

Stories
from the
Sidelines

N.C. High School Football Tales
from Murphy to Marion

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from Murphy to Marion**

Michael E. Hughes

YAV PUBLICATIONS
ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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FOREWORD

This book is long overdue. There were so many retired football coaches just sitting on good stories from their careers. Babe Howell was one of them. Coach Howell saw a lot more than I'm trying to see right now—and I'm still learning, believe it or not. Babe's not here anymore, and I'm thankful that Michael got to talk to Coach Howell before he died. I sure wish he could have talked to Johnny Anderson, because I loved listening to his stories. I coached for Johnny at McDowell from 1982 to 1986 and learned how things should be done. He's gone too, and it's up to me and others like Carson Gowan, and some other people who played and coached for him, to tell those Johnny stories. That's how he's going to live on.

Every coach has a story. There's not a coach out there who's not a personality or a character in some way. If you're worth a hoot as a coach, you've got stories, and now's the time to get these out while we can. So it was important to talk to all of these coaches. Their stories were going to fade away if we didn't get them out now. Somebody else might remember a version of what went on, or what these men taught and stood for, but it wouldn't be the same.

None of these stories and events was planned, and very few of the things in this book have been repeated. Something happens that's never happened before, maybe in a game or a practice, maybe on the bus to an away game. That's what makes these stories what they are. By the time you think you've seen it all, all of a sudden, you ain't.

This book will be out there after all of us are gone. And before these stories get away from us, it's a good idea, while they're fresh and on our minds, to get them down and share them with later generations.

Michael Hughes is more than qualified to put all this together. As much football as he's seen, I think he's got some stories himself that he ought to tell. He has a love for the game and appreciates the things that went on. I think his passion and the way he writes will help make this go.

I'm still trying to decide when or whether I want to retire or not. It may be that retired coaches have more time to dwell on the things that have happened, and value them a lot more.

I've always wanted to get these stories out. Now they're finally here.

*—Kenny Ford, head football coach,
C.D. Owen High School
Black Mountain, NC
June 12, 2013*

PREFACE

This book was Kenny Ford's idea. Owen High's longtime football coach even suggested the title, and his endorsement of the project provided access to former high school coaches whose legacies remain.

The years that these men guided high school football programs in North Carolina's Blue Ridge and Great Smoky mountains are the backdrop for *Stories from the Sidelines*. The times are past, but the memories are fresh.

The chapters in this volume contain firsthand stories and oral histories of 48 coaches who guided 38 football teams from 18 mountain counties. Five of the schools no longer exist. Some background and researched material has been added to make the setting more familiar, especially for readers further removed from the decades that are discussed and recounted in these pages.

Each chapter has a dual narrative, and every coach is quoted at length as he shares his tales and occasional commentary. The dialogue from previous eras is given as it's remembered.

One coach describes what he experienced when he moved from a small-town school to one with a much larger enrollment, where campus unrest lingered from the civil rights era. Another coach speaks of the power struggles and political wrangling that came with being the head coach in a football-crazy town. Two men give their respective sides on a controversial playoff ending involving their teams. The state's first integrated football team is discussed, unusual moments in the huddle and during timeouts are recalled, and rivalries are looked at in diverse ways. You'll also read of some off-the-field activity during playoff trips, of games interrupted by harsh weather, and learn how the Juice Jug originated in one mountain rivalry. You might chuckle at some of the pre-game antics that are mentioned, or sympathize with coaches who had problems with the press.

Four men wrote down and submitted some of their experiences for this volume. The son of one coach, whose illness prevented his

direct participation, provided a brief summation of his dad's career and the years he spent in the 1980s and '90s. Another coach, whose health is fragile, listened closely with occasional input while four of his former players shared information and stories of the years they had with him.

Accounts of a few players who grew up in western North Carolina are also included, along with recollections of how the game was played and prepared for in former days.

More than half of the 48 coaches were either offensive linemen (18) or runningbacks (7) in their playing days. Most of them played for or were involved with football at what is now Western Carolina University or at Mars Hill College. Of the 18 future coaches who studied at Western, 12 played for Tom Young, Dan Robinson, or Bob Waters. Nine of the 10 Mars Hill graduates played for Don Henderson or Claude Gibson.

The most enduring memories for the contributors were the relationships they developed with their players and staff members, together with the camaraderie that developed at coaches meetings and annual football clinics. Victory and defeat were often secondary. Each coach had a knack for knowing the tiniest facts and fine points of what happened years ago, while the precise years and exact dates were sometimes harder. "The times that I'm going to give you are approximate. I can't tell you exactly," more than one coach said. As former Rosman and Pisgah coach Jim Fox said, "My wife is always telling me, 'You can't remember to get bread and milk, but you can remember the slightest detail from a practice or game from 30 years ago.'"

It was the author's job to pore over the newspaper clippings and material supplied by these men, and to make use of other available sources. Any error in the researched material is the author's alone. Likewise, it was his responsibility to follow up on any oversight or omission found in the narratives.

Football has changed in only subtle ways since these men carried a whistle, mostly in how it's packaged and presented. Classifications are now determined by the 25th percentile rather than uniformity. As consolidation removed more of the smaller high schools, former 2-A programs dropped down in class, creating more schools with larger enrollments at the smallest level. The blocking rules have been modified and the players are larger than ever. "There are 300-pound linemen in high school," says former Brevard, West Henderson, and Pisgah coach Carroll Wright. "At Swain in 1954, my senior year, I was the biggest guy on the team at 175 pounds."

Push blocking with open hands led to a change in the way players dress. With virtual holding allowed near the shoulder pads, the

sleeves on football jerseys are worn high and tight to prevent loose material from being gripped by the opposition.

Weight training is now the norm for every football program. In the 21st century even golfers are pumping iron.

“You see YouTubes of kids in the eighth grade wanting a scholarship,” said former McDowell coach David Riggs. “That has changed coaching quite a bit. That puts too much pressure on everybody.”

Synthetic grass and other artificial playing surfaces are also changing how the game is played. “I’m sure it’s a faster playing surface,” said retired North Buncombe coach Perry Sanderson. “When I was coaching, one of your main jobs was mowing and weed-eating, and spreading and lining the field. It was year-round. Now I go out to North Buncombe and look at that beautiful, gorgeous field there, and they don’t have to do anything. You don’t water it, you don’t spray it, you don’t have to line it off—it’s just there.”

