windows of their cabins.

"We just about tore those cabins down. When we left, [head] coach [Bill] Milner said, 'Boys, I don't think they'll ever let us back here or not,'" Steve Davis said.

When camp ended, he was still standing and had earned his spot on the team.

Steve Davis played three years under Milner, a former All-American at Duke University and later a captain of the Chicago Bears.

"The first year he was there [Waynesville Township], we went



Diana Gates

From left: Raife, Locke and Steve Davis

undefeated and won the conference. We went to the playoffs at least four out of those six years he was there," Steve Davis said.

It wouldn't be easy for him to find playing time under Milner. "Milner never had a quarterback who played for more than one year. He tried to develop a team with a senior quarterback," Davis said.

When he became a senior in 1965, Steve Davis was named the team's starting quarterback. It wouldn't be an easy road, though.

"We played what I think is the toughest schedule that year," he said. Waynesville beat East Rutherford to start the season, then Chapel Hill and then had to play Canton and Brevard twice.

The boys reached the playoffs, but lost to Graham in the first round.

Steve Davis remembers Milner as a great coach.

"People have always asked me through the years, 'Did you like him?' I was ambivalent, but I respected him and everybody else did. He might walk past you in the hall and not speak to you, but he was a great football coach," Steve Davis said.

## Hard-hitting 1980s

Growing up in football-rich tradition, Steve Davis' son Raife Davis was bound to find his way onto the field.

When he entered Tuscola High School in the mid-1980s, he found a new coach, and a new brand of football.

"We out-hit everybody we played," recalled Raife Davis, who played under legendary coach Doug Brooks.

"Doug was an old school coach a lot like Milner. I respected

Continues on page 10









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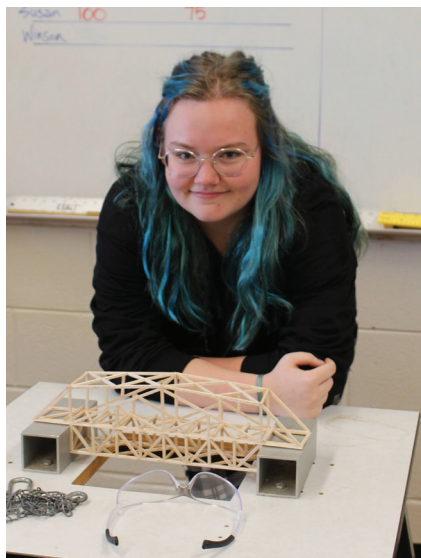
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## LEGACY



From left: Raife Davis, head coach Doug Brooks, and Brian Whitner in 1985

him a lot. He was tough on me," he said.

By then, football camp was hosted where the old Clyde High School once stood.

"Doug made it so tough in practice that the games were easier. You knew what to do. Doug had us prepared," Raife Davis said.

The boys pushed their bodies to the limit and, in the summer heat, dehydration was a constant threat.

"I remember waking up my junior year about 3 a.m. and it was pitch black dark with no air conditioning in early August. I was craving salt. I had to go around and wake my buddies up to get packets of salt because I could not get that craving out. We sweated so much that day. Back then we didn't have Gatorade, we just had water," he said.

When a talented senior class graduated and Raife Davis' class moved up as juniors, whether they could replicate their success was a real question, one that even the team's coach made clear.

"Coach Brooks had called our class the 'poor class.' He might have even done that to motivate us," he said.

Raife Davis was named the starting quarterback, and the team won 10 games and made it to the third round of the playoffs.

"We ran the wishbone very well. Every class that came through there, [Brooks] had them ready to play," he said. "We always had strong defenses, too."

Every week was not a celebration, however. Tuscola was shut

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## LEGACY

out 33-0 to Reynolds, and Raife Davis remembers the crowd that game, especially.

"I was getting cussed at so badly, I still have nightmares about it. I wanted to go into the stands and fight somebody but I couldn't find out who was cussing at me," he said.

In the playoffs, Tuscola got the chance to play Reynolds again. Over the loudspeaker, the Reynolds announcer told the crowd where the team would be playing next week, effectively writing off the Tuscola game as a victory.

"Coach Brooks opened the offense quite a bit. We beat them 28-6," Raife Davis said. "To get them again the second time that season was really special. We thought we'd never get another shot at them. That was the highlight of those seasons."

During Raife Davis' senior year, the team replicated its success, won 10 games again and advanced to the third round of the playoffs.

"We had some really good ballplayers. A lot of the guys' dad's played, too, so it meant a lot to those boys," he recalled.

Raife Davis beat Pisgah all four years he played at Tuscola, but remembers how heated the rivalry was in the community.

"Everybody stayed in their own town and didn't really communicate much with guys from the other side of the county," he said. "The community makes it such a big deal. I preferred playing at Pisgah because it was so stressful [to play at home]. It was a lot of pressure." **Continues on page 12**



Diana Gates

From left: Raife, Steve and Locke Davis




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### New school football

By the time Locke Davis, Raife Davis' son, was old enough to strap on a helmet, football was in his family's DNA.

His time at Tuscola — from 2017-21 — was a bit chaotic, though, a stark contrast to the legendary coaches his grandfather and father played for.

"I played for three different coaches in four years," he said. "I came in as a freshman and played for Tommy Pursley on junior varsity. We scored a lot of points and beat a lot of teams including Pisgah that year."

But Pursley's tenure was short-lived.

"He was a good coach, I respected him a lot, but he retired at the end of my freshman year," Locke Davis said.

Tuscola hired its offensive coordinator, J.T. Postell, to become the next head coach. He stayed for two seasons.

"We knew him well. He was in the weight room all the time with us. We were close with Coach Postell," Locke Davis said.

Locke Davis alternated between JV and varsity his sophomore year, and won lineman of the year as a defensive end. The JV team went 8-2.

The championship game came down to a final game against Erwin. If the team won, they were conference champions. If they lost, Tuscola and Erwin would share the trophy. The Mounties fell 6-0.

"That's still one of the hardest hitting football games I've ever been part of," Locke Davis said.

During his junior year, Postell brought back the Tuscola football camp tradition.

"We stayed at the cafeteria at Tuscola on the Hill. They'd wake us up at 5:30 a.m. every morning and I remember the first day of hitting was a Saturday, people would come in to make breakfast for us. All I heard was somebody shout, 'Are you ready for some football?' It was Doug McCracken getting ready to enter the kitchen and make breakfast. Stuff like that I'll never forget," Locke Davis said.

Current coach Chris Brookshire was hired his senior season and Locke Davis said they were molded into a tough group.

"My favorite game my senior year was against Asheville. There was a wide receiver named Famous Paisley; probably the most physically talented player I ever played against. He looked like Randy Moss on the field, but we really shut him down. We really got into his head all night," he said. Tuscola won that game.

Unfortunately, Locke Davis didn't have as much luck against Pisgah, having never beat the Bears. But he'll never forget the atmosphere of the game.

"We were playing in front of 10,000 people at C.E. Weatherby. It was unlike anything I had ever seen," he said.

Raife Davis said his son didn't miss a single practice or game in four years at Tuscola.

Locke Davis corrected his father: "Actually, second grade on."



Diana Gates

Locke Davis runs out onto the field during a 2021 game

### Family legacy

Steve Davis is nothing but proud watching his son and grandson carry on his football legacy at Tuscola.

"I'm certainly proud that they carried the tradition on," he said.

Steve Davis is surprised his family was able to carry on a football legacy for three generations, especially beginning from a young man in the 1950s whose family had never played the game before.

"Most of the time the son leaves and doesn't come back, so it's hard to get three generations. It's something we need to treasure and hang onto," he said.

"There's so much you gain from it in a small community, too," added Raife Davis. "I was so proud that Locke loved football like I did. It was a lot of fun to coach him and watch him play."

He believes having legacies like fathers and sons playing for the same team makes teams stronger and better.

"The tradition is good for these boys. It makes you better. It makes you try a little harder and that's a good thing. I'm so thankful to have had the experience," Raife Davis said.

Locke Davis never had a chance. He was bound to throw on a helmet at some point, and he's so glad that he did.

"I remember in elementary school I would wear [his dad's] No. 14 jersey on the day of the Tuscola-Pisgah game," he said.

"I'm glad I had them to look up to when I started playing."



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# Three generations of Bears: Williams family



From left: Charles, Zach, Clark and Dylan Williams

Tyler Auffhammer

## BY TYLER AUFFHAMMER

When he suited up on the Canton High School football team in 1956 under legendary coach Boyd Allen, Canton-native Charles Williams could never have known the legacy he was starting.

His son, Clark Williams, played for Pisgah High School, graduating in 1982, and his grandsons, Zach (class of 2008) and Dylan (class of 2010) followed in their grandfather's footsteps.

"You don't plan this," Clark Williams said. "It just happens. It comes up through the families."

What became a three-generation Canton football family has been highlighted by dedication to their school, their town and each other.

"When we all go to a home game and walk through that gate, it's a brotherhood," said Clark Williams. "That is Canton Memorial Stadium. We've all played there. Those guys on the field have been through what we've been through."

Zach Williams, who is a football coach at Canton Middle School, said the three-generation legacy is all about the connection between Canton and football.

"It all goes back to just how much football means to Canton," said Zach Williams. The lineage. All those guys at the mill played, and their dads played, so it's just a heritage and a lineage for the town."

## Start of a legacy

When Charles Williams played running back in Boyd Allen's T-formation offense, the game of football was nothing like it is today.

"Wearing a helmet was like wearing a bucket. It had one bar," he said.

Football in those days was just as important to the town of Canton as it is today, but the relationships were more tight-knit.

Allen was Charles Williams' boss when he was a lifeguard at the town pool, and he'd let players go workout in the weight room whenever they wanted. His early love of weightlifting helped Charles Williams find success in the Canton offense.

"I was fast. If they wanted somebody to run it around the ends, I could do it," he recalled.

To get onto the field, however, players had to endure pre-season football camp on Pisgah Creek.



## LEGACY

"We practiced in an apple orchard," said Charles Williams. "The coaches would go in and clear it with a tractor. It was rough."

He said water breaks weren't a common occurrence in those days.

"They wouldn't let us drink water when we were practicing back then. We'd pick up an apple, but if you got caught you had to run laps," he said.

Along with Allen, Cliff Brookshire was a young coach who worked with the team.

"He would get in there with us," said Charles Williams. "He was a really good coach."

He remembers being hungry most days.

"You just couldn't get enough to eat. I couldn't believe people would leave their milk cartons unopened, so I'd grab theirs and drink it, too," he said.

To test the boys' grit, Allen would have them participate in a drill called "pig in the poke."

The team would gather in a large circle with one player in the middle. The coaches would call out the names of players, who then had to go in and try to tackle the man in the middle.

As a sophomore at camp, Charles Williams said his name was among those called in first.

"You had to pay your dues," he said.

Although it was a rare occurrence, players would "cross the creek" and leave camp for home, effectively quitting the team.

"You lived hard after that," Charles Williams said.

He remembers the ritual of the games most of all, especially the ones against crosstown rival Waynesville High School.

"We played Waynesville on Thanksgiving Day during the day time. You talk about a crowd; they showed up for that one," he said.

The rivalry game wasn't without its share of antics, either.

"We went to Tuscola's field late one night," Charles Williams said. "We took a jug of kerosene and wrote 'CHS' in the grass. You could barely see it, but we knew it was there."

### Heated prank wars

Clark Williams played for Pisgah High School in the post-consolidation years, graduating in 1982. He played both sides of the line for the Bears.

"Coach [Woody] Fish was in charge of the morning practice," Williams said. "We did one lap around the road to start the day, and then we ended right there in formation for calisthenics."

He remembers coach Fish having the boys help with lawn maintenance.

"He would say he wanted us to be safe and that the grass was too wet and we might slip and fall. So we

*Continues on page 16*

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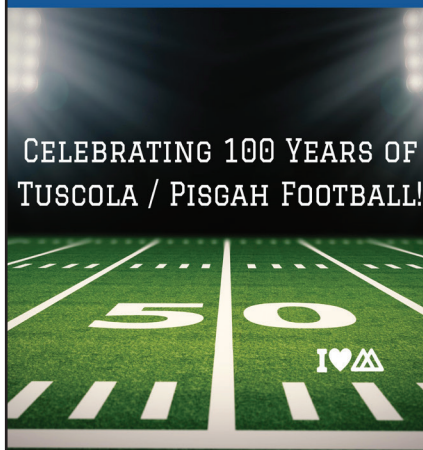


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## LEGACY



Tyler Auffhammer

Charles Williams' letterman jacket (circa 1960)

needed to dry the grass. 'Assume the push up position,' he said. 'Roll to the right, roll to the left.' He took a lot of pleasure in that," he recalled.

Raised on Newfound, Clark Williams said he hardly knew how to get to Waynesville.

"I never came [to Waynesville], and wouldn't have come here if my life depended on it. We hated Tuscola. I couldn't stand them," he said.

Once every other year, he would have to travel to Waynesville to play Tuscola.

But before the game, Clark Williams remembers the pranks got pretty rough.

"We had an extremely large bonfire made out of outhouses that we stole from all around Haywood County during the week of the game. We would go out at night and take outhouses, and would plant them around campus. As the week went on, the numbers grew, and on Thursday afternoon, we'd leave school and pile them on the ball field," he said.

His junior year, however, one of the players took it too far.

"Somebody got in a lot of trouble because they stole a very expensive, decoratively-painted outhouse. So, it was stopped. That's when the gates went up at Pisgah," he recalls.

What ensued was a back-and-forth prank war.

"Tuscola came up and put yellow 'Ts' on the bear prints at Pisgah. Our retaliation was to put big red 'Ps' on the Tuscola water tower," he said.

Clark Williams remembers being treated differently as a Pisgah football player, too.

"We were treated like royalty. We would come in from a practice and there would be windbreakers in our lockers and they would have our names embroidered on them," he recalled.

He plans to be at the first game when Pisgah Memorial Stadium reopens.

"We can't wait for our stadium to open so we can go back. We don't have any kids or relatives playing, but we

**Continues on page 18**



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## LEGACY

still go,” he said.

### Marrying of two towns

Like his dad, Zach Williams played both offensive and defensive line. During his time at Pisgah (2004-08), he played under coach David Pressley.

He remembers camp being just as difficult as his grandfather and father describe it.

“If you go through the weighs, through camps and the first weeks of practice, you’ll cut yourself. There was no quitting,” Zach Williams said.

He said practices became a little more intense once he earned a spot on the varsity team.

“One week in the spring, we would practice and the linemen had to show up at 6:30 in the morning. We were doing warm ups and one of the boys on the team said, ‘Coach, the grass is wet.’ We all looked at him and thought, ‘Why would you say that?’”

Zach Williams said coach Cagle, the offensive line coach, told the boys to get on the ground and dry it off with their bodies, just like his dad Clark Williams was made to do in the early 1980s.

He said he remembers the pride he felt making it through camp and onto the team.

“There was a lot of pride to get your jersey,” he recalled.

Zach Williams said technology, especially social media, helped narrow the gap between Tuscola and Pisgah by the time he played for the Bears.

“The rivalry was still intense. As technology got better, you couldn’t help the intermingling,” he said.

He even dated a girl from Waynesville.

“But I dated her after I graduated,” Zach Williams said.

The rivalry even continues to this day.

“Even though we’ve been married nine years, we’ll go to the games and poke at each other,” he said.

The first year they dated, his girlfriend was part of the Tuscola pep club, and she asked him to come stand with her.

“My initial thought was, ‘No. I’m not going over there,” he said, laughing.

The couple is now married with a son, Ellis.

“It is kind of cool to think about following in [his grandfather and father’s] footsteps and the opportunity, if my son wants to play football, that he’s going to have stories to share. It is pride because we all played for Pisgah. I didn’t consider how rare it was,” he said.

Now a coach at Canton Middle, Zach Williams said he finds some of his own coaches’ sayings coming out during practice.

“I know why the coaches did what they did. I’ve pulled some little Pressley sayings or coach Cagle sayings into my coaching



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## LEGACY

just because they were so memorable to me. It's one of the things you do to build camaraderie with the boys," he said.

