

THE FABULOUS FOUR OF FIFTY-SIX

Tonight we are recognizing a unique group of athletes: The athletes of North Penn High School's first championship teams, a group of young guys and girls who accomplished much in a short amount of time under unusual and somewhat adverse circumstances.

It was shortly after World War II that the educators in Lansdale and the eight surrounding districts determined a need for a larger facility to accommodate the students of the North Penn area. And so began the initial planning stages on just how that could be accomplished. For more than ten years dissension and disagreement would temporarily halt progress.

In the spring of 1954, differences were resolved, contracts signed and construction began. With Lansdale High School having the largest facility and room for expansion that site was chosen to become the new North Penn High School.

Prior to 1955 students from these eight districts attended North Wales High School, Hatfield High School, or Lansdale High School. In most of these communities students were accustomed to walking to school, attending classes with life-long friends and siblings, maybe even attending schools of their parents. It was familiar, it was comfortable and they looked forward to old traditions. Now the students faced riding buses, strange facilities, new teachers, new coaches, abandoning old loyalties and it all seemed like a huge and unwanted change.. The transition was not always easy or smooth. Some teams had to go off-site to practice and play games until construction was completed. Many of athletes who participated in their former schools did not get a chance to compete and the seniors barely had time to adjust as this was their first and last year.

Nowhere else was the transition more apparent than in athletics!

When North Penn High School opened its doors in the fall of 1955 to 1,964 students, the largest student body of any one-unit school in Montgomery and Bucks Counties, that transition in athletics came with amazing results. The new high school fielded eleven teams in 1955-56 and produced four championships that first year of the jointure. Not only did the athletes, and the coaches as well, put aside personal disappointments and loyalties, but they also demonstrated commitment, teamwork and a loyalty to their new school in meeting all the challenges set before them to achieve such resounding success!

Tonight we honor and applaud those athletes and recognize their achievements as the foundation upon which North Penn High School has built its winning tradition and is recognized as one of the finest athletic programs in the state.

Congratulations to all members of the championship teams of 1955-56 who brought not only honor to themselves but the new North Penn High School.

BOYS SOCCER - TRI-COUNTY CHAMPIONS 1955-1956

Under the leadership of future NPAAA Hall of Fame Coach Gerald Bower and assisted by Don Huber, the boys soccer team was undefeated Tri-County champions and brought NPHS its very first championship. Led by co-captains Bill Harris and Ray Snyder, the team was composed mainly of players from the former Hatfield HS and North Wales HS since at the time Lansdale had no soccer program. The former rivals proved to be a formidable opponent in the league as they swept to the championship. Goalie Lonnie Schwartz held opposing teams to a total of two goals for the season. Although this was their first year as a unit, they also defeated the Tri-County All Stars 2-0 before falling to Kennett Square for the District title by the score of 2-1. Ray Snyder was named most valuable player of the Tri-County League.

BOYS BASKETBALL - BUXMONT CHAMPS 1956

The boys basketball team, coached by future NPAAA Hall of Fame inductee Marv Angstadt and assisted by Marv Jaffe, consisting of a blend of former North Wales, Hatfield, and Lansdale team members showed early signs of spirit and a come-together determination. Led by seniors Jack Swartley, Harry Rakowski, Dick Sellers, Bud Albright, Dick Stauffer, Jack Gray, Carl Lung, Bill Harris and Steve Carlson, the team did not disappoint and captured NPHS's second championship defeating Pennridge High School 42-38 for the title. Despite losing to Radnor in District One PIAA playoffs, the team provided many thrilling moments throughout the season including Dick Sellers goal in the final 3 seconds of the Quakertown game which saved their title chances and moved them into the play-off game with Pennridge. Jack Swartley garnered first team honors on the All Bux-mont Team with Harry Rakowski and Carl Lung receiving Honorable mention.

BOYS TRACK & FIELD - BUX-MONT CHAMPIONS 1956

For the ninth consecutive year, but only the first as NPHS, the boys track and field team captured team honors in the Bux-Mont Track & Field Meet. Despite setbacks to senior captains Bill Rumpf and Rick Cuthbert, the team was victorious in typical Coach James Crawford fashion, winning with only three first place finishes but no one placing lower than fifth for a true team effort. Ailing ace hurdler Rick Cuthbert was a double winner turning in a first-place time of 15.4 seconds in the high hurdles and a second place finish in the low hurdles. Senior Wayne Smith successfully defended his shot put title with a distance of 47' 5 1/2". Jim Sherratt and George Stanton both cleared 11' to share the win in the Pole Vault. With valuable contributions coming from seniors Art Slobodin, quarter mile; Rip Teasenfitz, high jump; Anthony Zadlow and Lin Michener, mile; John Forgay, half-mile; Ron Yoder and Joe Exley, javelin; and Bill Ryan, 100 yard dash the team scored 55 1/2 points with the nearest competitor scoring only 46 1/2 points. Coach James Crawford, a future NPAAA Hall of Famer was ably assisted by John Vinski, also a future member of NPAAA Hall of Fame and Harold Wolff.

GIRLS SOFTBALL - BUX-MONT CHAMPIONS 1956

Coming off an undefeated championship season in 1955 as Lansdale High School, the new North Penn High School girls softball squad coached by future NPAAA Hall of Fame inductee Laura Ann Kehler, successfully defended their Bux-Mont League title. Led by returning senior letterman Barbara Schoettler, Captains Gwen Delp and Phyllis Shambough and fast-ball pitching sensation Patricia Whitman, the team swept through the schedule to clinch the title. Aided by strong play of second baseman Maryann Leight, catcher Carol Schmidt, third baseman Arlene Fluck, Outfielders Sondra Gerhart, Joyce Smith and Lynne Fuss, the team outscored their opponents 108-19. The team giving the girls their stiffest competition was Souderton High School which lost by scores of 5-0 and 6-1 while managing only two hits in each game off North Penn's ace pitcher. With Whitman allowing only fourteen hits and striking out 104 in nine games, the team beat Quakerton 14-2 in the final game of the season to give North Penn High School their third championship. The team's batting average was .376 including high batting averages of .461 by Pat Whitman, .448 Gwen Delp, and .441 Sondra Gerhart. The season ended with the Bux-Mont title as there were no district or state opportunities at this time.