As in every era, the modern game brings different ways to advance to football. The Spread is the latest fad on the field, although ball control and smash-mouth football is still in vogue.

“People had some skilled athletes and saw an opportunity to spread the field,” said Danny Shook, who coached at Pisgah, Enka, and West Henderson. “When they did that, they got more kids to come out who hadn’t been playing—maybe a basketball player, or a baseball player who wasn’t big enough and physically tough enough to be a regular in the old football regime. They came out and made wideouts out of them.”

Teams had fewer postseason opportunities when these men were coaching. Before 1989 the state’s four championship games were played at one of the finalist’s home fields. Using a higher percentage of gate receipts as incentive, the two coaches would sometimes bargain for the rights to host the final game. When the state association learned of that practice a system was set up for taking turns—in the east one year, and then the west. “[By then] you had to share the gate receipts with the state,” said former Robbinsville coach Bob Colvin, whose teams won 11 state titles in the old 1-A class.

“We didn’t have near as much state control over it as they do now,” said Hugh Hamilton, who coached at Andrews, Lee Edwards/Asheville High, and East Henderson. “When the North Carolina High School Athletic Association was getting started, they more or less let you govern yourself. But the conference itself did most of the regulations and discipline control.”

Player conditioning has improved over the years. Water, ice, and moist towels were occasionally permitted in earlier times. Athletes

were sometimes given salt tablets during a hot afternoon practice, never in games.

Some of the men who shared their stories for this book were still playing, and one was already coaching when Andy Griffith became a star with his hit recording, *What It Was, Was Football*. And when you think about it, even with the trends and fads through the years, football is pretty much the same.

From one generation to the next, to everyone who has played, taught, or followed America's gridiron sport, the men who coached high school football in western North Carolina have even more to tell.

I hope you enjoy their stories as much as I did.

Michael E. Hughes
2013

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE 48 MEN WHO
EXPERIENCED AND LATER SHARED WHAT WAS
COMPILED FOR THIS PUBLICATION.

“I don’t reminisce much because, as the old saying goes, ‘There’s nothing older than yesterday’s newspaper.’ I can tell you some things that I wouldn’t tell the public, because they would think, ‘He’s just blowing smoke.’”

*Lionel Brooks,
Former head football coach (1990 – 1996)
Smoky Mountain High
Sylva, NC*

HUGH HAMILTON

Andrews 1951 – 1954, 1961 – 1967
Lee Edwards/Asheville High 1968 – 1971
East Henderson 1972 – 1978

HUGH “PEE WEE” HAMILTON *acquired his nickname on the first day he entered his college dormitory. He and Bill Flack, a student from Marion, N.C., were walking toward one another on opposite ends of the hallway. Flack hollered at Hamilton, who paid no attention, so he yelled again, “Hey Pee Wee!” and the moniker stuck.*

At 5’6,” Hamilton is smaller than most males but not as short as the name implies.

He had two tenures as the head football coach at Andrews High School (1951 – ’54, 1961 – ’67) in Andrews, N.C.; spent four years at Lee Edwards/Asheville High (’68 – ’71) in Asheville, N.C.; and finished his coaching career at East Henderson High (’72 – ’78) in East Flat Rock, N.C.

In his playing days Pee Wee was a single-wing tailback at Andrews High, and later formed a dynamic backfield at Western Carolina College with fullback Chuck McConnell. His teammates included other young men who would one day coach football in the western third of the state. Hamilton was the Catamounts’ leading scorer and rusher in ’48, became an All-North State Conference selection, and added all-state honors in ’49 for Western Carolina’s first ever conference football champions.

Hamilton went directly into coaching after college and stayed in the profession until he retired after the ’78 season. He was inducted in Western Carolina University’s Athletics Hall of Fame in 1992.

In Coach Hamilton’s second stint at Andrews the 1-A Wildcats won state regional championships in ’64, ’66, and ’67. North Carolina’s smaller schools were not permitted to advance further in those years.



Pee Wee Hamilton walked tall as a player and a coach



Coach Hamilton
accepting Hall of Fame
honors at WCU

Five of his seven teams at East Henderson finished with seven regular season wins.

The football facility at Andrews was named Hugh Hamilton Stadium in 1988.



COACH HAMILTON set the Andrews football program in motion in 1951. Starting with no tradition and few resources, the Wildcats were annual playoff contenders in the 1950s and '60s and had their heyday during the two Hamilton eras.

"It was right after World War II," he said. "No coaches were available in World War II and right after the war. I got out of college, went over there [for] my first coaching job, and it took us four years. We built from scratch."

The program had about 15 boys to start with. Before long, football was the sport of choice in Cherokee County, making Andrews the toughest competition in North Carolina's far western counties.

"I was in high school from '41 to '44 during the war years," Hamilton said. "We really didn't have football my junior and senior year."

Hamilton graduated from Andrews at age 16 and enrolled at Western Carolina. He tried out for the football team, which was more of a club team, and played as a freshman before he was old enough to join the Navy for submarine duty.

"Anybody who was any age to play ball was [in military service] as soon as you got 18," he said. "We got a team up, we played, and the next year I went into the service."

Hamilton returned to college in '48 with help from the G.I. Bill. Western had a school-sanctioned football team by then and, with hard work and determination, he became a huge success. After a hall-of-fame playing career with the Catamounts he returned home to coach at his high school alma mater.

"Every game I coached [at Andrews] was one of my favorite moments," he said.



THE SPLIT SMOKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE began to dominate 1-A and 2-A football in North Carolina in the 1950s, and it all started with Andrews. One of Coach Hamilton's proudest achievements is taking his undefeated Wildcats to the state playoffs for the first time

in 1954. Since that year the region has won 25 state 1-A championships, six 2-A crowns, and another eight western state titles—four in each class—in the years when the state’s regional winners didn’t meet on the field.

“We got them started,” Hamilton said of the region’s supremacy. “Now, just about every year we have teams in the playoffs [and] winning. We opened the gate.”

His early football teams at Andrews used the single-wing formation on offense and switched to the split-T in ’54. During the 1960s the Wildcats ran the pro-set offenses that are still being used by NFL teams.

“This Spread [offense], we never did get into that,” he said. “If you start spreading them out everywhere, you don’t have many people left for blocking.”