### The Boyd Allen Curse

Dylan Williams was the fourth member of the family to play for Pisgah, graduating in 2010.

He played center on junior varsity, but his senior year he played tight end.

"I hit a final growth spurt," he recalled.

He, too, recognizes just how hard it was to even make the Pisgah football team.

"If you made it through camp, that was the hardest part. If you didn't want to play, camp would make you quit," Dylan Williams said.

He recalls a specifically tough time the players had his junior season.

"We'd just broken camp and, back then, they used to have a border bash. Teams from Tennessee came over and scrimmaged us," Dylan

Williams said.

Pisgah did not score and the scrimmage ended in a 0-0 tie.

"I knew it was going to be bad because Coach Pressley grinned. The last thing he told us was, 'You better do some soul searching this weekend,'" he recalled.

Dylan Williams and his teammates had the weekend to think about it.

"Monday we'd all hoped he forgot. All the coaches were quiet," he said. The entire practice was hitting drills.

Coming full circle, Dylan Williams and his teammates even had a special tradition called the Boyd Allen Curse, named after the legendary coach his own grandfather played for.

"If it was pouring rain, you got to practice with just your workout gear on in the gym. That was very rare, but we always called it the 'Boyd Allen Curse' because it'd be late afternoon pouring rain and never failed to quit



Pisgah Memorial Stadium

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# Mull sisters built a cheerleading legacy

BY TYLER AUFFHAMMER

For sisters Kari Mull Setser and Tara Mull Ryan, sports have always been in their blood, but it has been their passion for cheerleading that helped them build a legacy all their own.

The girls grew up in Bob's Sports Store in Waynesville, a business started by their grandfather, Bob Mull, and carried on by their father, Kenny Mull, and the extended family.

The sisters came by their love of sports early and honestly, playing softball, basketball, and even dancing.

## Setser leads the way

When Setser, the elder sister by three years, started at Waynesville Middle School, she decided to give cheerleading a try.

She relished the role as cheerleader, building friendships with her teammates to cheering on the team on game day.

Cheerleading became Setser's primary passion, and it followed her to Tuscola, where her role as cheerleader defined who she was as a person.

"I loved game day. The Friday Night Lights. One of my favorite things was the crisp fall air, the drumline and being able to cheer on the platform in front of your home crowd," said Setser.

She also enjoyed the many faceted roles a cheerleader took on.

"With cheer you have a chance to be involved in representing the school and be a leader," she said. "Through cheer, too, we were able to do community service and went to competitions, which boosts your self-esteem."



Kari Mull Setser (aged 7)

She remembers getting ready before games with her fellow cheerleaders and the long bus rides to games.

"Those were our best friends and they still are," she said.

Setser said she had four very close friends on the cheerleading team her senior year and they all still keep in touch.

"We were all in each other's weddings. Our friendship started early, like

preschool and first grade. For a little while, they danced, too, but then we cheered together. Even though we didn't go to the same colleges, we came right back together," she said.

## Back home again

Even though she had left cheerleading behind when she went to college to become an elementary school teacher, Setser was presented with the opportunity to lead the cheer team at Tuscola a few years ago.

"When the former cheer coach was leaving, she said, 'You're a mom and a teacher, that's so important. You're invested in HCS,'" Setser said. So, she accepted the job.

Now that she's back in the cheer world, she's found that, despite the changes, a lot of tradition has remained the same.

"There's a lot of new things that my girls do, but there are some that we did 25 years ago that are just classics. The fight song is the same. I tell the girls at practice, you never forget it," Setser said.

As a coach, her goal is to build girls of strong character.

"I want to build a program that shows our girls are scholar-athletes.. I want you to be kind, good people. Not if you were the top cheerleader; if you were kind," she said.

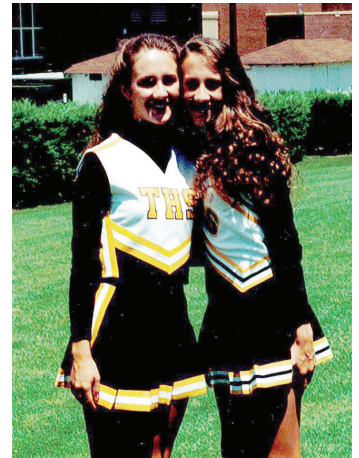
Cheerleading is a year-long job, too.

"We start Aug. 1 and go through the end of February. Try outs are in April and May and we have summer practices," Setser said. She tells her cheerleaders that a lot of their memories are going to be with each other.

Along with practicing and performing, the cheerleaders also have to fundraise for a lot of their gear, like competitive mats.

"We have to fundraise. We have to get all of the indoor wear, outdoor wear. It takes nine mats to be a competitive floor. Each mat is over \$1,000. Uniforms every five years could be \$8,000," Setser said.

But she does it all, no complaints, because she knows the value of the work her team is doing.



Kari Mull Setser, left, and Tara Mull Ryan, fall 1997

Continues on page 22





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Kari Setser, left, and her assistant coach Carlee Sutton

Diana Gates

That becomes apparent when they host the “Cheer babies” for one football game each fall. Girls ages 5 - 12 get to practice with the team, ride the bus and cheer at the game.

“I tell them that those little girls are watching every move that you

make. When we were in WMS, you were watching the girls, and everything that they did.

Even though Setser, especially as a Tuscola cheer alumna, can be the team’s harshest critic, she is also the girls’ biggest ally.

“No matter what you need, when it is, I’m gonna be there to help you,” Setser tells her girls.

### Younger sister goes pro

Growing up three years younger than her older sister, Tara Ryan Mull wanted nothing more than to follow her sister’s foot-

steps. When Setser was a varsity cheerleader, Ryan was on junior varsity.

“Once she was a Tuscola cheerleader, I had to be,” Ryan said. “It wasn’t a competitive thing. I wanted to be just like her.”

Even when Setser graduated, Ryan took over the spot as the resident “Mull” girl on the team. For her, though, it was the sisterhood she found on the team that solidified her passion for cheerleading.

“It was the bond that you had within the group,” she said. “In a time of adolescence when you’re already going through so many changes, it gives you a family of support that you know is there. I felt like my circle of friends was already established.”

Ryan also said being a cheerleader was crucial to gaining important life skills.

“Giving you a platform like that helps you learn about responsibility. You’re representing your school and your teammates. At that age, that’s something you haven’t thought about yet,” she said.

After graduating from Tuscola in 2001, Ryan attended Western Carolina University, where she was a member of the dance team for four years.

Her combination of cheer and dance experience led her to try out for the Carolina Panthers cheerleading team, also known as the Top Cats.



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## LEGACY

Trying out for an NFL team was a nerve-racking experience, she said. After all, she hadn't cheered since high school.

"What I tell girls is that the hardest part is walking through the door," she said. "Once you do that, everyone you meet is a cheerleader for everyone else. Once you're there, it's no longer competitive — everyone wants everyone else to do well."

Ryan was a TopCat cheerleader from 2006-11, reaching the Pro Bowl in her third year and eventually serving as team captain.

### Raising them right

These days, she's working the toughest job of her life: full-time mom to three — as fate would have it — boys.

Even though her boys are not following in her cheerleading and dance path, that doesn't stop Ryan from bringing her boys back home every now and again for a taste of Tuscola tradition.

"I brought them up this year for their first Tuscola-Pisgah game. It was everything that I remembered. Everything that I built up in their imagination was exceeded," she said. "Right when we pulled in, they could hear the rumbling. The lights in the mountains lit up the night sky. My boys were awestruck."

Ryan said her three boys enjoyed the full game experience: the band, the horns and, of course, the Mountaineer cheerleaders.

"For one little moment, they got to see what it was like for us growing up," she said.

And despite the big football game playing out on the field, Ryan couldn't help that her eyes strayed to her sister's cheerleading team, jumping, cheering and showing off their skills for the crowd of over 10,000 people.

"I felt pride in seeing that it looked like their bond was just the same as ours was," she said. "They represented well, and they served my memory well. I was proud to be a part of that."



Tara Mull Ryan as a member of the Carolina Panthers TopCats Cheerleaders

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# Three generations of Bears: Ivester/Sorrells family

BY TYLER AUFFHAMMER

Pisgah High School senior football player Dakota Sorrells comes by his football chops honestly.

He's the third generation in his family to suit up for the Bears after his great-grandfather, Ernest "Buddy" Ivester, and grandfather, William "Bill" Ivester.

For Sorrells, with the knowledge this will be the last season he suits up in red and black, every game will be special. As he places his pads, jersey and, finally, his helmet on, he'll have his family legacy with him.

## 'Red' Ivester a true athlete

Long before Sorrells or even his grandfather, Bill Ivester, were walking the field at Pisgah Memorial Stadium, Ernest Ivester was suiting up for the Canton High School team in the mid-1940s.

Known widely as "Buddy" or "Red" (due to his red hair), Ernest Ivester played football, basketball and baseball in Canton.

"He played halfback, and quarterback at times," said Kristy Ivester-Sorrells, Ernest Ivester's granddaughter and Sorrells' mother.

Ernest Ivester graduated from Canton High in 1947 and he was involved in fast-pitch softball for years while working for the Champion Paper mill in Canton.

Even in retirement, sports — which had defined his life up until that point — continued to give him pleasure.

Ivester-Sorrells grew up in Georgia, so she didn't spend a lot of daily contact with her grandfather, but when she finally



Mikell Clark-Webb

Kristy Ivester-Sorrells, left, and her son Dakota Sorrells got the chance to build a relationship with Ernest Ivester, sports was a constant.

"Once we moved up [to North Carolina], we did a lot with him because he was already [retired]. We stayed at his house, worked in the garden, rode the golf carts around and, of course, listened to ball games," she said.

Ernest Ivester passed away in 1991.

## Bill Ivester was a player from day one

Bill Ivester is a well-known figure around Bears football, and his passion for the game started early.

"My dad was huge into Pisgah," Ivester-Sorrells recalled. "One year for Christmas at about 6 or 7 years old, he wanted a football uniform. That's how much my dad was into football, even at a young age."

When he became a student at (then) Canton High, Bill Ivester played offensive lineman for coach Boyd Allen during the mid-1960s, and graduated in 1966. He was selected as a co-captain, as well.

"He was a good player," Ivester-Sorrells said of her dad. "A lot of people still talk about him."

After high school, Bill Ivester started driving trucks for rodeos, eventually marrying and settling in Georgia, where Ivester-Sorrells grew up.

Eventually, the family moved back to Canton, and Bill Ivester became a fixture at Pisgah Memorial Stadium on Friday nights.

"For as long as I can remember, my dad had a spot at the end zone fence between the scoreboard and the field goal post," Ivester-Sorrells said. **Continues on page 26**



Kristy Ivester-Sorrells

Bill Ivester poses with his Christmas present: a football uniform (circa 1954)



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## LEGACY

Bill Ivester also worked as an equipment assistant during the coaching tenure of Woody Fish.

Even after he became sick, it never stopped him from seeing the Bears football team play.

"Until he was very sick, he did not miss a game," Ivester-Sorrells said. "He even traveled to away games."

Bill Ivester passed away in 2012, but not before getting to see the next generation of Ivesters take the field.

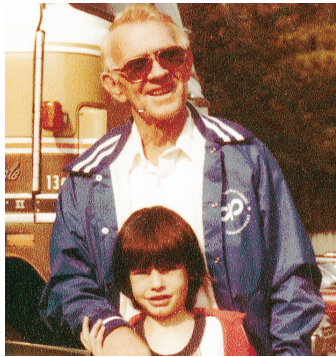
"Dakota was about 8-years old when dad died," Ivester-Sorrells said. "But he got to see him play youth ball."

### Family legacy comes full circle

Although the family lineage skipped a generation, Ivester-Sorrells said Bill Ivester made sure the football legacy picked right back up with her son.

"He's been in red and black his entire life," she said of Sorrells.

Sorrells started his playing days in Canton youth football, but football was a part of



Ernest Ivester, top, and Kristy Ivester-Sorells



Bill Ivester, right, and Dakota Sorrells

his life long before that. He had a Pisgah Bear — Bill Ivester — living nearby.

"When Dakota was about 3-years old, he'd be playing with my dad and my dad would say, 'Yep, he's going to be my football player. He's going to play by the river,' Ivester-Sorrells said, a reference to the Pigeon River that runs behind Pisgah Memorial Stadium.

"I remember my grandpa talking and watching football," Sorrells said of his early years.

Sorrells, now in his senior campaign, plays offensive and defensive line for the Pisgah Bears, and carries on the legacy his great-grandfather began.

It's that family legacy that helps drive him to be a better player.

"It's a motivation to keep the legacy going through football. Growing up with it, it's become a lifestyle," Sorrells said.

Sorrells will participate in the 100th anniversary game between Tuscola and Pisgah in October, and hopes to make it 10-straight wins versus the Mountaineers.

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# Three generations of Mountaineers: Sutton family



From left: Henry, Bobby and Will Sutton

Tyler Auffhammer

## BY TYLER AUFFHAMMER

Tradition is nothing new for the Suttons, whose forebears were among the first to settle the Cataloochee Valley. Will Sutton, his son Bobby, and now Will's grandson, Henry Sutton, have created a tradition as a Tuscola football family..

The Suttons boast three generations of Mountaineer football players, a lineage that began with Will Sutton, who graduated from Waynesville Township High School in 1964.

## Waynesville's golden age

Will Sutton had spent time on his junior high team, but said he didn't get much action until late in his ninth-grade season. When he arrived for Waynesville's annual football camp as a 10th-grader, he was in for a rude awakening.

"It was no picnic. We had little shacks to live in. It was tough," he said. The players practiced at Camp Adventure in Lake Junaluska.

Camp was a trying time for the boys who were new to the school and the team. Will Sutton was put in on the offensive line. His average size didn't bother the coaches. The only requirements to being an offensive lineman on the team were to be "quick, mean and tough," he said.

With drills, practices and lessons throughout the day, the

boys were exhausted by the end of the day.

"They beat me to death," Will Sutton recalled.

The older players who would become their teammates often gave underclassmen a hard time.

"We had a big nose guard and he wanted to hit me with everything he had," Will Sutton said. "He weighed about 240 pounds, and I weighed about 140."

But he was also surrounded by legendary names in Waynesville football.

His coach was Bill Milner, a Waynesville native who went to gridiron stardom at Duke University and then with the Chicago Bears and New York Giants.

"All I ask of you is to give it everything you got. Give it all you got," Will Sutton recalled Milner saying to the team, who wasn't a happy-go-lucky coach by any means.

"If you gave it all you got, you got along fine," Will Sutton said. "But, if he saw you out there loafing around, he wasn't too happy. He'd say, 'Hey, come here.' And he'd tell you what's going on."

One year, the team was riding a Greyhound bus to play Andrews High School. When they got there, soldiers were performing military maneuvers, and started drinking with the team's bus driver during the game. *Continues on page 28*

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## LEGACY

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“They gave him a little too much alcohol,” Will Sutton recalled. “He brought us back through the [Nantahala] Gorge and he straightened the road out.”

The erratic driving earned the ire of Milner, who told the driver to pull over.

“Coach said, ‘I’ve got some precious boys on here. I think a whole lot of myself, too, but you don’t think nothing about yourself. If you can get back on the bus and drive like a normal man, not like a drunk, you can go home. If not, I’m going to call and get another bus to take us home,’” Will Sutton recalled. “He shaped up after the Bear got a hold of him.”

To top it off, legendary coach C.E. Weatherby was his principal and played a critical role as coach emeritus and team chaplain despite being retired from coaching.

“If you played sports, and you tried at all, he’d help you any way he could,” Will Sutton said of Weatherby.

There weren’t many coaches on the Waynesville staff during those years, but the number didn’t matter.

“Milner ruled over all of them, and he told them how to play the game,” he said.

One of Will Sutton’s daily missions was getting home. C.E. Weatherby Stadium is over 20 miles from his home in Cataloochee Valley.

“We’d get out two minutes before 5 p.m. and run down to Frog Level Bridge,” Will Sutton said. “There’d be people coming down from Waynesville who would pick us up. But, sometimes you had to walk a long way before someone would pick you up.”

Even as a young boy, he remembers the Waynesville-Canton game having a lot of community passion around it.

