

VAN METER WINS GAMES AND HEARTS OF FANS

Flying Eagle Boss In Action Nearly Quarter-Century

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Twenty-one complete seasons, with the exception of a two-year term in the service, for Jerome Van Meter as head coach at Woodrow Wilson High school has taught the fans of Beckley to become very endeared to the man who brings up the young high school boys in athletics. A man, who has served his community for a little better than a fifth of the century we are celebrating this coming weekend, certainly deserves recognition of his great work.

He's not a native, born out in Illinois, nor a graduate of a state institution—his college was Illinois Wesleyan. But everyone will concede he's as much a fixture in the city as the corner of Main and Heber streets.

Men like Van Meter come few and far between. This writer who has been writing sports for a quarter of a century and not in the same place, ranks this great Beckley coach above any other high school mentors we ever came in contact with—and we've seen and known some excellent ones.

What Paul Brown and "Greasy" Neale are to professional football, what Frank Leahy, the immortal Knute Rockne, "Pop" Warner and Wallace Wade were and are to college football, so is Jerome Van Meter to the high school variety.

His record is excellent, super-duper in fact, but there's more to it than that just figures. Ask the kids who played for him. Look at the success they have made for themselves. Glance around the state at some of the high school coaches. You'll find them 100 per cent grateful to "Van" that they had the opportunity of playing under him when they were teen-agers.

A coach will go on a long tirade about "character building" more so when he has a losing season and wants to convince his followers that he'll come along eventually. But Van Meter wins and builds character at the same time. He's a great organizer, a great student, a splendid teacher. He knows what to do, when to do it and how to do it. He lets nothing come between him and his job. He's stern with his boys and stands for "no tom-foolery." Yet he has a place for plenty of jollity in his program.

He has the respect of every opposing coach and player who ever went against him. Travel north and south, east and west across the broad expanse of West Virginia and you'll never hear anything but praise for his efficiency, his personality and his coaching greatness. His opponents know that when they play Beckley, theirs will be a fair deal, they'll play against a well-coached club and a group of boys who embody all the sportsmanlike qualities of their coach.

These are the important items in lauding the work of a man who ranks with the greatest coaches in the land. He has coached hundreds of boys who were standouts. The All-State ranks in football and basketball are replete with the names of his athletes, and he's had a lot others equally as good, who were overlooked in the all-star picking fantasy.

You'll find Van Meter's boys coaching at many of the county schools, to name a few, Aubrey Jackson at Clear Fork, Bob Douglas at Sophia, Hubert Jackson at Trap Hill. There are others like Nelson Bragg at Hurricane, Clyde Underwood at Nitro, Jess Lilly at Elkview, "Red" Underwood at the University of Kentucky and Stanley Huffman at Burlington, N. C. This is just scratching the surface of the boys who played under Van and made good in a big way.

His record is amazing down through the 21 years he has been coaching. The statistical chart shows that he has won 139 football games and lost 61. That's for a 69 per cent record. In regular season play his basketball teams have won 282 games and lost 123, practically a 70 per cent average.

In hoop tournaments the win record is even higher, 83 per cent, with 97 wins and 20 losses. He doesn't coach baseball, track or wrestling, but under his supervision and direction baseball shows 53 wins and 31 losses.

That's a total number of victories in the three major sports of 473, right close to 500 which he should surpass in his 22nd year. He has lost 235 times and that's for an average of .668.

To go down over the entire list of boys who earned letters under Coach Van Meter would fill columns of these pages. We jotted down some of the names of that first football team in 1929. Like Mike Quinn, Tom Covey, Roland and Fred Hurt, and have the list of all-staters in football and basketball as gleaned from the records.

In the gridiron sport Frank Huffman made an end post in 1933, Jim Hanson was an end and "Buster" Smith a quarterback in 1938, George Davis took tackle honors in 1941, while in the later years follows the names of "Ink" Nick Bahall, Don Hodson, Randall Broyles, Joe Conite and Bill Sigmond were prominent.