After he switched schools, Hamilton’s teams at Asheville High and East Henderson ran the triple-option offense from the three-back wishbone. His early defenses were a six-man stacked line. In his later years he favored a five-man front with two linebackers.

“We’d always put them in a position where they could out-quick you,” he said. “[In] my coaching years, there wasn’t a whole lot of passing.”

HAMILTON LEFT Andrews and the school system in 1955 for a construction job in the Southeast, becoming a heavy equipment operator. Five years later the Wildcats’ football program was on probation with the state association. Unsupervised football players had vandalized a motel during a postseason trip and created general mischief.

“They had to drop some of their ballgames [and] couldn’t play any home games, all sorts of things,” said Hamilton.

The new superintendent in Cherokee County, Charles Frazier, was a college friend of Hamilton’s and the principal at Andrews High in the 1950s. Frazier brought a group to the construction site where Hamilton was working in ’61 and asked him to return.

“I knew all of them,” Hamilton said. “I finally decided, ‘Well, maybe so.’

“When I went back they were still under that probation, then we got things rolling. From there to ’68 we were in the playoffs every year.”

Coach Hamilton had no trouble getting a full team together even though Andrews was one of the smallest public high schools in the state.

“They always seemed to come out for football,” he said of youth on the eastern side of the county. “Kids in third or fourth grade, you could walk across campus, and those kids would come out and holler, ‘I’m going to play ball for you!’ You could pass through the community of Andrews anytime during football season and the yards were full of kids playing football. By second or third grade, they’re just going at it.

“But in those years, the class A division could not play in the state playoffs. They just played the regional playoffs—east and west divisions. I wanted to win them all.”



Hugh “Pee Wee” Hamilton was Western Carolina’s leading scorer and rusher on the Catamounts’ 1948 and 1949 football teams. The ‘49 squad (pictured) is enshrined in the university’s Hall of Fame, and also featured end Elmo Neal (see ch. 4) and fullback Joe Hunt.

HAMILTON LEFT Andrews again in ‘68 to become the head coach at Lee H. Edwards High School in Asheville, N.C. A year later Lee Edwards was renamed Asheville High.

“I had accomplished all I could ever accomplish at Andrews,” Hamilton said. “I wanted to test my wings a little bit . . . try to get a little faster brand of ball, and that just didn’t work out.”

He accepted the new job that summer and moved his family of four from small-town Andrews to a growing city of 60,000. The career move came when the Vietnam War was at its highest level of activity, the civil rights movement was in force, and school integration

for blacks and whites was finally being enforced in the southern United States.

Early on at Lee Edwards, Hamilton noticed some litter near a young black student on the school grounds. After telling him to pick up the trash and keep the area clean, the new football coach got a scornful ‘How dare you?’ look in return. Incidents of that type were common in the late 1960s.

“I’ve got pretty thick skin,” said Hamilton, who still wasn’t used to the reactions he got in those first weeks. “I’ve been called everything a man can be called. I’ve never resented it. I never said anything back to them.”

Understanding some of the reasons behind those early rifts, he said, “I’ve had white people talk to me a lot worse than the black people have.”

The general mood of Southern life was changing in the 1960s. Asheville was also much different from Andrews, and Hamilton had to adjust in ways that he didn’t expect. During his first preseason at Lee Edwards he knew he was in the wrong place, but was determined to make the most of it.

“I knew my days were numbered there,” he said. “It just wasn’t my type of school. It wasn’t my type of people, my type of players.”

Getting young people from different backgrounds to work together was harder in those days. Some of the players were unwilling or reluctant to even be on the football field—in practice or in games—unless they were comfortable with their teammates.

“If he didn’t know everybody real well on the field, he didn’t want to go in,” Hamilton said of one of the many sentiments he had to sort out.

Given the circumstances surrounding the city and the school, he was sympathetic, “but if you’re in a position or a group, all these things are forgotten. You’re just people. We’re out here to practice ball, to play ball. . . .

“I didn’t want to give up before I got started,” he said of some early frustrations. “I wanted to try, which I did. We were all in that civil rights business and all of that. It took the place of everything.”

INTEGRATION IN ASHEVILLE’S CITY SCHOOLS was gradual at first. South French Broad High School was built to take in most of the city’s minority students when all-black Stephens-Lee High was closed in 1965, while some of the former Stephens-Lee students enrolled at Lee Edwards. The city schools were fully integrated when South French Broad became a junior high in ’69, though some of the students resented having to change schools.

“They brought them over there against their wishes, evidently many of them,” Hamilton said. “Lee Edwards was an old school. They came from a brand new one, and [there was] agitations on both sides. It was difficult for everybody. The faculty was in the middle of it. You didn’t really know how to react to the kids; they didn’t know how to react to you. They’d never seen you before, didn’t know anything about you, things like that. Who could know what would happen if you hadn’t been in that situation before?”

“It was a real boiling pot. Nobody knew what anybody wanted. You never knew what was going to happen.”

Opposition to the Lee Edwards name triggered a walkout by about 200 students at the start of the ’69-’70 school year. The new students opposed keeping the name of what had been an all-white school for 35 years. They also wanted to change the school colors and mascot/nickname. Equal representation on student councils and the cheerleading squads were other concerns, along with issues like opposition to dress codes, and wanting the trophy case to include awards, plaques, and other reminders from the Stephens-Lee and South French Broad years. Outside groups were behind the protest and helped organize the students.

“They broke all the windows. I saw them turning over automobiles.”

The demonstrations turned violent on the third day of classes.

“It lasted all day,” Hamilton said of the school riot. “They turned over cars and broke down windows. [The school] had a new section they had built on the northeast corner toward the hospital. On the new wing there, it had a lot of glass windows in it. They broke all the windows. I saw them turning over automobiles.”

Most of the black students were not involved, he added.

“When all that stuff started they did not participate. They came down to the gym and stayed out of the way.”

AFTER ORDER WAS RESTORED, school activities were suspended and a citywide curfew lasted three days. The varsity football team held practices off campus while school was out, and home games went on as scheduled at nearby Memorial Stadium.

“[When] this started brewing, if you were a black child and wanted to go to Lee Edwards, you could,” Hamilton said of the three years after Stephens-Lee closed. “There were a lot of black kids at Lee Edwards. There were a lot of good kids over there. But the kids who wanted to stay in the black schools, they went to South French Broad. We played them in football.”