“Five or 10 years before I played ball, they had a Thanksgiving Day game and it got nasty. About five boys got hurt,” he said.

For Will Sutton, though, it didn’t matter which team they were playing, he focused on the game itself.

“[Playing Canton] was just another ball game for me,” he said.

After a few years of playing under Milner and honing his football skills on the Waynesville gridiron, senior Will Sutton returned to football camp a more mature young man.

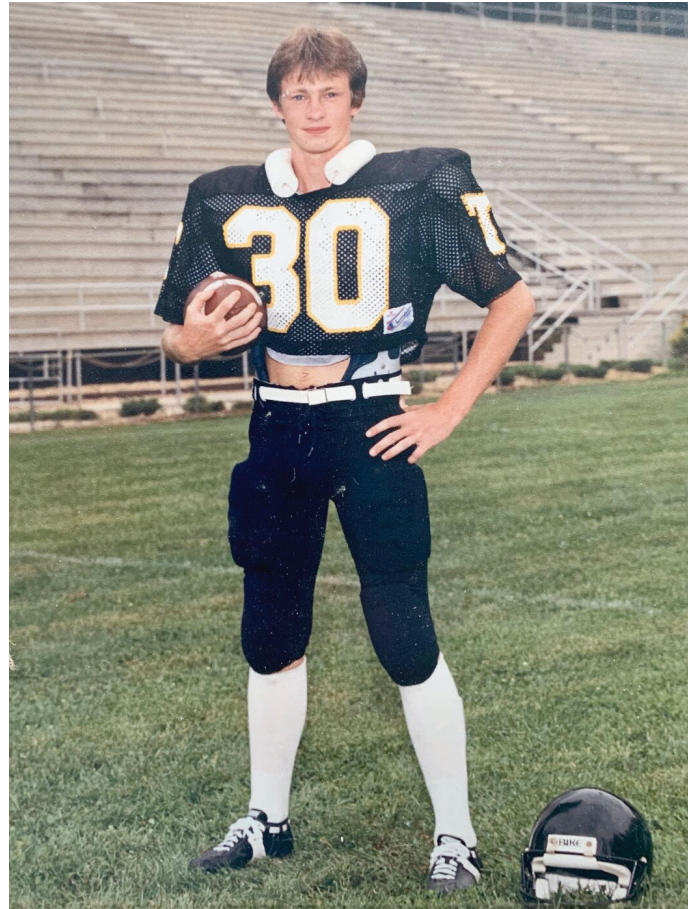
“The last year I was at camp it was no more than 43 degrees in August, and everybody was cold,” he recalled. “But I brought an extra blanket because I knew it was worth having one.”

### The poor class

Bobby Sutton, Will Sutton’s son, was brought up in a house steeped in football tradition.

“Daddy got us started on football when I was playing for Lake Junaluska Warriors,” he said, which usually started in fourth or fifth grade.

One of his eventual teammates, Raife Davis, was on those



Bobby Sutton as a Tuscola Mountaineer (circa 1987)

early teams. And Davis’ father, Steve Davis, was the coach.

And even when Bobby Sutton was at home in Cataloochee Valley, he was still practicing his skills. He spent day-in-day-out running up and down the yard playing football with his brothers and cousins.

“As far back as I remember, I had football on the brain,” he said.

By the time he got to Tuscola in 1983, the Mounties were on a roll under head coach Doug Brooks.

“I remember I went and watched a playoff game at Shelby, my ninth-grade year and boy, I was really excited to get on the team,” he said.

The classes ahead of them were successful teams with star players. But Brooks — in his wisdom, or his error — dubbed them the “poor class.”

Bobby Sutton, and many of his classmates, took that as a challenge from Brooks.

“[Success] was expected out of ourselves,” he said.

The boys began with the goal of proving their coach wrong. And in Bobby Sutton’s junior year, ‘the poor class’ finally got its chance.





Henry Sutton watches a game in 2022

Diana Gates

That season, the Mountaineers made the playoffs and went deep into the third round before they were knocked off.

In his senior year, expectations for the team were high. Bobby Sutton, who played strong safety, was elected a team captain alongside friend Raife Davis.

Just like the team did the year prior, they outperformed their coach's nickname and made the playoffs.

Bobby Sutton ranks the McDowell playoff game as one of his favorites.

"They were ranked really high, and it was a really tight

game," he said.

Tuscola managed to score a touchdown with 40 seconds to tie the game. But McDowell had a chance to score and avoid overtime.

Bobby Sutton and his defensive teammates took the field to make a last stand and, hopefully, force overtime, or get the ball back for their offense.

"They had this wide receiver that was really fast and their go-to guy," he recalled.

Bobby Sutton was in position at his strong safety spot, but one of his coaches noticed the opponent's star receiver was left uncovered.

"Coach yelled at me to get over and cover him," he said. "I got over there and ended up making the interception."

Bobby Sutton's interception sealed the tie and forced overtime, and the Mountaineers scored to win the game.

Tuscola went on to the third round of the playoffs that season again, but fell just short.

In the end, though, it was all about exceeding the expectations their coach had set for them and then some.

### 100th anniversary opportunity

Getting the third generation onto the field at C.E. Weath-erby was no easy feat. But Henry Sutton, son of Bobby Sutton, did just that, and is making the most of his opportunity to continue his family's legacy. *Continues on page 30*

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## **LEGACY**

Henry Sutton is a senior this season, and will be on the field for the 100th anniversary game between Tuscola and Pisgah. But you'd never know the young man wearing No. 22 grew up far and away in Montana.

His father worked as a smokejumper — airborne firefighters who parachute into forest fires — and started a family in Montana.

So, during his freshman and sophomore years in high school, Henry Sutton played Montana-style football.

"We were playing six- and eight-man football," Henry Sutton said. "We had seven kids on the team my sophomore year."

The lack of people in some remote places of Montana forced schools to field six- and eight-man teams.

"I enjoy football a lot, but it was tough, especially competing against teams that had a deeper roster and could substitute kids in and out. It was tough to compete,"



Henry Sutton in a game in 2022

*Diana Gates*



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## LEGACY

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he said.

In Montana-rules football, everyone is a running back and receiver. The constant running gave Henry Sutton the stamina he'll need as he enters his final season on the gridiron.

The Suttons moved back to North Carolina at the tail-end of his sophomore season after the football season had ended in Montana.

In Waynesville, football was just starting. COVID delayed the football season to the spring, which gave Henry Sutton a chance to experience Tuscola football like his dad and grandad before him.

"I heard a lot of stories from my dad," he said. "A lot of people knew my dad. Coach [Chris] Brookshire was on the team with my dad, too, so I heard a lot from him about it."

Unfortunately, he couldn't play due to high school athletic rules that prevent kids from playing two seasons in one year, but he was a part of the team.

As fate would have it, the family moved back to Montana before Henry Sutton's junior year. By that time, his Montana high school had grown — it now had an eight-man football squad.

In 2022, the Suttons returned, and are committed to a full season in Waynesville. The 100th anniversary of Waynesville and Canton football is as good a time as any to play your first real season as a Tuscola Mountaineer.

"It's a good time to have a senior year," Henry Sutton said. "Being in the 100th year of the rivalry, it's going to be really cool."

He plays running back primarily for Tuscola, and has already scored his first touchdown in the Black and Gold. He's already getting a taste of what it means to play football in Haywood County, too.

"Whenever we're working out, coaches will constantly remind us to put in the work to beat Pisgah," he said.

Will Sutton said it feels good to know his grandson is finally getting a chance to play for the Waynesville team, just like he did.

And Bobby Sutton is a proud dad, too.

"Watching your kids play is better than playing in the game," he said. "It's going to be cool for Henry to get that experience. I'm happy for him."

Three generations in, Henry Sutton is continuing his family's football legacy.

They hope it will be capped off by a win over Pisgah.



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# PISGAH Was TOP Team In THE 1960s and 1970s

BY KAYLA SMITH

Football in the 1970s was different than what it is now, but in those years, Pisgah Bears football was known as one of the best programs in the state of North Carolina and the best program in Western North Carolina.

The team separated itself from other area squads after winning state championships in 1966, 1971, 1975 and 1976 in the 3A conference.

An Asheville-area newspaper even dubbed the 1971 Pisgah Bears football team “the greatest Western North Carolina high school football team.”

Even if Pisgah wasn't winning state championships, it was still making the title game. The team was state runner up in 1970 and 1974. Both of those years motivated the team for its championship seasons the subsequent years.

“Being able to get to high school and play as a Bear in Pisgah Memorial Stadium was what everyone looked forward to,” said Pisgah alumnus Pat Smathers, who played on the 1971 state championship team as a sophomore and then went on to play for Duke University.

“Back then, teams represented your town and community. It was a sense of pride to be able to come from this community and to be able to play for Pisgah,” he said.

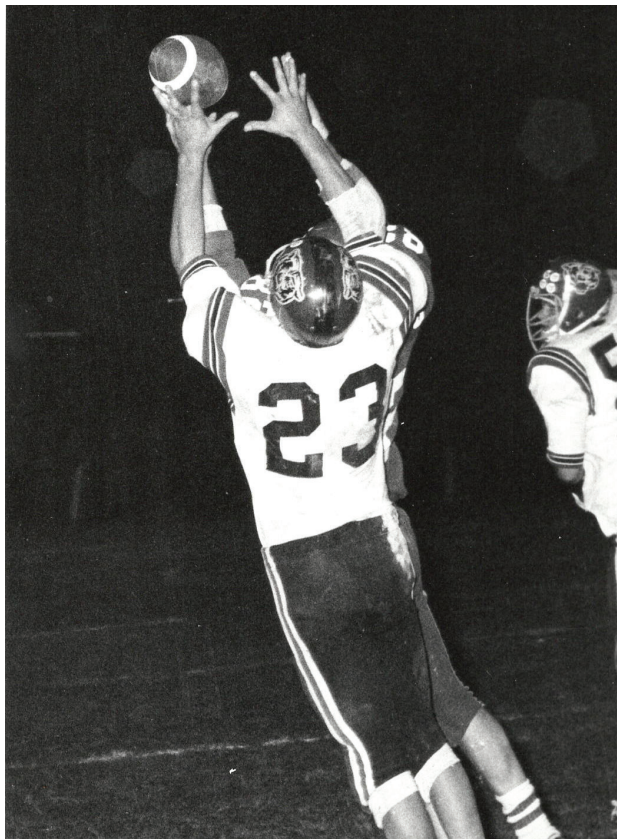
In 1971, Pisgah football went 13-0 in the regular season and beat teams in the state playoffs like South Stokes and East Alamance.

In 1975, the Bears played Havelock in the state championship and, in 1976, played Clinton in the title game. Pisgah beat both teams and earned back-to-back state titles.

The energy in the community was high.

During these years, football was more than just a high school sport. It meant a lot to the communities that these high schools were in. Football brought the Canton community together.

People would carpool to watch big playoff games and gather



David Singleton in 1974

*The Mountaineer*

to celebrate for the team. Football became a tradition. It was special, and being able to grow up and play for the Pisgah Bears became a special right-of-passage for many boys.

## Football camp

What started the momentum that led the team to numerous championship seasons was the work the players put in during the summer, especially during the week-long football camp at Camp Hope right before the season.

During this week, the team had three practices a day with pads and hitting and a last-day scrimmage.

This camp built team chemistry and allowed time for the players to get to know one another as brothers, and bond.

“The atmosphere was great. Spending that week created team unity. It separated who really wanted to play and who didn't. Those who didn't wouldn't make it through the week,” said Pisgah alumnus David Singleton, who went on to play college football at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill as a defensive back from 1977–80.

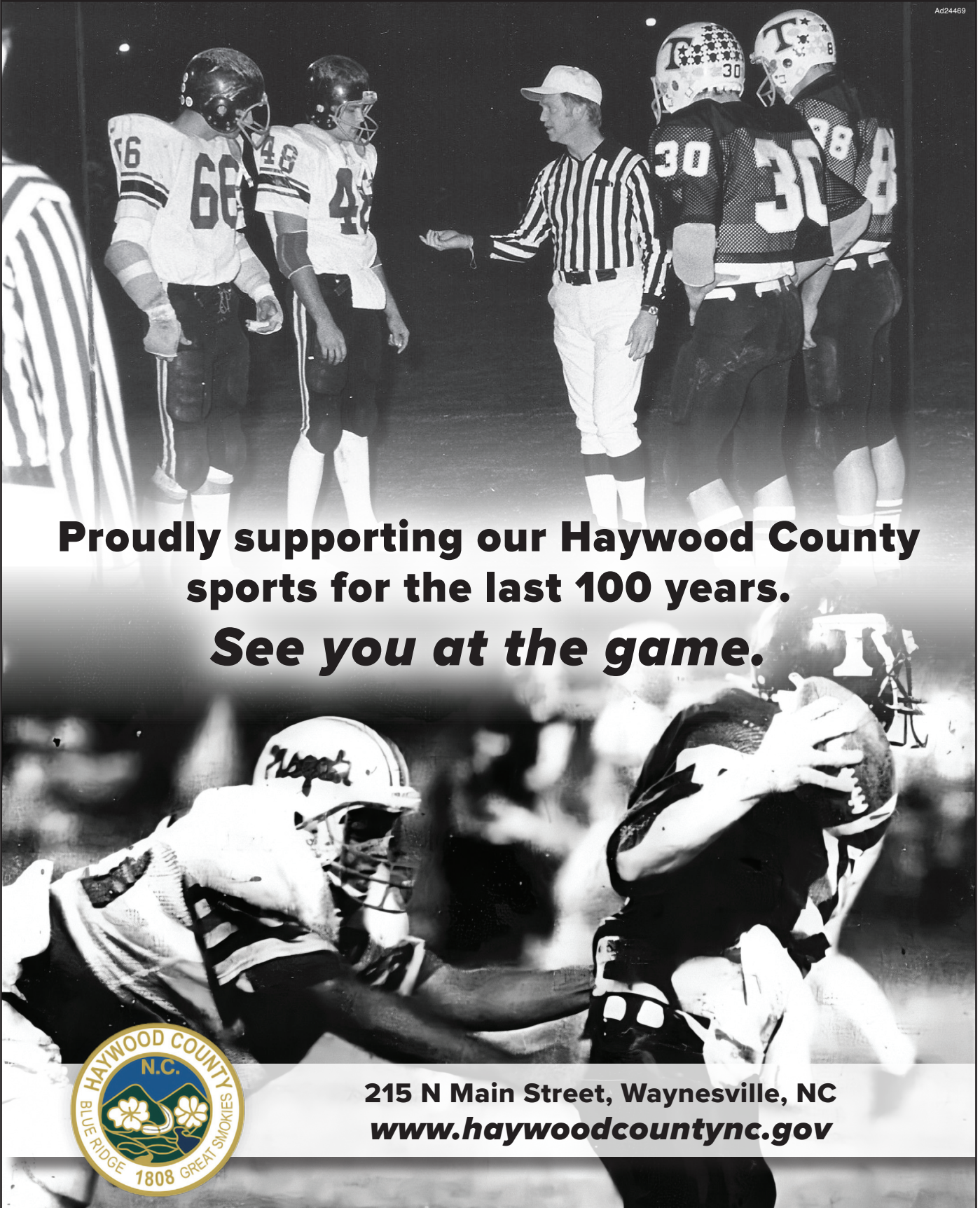
Singleton is also the nephew of the late Jimmy Poston. Poston played on the 1966 team as a defensive tackle, went on to have a successful college career at The University of South Carolina and was an 11th round draft pick for the Oakland Raiders.

From players like Poston, Singleton, Smathers, the Streeters or Frank Leatherwood, to coaches like Boyd Allen, Perry Person and Joe Compton, Pisgah created a powerhouse in the 1960s and 1970s, establishing themselves as one of the premier teams in the North Carolina football world.

“Unless you were there, you wouldn't be able to understand the dynamic that our team had. We understood that we were playing for more than a title. We had our whole community with us,” Singleton said.

The times may have changed, but the legacy of the Pisgah Bears from those years will endure.