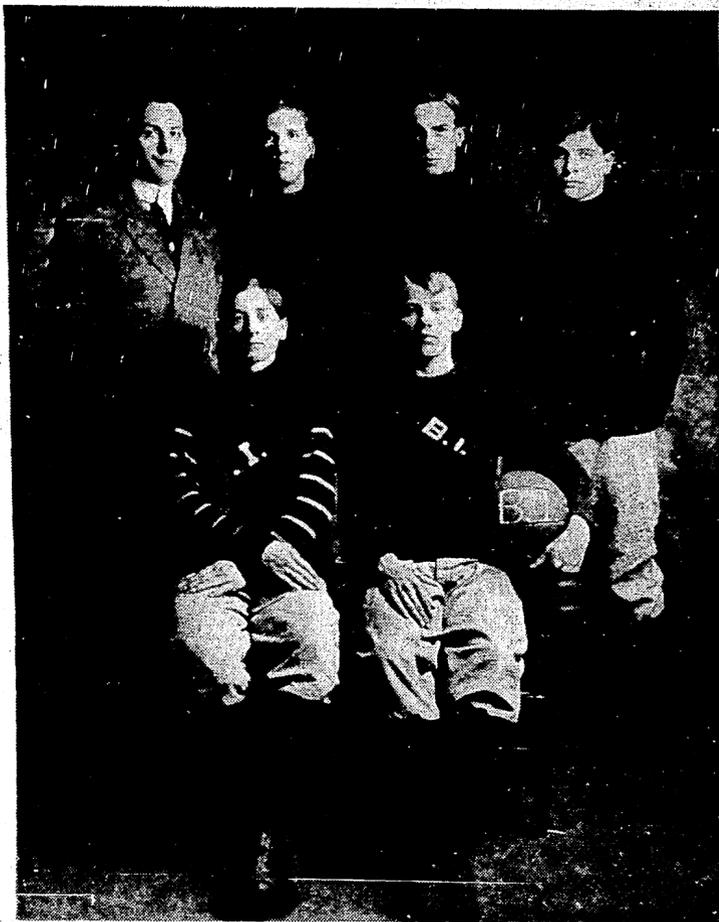
And the football sport couldn't be complete without mentioning some of the near all staters like Sam Tucker, Clarence Underwood, Ned Quinn, Joe Fleishman, Jess Lilly, Nelson Bragg, Frank Grecco, Guy Potts, Pat O'Leary, Charles Stansbury, Ralph Burke, Clyde Underwood, Gene Warden, Curtis Mills, Stan Huffman, Melvin Wood, Tony Sparaco, Jim Kuhn, Vic Peelish, Randy Miller, and Sam Rahall.

Through the many years Beckley has visited the state basketball tournament it has had a goodly share of boys picked all-tourney since Van Meter's days and this list includes the names of Arnold Yost, Nick Bakalis, Jesse Lilly, Aubrey Jackson, Bob Goldsmith (who made all-tourney honors twice), Steve Ulaki, Jimmy Bakalis, Larry Hunt and Frank Rodriguez (all from the 1946 state champion team).

On the rolls of the all-state teams you complete the basketball lists with the names of such outstanding players as Ted Cook, who later captained the University of Tennessee; Jimmy Bakalis, who played with Cam Henderson's fine club at Marshall; Arnold Yost; Bob Goldsmith, star at Washington & Lee; Lawrence Hunt, a sensation in basketball and track in his first year at Woodrow Wilson and now is at West Virginia University, and Frank Rodriguez, another current WVU performer.

A word about Hunt. It was the year Van Meter had been out-kept continuously busy helping needy families, aiding transients, and giving religious counsel to all those in need.

Some Old Time Raleigh County Athletic Teams That Made History



Eccles Had Great Ball Club Around World War I Era

"That was the greatest coalfield team West Virginia ever had." Such a statement about a team that performed in Eccles around 1917 came from its manager, Carl V. "Duke" Ridgeley, now on the sports staff of the Huntington Herald-Dispatch. So, no Centennial sports page could be complete without the story on that great club.

It was World War I that brought about this outfit. Before Kaiser Wilhelm drew America into the first big fight, Eccles had a ball park on the road to Stevens branch, but when Hal Scott's Company, guarding tunnels in this area, came in, it took over the ball park for its camp.

The Eccles community thus moved to a new spot, the present location of the Admiral club, on top of the knoll across from the company store. The entire town turned out to keep a ball park in Eccles, getting slabs from a nearby saw mill with the bark still on it to inclose the diamond with a fence.

Hammers, nails and lumber were toted up the hill and a grandstand built. Though the fence and stands have weathered and have needed replacements, they're still standing. R. J. Burmeister mentioned that Eccles had a "ringer" team that year and Ridgeley could provide the information.

"I can't remember all the players," said Ridgeley when contacted. He then proceeded to reel off the complete squad, the fact that the team won 32 out of 34 games, and some of the history of the ball players. He even remembered that Beckley was one of the two teams to beat the Eccles outfit, mainly because of great work by Don Daniel, Aubrey Smith and pitcher by the name of Guy Morrison, who was a teammate of Earl "Greasy" Neal at West Virginia Wesleyan.

Burmeister recalls that the team rode the trains to the various towns that games were played in and Ridgeley added that games in Huntington, Charleston and Cincinnati were on the schedule. "In fact, Huntington was the other team to beat Eccles that year," Ridgeley went on.