Lee Edwards and the South French Broad Bears fought to a 6-6 tie in ’68. The Lee Edwards Maroon Devils became the Asheville High Cougars in Coach Hamilton’s second season in Asheville. The school colors changed from maroon to

cardinal-and-black. A new alma mater and fight song were added later, among other changes.

THE COUGARS had two .500 seasons in Hamilton's four seasons in Asheville.

A second riot at Asheville High School occurred on October 18, 1972.



ORIGINALLY FROM HENDERSONVILLE, N.C., Hamilton returned to his roots when East Henderson hired him as its head football coach for the 1972 season. He always met with his family before he uprooted his wife and two children to a different home and school system.

"We always sat down and talked about it," he said. "They got their say-so's in."

The discussions centered on questions such as, "Would that be an improvement for us? Would you like to go to school there?"

East Henderson was another consolidated high school from the 1960s. Several smaller schools in neighboring communities combined, but the rural district was more spread out than inner city Asheville, and certain problems had to be resolved.

"When they were competing in athletics [as] individual schools they were tremendous rivals," Hamilton said of former schools in the area. "When they were thrown together to compete as one team, those rivalries didn't go away. You couldn't bond them together. But for awhile, we had some pretty good ball clubs."

East Henderson unified with the children and grandchildren of former rivals who teamed up and made progress possible, similar to other schools that went through consolidation in western North Carolina. There was less social unrest at East during the '70s, "but they had some problems there," Hamilton said. "Of course, I stepped right in the middle of them."

Among the worst of the trouble, seven football players from the Hamilton era were caught putting firecrackers in some neighborhood mailboxes. The boys were placed under federal probation, "so you had near convicts playing right with you," Hamilton said. "But you never really look at it that way. They're just kids. You had some doers and some don't-doers. . . . But I got pretty good results from them."

Coach Hamilton's son, Billy Hamilton, played three years for the Eagles during 1970s as a split end/wide receiver.



Coach Hamilton in his well-adorned Clay County home



The oldest of the 48 coaches featured in this volume relaxes with his wife, the former Mildred Arrowood Brooks

AFTER 22 YEARS as a head football coach, Pee Wee Hamilton resigned as East Henderson's head football coach and ended his tenure as athletic director in 1978. He also left the physical education department and spent his last eight years as a state employee teaching mathematics.

After his first wife died he married the former Mildred Arrowood Brooks in 1991. The Hamiltons have lived on a lakefront home in Hayesville, N.C., since the mid-1990s.

"There are a lot of turmoil years in this thing here," Coach Hamilton said, pointing to a therapeutic view of Lake Chatuge outside his living room window. "I just like the mountains out here. I like this area."

Hamilton returned to East Henderson on October 11, 2013 to become the first inductee in the school's Eagle Hall of Fame.

CLIFF BROOKSHIRE

C.D. Owen 1956
Brevard 1960 – 1965
Tuscola 1966 – 1969
Enka 1970

CLIFF BROOKSHIRE was a head football coach at four high schools in western North Carolina from 1959 to 1970. Counting his four years as a line coach at Canton High, he worked with five football programs in the mountain region.

As a player, Brookshire was an offensive guard at Wake Forest College, where he majored in physical education and biology. He played for two more years while he was stationed at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C., during the Korean War. His football coach at Sand Hill High near Asheville, N.C., was Bill Morris. “We didn’t have a blade of grass on our [home] field,” Brookshire said of his first days on the gridiron. “The goal posts were made out of two-by-fours.”

As a Sand Hill senior Brookshire won Most Valuable Player honors for the West all-star team after he blocked three punts in the first Optimist Bowl held in Asheville.

“My dad didn’t know anything about football,” he said. “When I got to play in that all-star game he listened to it on the radio. I think it impressed him because they were calling my name out so much. When I started playing college ball he’d come to the games.”

A truck driver by profession, William A. Brookshire drove the 230 miles—before the Interstate Highway System was built—to see his son play when the college’s campus was still in Wake Forest, N.C. “I



Two of Cliff Brookshire's six teams at Brevard finished undefeated

think what he enjoyed more than anything was the two years I played at Fort Jackson,” Brookshire said.

There were two military units at the Army base, the Eighth Division and the Dixie Division. Six former college all-Americans were on the starting offensive teams.

“He and Mom would get in that old Chevrolet and come to Columbia,” said Brookshire, still relishing the memory. “He enjoyed that. They’d march thousands and thousands of troops in, and they had two big bands. All the cars [had] flags flying on the bumpers. Dad got a kick out of that. When they played the national anthem it put chills up and down you.”

Brookshire was inducted into the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) Hall of Fame in April 2003. After he retired from coaching he had guided three teams to the pinnacle of their playing level—an undefeated state champion, a west-regional state champion, and a regional state co-champion, all in the 3-A class at Brevard High School, where he also led the state’s first integrated public school football team in 1963.



BROOKSHIRE BECAME THE head football coach at Charles D. Owen High in Swannanoa, N.C., in 1959—four years after the consolidated school was established. He worked feverishly to get his first football program underway while he and his pregnant wife, Nancy, raised two small girls in a rented home. A major college standout and war veteran, he had limited patience in those days with people who didn’t share his strong work ethic. Along with his football duties he built what became Shuford Field and the adjoining fieldhouse, installed an underground sprinkler system, and generally “worked my tail off,” he said.

Owen won the unofficial Buncombe County championship that fall and the program showed promise for future years. The dream ended when Owen’s principal retired in the middle of the school year. During the winter a meeting was arranged that included the school’s advisory committee and two more coaches. Brookshire was told to sit in the hall while the principal and committee members met with the other men in private. That made him restless and uneasy before he was called in—“sitting out there like a first grader,” he said. “When I went in, they had a chair set up in front of this long table. All the guys were behind the table and the new principal was sitting there facing me.”



Cliff Brookshire, 1960 WNC Coach of the Year—with more accolades to come

responsibilities, he had Brookshire's resignation in the morning.

Brookshire took his seat and was told, "We're just setting up the curriculum for next year. Here's what you'll be teaching."