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# Revisiting Tuscola's state co-title in 1972

BY MIKE SCHOEFFEL

For modern football fans, most of whom have grown accustomed to the presence of overtime, it seems almost unthinkable that a high school state championship game could end in a tie.

Yet, that's what happened Dec. 3, 1972, when Tuscola and Sanford played to a 14-14 draw in front of thousands of people at C.E. Weatherby Stadium in Waynesville. Thus the teams had to share a piece of the Class 3A state title.

That ending seems as though it would have felt a bit like "kissing your sister," as the old saying goes, but given the circumstances, it came as a relief to many of the Mountaineers.

The circumstances were as follows: Tuscola was down 14-0 at halftime, drove 87 yards over the third and fourth quarters to make it 14-12, and then completed a two-point conversion to tie it up.

Such a neutral conclusion seemed fitting, in a come-full-circle way, considering the Mountaineers had opened the season with a 14-14 tie with Sylva-Webster, a team that finished undefeated (13-0-1) and went on to win the Class 2A state title. Between those draws, however, the Mountaineers were nearly unstoppable, save a 17-0 loss to rival Pisgah at the end of September (which they avenged with a 16-6 victory in the second round of the playoffs).

By season's end, the Mountaineers had outscored their opponents 319-78.

"We tore it up, for the most part," said Nevin Caldwell, the team's small-but-scrappy center.

The squad was led by a strong group of seniors, including Caldwell and Ronnie Kirkpatrick, the latter of whom remembers being called into the office by head coach Joe Caldwell – or "Big Joe," as he's now affectionately known – for an important chat before the



*The Mountaineer*

A Tuscola player (No. 32) plunges through the defense in 1972. season began.

"He said, 'You're a leader, and I expect you to act like one,'" recalled Kirkpatrick. "I imagine he did that to all the seniors, but it gave me a challenge, and it's something that I took very seriously."

The team was filled with overachievers, as Caldwell and Kirkpatrick remember. Guys like linebacker and fellow senior Mike Tate, who despite being only about 160 pounds, "could absolutely knock the snot out of you," as Caldwell put it. In another article that appeared in that Dec. 6, 1972, edition of *The Mountaineer*, coach Caldwell called Tate "one of the best linebackers I have ever coached."

Guys like Caldwell, Kirkpatrick, Tate, Dehart, David Finger, Jeff Caldwell, Keith Watkins, R.S. Baramore, Tim Rhinehart, Dale Blaine, Gary Allen and countless others, comprised the heart of that historic group. None stood out individually, yet all seamlessly coalesced to become perhaps the finest football team in school history.

Several players from the Class of 1973 had opportunities to go on to play at the college level, yet none did, according to Kirkpatrick. One of those players was Kirkpatrick himself, who could have played at VMI in Lexington, Virginia. He was also invited to compete in a North Carolina high school all-star game, but turned that down, too.

Why?

"I didn't feel like I could ever experience anything like I just came out of [at Tuscola]," he said. "By myself, I didn't feel like I was much help. But with the team by my side, I felt like we could move mountains."

Kirkpatrick took the lessons he learned during his time on the



*The Mountaineer*

Tuscola's David Finger (far right) runs around the defense in 1974.



## THE RIVALRY



*The Mountaineer*

Nevin Caldwell's letterman jacket

career in business. Caldwell now lives in Raleigh and is the COO of Panolam Surface Systems.

"What I learned from Big Joe [coach Caldwell] was to compete as a team, know your position and play it well," he said. "A lot of the lessons he taught me are lessons I try to preach to folks in the professional world."

Perhaps the most telling quote about the collective character of the 1972 team came from coach Caldwell, who had this to say to Nick Nicholson, *The Mountaineer's* sports editor from yesteryear, after the state title draw:

"This is one of the greatest team efforts that I have ever seen in my 15 years of coaching. We didn't really expect to go this far at

high school gridiron — hard work, unity and pride — and applied them to life, earning his master's degree and starting his own company, which he recently sold.

Caldwell, too, credits the 1972 season for laying the character-building groundwork that eventually led to a successful

the beginning of the season, but everyone seemed to perform at or better than we expected."

Many of those players gathered at C.E. Weatherby Stadium to be honored on the 45th anniversary of their achievement in 2018. Caldwell didn't claim to know what the recognition meant in any greater sense. But he did know the significance it carried for the players who united all those years ago to pull off perhaps the greatest achievement in the annals of Tuscola football.

"Honestly, I don't know how much it means to the [fans and students] who will be there," said Caldwell. "The players look at us like a bunch of old guys. But for us who are coming back to Waynesville from all over, it means something. We're coming back there because we care about each other."

"Plus, it's a good chance to reminisce and revisit everyone again," he added. "You get to see who's turned into a couch potato and who looks like they could still go out there and play."

*This article was originally published in The Mountaineer in 2018.*



A medal honoring the 1972 state title

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## THE RIVALRY

# LIFE AT PISGAH FOOTBALL CAMP



Pisgah football players complete drills at practice in the 1970s.

*The Mountaineer*

### BY TYLER AUFFHAMMER

For the boys who passed through Canton High School and, later, Pisgah High School, the thought of “football camp” brings back a lot of memories.

Pat Smathers is one of those, having spent his years as a Pisgah Bear at Camp Hope in the 1970s. He played on the 1971 state championship team as a sophomore and then went on to play for Duke University.

“Football camp was a really big deal,” he said. “It really was sort of a boot camp. It was a type of rite of passage, you could say, for the young men in the community,” said Smathers, who started playing football when he was just 6 years old.

While it’s uncertain which coach started the first Canton-based football camp, Smathers said he believes it began in the 1950s on Pisgah Creek.

“The first camp was actually on Pisgah Creek up in Cruso. Several people in town had camps up there,” Smathers said, alluding to the rustic cabins various families built along Pisgah Creek.

He also believes the camp was started to help build up discipline and strength in the boys, whose fathers and coaches were World War II veterans.

“I think that a lot of the fathers of the guys who were playing ball and leaders in the community were veterans and had fought

in the war. I think their attitude was, ‘Look, military boot camp is hard, but it taught us a lot.’ So it was a very disciplined, hard thing. Someone came up with the idea that we needed to make the young men on our team strong and disciplined. For a week we’re not going to do anything except practice football,” Smathers said.

So the boys of Canton High and later Pisgah would travel to stay at the camps on Pisgah Creek. Smathers remembers visiting the camp at Pisgah Creek when he was about five years old.

“In the mornings, [the players] would get up, get their uniforms on and run down to the field and clear all the river rock out of it,” he said.

In the 1960s, the camp was moved to Camp Hope and, in the 1970s, Smathers was now old enough to join the Pisgah High football team, and remembers his time at camp well.

“I couldn’t wait to be a Pisgah Bear. I played Canton youth sports and then junior high, but my first real experience of football was football camp,” he recalled.

He said they would have three-a-day practices, among a list of other drills and workouts.

“We’d get up before breakfast and run the entire road around Camp Hope and then we’d have a morning practice, breakfast, practice midday and then there was a late afternoon practice, which was a full scrimmage,” Smathers recalled. **Continues on page 38**





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## THE RIVALRY

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He said the coaches were on top of players, instructing them constantly about technique and skills like catching, passing, kicking, blocking and tackling.

"It was very well run," Smathers said. "It was a set schedule and it was hard and all we did was play football and practice individual skills."

To top off the boys' unyielding day, they would even have meetings at night.

"It was a very strict, disciplined practice. Any of the guys who went through football camps will tell you it was a hard, knockdown, but fun, thing to do," Smathers said.

Being secluded and locked in with other boys, many of them upperclassmen, hazing and pranking was constant.

"Back then, there were a lot of things that you couldn't get away from now. There was a certain amount of hazing in the rooms at night. The seniors were always initiating the underclassmen," Smathers said. "Either you were going to get thrown in the river or got water thrown on you at night. One of my biggest fears was laying down in those cold mountains with a wet bed. The seniors ruled the roost and the bunkhouses. You didn't get a lot of sleep because you were scared to death."

Sometimes the heat, the cold, the hits or the hazing got too much for some boys, and they would walk off in the middle of the

night and return home, effectively quitting the team.

"It was always a question when football camp was going on — 'who left?' 'Who crossed the river and went home?' Many were the story of the guys who said, 'I'm done. I'm going home,'" Smathers recalled.

For those who did stay, camp didn't get any easier.

Many former Pisgah players who were playing college football would come up on Thursday afternoon because they knew the boys were going to scrimmage. So the collegiate players would fall in with some of the high school players and scrimmage the rest of the team.

"I can remember when I was there, guys that were playing college ball would come back and knock the absolute devil out of you," Smathers said. "It made us better but I don't know how you'd get away with that now."

Smathers remembers one particular player coming back to help "teach" the new Bears players.

"One year I went one-on-one with Charlie Brown. He was a lineman. I remember when I was a senior and Charlie came back, one year later, he hit me once or twice and had learned to use his forearm in college, and rang my bell," he said.

The camp was also an opportunity for the boys to get scouted.

"A lot of the college recruiters would come. We didn't have internet or game films. It really was the recruiters getting out and beating the bushes," Smathers said.

Smathers started getting recruited his sophomore year and guesses it was fun for the coaches to come down to Camp Hope to see the boys practice.

"Some would come and stay all day. The coaches saw us going up against older guys. They'd say, 'You're strong enough, big enough.' It gave the opportunity to see guys go one-on-one," he said.

By the end of camp, those boys that had seen it through were now officially Pisgah Bears.

"When you came out of football camp, you felt like you really accomplished something," Smathers said.

Even though camp was a rough experience, Smathers said the bonds that were built between players were unbreakable.

"There is a bond because we were there, every year for three years. One thing about Canton, and now Bethel and Clyde, we have a very strong commitment to our youth sports and middle school and high school," he said. "I think football camp was at that time an example of the commitment of the community in how you wanted to develop the focus on a team and that has continued to carry over into today," he said.

Smathers believes that community mentality carried over into girls' sports, which were later added at Pisgah.

"Sports is a great way to truly build character, to have kids grow and accept victory and defeat. You see that attitude is not just in football but also with the advent of girls' sports, you see the same thing in the softball team, girls' soccer," he said.

Smathers said the camp continued at Camp Hope until the 1980s, when it was moved to Pisgah High School.



*The Mountaineer*

Pisgah football players watch practice in the 1970s.





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# ‘Pig’ Bryson ran his way into the record books

BY AARIK LONG

“My brother was always told that he was too little; that he wasn’t big enough.”

That is how Sheldon “Pig” Bryson’s brother, Michael Bryson, described his brother’s motivations to be the very best at what he did. And Tuscola fans will know, what Pig Bryson did best was play football.

Bryson was among the very best to ever play the running back position, not just at Tuscola High School, but in Western North Carolina as a whole.

Most wouldn’t know it, but as a child, Bryson dealt with rheumatic fever and was told he would never play sports. That did not stop him.

“Football is what he loved from the time he was 2, 3 years old,” Michael Bryson said. “So he put in the work. I wanted to be a boxer, so I’d run lots of miles. I’d run from Waynesville to Canton. My brother would run as far as he could go and then he would come back and run sprints.”

As a child, Bryson sneaked out and went to youth league football practice to follow his love of the sport, starting what would be a legendary career in Haywood County.

He had four solid years in a Tuscola jersey, the best of which came in 1974, his senior season.

Michael Bryson recalled his brother working out for Ara Parseghian that season.

At the time, Parseghian was head coach for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish football team, and was coming off his second national title win in 1973.

Parseghian asked to see Bryson, thinking the running back was much bigger than he was based on the stories he’d heard out of Western North Carolina.

During the workout, Bryson ran a 9.7-second 100-yard dash and a 4.4-second 40-yard dash, according to Michael Bryson.

“Ara thought Pig was not who he was wanting to see,” Michael Bryson said. “He told [Tuscola] coach [Joe] Caldwell that he can



*The Mountaineer*

Pig Bryson carries the ball in 1974.

take a joke as well as anybody, but his time was valuable and he wanted to see that real running back that everybody talked about.”

Michael Bryson said his brother was justifiably upset, and told Parseghian, “I know who you’re recruiting, but I am the best football player on the field.”

Parseghian asked how much Bryson weighed, and Michael Bryson said his brother replied, “Friday night, I will weigh 800 damn pounds, and we will win the game.”

That Friday night, the Mountaineers followed through on Bryson’s promise, crushing Mount Airy 34-6.

Bryson put up an incredible performance of his own, rushing for 189 yards and three touchdowns.

“And then he cried,” Michael Bryson said. “He said, ‘Why does everyone think because they’re tall, that they’re better than me? They’re not big. They’re just tall.’”

“And he did 200 pushups, curls, squats and sit-ups because he wanted to be the best. That’s who my brother was,” Michael Bryson continued.

Throughout the 1974 season, Bryson proved he really was the best on the field. In an earlier game against crosstown rival Pisgah, he put on one of the most legendary performances in the rivalry’s storied history.

The Mountaineers won a low-scoring, 12-7 game behind 257 rushing yards, of which 252 were Bryson’s, shattering the previous Tuscola rushing yards record of 214.

Bryson scored all 12 points with two touchdowns.

In a game against Enka later that season, Bryson eclipsed his own single-game rushing record, amassing 305 yards on the ground and scored five touchdowns. He even had a shot at a sixth before giving himself up at the 7-yard line to avoid running up the score. The final score was 68-19.

The game put Bryson over the 2,000-yard mark on the season, as well.

**Continues on page 42**



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## THE RIVALRY



Pig Bryson carries the ball versus Mt. Airy in 1974

*The Mountaineer*

After graduation, Bryson spent a short time at North Carolina Central University.

"He did get a scholarship to attend N.C. Central. He went there on a full scholarship," said Rod Conley, Bryson's only child.

But a collegiate career was not to be, as Bryson suffered a career-ending leg injury.

Although he was not able to have the same impact on the field that he did at Tuscola, he did have an impact off of the field.

"When he went to college, his best friend was Reggie Smith," Michael Bryson said.

After a stint in the NFL, Smith found success in the Arena Football League, and was inducted into the Arena Football Hall of Fame in 2002.

"[Smith] says to this day that he learned to work really hard from my brother and the work he put in," said Michael Bryson.

Bryson's life was cut short after being shot and killed in 1993, but his legacy as a player and a man will live on in the collective memory of Haywood County football fans.

Despite his size, which some thought just wasn't big enough, Bryson played much bigger than he actually was, and left behind a legacy that was truly larger-than-life.

"He always put his all in on game night," Michael Bryson said. "It was strictly tunnel vision and a controlled fury when he hit the field."

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# BEARS IN THE PROS

BY KAYLA SMITH

Some Canton boys are able to call themselves Pisgah Bears, and some show enough promise to earn a scholarship to play at the collegiate level, but only three players have ever gone pro: Jimmy Poston, David Burch and Frank Leatherwood.

## Burch becomes a Blue Devil

David Burch attended Canton High School, and was a member of the 1956 state champion football team.

After graduation in 1957, he earned a scholarship to play football for Duke University, where played for five seasons.

Burch went pro with the Washington Redskins and spent one season with the team in 1962.

## Poston joins Madden

Jimmy Poston got his start as a defensive tackle for Bethel High School, playing there from 1963-65. After Bethel was consolidated into Pisgah High School in 1966, Poston played under head coach Boyd Allen and the team was crowned state champions.

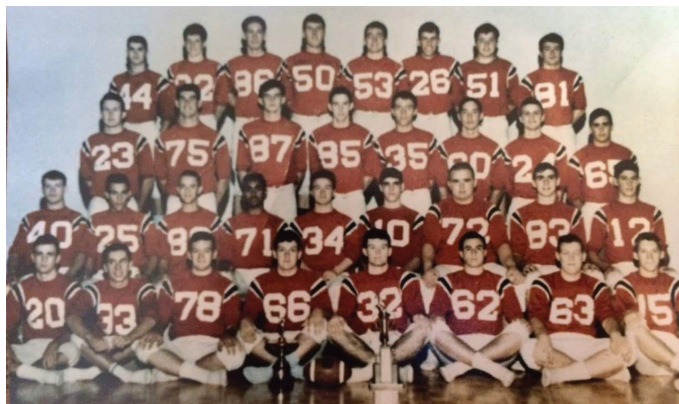
Poston earned a scholarship to play at the University of South Carolina when the team was a part of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) from 1967-1970. He played under coach Paul Dietzel.

