

History of the North-South Game

by Rat Thom

North-South Game Press Relations Director

Bill Calvert, head football coach at Cabin Creek, District High School at East Bank, was the man who conceived the idea of a North-South High School All-Star game and it was through his efforts that the first North-South game was held at Laidley Field on January 1, 1934.

Bill approached Frank Knight, then Sports Editor of the Charleston Gazette, with his 'brain storm' and together they worked out the details of staging the initial game.

The Charleston Gazette and the Charleston Knights of Columbus agreed to sponsor the game. Jimmy Duggan of the K.C.'s and Frank Knight of the Gazette were named Co-Chairman. Russ Parsons, who was coaching at Oak Hill, and Bill Calvert served as Game Directors. Parsons also coached at Charleston Catholic, Stonewall Jackson and Parkersburg during his coaching career.

Charleston High football coach Albert (Big Sleepy) Glenn was selected to coach the South team and Farley Bell, coach at Victory High School in Clarksburg was named to coach the North stars.

Glenn's assistants were J. R. VanMeter of Beckley, Rat Thom and Happy Borchardt, both members of Glenn's Charleston High coaching staff. Bell named Ted Leader and Harry Mintor, both successful coaches in the Clarksburg area, as assistant coaches.

The North squad was assembled at Clarksburg and was quartered at the Gore Hotel. The South squad was selected and quartered at the Holley Hotel in Charleston. Only 22 players were named to each squad in the first game, compared to 35 on each squad today.

The North held daily practice sessions in Clarksburg during the Christmas holidays and came to Charleston on December 31—the day before the game—to hold a final practice session.

In the meantime, Glenn and his assistants were putting the South players through daily paces at Laidley. Weather was a key factor, as light snows and sub-freezing temperatures hindered practice sessions and the game. Many Laidley field practice sessions were held under the South stadium and the North was forced to hold several sessions in a gym. On January 1, it was a cold, freezing, windy day—and both teams found it difficult to get any kind of offense in motion. As a result, it became strictly a defensive battle with the game ending in a scoreless tie.

Players participating in the first game were: South—Woodrow (Jurd) Lipscomb and Roy Brown of Hinton, Kin Dunlap of South Charleston, Everett Hancock of Welch, Frank Huffman, Robert Biggs and Gordon Grissinger of Beckley, Denver Alexander and James Green of War, Ira Adams of Northfork, Raymond Ray of Logan, Robert Moore of Griffithsville, Raymond Simonton and Gene Darnell of Huntington, Hobart Scott of Oak Hill, Lawrence Boland and James McQueen of Williamson, Lee Summers of Summersville, John Atkins of East Bank, Earl Wheby of Princeton and Sam Gardner, Dave Isaac and Maurice Morton of Charleston.

North—Bill Jay, Clarksburg R.W., Charles Stolzenfels, Grafton, Gerald Hayes, West Union, Paul Cochran, Clarksburg Victory, Tom Bolyard, Grafton, Bernard Gilchrist, Parkersburg W.I., Bill Kannan, New Martinsville, Ashford Broadwater, Parkersburg, Harold Joe Madden, Clarksburg W.I., Ralph Moats, Clarksburg R.W., Aldo Paletti, Clarksburg Victory, Francis Knight, Moundsville, Victor Folio, Grafton, Fred Mebera, Fairview, Henry Fryer, Wellsburg, James Call, Clarksburg W.I., Louie Geso, Clarksburg Victory, John Vanchon, Parsons and Glenn Carder, Bridgeport.

Officials for the first game were: Referee—Charles Hodges of Morgantown, Umpire—Patrick Beacom of Huntington, Head Linesman—Carl P. Schott of Morgantown, Field Judge—Jake Miller of Bluefield.

The Knights of Columbus and the Gazette again sponsored the 1935 game with Frank Knight serving as Game Director. In 1936 several newspapers in West Virginia, along with the Charleston Elks Club, sponsored the game with A. L. (Shorty) Hardman, Sports Editor of the Gazette, and Duggan serving as Game Directors. Irish Garrity, former Hinton and Charleston High coach was coach of the South team and Art Clyde of Morgantown was coach of the North All-Stars. The game ended 0-0.

In 1938, due to the unfavorable January 1 date, the date of the game was changed to August. This was a wise move and soon the North-South game 'caught fire' and became an annual event of many activities and a sell-out game crowd. The North-South game became a North-South Week with many sideline activities added—including a tennis tourney, golf tourney, spectacular parade, crowning of North-South Queen—plus a dazzling display of fireworks during half time of the game. Instead of the one day affair it was a week of many activities—climaxed by the playing of the game on the final day.

Hardman, who served as Game Director until 1940, entered the U.S. Navy, and Knight again took over as Game Director. Knight was then the Promotion Manager of the Gazette and was Game Director until the series ended in 1955. It was under his leadership that the game became one of the annual highlight sports event in West Virginia. During this successful period the North-South game was played before S.R.O. and record crowds of 18,000 to 20,000 fans packed Laidley field each year to witness the game.

However in 1955, when everything seemed to be moving along in great style, the series suddenly came to an end. Reason—a ruling by the NCAA in regard to senior high school graduates playing in summer All-Star games. As a result the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission withdrew it's sanction of the game. This was the knockout blow—and the North-South game came to an end.

Then in 1976 the North-South All-Star game was revived when the West Virginia Commission gave its approval and sanction to stage the classic, granting permission for the Charleston Lions Club and the West Virginia Coaches Association to sponsor the contest.

Dr. Charles Byrd, Director of Instructional Technology at West Virginia State College and President of the Charleston Lions Club and Frank Vincent played the leading role in restoration of the All-Star game in 1976. Byrd served as Game Chairman in 1979 and is Game Advisor for the 1980 game. William Seaton is the 1980 Game Chairman and Kenny Wright, Pennsboro Coach, and President of the West Virginia Coaches Association, is again serving as Game Director in 1980.

During the original series, 1934-55, the South dominated the games by winning 14 games, losing five and three resulting in ties. The North won three in a row, beginning in 1949, taking the South 14-9, 12-9 and 27-0. The South won the next two games to run its total victories to 13 before the North won again in 1954. The South won the last game in the original series in 1955, 40-2. This was the most points scored by either team during the 22 year series.

When the classic was resumed in 1976, the North won, 8-6. The game was played in Parkersburg in 1978 due to the fact that the new Laidley Field 19,000 seating capacity stadium was under construction. With the completion of the stadium in Charleston the series was returned to its original site.

The South has dominated the last three games with scores of 23-6, 14-9 and 15-8 and now holds a 17-6 over-all advantage, with three games ending in ties.

Curt Warner, Pineville's great backfield player, played a leading role in the South's 1979 victory by scoring two touchdowns. Warner is now an outstanding player at Penn State.