When Brookshire was hired he agreed to teach physical education and be the athletic director, head varsity football coach, and head baseball coach. When the new principal overloaded his schedule with extra classes and

A large number of students walked out of class the next day in protest. Across town in Swannanoa, citizens burned the principal in effigy.

"I didn't know they were going to do anything like that," said Brookshire, who stayed on as teacher for the rest of the school year after he resigned as coach.

The new principal called Brookshire into his office and said, "We've got to get these kids back to class."

Brookshire said, "I'll get them back to class. Get on the PA system and tell them Coach Brookshire wants to meet with them in the auditorium."

He insisted on going alone, believing it was best if the source of the students' walkout was not present. When the students were assembled he said, "I resigned on my own. I was not forced to or anything. You kids get back to class; there's nothing you can do. I've already resigned."

The students returned to class without further incident, but western North Carolina had not seen the last of Cliff Brookshire. After the newspapers reported his resignation he got a telephone call from Transylvania County Schools Superintendent C.W. Bradburn. The result of that exchange was, he said, "the best thing that ever happened to me."



Brevard Blue Devils, 1963
— first integrated public
high school football team
in North Carolina

BROOKSHIRE BECAME THE head football coach at Brevard High in 1960. His first season included a 20–19, headline-grabbing victory over regional power Canton High, which was coached by his former boss, Boyd Allen. The elation from that win ended later in the evening.

“My daddy died that night after the game,” said Brookshire, who was 32 at the time. “He died at my house. He had a cerebral hemorrhage.”

Rushing from one set of emotions to another, Coach Brookshire held on as his team recorded nine shutouts that fall, including a 26–0 win over Rockingham in the state 3-A final to finish 13–0. Both teams had come into the game without a loss and were power-packed. Because neither school’s stadium was big enough to meet the demand for tickets, the title game was held at Memorial Stadium in Asheville, N.C.

“We beat them pretty bad,” Brookshire said. “In fact, they didn’t even get across the 50 [yard-line].”

The score was enough to embarrass the defending state champions, giving the eastern school more to brood over on the 170-mile trip home. What’s more, the one-sided outcome set off a series of decisions that would splinter the championship format for the next 11 years.

North Carolina held four state championship games in four classifications starting in 1959, but that format was tweaked after a two-year run. From ’61 to ’71 the NCHSAA did not hold statewide title games for every division. Some or all of the classes were subdivided into East and West winners. In some cases there were regional championship games in as many as five zones throughout the state. The ’61 season ended with two champions in the 3-A brackets, three in the 2-A class, and four in the 1A’s.

After his team was routed by the Blue Devils in 1960, Rockingham coach Bill Eutsler, a fellow Wake Forest graduate, drove to Chapel Hill to lobby the NCHSAA on behalf of the state’s eastern schools.

“[Coach Eutsler] and some other people said they didn’t want to come back to the mountains,” said Brookshire.

The twisting climbs and long bus rides weren’t the main concern for teams from the Piedmont and Coastal Plain, although state highways were not as accessible in those years. Prior to integration and before completion of the first phase of consolidation, schools outside the mountain region had little success against football teams from Brevard, Canton, Waynesville, and especially the 1-A programs in the state’s far western counties.

“They couldn’t compete with us, so they got it divided, East and West,” Brookshire said. “Eutsler made a statement after [the 1960 state final]. He said he’d been coaching for 16 years, and [Brevard] was by far the best high school team he’d ever seen.”

Canton High was the West state champion in 1961. Rockingham and Brevard were the East and West champions, respectively, in ’62 and again in ’63, when the Blue Devils tied Reidsville in their final game. Waynesville Township won the West in ’64 and Eutsler’s team took a third consecutive East crown, but never went head-to-head with the West winner.

The ’63 final with Reidsville was held in Asheville on a cold and rainy Saturday, November 23, one day after U.S. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Reidsville traveled 200 miles the day before and had almost arrived when the news hit that Kennedy had been shot. The game ended 0–0.



ATTENDING THE FUNERAL of a former player is one of the hardest things for any football coach.

All-American Denny Landreth played fullback on the ’60 state champions at Brevard. The newspapers that year were touting Rockingham’s option quarterback, Ron Tuthill, and another fullback from Reidsville ahead of Landreth, so Brookshire used that as incentive during the postseason.

“He would rise to the occasion,” Brookshire said of Landreth. “He was a little lazy [though]. I had to run him extra wind sprints to keep him in shape. We won a lot of games in the last quarter.”

Landreth hated conditioning. Coach Brookshire had the team run three successive 100-yard dashes in one hard afternoon practice, prompting Landreth to plead, “That’s enough coach.”

“Denny,” Brookshire said calmly, “that’s just the end of the third quarter.”

Brookshire inserted his all-American at left defensive end for the ’60 state final with Rockingham, assuring several head-on meetings between Landreth and Tuthill.

“Tuthill would roll right a lot,” said Brookshire. “He’d either keep [the football] or pitch or throw. He was right-handed, so I put Denny at left end. I told him all week, ‘I don’t want you to do anything except hit Tuthill. I don’t care where he is or what he’s doing; I want you to *hit* him!’

“*Boy*, he did.”

Landreth died from lung and brain cancer in late summer 2011. Coach Brookshire spoke at his August 27 memorial service.



FOLLOWING UNDEFEATED CHAMPIONSHIPS in 1960 and ’62, Brevard faced a bigger test in ’63. Segregated public schools were ruled unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in 1954, but the results of that class action were delayed in parts of the country. In North Carolina, Brevard High took the lead while the other schools looked on to see how the transition was handled.

“We were the first public high school in North Carolina [to integrate],” said Brookshire. “Some people say we were the first in the South. The experiences we went through that year were unbelievable. We had a lot of things happen that year.”

The Transylvania County school’s name was not changed. Brevard High School is still named for the county seat and town of the same name. The Pisgah National Forest provides a scenic backdrop for the campus and community within the well-known Blue Ridge Mountains.

Before integration, the district’s black students were bussed to a separate high school in Henderson County. Transylvania County had a “colored” elementary school, as separate facilities and institutions were called, but no secondary school for those students.

Brevard High was integrated by court order. The first year for admitting minority students, in the fall of ’62, was “token integration.” School districts were allowed to phase in the process, so Brevard admitted two black students in good academic standing to each grade level at the high school. Nancy Brookshire, Coach Brookshire’s wife, taught classes in the seventh through ninth grades and had the first black students that year as freshmen.