With the Gamecocks, Poston was elected a team captain, selected as an All-ACC and an All-American and was named the most outstanding college athlete in the state of South Carolina.

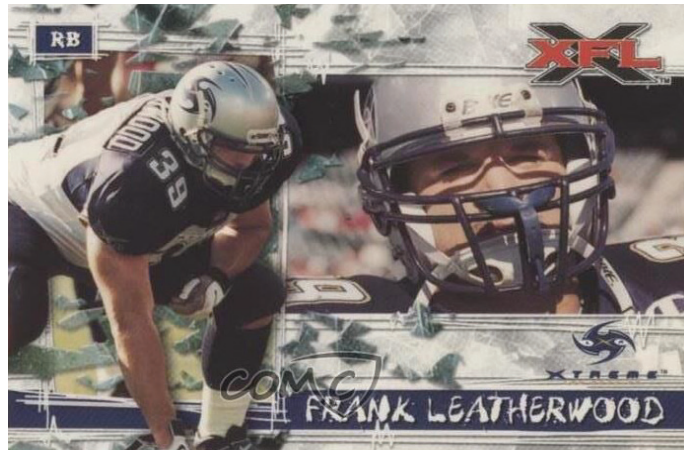
Poston's Gamecocks were ACC Champions in 1969 with a perfect 6-0 record in the ACC, which remains their only conference championship in program history.

As a senior in 1970, Poston was elected a team co-captain.

He was selected in the 11th round (279th overall) of the 1971 NFL Draft by the Oakland Raiders. Leading the team was Hall of Fame coach John Madden.



The 1966 state champion Pisgah Bears



A 2001 XFL trading card for Frank Leatherwood

## Leatherwood wins Million Dollar Game

Like Poston and Burch before him, Frank Leatherwood got his start as a Pisgah Bear, spending his developmental years in Canton during the early 1990s.

After graduation, he played fullback for the Appalachian State Mountaineers from 1995-1998, where he compiled 28 receptions for 364 yards and one touchdown as a senior. Leatherwood was named a First-Team All-Southland Conference player that season.

In total, Leatherwood recorded 83 receptions for 1,036 yards and 15 touchdowns during his four years in Boone.

Leatherwood went undrafted in the 1999 NFL Draft but earned a spot on the Miami Dolphins' practice squad during Jimmy Johnson's coaching tenure.

He was allocated to NFL Europe's Amsterdam Admirals in 2000, and made 23 receptions for 251 yards and one touchdown.

He was then drafted by the Los Angeles Xtreme in the 2001 XFL Draft with the 128th overall pick. He played for the Xtreme in 2001 and won the Million Dollar Game (the championship game) at season's end.

Leatherwood also had short stints with the Georgia Force and Detroit Fury — two other XFL teams — from 2002-2003.

Leatherwood said he wouldn't change a thing about his career. "I'm lucky to have been able to get that far. I never dreamed that I would. My experience was amazing," he said. "The XFL brought excitement back to the sport for me. The pay was the same and you got bonuses for winning. It was really fun."

He said that his playing days were some of the best of his life.

"Set your goals high, and don't let anyone say you can't. Cherish it all because those years you get to play become some of the best," Leatherwood said.

# MOUNTAINEERS IN THE PROS

BY CHARLES ALLISON

Mountaineer football has a rich history, dating back over 100 years to 1922, but only four players from Waynesville Township or Tuscola High Schools are known to have played professional football.

## Fred Crawford

Crawford played on the 1927 and 1928 Waynesville Township teams, primarily as an end. His teams went 2-0 against Canton, winning 19-0 in 1927 and 12-6 in 1928.

Crawford joined the McCallie School of Chattanooga for a season of prep school ball in 1929, and was named the school's top athlete for the 1929-30 school year.

It was at Duke University where Crawford earned his reputation. He played for the Blue Devils from 1931-1933. He was named to the All-Southern team and was a second-team All-American that year.

Duke finished 9-1 in 1933 and won the Southern Conference Championship. Crawford was named first-team All-American, the first native North Carolinian to ever be awarded the honor.

Legendary Duke coach Wallace Wade declared him to be one of the finest and quickest players that he ever coached.

Crawford had extraordinary speed and quickness for the day. He was timed at 10.0 in the 100 yard dash. According to his niece, Bo Prevost, Crawford took ballet classes while at Duke, which aided his agility. He was utilized on punt coverage, too, as his speed allowed the Blue Devils to contain and shut down their opponent's return.

Crawford was selected to play in the first college All-American All-Star game in 1934 at Soldier Field in Chicago.

Crawford signed with the Chicago Bears for the 1935 season, his only pro season.

Accolades for Crawford's career poured in over the subsequent years: North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in 1964, College Football Hall of Fame in 1973, Duke University Athletic Hall of Fame in 1976 and WNC Sports Hall of Fame in 1978.

Crawford passed away on Mar. 5, 1974, at the age of 62.



Bo Prevost

Fred Crawford

## Bill Milner

Milner played for Waynesville Township High School from 1937-1939, primarily playing halfback.

He was team captain in 1939, and led Waynesville to a 13-0 win against Canton that season. The win gave Waynesville the 1939 Blue Ridge Conference Championship. Milner would be named to the All Blue Ridge Conference team.

Milner attended the University of South Carolina, where he was a member of the freshman team as an end and fullback for the 1940 season. He was named to the All-Southern Conference sophomore team for 1941.

During World War II, Milner enlisted but was allowed to continue his college studies. He spent one more season with the Gamecocks, and was elected as a captain in 1943. Before the season began, Milner was reassigned to Duke by the Marine Corps.

Milner had a great 1943 season, and was named All-Southern Conference and a collegiate All-American, the second Waynesville native to receive the honor. The Blue Devils went 8-1 and won the Southern Conference Championship.

He missed the 1944 and 1945 seasons on active duty.

Duke welcomed Milner back for his senior season in 1946, and was named co-captain. The Blue Devils went 4-5.

The Chicago Bears signed Milner as a guard in February 1947. Milner started six games for the Bears from 1947-48.

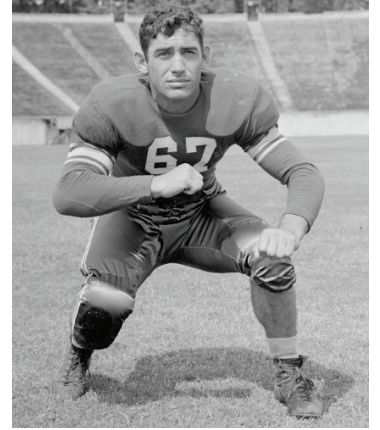
Milner was traded to the New York Giants in 1950. He started all 12 games that season for the Giants. He was also elected team captain. Milner retired from football at the end of the season and returned to Haywood County to raise his family.

Milner was announced as the new head coach at Waynesville in 1959. The Mountaineers finished 10-0, but lost to Morehead 17-7 in the playoffs. Milner was named WNC Coach of the Year.

The Mountaineers won the Western 3A state title over Chapel Hill High in 1964. Milner received his second WNC Coach of the Year award.

Milner resigned as head coach in 1965 and was named assistant principal of the new Tuscola High School in 1966.

Milner was inducted into the WNC Sports Hall of Fame in 1979. He passed away in 2006 at the age of 84.



Duke University Digital Repository

Bill Milner



## THE RIVALRY

### Mark Wallace

Mark Wallace arrived at Tuscola High School with new head coach Doug Brooks in 1980. Wallace quickly made his mark with hard-hitting in summer camp. A sophomore, Wallace was named a starting linebacker. Tuscola won the Big MAC conference Championship (10-2 record), advanced to the second round of the state playoffs, and Wallace was named an All-Conference linebacker.

In 1981, the Mountaineers finished 7-3 on the season but did not make the playoffs. Wallace earned his second-straight All-Big MAC Conference honor.

In 1982, Wallace was named one of the four senior co-captains. One of the season highlights was a 50-14 win over Pisgah. The 1982 team became the third group of seniors to defeat Pisgah all three years of their high school career.

Tuscola made the playoffs, and Wallace received his third-straight selection to the Big MAC All-Conference team. This was the first time a Tuscola Mountaineer player had been so honored, and he was named an All-Western Region player. He was also selected for the N.C. Coaches East-West All-Star game.

After graduation, Wallace signed with Winston-Salem State University. He was named an All-CIAA linebacker for both the 1986 and 1987 seasons. During his college career, WSSU won the CIAA Southern Division every year and won the conference championship game in 1987.

Wallace was inducted into the Rams Athletic Hall of Fame in 2017.

Wallace was signed as a free agent by the Dallas Cowboys in 1988.

He recalled there were 15 or more linebackers signed to camp and he survived until the third round of cuts, when he was released.

The Hamilton Tiger-Cats of the Canadian Football League (CFL) signed him as a free agent in 1989, but he injured an ankle and spent the rest of the season on the inactive roster. It was his last time in the pros.

Forty years later, when asked about his memories of playing Pisgah, he recalled the excitement of the players and the students and the fans in anticipation of Friday night. He still feels pride that he and his teammates never lost to their county rivals. **Continues on page 46**



Mark Wallace

Courtesy WSSU

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## THE RIVALRY

### Jonathan Crompton

Jonathan Crompton transferred from Erwin to Tuscola in 2003, and the team started the season 8-0 until they ran into a loaded Asheville High squad, and Tuscola fell 35-28.

The 8-0 run included a 27-0 thrashing of Pisgah, in which Crompton threw one touchdown pass and ran for another. He said the crowds were so large that they hindered the Tuscola team buses from getting to the stadium.

Tuscola qualified for the state playoffs but was knocked off by High Point Central. Crompton was named to the All-MAC team.

The Mountaineers broke out to a 5-0 start in 2004, including a 28-16 win at Pisgah. A late season loss to Asheville put Tuscola in second place in the conference. The team defeated Hunter Huss 42-22 in the first round and earned another shot at Asheville in the second round. The Cougars beat Tuscola 28-14.

Crompton was named to the N.C. Shrine Bowl, played in the U.S. Army All-American game and was named a Parade All-American.

He signed with the University of Tennessee in 2005. Crompton played in seven games for the Vols in 2006, starting one. He played in seven games again in 2007 and, in 2008, started the first four and final two games.

In 2009, Crompton started 12 of 13 games. He threw for 224 completions for 2,800 yards, placing him in the top 10 in both season categories all-time for Tennessee.

The San Diego Chargers selected him 168th overall in the 2010 NFL Draft. He made his NFL debut in a preseason game versus the Chicago Bears.

The Chargers cut Crompton in September. He signed with the Patriots in November, where he finished out the 2010 season.

Crompton signed with the Edmonton Eskimos of the Canadian Football League in 2013. He earned regular season snaps in seven games that season.

He signed with the Montreal Alouettes in 2014, where he had his greatest success as a pro, passing for over 2,400 yards and 11 touchdowns. The team made the CFL playoffs and won its first game, but fell to Hamilton in the Eastern Division final.

Crompton returned to the Alouettes as the starting quarterback in 2015, but sustained a shoulder injury in the season opener. He wound up only playing in three games that season and was released in 2017.



Jonathan Crompton

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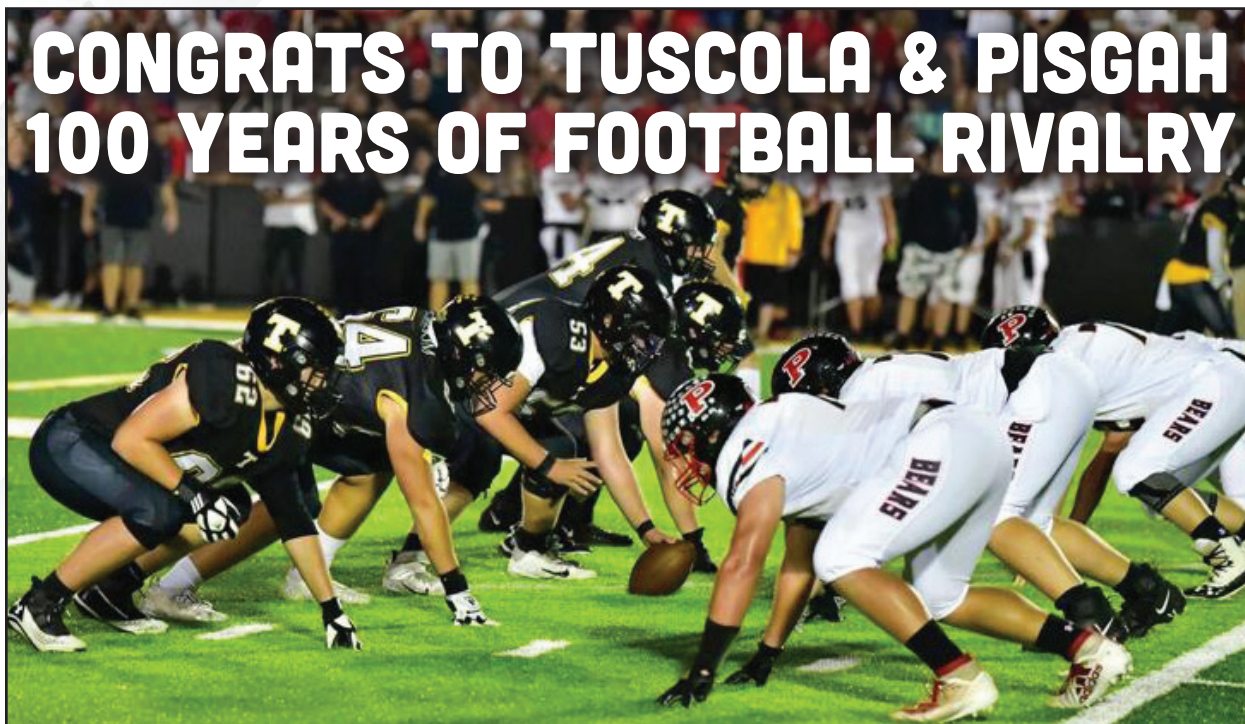
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# A rivalry is born:

## *Canton 'gridsters' meet Waynesville*



The 1924 Waynesville Township football team.

Public Domain

### BY TYLER AUFFHAMMER

Football in 1922 was a sport still in its infancy.

A minor sporting league had just changed its name from the American Professional Football Association to the National Football League. It was comprised of teams from rural markets like Akron, Ohio, and Rochester, New York. Many teams struggled financially.

College football, meanwhile, experienced a surge of popularity behind teams like Notre Dame and Illinois with celebrity-status coaches and players like Knute Rockne and “Red” Grange.

North Carolina followed this trend, too, boasting numerous top college teams during the 1920s.

The construction of new football stadiums at UNC Chapel Hill and Duke University fulfilled the growing public appetite for the gridiron.

According to an article from the Tar Heel Junior Historian, “The best football teams in North Carolina weren’t as famous as teams in the North or Midwest, but local interest was high. Local teams sometimes would board trains and go north to play schools such as Yale or Michigan State. By the end of the decade, many games were broadcast on the radio.”

### Waynesville returns

Team photos from Waynesville Township High School show football teams as early as 1905. There was a lull in play from 1909 – 1921, likely due to World War I.

Then, in 1922, all that changed thanks to an increased interest in sports among high school students. That fall, Waynesville fielded four teams — basketball, baseball, tennis and, finally, football.

According to a Sept. 12, 1922, article in *The Asheville Citizen*, “Every boy in high school is backing [the athletic organization] both with his funds and his willingness to try out for the teams.”

Nearly 60 boys attended the athletic meeting, with many pledging support and exercising interest in athletics.

“This will be the first time for many years that football has been played in Waynesville,” the article noted, adding that prospects for a strong team are “very bright.”

And, so, Haywood County football was born (again).

The coach/principal at Waynesville, J.H. Rhyne, made the call for candidates and more than 30 responded, ranging from between 120 to 180 pounds.



## HISTORY

Despite the “green” players, the articles noted that the boys planned to begin practicing right then. “By three hours’ work every afternoon something definite should begin to emerge in a few weeks time.”