The Eccles pitching staff had

Wayne Wright, Clyde Marks, "Dago" Lawrence and Hugh Davidson. Wright later went on to the St. Louis Browns in the American League and in 1919 had the AL's best win and lost record, 10 wins and two defeats. Lawrence and Davidson were Marshall players and Marks from Huntington.

Frank Crum and "Chuck" McDaniels divided the catching duties. Crum later became a state amateur golf champion, swinging his clubs as a southpaw. He batted from the left side and threw right-handed.

The infield had "Bud" Dearien on first, Dick Smith at second, Tom Thurmond on short and Ezra "Saltrock" Midkiff on third. Smith is none other than current director of athletics at Washington & Lee, playing with Eccles soon after he graduated from the Lexington, Va., school. Fans will remember him as a great defensive player and good hitter.

Thurmond was from Charleston and Midkiff, now the sheriff of Cabell county, went on to play under Hal Chase with the New York Yankees and later with the Cincinnati Redlegs.

The Eccles outfield had "Cutie" Falbert in left, Wilbur Fisher in center and "Dad" Snedegar in right. Ridgeley, himself quite a ball player who played some 12 years in the minor leagues, could break into that lineup.

COUNTY ON PLATEAU
Raleigh County lies in the Cumberland Plateau region. The northern portion is a high dissected plateau, reaching from 2,500 feet above tide on Kayford Mountain to 3,300 feet on Pilot Knob along the boundary line between Raleigh and Wyoming counties. Water erosion has reduced all this original plateau to slope, and the streams flow in deeply cut "V"-shaped valleys.

GENERAL ASSIGNED
On May 13, 1861, General George B. McClellan was assigned by the War Department in Washington to the Department of Ohio, which included Raleigh County.



Upper left: The 1905 football team of Beckley Seminary that started the sport on a big scale with a 20-0 win over Hinton. Back row, left to right: Grover Hunt, George Williams, captain and coach; Floyd Thompson, Ernest Richmond, Bernard Bailey, Phil Williams. Middle: Blaise Phillips, C. P. Garten, Cam Lewis, Robert Lewis, D. W. Scott. Front: J. Baxter McCorkle, Fred Hawley, mascot, Paul Earwood. Upper right: An outdoor basketball team of 1909 representing Beckley Institute. Back row, 1 to 8, Coach Mays, Emmett Snead, Aubrey Smith, Guy Morrison. Front, Carlton Cook, Grover Trail. Lower left: March 1931's first football team, coached by Charles Munson, in 1927. Back row, 1 to 8: Coach Munson, Leslie Bradley, Virgil Sarrett, Stan McIntyre, McGraw, Acord, Matsos, Cecil Bradley, Pat Talierico, Mgr. Babe Green. Front: Dennis Hartless, "Fats" Neeley, Boyd Hartless, "Batey" Foster, Doris Marshall, Raymond Stammer, Ed Pettigrew. Mick Forsman absent when picture taken. Lower center: Mabscott baseball team of 1915. Back row, left to right, Garnet Wright, Mick Stewart, Gladwyn Davenport, Rucker Cline, Carter, Laey Carper, Jimmy Rook, Carl King. Front, Newt Harlow, Mgr. Dewey Combs, Eddie McDaniel, Finley King.

Butcher, Ragland Played For First Paid Mentor

Much has been written about how far back the start of football goes at each school, but let's take a look at the record of the first paid coach at Woodrow Wilson and see who helped make his years a success. On the list of names, the first ones that strike out are those of Max Butcher, later a major league ball player, and Ned Ragland, prosecuting attorney in the county now.

Bowers, a successful attorney in town now, made Woodrow Wilson his first stop in a position once he graduated from West Virginia University. Up to his time with the Flying Eagles, teachers coached Beckley's teams. But Bowers got paid for his coaching. He taught a little on the side. The first "paid" coach was himself an excellent athlete, playing all sports in his high school days, but concentrating largely on basketball in his inter-collegiate years.

He came to Beckley in the fall of 1925 and after two years, dropped out of coach, as Paul Steinbecker succeeded him to the WWHHS helm. Paul was Van Meter's predecessor.

In football, Bowers recalled some of the players who were on the squads his two years as mentor. Butcher played an end for Woodrow Wilson and was a center in basketball. Besides Ragland such names as these favored for the Flying Eagles:

Hugart Holliday, George Hankla, Tom Gatherum, Wheeler Davis, Paul Malone, Roy Foster, Dayton Meadows, Clint Warden, Ray Bowden, Dr. Clyde "Pinky" Smith, Louis Gravelly, Cecil Spangler and Euland Thomas.

"Bumps" Hobson and "Dutch" Thompson, both deceased, were other members of those athletic teams at Woodrow Wilson in the area of Coach Bowers.