“We were the first public high school in North Carolina [to integrate]. Some people say we were the first in the South.”

More changes for the district were phased in during the next school year under full integration. The football team was basically trouble-free.

“It didn’t affect my program any,” said Cliff Brookshire, although some of their opponents were disturbed. “We [eventually] went through some things that I never dreamed would have happened.”

After fall classes started, seven minority students came out for the football team. “They were super,” Brookshire said.

Several veterans had returned in ’63, including quarterback Danny Shook (see chapter 19) and co-captains Lloyd Fisher and Wayne Hunter. Optimism was high, even with the uncertainty of integration. When local policemen showed up for the first football practice, Dr. N.A. Miller, the school principal, asked them to leave because they expected no trouble.

One of the newcomers eventually quit, but the other six made a lasting impact on the community that helped integrate the school in other areas. Keith Elliott, a 180-pound tackle with quick reflexes, went on to play at Western Carolina and was named to the small college all-America team. As Dr. Keith Elliott, he eventually became the pastor of Sentertown Missionary Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Other black students who finished the ’63 season were Paul Scruggs, James “Tank” Whitmire, Tommy Ferguson, Reggie Lynch and Robert Conley. The newcomers fit well with the team and did everything Coach Brookshire required.

Lynch, a 150-pound junior guard, won that season’s Mr. Guts trophy, an award Brookshire presented every year to a player who gave total effort on every play, every day, regardless of ability. After graduating from high school in 1965, Reginald Wayne Lynch was drafted for military service in Vietnam. He was killed on January 20, 1967, less than two months shy of his 20th birthday. Among the decorations he earned in the 35th Infantry was the Bronze Star for Meritorious Service.

Tank Whitmire was a 135-pound running back whose unflappable sense of humor and quick wit made the process smoother for his white teammates and coaches.

“Little old Tank, he was a story in itself,” said Brookshire.

After a particularly hard practice one afternoon Coach Brookshire walked by the dressing room entrance, where Whitmire and Elliott were unlacing their cleats. Brevard football players always changed shoes on an outside bench before and after practice to keep the mud out of the fieldhouse.

Brookshire looked down at Whitmire, who was known for his bony legs, and said, “Tank, your legs look like match sticks.”

Whitmire replied, “*Yessir* coach, *burnt* match sticks!”



COACH BROOKSHIRE MET with his Brevard teams regularly for Sunday worship during the football season.

“We went to the churches in the county where the boys belonged,” he said. “When they integrated, Dr. [N.A.] Miller decided the best idea was to go to a church where we were invited.”

Dr. Miller, the school principal, contacted the local ministerial association and sent letters requesting invitations to more than 20 churches in the area. Only a handful invited the boys to their Sunday services.

“When we went to the church that Nancy and I belonged to, some got up and walked out,” Brookshire said. “That’s the only church where that happened.”

At a Baptist church in Brevard where only black families were members, the football team entered the sanctuary and was greeted warmly, and then ushered to a special section of pews reserved just for them. When it was time to pass the collection plate the church deacons carried what looked like a gourd at the end of a long handle and took it down the aisles.

“If you didn’t put something in the gourd, they’d shake it until you did,” said Brookshire.

When the collection was finished, the deacons emptied the shells, counted the money on a table near the pulpit, and wrote out the amount on slips of paper. As they handed the papers to the preacher, the gourds with “insufficient funds” were sent back through the aisles.



BREVARD’S FIRST VARSITY game after full integration was against T.C. Roberson High School in Skyland, N.C. The football game was held a few miles away at Enka Memorial Stadium because of construction delays at Roberson, which had opened a year earlier in 1962.

“We got some local harassment as we were going to the stadium,” Brookshire said. “Black Devils” was one of the names the team was called.

The atmosphere was electric and security was tight. All-time football great Charlie Justice was in the stands, and the press box

included visiting sportswriters from Charlotte and Greensboro. *Charlotte Observer* columnist Kays Gary described it this way: “It was the first time [the black players at Brevard] had ever played against white boys. But more important, it was the first time they had ever played on the same team with white boys.”

Paul Scruggs rushed for three touchdowns in the first half, including the tiebreaking score on a 48-yard run. Tommy Ferguson and Tank Whitmire also scored, and Keith Elliott blocked a punt and ran it in for another touchdown. The Blue Devils beat the Rams 39–13.

“As far as the home folks from Brevard were concerned, we were integrated,” said Brookshire, “and they were happy for it after that first game.”

On the bus ride home the players and coaches sang a song called, *Stay all night, stay a little longer*.

“We sang [it] on the bus all the time if we won,” Brookshire said. “If we hadn’t won, nobody said a word. That was a new song that the black boys had never heard.”

The refrain says it best:

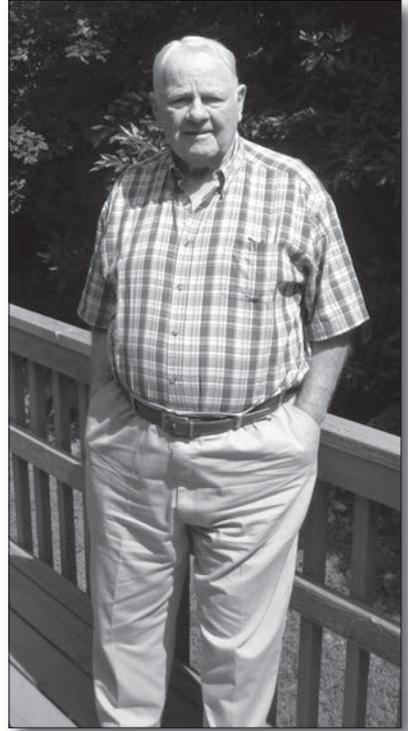
Stay all night, stay a little longer
Dance all night, dance a little longer
Pull off your coat, throw it in the corner
Don’t see why you can’t stay a little longer

The football team liked to stop at a hamburger place called the Arcadia when traveling home from away games in the 1960s.

“The woman who owned the place had the best hamburgers,” Brookshire said, “and anytime we played a game over in that direction, we’d always stop by on the way home. All the boys would go in and get a hamburger and a milkshake or something.”

Brookshire pulled the bus in for another victory meal after the Roberson win in ’63. The owner met the coaches at the door as the players got off the bus.