Games would be played at the baseball park, and many “old football men” volunteered their service in coaching both backfield and line.

Meanwhile, rumblings of another budding team echoed across the mountain.

### Canton joins in

In Canton, not only was the game of football completely new, but so was the school.

An article from the Sept. 11, 1922, edition of *The Asheville Citizen* describes a “large enrollment” of 1,000 students showing up for classes that week.

The school principal, as well as the French and science teacher, N.H. “Bill” Marlette, would become the football coach that season.

The team got off to a hot start, winning its first game 7-0 against Marion Nov. 1, 1922.

### Getting a taste for the game

Since football hadn’t been played in Haywood County for nearly over a dozen years, many of the players had no knowledge of the game before they stepped on the field.

According to an article from the May 13, 1974, edition of *The Mountaineer*, J. Hugh Noland, who played center for Waynesville, said he’d never seen a football game played until 1922, when he joined the team.

When Rhyne put out a call for players to field a football squad, Noland showed up. After Rhyne took one look at Noland, Noland was told he was the team’s center. So he was from there on out.

“As the boys were entirely ignorant of the game, only a few having before seen a game, the work had to begin at the very bottom,” stated an Oct. 12, 1922, *Mountaineer-Courier* article.

Rhyne put the boys through conditioning workouts, and “many were the sore muscles that resulted.”

Fundamentals of the game followed, from passing, punting, lining up, tackling, running and breaking interference, “so that they could get a taste of football proper.”

The team lacked more than football knowledge. It also had no equipment to play games.

“At the beginning of school there was no equipment on hand, nor had any been ordered,” but only after “sufficient interest had been manifested,” was equipment ordered.

By the end of their grueling workouts and fundamentals lessons, “the rapidity with which the boys are ‘catching on,’ together with the spirit and loyalty to team work they are showing can only mean that somebody is going to have to work to beat them.”

Waynesville’s first game was against Asheville’s second-team players, otherwise known as the “scrubs.”

According to an Oct. 14, 1922, edition of *The Asheville Citizen*, “It



Waynesville’s Harry Rotha in 1925

Public Domain

is unofficially reported that the Waynesville eleven will outweigh the [Asheville] team 20 pounds to the man.”

Despite the size advantage, “The visitors from Asheville launched a baffling attack that the Waynesville boys were unable to solve.”

The game was a one-sided affair, and Asheville walked out with an 86-0 victory, later winning the state championship.

The lineup for the first Waynesville game was: Boone at quarterback, Herring at fullback, Logan at left half back, Welch at right half back, Howell at left end, Frances at left tackle, Kirkpatrick at left guard, Noland at center, Campbell at right guard, Siler at right tackle and Garrison at right end.

Boone and Herring were described as the “outstanding players on the offense and defense” and “show promise of making good football materials in later years.”

Although an 88-0 loss, the game was described as “hard fought from beginning to end.”

The next game wasn’t much better: Waynesville fell 114-0 to Blue Ridge at the Hendersonville grounds.

“The Waynesville High team played a hard, clean game throughout the entire contest,” according to an Oct. 22, 1922, edition of *The Asheville Citizen*.

Despite the lopsided score, “This eleven has been rounded into a fair football team.”

Two players in particular, were singled out: “Garrison, at tackle, and Campbell at full, were the outstanding stars of the Waynesville outfit.”

The third game proved a turning point, as the boys lost 10-6 to Christ School, at home, but scored their very first touchdown.

The highlight of the game as a first-quarter “march down the field from their own 40-yard line across the Christ School goal line,” according to a Nov. 12, 1922, edition of *The Sunday Citizen*.

Schulhofer, left end, caught a 15-yard touchdown pass, which proved the only score of the game for Waynesville. Boone attempted to add an extra point with a drop kick, but it was too wide.

The lineup for the Christ School game was a slight change from the earlier contests: Boone was listed at quarterback (and now noted as team captain), Herring at fullback, Logan at left half back, Campbell at right half back, Schulhofer at left end, Frances at left tackle, Crawford left guard, Noland at center, Kirkpatrick at right guard, Siler at right tackle and Welch at right end.

### The Bears

Canton, meanwhile, was fielding its first team under the tutelage of coach Marlette, and was experiencing success in the infancy of its program.

Its first game was a 7-0 victory over Marion.

“The local boys put up a fine brand of ball against the Marion club, which resulted in a victory for the locals,”

*Continues on page 50*



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## HISTORY

according to the Nov. 15, 1922, edition of *The Sunday Citizen*.

Rhinehart, the quarterback, scored the school's first touchdown, and Westmoreland, the fullback, landed a place kick that earned the team the extra point.

In the Marion game, the lineup was: Rhinehart at quarterback, Westmoreland at fullback, and H. Smathers at right half back, McClure at left half back, Bailes at left end, Justice at left tackle, West at left guard, Osborne at center, Pless at right guard, Clark at right tackle and Scroggs at right end.

### The big game

Long before the tradition of "Friday night lights," Canton traveled across the mountain to visit Waynesville at 3:30 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 18, 1922, in what would be the first of many, many meetings between crosstown rivals.

The public, apparently, felt it would be a "hard tussel," according to a Nov. 16, 1922, edition of the *Mountaineer-Courier*.

The Canton team brought with it a unique advantage: the Canton boys weighed an average of 155 pounds, which was greater than the Waynesville squad.

But Waynesville also had an advantage: it had played two more games than Canton.

"Waynesville's experience should counteract [the weight] disadvantage," the article stated.

In what may be best described as a prelude to the record crowds that gather each year at the Pisgah-Tuscola game, the article describes a "great crowd" planning to gather for the first meeting of Canton-Waynesville.

Although statistics are not available for the game, according to the Nov. 19, 1922, edition of *The Sunday Citizen*, the final score was a 25-19 Canton victory.

But Waynesville wouldn't go down without a fight.

"There was considerable protest over some of the decisions," the article stated.

In a 1974 interview with *The Mountaineer*, Noland, who was on the field for that game, said his team scored two touchdowns, but both were called back by the referees.

According to the article, the game was intended to be "played over" the following weekend, but no record of that rematch can be found.

The controversial finish was a fitting conclusion to the very first game in what would become a great American rivalry, one that has endured for nearly a century.

## WAYNESVILLE IS LOSER TO CANTON

CANTON, Nov. 18.—Canton High School football team defeated Waynesville High here this afternoon, 25 to 19. There was considerable protest over some of the decisions, and the game will be played over at Waynesville next Saturday.



# N.C.'s first All-American hailed from Waynesville

BY PEGGY MANNING

Haywood County has always been known for its rough and tough men, some through military fame and others for their athletic abilities.

When it comes to football, one man — Fred Crawford — earned a state and national reputation.

Frederick Eugene Crawford was the first football player from North Carolina to be selected for the All-American football team.

Born July 27, 1910, in Waynesville, Crawford was the son of U.S. Rep. William Thomas Crawford and Inez Edna Coman Crawford. He was the youngest of four boys and three girls.

He attended Waynesville Township High School and, later, The McCallie all-boys school located east of Chattanooga, Tennessee, for one year.

While at McCallie, Crawford won the Stephens gold medal for Best All-Around Athlete, a sign of greater things to come.

His father died when Crawford was only 3-years old, so, by the time he was old enough to attend college, he discovered there was no money to pay for his continued education.

What was available was a large flock of sheep, according to an interesting story told by Charlotte Observer sports editor, Wilton Garrison, in an article printed in The Waynesville Mountaineer in 1964.

Crawford and a brother saddled their horses and led the sheep to Cincinnati, Ohio, to sell, according to Garrison.

Using part of the profit from the sale of the sheep, Crawford entered Duke University in the fall of 1930.

On the football team, he played tackle and end, and was selected to the All-Southern team in 1932 and the All-American squad in 1933.

At that time, several coaches considered Crawford to be one of the best players in the entire country, according to The Waynesville Mountaineer articles.

In fact, Duke University coach, Wallace Wade, vowed that Crawford was the greatest lineman he had ever seen play the position.



*The Mountaineer*

Fred Crawford in his Duke University uniform (circa 1930s)

Crawford stood 6-feet-2 inches tall and weighed a stout 195 pounds, during his Duke playing days.

One story was told that Crawford was so strong that he could lift a car up with one hand, and so fast that he could run 100 yards in 10 seconds.

Another report from the era stated Crawford threw the ball from his team's 2-yard line all the way to the opponents' 16-yard-line for a total distance of 82 yards.

After his collegiate playing days were over, Crawford played professional football for the Chicago Bears in 1935, before giving it up after a year when he suffered a broken leg.

He enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1942 and later had a brief experience in acting.

He moved to Tallahassee, Florida, where he worked for the Florida State Motor Vehicle Department until his death March 5, 1974, at the age of 63.

But Crawford's reputation as a collegiate athlete never wavered.

He was elected to the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in 1964, the College Football Hall of Fame in 1973 and the Duke Sports Hall of Fame in 1976.

Ten years after Crawford was named All-American, another Waynesville player claimed the honor. Bill Milner, who started out at the University of South Carolina before transferring to Duke in his junior year, was named All-American in 1943.

Milner was also named All-Southern that year before World War II interrupted his football career. After two years of service in the Navy, he returned to Duke and picked up where he left off. During his final year at Duke, he was named to the All-American second team and was again named All-Southern.

Milner signed with the Chicago Bears and played for them three years before being traded to the New York Giants. He played for the Giants one year before joining the Marine Corps at the onset of the Korean conflict.

He returned to Western North Carolina in 1950 and coached at Brevard High School before being hired as head varsity coach at Waynesville Township High in 1959.

# Two players put Clyde on the map

BY PEGGY MANNING

One fateful night in 1962, two young men were offered a shot at playing for one of the best college teams in the South. Only one accepted the offer.

Haywood County had eight high schools prior to the Pisgah and Tuscola consolidations in 1966. One of those was the small Clyde school. But, big things often come from small beginnings.

Such was the case that night when the Clyde Cardinals were playing in the rural town of Marshall, north of Asheville. A Clemson University scout was in town to watch a Lee Edwards High School game in Asheville. When that game got rained out, the scout decided to check out the Clyde/Marshall game.

When he saw Floyd Rogers and Walt Leatherwood dominate the field for Clyde, he invited both down to Clemson — the first two Clyde players to ever be offered grants-in-aid at Clemson.

Rogers seized the opportunity, but Leatherwood chose a different direction for his athletic talent.

“It was very rare having two players picked from such a small school as Clyde,” Rogers said. “There were only 23 people in our graduating class.”

Clyde never had summer camps or weight rooms for players to improve their physiques. The most exercise players got was doing chores for their family before walking across the swinging foot bridge over the Pigeon River to the Clyde football field.

“When Coach Brown Griffin asked me to play football in my freshman year, my father didn’t want me to play. He told me if I was going to play I had to keep up my milking and other chores,” Rogers said.

Although he had never played football before, it was something he really wanted to do.

And, as it turned out, it was something he was good at. Clyde won the conference championship in 1960 and 1961, the two years prior to Rogers graduating.

Rogers carried that homespun talent to Clemson, but admits he felt



From left: Floyd Rogers Clyde coach Brown Griffin and Walt Leatherwood

*The Mountaineer*

like a fish out of water during his freshman year there. One day, head coach Frank Howard called him into his office and spoke five words that changed Rogers’ life.

“Get good or get gone,” he told Rogers.

“That was great motivation,” Rogers said.

Rogers hit the weight room and started getting serious about the game. By his senior year, he was captain of the team. A tradition started in 1965 that continues to this day, he recalled.

“We were playing Virginia at Clemson and coach Howard called me and another guy over and told us that before we ran down the hill to the field, he wanted us to touch a rock.”

The rock, which is now known as Howard’s Rock, was given to Howard by his friend Samuel Columbus Jones, who picked it up in Death Valley, California. He gave it to Howard for Clemson’s Death Valley stadium for good luck.

“We all touched the rock as we passed it, but by the end of the third quarter, Virginia had us beat by about 10 points. Coach Howard was ready to throw that rock away, but we came back and won that game 40-35,” Rogers said. **Continues on page 54**





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## HISTORY

"After we beat Virginia, coach Howard said he wanted us to touch that rock before every game," he said.

Clemson won the Atlantic Coast Conference championships in 1965 and 1966 while Rogers was there, a feat he is still proud to have been a part of. He said he also feels partially responsible for opening the door for three other Western North Carolina athletes while he was at Clemson – Dale Henry from Maggie Valley, Randy Taylor from Waynesville and Trevor Putnam from Canton.

In his senior year, Rogers was drafted by the Cleveland Browns. He went to their spring camp, but didn't stay long.

"I realized this country boy wasn't cut out for pro football," he said.

Leatherwood admits he "screwed up the opportunity of a lifetime" when he passed up the Clemson offer, but at the time he was tempted by what he thought was a greater calling.

"Coach Howard told me I was exactly what he was looking for," he said. "And, more times than one, I have regretted not playing football at Clemson."

Leatherwood was an All-Conference football player at Waynesville before he transferred to Clyde as a junior, where he also made All-Conference as a quarterback his junior and senior years. He was chosen Most Outstanding Football Player and Most Valuable Athlete his senior year.

At 17 years of age, Leatherwood was 6 foot, 5 inches tall and 210 pounds.

However, he had another athletic talent that soon got the attention



FLOYD ROGERS, Defensive Tackle  
All-Atlantic Coast Conference Scholastic Team, 1966

Floyd Rogers

*The Mountaineer*



## HISTORY

of a scout for the Baltimore Orioles. After seeing Leatherwood pitch a 96-miles-per-hour fastball, the scout pitched his own offer and dangled a \$1,000 sign-on check for good measure.

"That was a lot of money in 1963," Leatherwood said.

And Leatherwood was a lot of athlete; one of the best athletes to ever graduate Clyde High School, according to one *Waynesville Mountaineer* article.

He played a year in the rookie league for the Orioles and made it to the last cut after spring training before his wild carelessness began to trouble his coach, who had some advice for Leatherwood similar to that Howard had for Rogers.

"Leatherwood, if you straighten up, you'll have it made," the coach told him.

In the end, though, Leatherwood and four other players were let go.

His talents were put to a different use later in life. After serving three years in the Army, Leatherwood returned to Haywood County and began coaching little league girls softball. In 1988, he took a team to the World Series in Michigan after winning district, state and regional championships.

Like Rogers, Leatherwood got his grit and fortitude by hard work.

"Our greatest asset was what we learned from hard work growing up on a farm. We knew what a blister was and how to take it. We could out-tough competitors," Leatherwood said.

His hard work continued on the playing fields at Pisgah in a different manner. He put countless hours in the building and maintenance of



Walt Leatherwood

*The Mountaineer*

the school's stadium, dugouts and baseball diamond.

In 2021, Pisgah High's Booster Club recognized Leatherwood's hard work and dedication by honoring him with the Albert Cline Jr. Service Award.

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# DEMONS WERE FIERY RIVALS

BY PEGGY MANNING

Nobody seems to know who picked the Blue Demon mascot, and some have even tried to change it, but one thing is for sure, rivals knew the Bethel boys who wore those jerseys were a force to be reckoned with.

Doug Clark recalls nights on the Bethel football field before the consolidation, being cheered on by a community that supported its athletes. The school had a first-class football field, but the team suited up in the basement of a building which was later torn down after Pisgah and Tuscola consolidated eight high schools, including Bethel.

"We had a pretty good team and a lot of school spirit," said Clark, who was named Most Athletic during his senior year at Bethel in 1965. "We were fast, but we took a licking from the bigger schools."

One game that stands out in his memory was a matchup between Bethel and Clyde.

"I scored four touchdowns during that game and was named Player of the Week by the newspaper," Clark said.

"But, I took a beating many times," he said. "I had at least two concussions and I had a special helmet they had made just for me. But, it didn't help that much."

Clark played defense and offense. He credits much of Bethel's success to the coaching team of varsity coach Gene Hall, Joe Turner, Hugh Terrell and Bobby Ballance.

While he loved playing football, Clark said his first love was basketball. His younger sister, Shirley Clark, also excelled in basketball and in 1967 was named Most Athletic at Pisgah High School.