WELFARE ASSEMBLY
The Raleigh County Social Welfare Assembly was formed in 1949 with Gus F. Walker, Appalachian Boy Scout Council Executive, spearheading its organization. The Assembly aims to co-ordinate the activities of all civic and service organizations in the county. A. U. Fault is now prexy.

KILLED BY TREE
Nehemiah Daniel, who came from Carroll County to Marsh Fork near Saxton in 1840, was killed by a falling tree near the present Henderson farm on Feb. 29, 1852, while returning home on horseback.

County Fair Had Racing Programs

Horse racing, confined largely nowadays at Wheeling and Charles Town in West Virginia, had its beginnings in Raleigh County in the days that the Raleigh County Fair was held out on the Fairgrounds on the Stanaford road.

This fair started back in 1925 and while there were all the usual sidelights, the horses were quite numerous at the track and the races good. At first it was the trotters and pacers who came in, a program of the Fair in 1928 showing purses as high as \$300 being offered. Four or five events were the rule each day.

In 1930 the running horses were the rage and betting evidently was legal since the newspapers carried the payoffs for each of the three winners. On Labor day that year Sporting Silk won the second race and paid its backers \$15.60, 3.20 and 3.00.

The same horse ran the next day, but in winning paid only \$2.80 and \$2.00 in a three-horse event. And it was the same story the rest of the way, with the mutuels much lower as the favorites came through in the majority of cases.

In one of the reports of the 1930 horse races, the story read like this: "Tish, J. H. Womack's brown mare, acted up at the post and broke away several times before the start. Finally when the lineup was set, she swerved through again breaking the string, and the flag was dropped.

"Patsy McDonald, Sporting Silk and Polly May managed to get away, but left Stormy, Wild Waves and two others standing still. Tish was an outsider in the wagering and the fans howled for a disqualification. The racing judges decided to call of all bets and return the wagers. This won the race and got the Purse of \$150."

During the late '20s when the sulky races were in evidence the Raleigh County Fair's total purses ran as high as \$4,500.

John Gorsica

Born in New Jersey, but now settled down as a Beckleyan since he started his professional baseball career in Beckley, is John Gorsica, only other ball player in these parts who has seen action in a major league World Series. The big righthander, pitching sensationally for two years in the Class D Mountain State league with the local Bengals in 1937 and 1938, then went on to Detroit, with a stopoff in between at Beaumont in the Texas league.

Though used largely as a relief pitcher with a consequence that he never hunted up great pitching records in the win and lost column, Gorsica played a brilliant role in Detroit's march to the American League pennant in 1940.

He won some vital and crucial games in low-hit pitching performances in September. On a staff that included "Schoolboy" Rowe, Bobo Newsom, Tommy Bridges and Dizzy Trout, Gorsica relieved in two losing games of the '40 series against the Cincinnati Redlegs.

He might have been in another series, but when Detroit won in 1945 Gorsica was pitching another kind of game, World War II for Uncle Sam. He rejoined the Tigers for 1946 and 1947 before he came up with a sore arm that has caused him unhappiness and some rather vain attempts to get back in harness and make a comeback with San Diego in the Pacific Coast league. With no response from his arm this past spring, Gorsica decided to hang up his glove.

PRODUCTS OF 'VAN' IN COACHING RANKS



CLYDE UNDERWOOD (Nitro High)



BOB DOUGLAS (Sophia High)



JOHN GORSICA (Beckley High)



RED UNDERWOOD (Kentucky U)

BKCC Started To Operate In 1929

The Black Knight Country Club, first opened in 1929, has been largely the center of all golfing activity in Raleigh County, attracting its members even from outside the district. Its current champion is from Mt. Hope in Fayette, Ed Tutwiler.

C. B. Sweet, the club pro, has been with Black Knight practically ever since it was built. C. B.'s father built the greens and his son took over. One of the earliest golf enthusiasts was E. M. Payne, Sr. Some of the champions who have preceded Champ Tutwiler were Lou Scherer, Doug Bowers, Earl Bailey, J. S. Trump, Ned Payne and Ray Sawyer.

SALVATION ARMY
Captain John Roy Jones heads the Beckley Citadel of the Salvation Army. The organization is kept continuously busy helping needy families, aiding transients, and giving religious counsel to all those in need.

Glen White Baseballers Of 1910



Glen White had an almost all-winning team in 1910. The boys are pictured above. Fourth from left in back row was D. A. G. Bowles of Beckley. Man in the derby hat in front is G. F. Stahl, who acted as manager of the team and is now assistant to vice-president of Eastern Gas & Fuel Associates. Others in photo are front, 1 to 4, Burton (first name unknown); second man unidentified; Larbin Potts, Bob Yancey. Back row, Edgar Fairburn, Luther Browning, Harry Dewees, Dr. Bowles, L. C. Thomas, Jack McHugh, A. A. Potts.