“Coach,” she said, looking at Brookshire, “you and the white boys can come in. But don’t bring them niggers in here.”



Coach Brookshire enjoying his golden years

Brookshire said that wouldn't do, and added, "We've enjoyed eating your hamburgers all these years, but we won't be back."

Thinking back to that night, he said, "That's what [a lot of] people thought back then. They [even] had separate water fountains, and wouldn't let them use public restrooms."

The Blue Devils lost one game in '63, at Greeneville High in eastern Tennessee.

"They weren't going to let us win that game," said Brookshire. "There's no way I can ever forget that."

Brevard players wore a coat and tie when they traveled to away games. Coach Brookshire wanted his team to "dress like we were going to church," he said. They were expected to keep their shoes shined and their hair cut, with "no beards or long hair or anything."

The school chartered a Trailways bus to Greeneville without knowing what was ahead, although the coaching staff anticipated some problems. Their fears were confirmed when racial epithets were seen on the sides of buildings. The bus passed a banner that was hung by the roadside. It read, *No Niggers Allowed*, "something like that," Brookshire said.

Greeneville High was a football power in Tennessee and had a 4-1 record coming in. The Greene Devils had more size than the Blue Devils along with home field advantage. They also had what some observers called, "home cooking."

"During the first half, every time we'd get a drive going they'd throw a flag," Brookshire said of the game officials. "They were not going to let us win that game."

Greeneville beat Brevard 17-7, snapping the Blue Devils' 16-game win streak, but that wasn't the worst of it. When the players returned to the dressing room after the game, the floor was flooded and their clothes were lying on the floor, sport coats and all. No explanation was given, and no one from the host school offered assistance. Greeneville coach Don Riley could not be found. "They wouldn't [even] give us any towels," Brookshire said.

When the visitors returned to the bus, some of the cars with North Carolina license tags had been scuffed and scraped, including the vehicle driven by Coach Brookshire's mother. While the Trailways warmed up, some troublemakers began to beat on the bus panels and windows with their fists.

"They had some sheriff's deputies there, but they wouldn't do anything," said Brookshire. "Somebody from Brevard went down and found a Tennessee highway patrolman. He got us out of there."

"Somebody from Brevard went down and found a Tennessee highway patrolman. He got us out of there."

We finally got home about 2:00 in the morning.”

Brevard never allowed another point the rest of the season, shutting out its next six opponents before a 0–0 tie with Reidsville made the Blue Devils West Region state co-champions in 1963.

A year later the undefeated Greene Devils traveled to unbeaten and unscored-on Brevard for an anticipated return game.

“Our fans called them the jolly green giants, said Brookshire. “They were dressed in solid green—green head gear, green shirt, green pants—and they were huge.

“And I had the dressing room spotless.”

Rather than retaliate for being abused the year before, he placed a stack of fresh towels in the visitors’ dressing room, and made sure every need was promptly met. Brevard’s cheerleaders ran to meet the Greeneville cheerleaders, and Greene Devil fans were given a real dose of Southern hospitality.

Tank Whitmire scored the only touchdown that night as Brevard won, 7–0, moving to 6–0 on the season and keeping its string of shutouts going at 13 games. When Coach Riley met Brookshire at midfield after the horn sounded, the two men shook hands.

Riley said, “Good game coach. I want to talk to you sometime about your defense.”

“No,” Brookshire said, “I don’t want to talk to you about it. I just want to prove to you that you can beat a team and treat them decent—not be treated the way you treated us last year.”

Riley said nothing more and went on to bigger things. He eventually joined the football staff of UCLA coach Terry Donahue.

“But that was a very satisfying win,” said Brookshire. “We discontinued the series after that.”



COACH BROOKSHIRE DID more for Brevard than build the football program into a state giant. He rebuilt and restructured the entire athletic program in the 1960s, but when his principal, Dr. N.A. Miller, and superintendent, Dr. Wayne Bradburn, left, it was time to move on.

Brookshire felt betrayed after he had been a virtual one-man athletic department for six years. He had formed his football staff from scratch. He taught the game’s fundamentals and how to coach

***“Coach, there’s
a man out here
who wants to
talk to you.”***

the sport to dependable men who became hard-working assistants. He built the program up to where gate receipts could pay for a new stadium, be serviced by a commercial laundry company, and buy the best equipment available—“and plenty of it,” he said. Under his leadership, Brevard athletics were out of debt and had money in the bank.

All that was squandered under the new administration, Brookshire felt, so after one more season, in 1965, he left the game and the education field. After that he “hocked everything I owned,” he said, using risky loans to buy into a building supply business.

Brookshire enjoyed what he was doing but began to miss football. His warehouse foreman, an elderly man named Willie Galloway, came into his office one day in ’66 and said, “Coach, there’s a man out here who wants to talk to you.”

Brookshire walked out to speak with the gentleman, who owned another building supply store but had retired from day-to-day operations. He wanted to expand his business, so he asked the former football coach if he would sell. Brookshire said yes.

“Well then, work up some figures for me, and I’ll get back to you in a week.”

Brookshire got everything ready and closed the deal. When word got out that he was ready coach again, he got a phone call from the central office in Waynesville, N.C.

“They wanted me to come over and talk to them about the job at Tuscola,” he said. “That was the first year they had opened up (consolidated).”

Brookshire met school officials at a new high school that was built into a craggy mountain in Waynesville. He could see the kind of effort that was available, so he took the job when it was offered.

“Somebody gave them the land,” he said, but there were no football facilities worth mentioning. “They had cut out a slice of the mountain to make a practice field that was nothing but a rock pile. Every day before practice I’d line the boys up across the field, and they’d go by and pick up rocks. And then their cleats would dig up more [rocks during practice].”

“Oh, what a year that was.”

Haywood County integrated its school systems that same year, giving the Mountaineers two black players in ’66. Holding a 2–4 record with three games to play—one win was a 27–7 victory over Brevard—they won the next two to set up a showdown at home with undefeated Sylva-Webster and its acclaimed backfield of Tommy Love and Gary

Phillips. Tuscola blocked two extra points that night to end the Golden Eagles' long winning streak, 20–19, and finish the season 5–4.

"I had a great group of kids," Brookshire said of his first year in Waynesville.