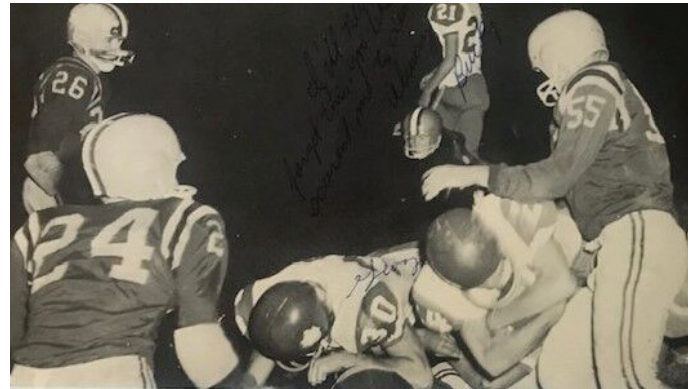
Doug Clark

*Doug Clark*

Several of the last varsity team to play at Bethel made their way to the inaugural Pisgah Bears team in 1966, including Steve Williams, Butch Smathers, Johnny Fish, Neil McCracken, Jerry Caldwell, Mike Mathews, Jack Holland, Vick Inman, Joe Morgan and Jimmy Poston. They proudly hold the honor of winning the state championship that fall.

After graduation, Clark considered a scholarship to play basketball at Gardner-Webb University. Instead, like many young men at that time, he chose to go to work at the Champion paper mill in Canton. He retired after working there for 43 years.

Clark escorted Joyce Stevenson to the Homecoming Court during his senior year at Bethel. He and Joyce recently celebrated their 56th wedding anniversary. Some things pass and others last a lifetime.



Doug Clark carries the ball for Bethel High (circa 1965)

*Doug Clark*

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# Remembering Boyd Allen

**BY ROBERT ALLEN**

When your dad is Boyd Allen, head coach at Pisgah, football just becomes part of you.

As the son of the football coach in a football-crazy town, my childhood was heaven. I always considered myself to be very lucky to have grown up when I did in Canton.

I loved being at the football stadium, and spent nearly a third of my life there. In my younger years, I played in the stadium and knew the inside of it like the back of my hand. This was when the current visitors side was the home side. The players dressing room was underneath along with the coaches office, storage and training room.

I was the luckiest kid in town.

## Boyd Allen becomes a Bear

Boyd Allen had a successful prep playing career at Shelby High School, and played in the 1941 Shrine Bowl.

He enrolled at Clemson on a football scholarship, but had to drop out because he was drafted in World War II. After the war, he married Mary Alice Bradshaw in 1946.

In 1946, he enrolled at Wake Forest and had an outstanding college career.

His coaching career began as an assistant to friend and teammate from Wake Forest, Don Hipps of Canton High School. When Hipps left in 1952, my dad took the head coaching reins.

In 1953, the Black Bears finished with an 8-2 record. One of the two losses was a 7-0 loss to Waynesville.

After a 7-3 record in 1954 and a 7-2-1 finish in 1955, Canton High won the 1956 AA State Football Championship, becoming the first team west of Hickory to win the title in football.

After a few years as runner-up, Canton again won the championship again in '61.

In Canton's last season before consolidation in 1965, Waynesville defeated Canton 15-0 in the first meeting, but in the second game that season, Canton won 13-7.

With that win, Canton won both the first game between the two schools in 1922 and the last game in 1965.

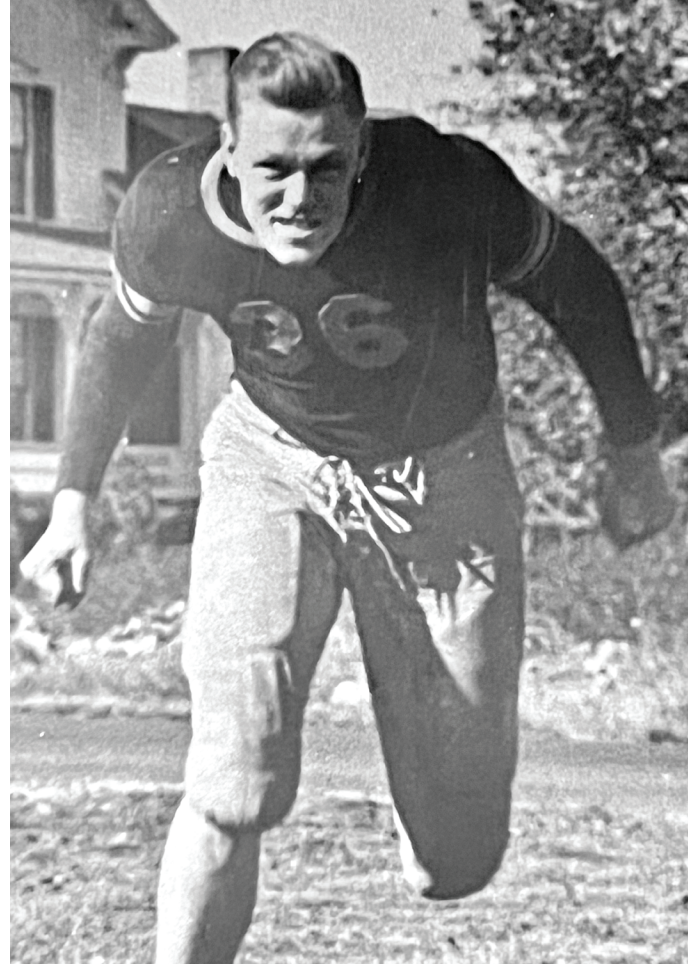
## Robert Allen suits up

My first year as a player was 1965 on the freshman team, the last year of Canton High.

It was tough bringing four schools together. We all had to get used to a new school building, new students and new teammates. As far as football went, the players from Bethel, Clyde and Reynolds had to get used to a new way of doing things.

Dad and his assistant coaches began molding this group of young men into a cohesive team.

Football camp was new for some. Bethel had gone to Camp Hope with Canton in 1965, so they knew what to expect.



Robert Allen

### Boyd Allen as a player for Shelby High in 1941

Practices were tough. We practiced twice a day, the first at 6 a.m. They woke us by ringing that big bell next to the dining hall. The afternoon practices were at 4 p.m. It always seemed like it was hotter there than anywhere else when we practiced.

Some people used to think it was funny to sneak into Camp Hope during the night and ring that bell to wake us up. Jim, the Camp Hope dog, usually chased them off.

There was some attrition, as always. Some would just come to the coaches and say they didn't want to play and got a ride home, some would leave in the middle of the night and one even crossed the river at night to leave.

The thing about Camp Hope that many of us didn't realize at the time was that it brought us together, bonded us and helped us develop the toughness our teams needed.

After beginning the year 0-2, no one was thinking about the



## HISTORY



Boyd Allen as a player for Wake Forest in 1948

Robert Allen

state championship. We hosted Andrews the next week and got our first win 26-0. Then the first ever Pisgah-Tuscola game was played in Canton Memorial Stadium. It was back and forth early, but we pulled ahead and won 26-12.

At 2-2, we were feeling much better about ourselves until our quarterback Carroll Jones went down with a knee injury. We traveled to Sylva and took on one of the best teams in North Carolina. We were playing with a sophomore quarterback.

We played well in the first half and were only down 14-13 when Sylva's Tommy Love returned the kickoff for a touchdown to start the second half. We lost 26-13, but it was our last loss of the year.

In the remaining six games Pisgah, behind sophomore quarterback Mike Matthews, averaged 30 points per game and only gave up seven per game.

In the playoffs, we shut out Forest Hills 41-0 and Graham (Burlington) 16-0 to win the Western AAA State Championship.

Dad and his assistants had pulled this team together and basically did the unthinkable: no newly consolidated school in North Carolina had ever won a state championship.

Two of Pisgah's three losses came against teams that won titles: Science Hill was the AAAA State Champion in Tennessee and Sylva-Webster was the AA State Champion in North Carolina.

This Pisgah team had overcome the

Continues on page 60



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## HISTORY



Boyd Allen is carried off the field by Pisgah players after beating Tuscola in 1967

*The Mountaineer*

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adversity of having to come together with new teammates, no practice field, no field house and no official colors. Each day after school we walked to the stadium and practiced on the game field. We dressed in the dressing room under what is now the visitors side of the stadium. The varsity, JV, and junior high all practiced there.

By the first of October there was no grass in the middle of the field. The good thing was that we were so naïve that we didn't think of any of these things as hardships. We just went out and played.

I truly believe that winning that championship brought the school and community together. It gave everyone a sense of pride.

In August, four schools had come together as one and four months later there was this great sense of accomplishment. It set the bar for all future Pisgah teams.

Pisgah finished 6-2-1 in 1967, although the Bears beat Tuscola 15-7. And in 1968, Pisgah ended the regular season 9-1. We faced Hickory the next week in the AAAA playoffs, but lost 16-14.

The 1969 season began with a loss to Science Hill. Pisgah rebounded to win its next four games before losing to Brevard. Tuscola was up next. It looked to be an evenly matched game. The game was Oct. 17, which happened to be dad's birthday.

Pisgah controlled the game from the beginning and would win its fourth in a row 18-8. Sadly, the game wasn't remembered for the win. It was remembered for Dad

**Continues on page 62**



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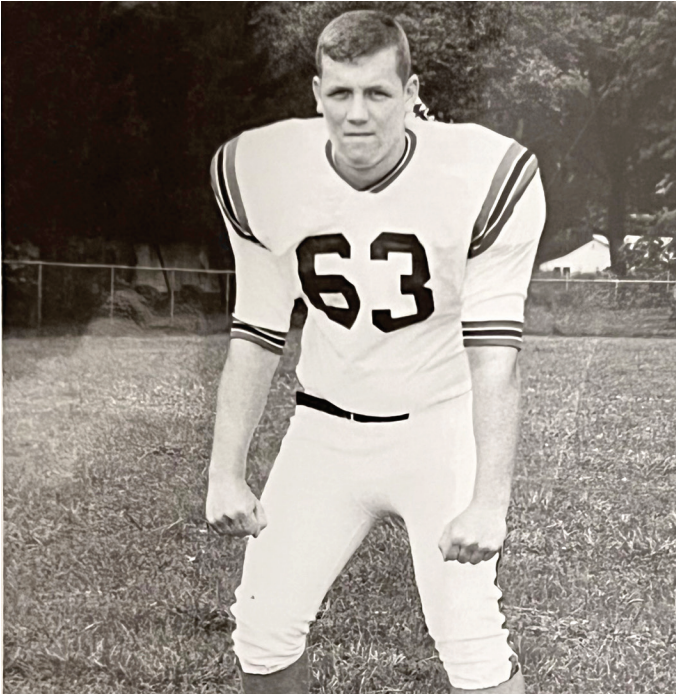
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## HISTORY



Robert Allen in his Pisgah football uniform (Circa late 1960s)

*Robert Allen*

having a heart attack on the sideline and dying less than 30 minutes later at the hospital.

### Boyd Allen's legacy

He left a legacy that many of his former players still remember to this day.

Of the 800 or more players he coached, he remembered everyone and, when I would ask about them, he could tell me exactly where they were and how they were doing.

Canton and Pisgah are special to many of us not just for football but because it's home for us no matter where we are. It is a football town.

Dad, and before him, C.C. Poindexter, along with all the players and fans, have made it that way. It's Red and Black, it's Black Bears and it's Pisgah Nation.

### Carrying on the legacy

I knew when I was 6 years old that I wanted to be a football coach.

Most people only see what the coaches do on Friday night. My dad was my coach, so I got to see it all: planning practices, taking care of fields and players and the many things you do just to get to game nights.

Coaching is demanding on the coach's family, too. Your whole family plans around practices and games and the family hears the

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## HISTORY



Robert Allen coaching at Cartersville High in Georgia (Circa 2010s) *Robert Allen*

things the fans say about their spouse and father. Both my wife, children and my mother have all been through this.

I got my coaching start at Canton Jr. High in 1974. Later, coaching at Pisgah was a dream come true for me. I loved my time at Pisgah, but I wanted to be a head coach. I was lucky enough to become head coach at Andrews in 1988.

In 1994, I got the opportunity to go to North Henderson, which was a new school at the time, and helped build that program into a playoff team my last two years. In 1999, I went into administration for several years before retiring in 2004.

In 2004, we moved to Cartersville, Georgia, and I resumed in 2007 with Cartersville High, where I got to be part of a great program.

In my 11 years coaching there, we won two state championships and were runner-up two more times. Getting to coach Trevor Lawrence was a bonus.

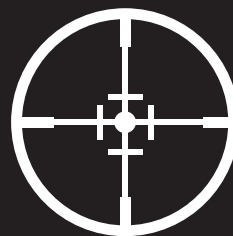
It was such a great experience to not only be coached by my dad, but to also coach my son. It is something special that I will always cherish.

One of the things I shared with my dad was loving and caring for the young men and women we coached, hopefully, in some way teaching them the lessons that would help them later in life.

A wise coach told me: you have to be a good teacher to be a good coach.



Young Robert Allen, center, with his parents, Boyd and Mary Allen (circa 1950s) *Robert Allen*



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# Football with a feminine touch

BY PEGGY MANNING

Friday nights took on new excitement when I was editor of *The Enterprise* newspaper in Canton. Small newspapers have small staffs, and thus football became part of my routine each fall.

While I had never been a football fan, I quickly learned the rules enough to follow the plays and write my articles. This became even trickier while trying to follow the ball with a camera to capture the action.

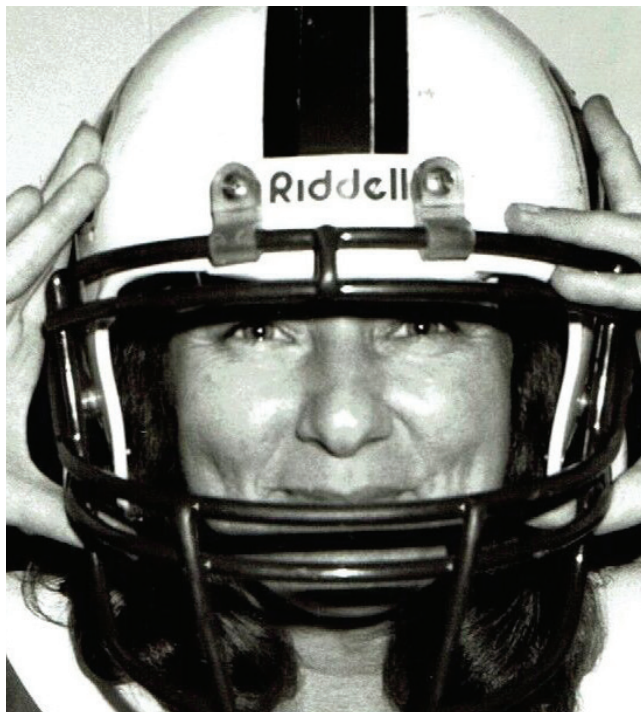
Football is rough. It's tough. And those covering it have to be tough. It involves running up and down the field with the players, juggling your notebook and camera and trying to keep up with what is happening.

Add to that the male mindset and the girly greenhorn becomes an alien in an unwelcome territory. A player once asked me which player was my son, thinking, I guess, that I was a football mom intruding on the gridiron to steal a closeup of my son in action.

I was pushed, stepped on and even trampled once when I was too engrossed in the camera's viewfinder to move out of the way of the charging runner who was being forced off the field.

It got even more intrusive once when I was chasing down the football coach for some after-game comments.

I was running and writing and was so engrossed that I didn't notice he had led me into a stinky locker room with half-nude boys



Peggy Manning

and jockstraps. I was so embarrassed that I knew I turned three shades of red.

The coach thought it was hilarious and the hoots and hollers from the boys as I made my hasty retreat are still embedded in my memory.

As I became more familiar with the players (nothing to do with the locker room scenario), I also had to overcome my motherly instinct to tackle some rude opponents who used unnecessary roughness, to cheer when my team scored or to chastise the coach for some off-color remark made to one of "my boys."

In the end, I learned that most of the boys and their parents weren't all that interested in my review of the game. They liked seeing their name or photo that otherwise might not have been included on a larger newspaper's sports page.

Fans and coaches seemed to eventually accept my style of writing, as I was nominated numerous times for recognition by the N.C. High School Athletic Association.

Over time, I also improved my, at-first, blurry photography, and learned how to adjust my shutter speed and aperture to get better results.

At the end of the day, however, I am still not a football fan.

It was a great experience, but I prefer to spend my Friday nights with a tantalizing mystery novel and a cup of hot tea. That is one job I gladly will leave to the male reporters.

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# FORMER SPORTS EDITOR RECOUNTS 1988 MONSOON GAME

BY ANDY RHINEHART

A pouring rain was not going to dampen the celebration in Canton, nor encourage everyone to stay clothed, apparently.

Highly anticipated likely doesn't do justice to the atmosphere in Canton in the days prior to the 1988 meeting of Pisgah and Tuscola's football programs.

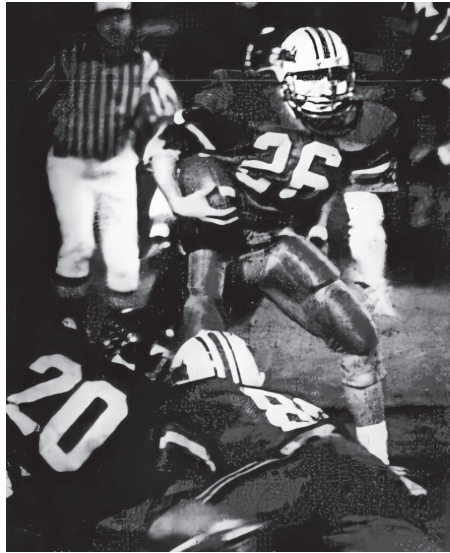
The Mountaineers were riding a 10-game winning streak in the series, a decade of dominance that had slowly eroded the giddiness of Pisgah's back-to-back state championships in the mid-70s.

The Bears, though, were on a bit of a revitalization kick that season, with first-year head coach Carroll Wright leading Pisgah to a 6-3 start. Forget waiting until next year — the Canton faithful expected the first Friday in November to once again be their moment in the sun.

Not that there was any sunlight to be found; game day arrived Nov. 4, 1988, with a steady rain falling throughout the day and into the evening. That didn't stop the usual full house from congregating on the banks of the Pigeon, packing Pisgah Memorial Stadium for the 24th Haywood County tussle.



Tuscola QB Shane Brook dives forward in the 1988 monsoon game



Pisgah's back carries the ball in the 1988 monsoon game

The rain never relented, nor did Pisgah's focus on snapping Tuscola's reign.

Late in the second quarter, quarterback Randy Woods gave the Bears a 6-0 lead with a 64-yard touchdown run, then followed a Mountaineer fumble on the ensuing kickoff with a 14-yard scoring run for a 12-0 Pisgah halftime advantage.

Bear prospects for a win were brightening the gloomy evening, at least on the home side of the field. Then, sometime in the second half, the stadium fell dark courtesy of a power failure. A rescue vehicle turned a spotlight onto the field — and that's when one hearty fan decided to give the masses a bit of in-game entertainment, sprinting into the light's glare and beginning to remove his clothing.

Say it wasn't so, Ethel.

Fortunately, law enforcement quickly ended the show before fans witnessed anything

they might have never seen at a Pisgah-Tuscola game.

Power soon returned, and the Bears added another touchdown late to secure a 19-0 victory and restore a measure of contentment in Canton. It was quite a scene, even from the press box where I sat.

I spent two terms working at *The Mountaineer* (1986-89, 1990-91), but have had Haywood County football in my blood since birth, a proud native who grew up in Canton.

Not sure how many Pisgah High graduates have been sports editor at *The Mountaineer*, and that certainly provided an early lesson in my career on objectivity, one I felt I must have passed with some degree of success when the mother of a former classmate called the office one day to berate me for "forgetting my roots."

My journalism career took me to a few stops in the Carolinas before I left for other pastures, though I still scribe around a bit these days.

No matter the locale, though, whenever I chat with coaches, fans or fellow writers and happen to mention my heritage, the same question inevitably arises, "Is the Pisgah-Tuscola game really all I've heard about?"

And, upon hearing my answer of "Yes, and more," there's always the same followup, "I need to get up there and see that game one time."

Get there early, I urge. And bring money for the half-and-half.



## SIDELINE STORIES

Football in Haywood County is woven into the fabric of everyday life. Maybe fans can no longer gather at Charlie's Drive-In or Dixon's Little Boy, but talk of Bears and Mountaineers still fills workday chatter and dinner conversations from Canton to Waynesville, Bethel to Jonathan Creek, Thickety to Balsam.

Especially in this era of political polarization, it is the tie that binds — for 10, 12, 14 Friday nights every late summer and fall, it's just Bear fans and Mountaineer fans in the stands, all cheering for a common cause.

It is a theme that runs through my childhood memories as well.

I attended games with my paternal grandmother, Emma Lou Rhinehart, who always had to be among the first fans through the gates.

My maternal grandmother, Rachel Mitchell, helped oversee Pisgah's home concession stand and always had hot chocolate waiting when I slipped into the door. My father, Phillip Rhinehart, served on the Bears' chain crew for years.

I remember the buzz of Canton on Friday afternoons, picking up tickets at Howell's Men's Shop and maybe dinner at Medford's before heading to the field.

But, more broadly, I'll always think of Haywood County football as two high school programs zealously supported by communities of good people who work hard and root harder, especially on that one magical evening each year when the two sides gather to



*The Mountaineer*  
Tuscola players rest on the bench in the 1988 monsoon game

settle the question of the county's best for another year.

I look forward to hearing the outcome of this season's match-up, with Pisgah looking to match Tuscola's streak of 10 straight victories. Let's hope the power, not to mention everyone's clothes, remains on.

*Andy Rhinehart is a former award-winning sports writer who now serves as director of customer support for Parse.ly, a content analytics company. He also founded and still oversees PolkSports.com, where he is a member of the Associated Press Sports Editors.*

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# What Maya Angelou understood about the county clash

BY MIKE SCHOEFFEL

I'm glad I only covered one Pisgah-Tuscola football game.

Not because I don't think covering two, or three, or five, wouldn't have been great, but because the subsequent show-downs wouldn't have matched the visceral pleasure, or the sheer awe of that first game.

I moved to Haywood in 2018 after covering high school football in Texas for nearly two years. I'd grown somewhat jaded to all of the bluster, the inordinate amount of value placed on a game being played by teenagers.

So when I first heard about the whole Pisgah-Tuscola thing, I thought: "No way there's anything to it."

I mean, this is rural Western North Carolina. There are more cows here than people (maybe), and none of those cows seem to care much about identifying man coverage or cooking up a hot new blitz scheme. I was naive, and maybe a bit pretentious. I wasn't expecting to be impressed.

Of course I was impressed, because the whole thing is annually impressive.

I stumbled around in a daze for two hours before kick-off, absorbing the manic atmosphere, sweating and jotting down half-formed observations (you can read them in a piece I wrote for *The Mountaineer* called "Before the First Whistle").

The jaw-on-the-floor tone of that piece proves how wrong I was to assume a county of 60,000 people couldn't host a rivalry game on par with what I'd seen in Texas, not necessarily in terms of attendance (though 10,000-15,000 fans is mind-boggling for a relatively small county), but in spiritual significance.

The relatively isolated nature of Western North Carolina makes the rivalry feel more vital. More alive.

Those Texas games were great, sure, but perhaps their roots aren't as deep. Austin is a transplant-heavy region\*. Families move there from all over the country.

But in Haywood, it's no stretch to imagine a sixth-generation Trantham from the darkest holler of Fines Creek executing a form tackle against a fifth-generation Messer from a sun-bathed farm in Bethel. I'm making up the specifics, but I think most Haywood natives will recognize the sentiment.

I don't remember many individual moments from my only



The home crowd at Pisgah Memorial Stadium in Canton

County Clash. I do recall the pre-game skydiver. And the way Hunter Cseledy's arm snapped like an icicle in the second half\*\*. And Pisgah winning for the sixth time in a row\*\*\*.

Yet, my awful memory for specifics doesn't lessen the thrust of the experience.

I think that quote by Maya Angelou rings true here: "you'll forget the things people say, you'll forget what they do, but you'll never forget how they made you feel." That Pisgah-Tuscola game made me feel something primal,

nostalgic and alive\*\*\*\*.

I still have two hand towels that were given out for free before kickoff. A red one for Pisgah, and a yellow one (sorry, gold one\*\*\*\*\*) for Tuscola.

Recently, my wife found them in the laundry. She thought they were rags, and asked if she could throw them out. I said no, perhaps a bit too aggressively, because I felt a strong attachment to these towels because, in a way, I've come to view them as signifiers from a specific time in my life.

My pre-COVID, pre-flood, pre-child and pre-career change life, when covering a high school football rivalry was the foremost thing on my mind.

What the County Clash means in the grander scheme of things is a subjective judgment, but if you asked most Haywood County lifers, those sixth-generation Tranthams and Messers, I think they'd tell you it means a whole helluva lot.

And that's the way it should be, because in these strange and shifting times, we all need things that matter. Perhaps we need that more than anything else.

Footnotes:

\* At least that's how it feels. I don't know if data would bear this out.

\*\* He recovered by spring and was back on the baseball diamond by spring.

\*\*\* I had to Google the exact number.

\*\*\*\* Yes, I did just apply a Maya Angelou quote to a high school football game.

\*\*\*\*\* I was once berated in a letter to the editor by a Mountaineers fan for erroneously calling Tuscola's school colors black and yellow.



# Former sports editor remembers passion

BY ANDREW SCHNITTKER

I only got the chance to cover football in Haywood County during the 2019 season, but it was one of the most fun, rewarding experiences of my career.

While I was there, we had an assigned “beat writer” for each football team: I covered Tuscola and former Mountaineer reporter Kyle Perrotti covered Pisgah.

Covering every Friday night game was something I looked forward to throughout the week.

Getting to spend time in the press box with everyone else talking about the games, and, of course, getting to see some good football, was always a good time.

The thing I’ll remember most about covering football in Haywood County is the passion everyone had for it.

During the fall, the football games were the talk of the towns.

It’s always fun to cover something people care about, and being the authority on something so many people were passionate about was a cool feeling.

And, of course, the highlight of my time as *The Mountaineer* sports editor was getting to cover and experience the Haywood County Clash, the famous Tuscola-Pisgah rivalry game.

The game I covered in 2019 was at C.E. Weatherby.

I’d been told that I’d see nothing like it, and had to experience the atmosphere for myself.

So, I let Kyle stay in the press box and cover the game, while I wan-



The home crowd at C.E. Weatherby Stadium in Waynesville

Diana Gates

dered among the crowd to truly experience the atmosphere.

I’ll always be glad I did.

I don’t remember much about the game itself (I believe it was a Pisgah shutout), but I do remember the atmosphere.

Packing over 15,000 people into a high school football stadium created a raucous environment, and the dueling crowds added to the action on the field.

The atmosphere was indeed unlike anything I’d experienced, and it’s easy to see why it’s dubbed the best high school rivalry in North Carolina, and one of the best in the country.

Throughout my career, I’ve been fortunate to cover some big sporting events.

I’ve covered the ACC Tournament, NCAA Tournament, big ACC football and basketball rivalry games and the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and I’ve seen some crazy environments.

The County Clash brings an atmosphere and environment that, while obviously features a smaller crowd than any of those events, is on par, especially with everyone packed into a smaller stadium.

And there’s something different, something special about that atmosphere, that feels more intimate.

You can tell what the County Clash means to everyone. It’s a source of community pride and bragging rights. It’s not just a football game, it’s a way of life.

I’ll always be glad I got to cover and experience football in Haywood County, and see a County Clash, and I would highly recommend any sports fan in North Carolina who hasn’t seen the big game find a year that they can make the trip.

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# CAPTURING THE Game

BY MIKELL CLARK-WEBB

I have always been a football fan.

When I was little, I attended football games at Tuscola with my family, often so crowded we had to sit atop the buildings which lined the lower visitor side.

My mom attended Waynesville Township High School, the Clark side of my family attended Canton and Pisgah and my dad, Roger, was among the first graduates of Tuscola.

I was even a cheerleader for Lake Junaluska Warriors while my brothers played football. My Canton cousins cheered for the Bears and my cousin, Cody, was quarterback for the Bears.

Cheerleaders in middle and high school mostly had their backs to the game, but at THS, the marching band sat in end zone bleachers and attended every game.

I wanted to be right there in the action, so I joined the marching band. I missed only one game in three years when I had the flu.

Photography has always been a passion of mine.

I got my first camera when I was in sixth grade, and fell in love with taking pictures.

My husband, Jack Webb, and our four daughters — Maddie, Grace, Jacquelin and Katherine — are big sports fans, too.

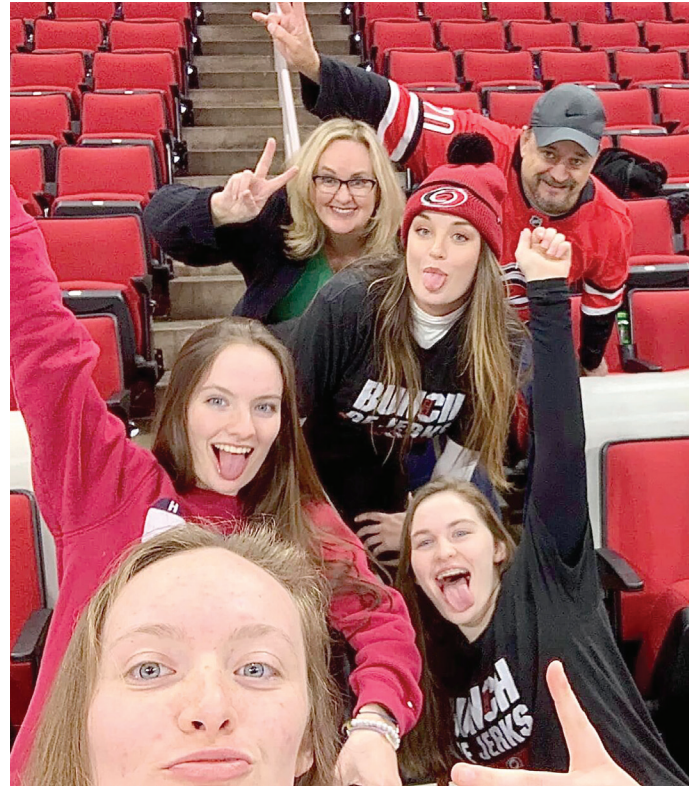
Jack played high school sports, and he loves being the stadium announcer for football and doing broadcasts for WPTL for basketball, baseball and softball.

My passion for pictures increased when my oldest daughter, Maddie, started playing youth sports in 2002. I became her — and later her younger, triplet sisters — personal photographer.

In 2012, *The Mountaineer* sports editor Chuck Fiebernitz asked me to send him some of my photos for print.

He liked what I shot, so I became one of *The Mountaineer's* sports photographers.

Over the past 11 years, have enjoyed being a photographer for all sports, but especially football, which is my family tradition.



Front to back: Grace, Jacqueline, Katherine, Maddie, Mikell and Jack Webb at a Carolina Hurricanes Hockey Game

Negativity abounds in the world, so I love celebrating the good things like effort, energy and sportsmanship among the players.

I want these students to see themselves how I see them: strong, capable and members belonging to a group who become a family.

When my girls and my Clyde students played sports for Canton and Pisgah, I became a Bears fan. Pisgah has so much community support, and it is amazing to be a part of this spirited small town with a big heart.

Not having a home stadium for Pisgah for the past two year—has been exhausting for our community, but I am so proud of our students, coaches, families and fans.

They work so hard and travel well to support our teams — it makes every game together more enjoyable knowing those struggles and what we have lost.

My prayer is always for no injuries, good sportsmanship and the “W” if possible.

The rivalry Pisgah has with Tuscola is fun, but the camaraderie and sense of community are what makes Pisgah football so great.

We all live and work in Haywood County, but encouraging and celebrating the kids is what matters most to me.

I am grateful for the opportunity and bonds we have made through tradition and sports.



Mikell Clark-Webb shoots a game.

Dale Godfrey





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