After 24 wins in four seasons, his only trouble at Tuscola came when he removed a young black player from the team for a rules infraction. That backlash was minor compared to what he endured in previous years.

"I had some good kids and we won a lot of games," he said of his tenure, which included four hard losses to archrival Pisgah High in nearby Canton.

Brookshire resigned after the 1969 season after he got into an argument with the Haywood County superintendent over a forgotten issue. Intending to coach no more, he retired for the second time in his storied career.

Both Brookshires were physical education teachers. Nancy usually had the girls' classes and he led the boys', so she continued to teach in Haywood County while he looked for work.

The Enka High advisory committee called the Brookshire home when they learned he had resigned from Tuscola, asking him to interview for the coaching vacancy at their school. The Brookshires were graduates of nearby Sand Hill before consolidation and still had ties to the area, but their home was more than 20 miles away near Lake Junaluska.

Brookshire wasn't interested. What happened in Waynesville was similar to his earlier years, and he had no desire to repeat the process.

"I got real disgusted [with coaching]. That deal over at Tuscola, I worked my sad tail off," he said after building a new fieldhouse, raising money for an activity bus, and sending several players on to the next level. He also got the school's first wrestling program started. Needing another activity for his football players during the offseason, he hired Art Boger to coach a beginning wrestling program and to help with football.

"Best thing I ever did," Brookshire said. "We finagled around and got enough money to buy a mat."

Those efforts notwithstanding, he was ready to give up football for good. Enka's new principle, Bill McElrath—whose Jets had gone 2–6 against Brookshire-coached teams when he was the school's football coach—and the committee were equally determined, and convinced Brookshire to at least come in for an interview.

"I'm not interested in getting back into coaching," he said up front, but he was willing to hear them out. The pull to coach in his home

area became too strong, and within days he was back on the sidelines with a new team at a new school.

In case things the new job didn't work out, he took night classes in Asheville to get his real estate broker's license. With Nancy teaching in Waynesville, he commuted during the workweek from Lake Junaluska to Enka in southwest Buncombe County. His former quarterback at Brevard, Danny Shook, was one of his first hires for the Jets' 1970 coaching staff.

"We had maybe 45 kids who came out for football at Enka," he said. "By the time we got around to playing our first game, we only had 15. They didn't know how to block and tackle, evidently. All the seniors quit."

Those who remained were tough-minded and hard-nosed—"They'd knock your tail off," Brookshire said—and were all sophomores and juniors. Despite the disadvantage, the Jets still defeated three of the five Buncombe County schools on their schedule.



"One night we played a game," he said, "and I had 11 boys on the field and one on the bench. Two were hurt. We had a boy named [Johnny] Benson, who could throw that ball, and a skinny kid named Ronnie Capps—skinny as a snake. When you got that ball anywhere near him he'd catch it."

Benson and Capps were juniors that year along with backfield standouts Tim McDonald and J.D. Hinson. Capps went on to earn on-field accolades at Mars Hill College before working on multiple coaching staffs in the region.

High blood pressure led to Brookshire's resignation after Enka's 4–6 season in 1970. He then went into the real estate business, and never regretted it.

"We had to put three kids through college and [couldn't] do it on a teacher's salary," he said. Lacking experience in real estate, he had trouble getting hired at first. But persistence is what every sales team wants to see, so he stayed after the firm at

Connestee Falls Realty.

"They said, 'If you're really interested, come back in a month.' " He returned in two weeks and was hired. After a few days training he sold an \$8,000 lot and was just getting started. His first paycheck was as much as he'd ever made in one year.

Brookshire never went back to coaching. After starting Brookshire Realty Company he retired for good in 1989. The three Brookshire children became teachers until the youngest, Jeff, took charge of the landfill for Transylvania County's recycling centers.



BROOKSHIRE WENT through several changes in the game during his coaching career and has witnessed more in his retirement years.

“One of the biggest changes that would affect me more would be blocking techniques,” he says. “They let these boys use their hands and all. It looks to me like they’re playing a lot of rooster fighting rather than blocking.

“When I was playing, they coached the reverse body block. You can’t do that anymore, and you don’t see nearly as much angle blocking and trapping now as you used to. I guess the reason is because teams are throwing the ball a lot more. The years I coached, we didn’t throw the ball a lot, just enough to keep them honest I guess.”

The Brookshires haven’t been to many high school games in recent years, not like they did in the 1970s and ’80s.

“I kind of got disinterested when [the players] started wearing long hair and tattoos . . . body piercing and stuff,” he said. “And [there’s] too much showboating. If they make a tackle, they start beating their chest and holding their hands up [as if] they’ve done something great. What they’ve done is what they’re supposed to do.

“Of course, the offenses have opened up more and they spread them across the field, and all that stuff. I’ve always been defensive minded.”

Brevard gave priority to defense during the Brookshire era. The Blue Devils kept 34 foes scoreless in his six seasons there, eight each in ’63 and ’64.

“We didn’t lose a one of those games,” he said with a chuckle.

From the few football games he has seen since offenses opened up, he noticed that the earlier August schedules have led to more muscle cramps during play.

“Especially the wide receivers,” he says. “They’re the ones doing the running.”

A big advantage Brookshire sees in the modern game is artificial grass—not the old, carpet-like AstroTurf, but synthetic surfaces that have more give. The money saved on routine maintenance for a well-used field is worth the initial investment, he says.

“You can have so much activity on them now.”

Chapter 3

BILL McELRATH

Enka 1962 – 1969



Bill McElrath became Enka High's principal after spending eight years as the Jets' head football coach

*Before he became the school's principal in December 1969, **BILL McELRATH** was the head football coach at Enka High near Asheville, N.C., from 1962 to 1969.*

In his playing days in the mid-1950s McElrath was a lineman at Western Carolina College, starting out as an end before becoming an all-conference tackle. "I had more fun than a barrel of monkeys," McElrath said. "I had a fortunate opportunity in college to play with guys who had defended this country in World War II. I was [then] fortunate enough to coach against some of the best coaches we've ever seen in this area. Most of them have passed away since that time, but they were all veterans. They were well-established men. Boyd Allen, I wish he were here. Cliff Brookshire, Buffalo Humphries, Joe Hunt . . . I can go on forever. 'Pee Wee' Hamilton was another one. These guys were unbelievable. They were wonderful to coach against and became good friends."

Before college McElrath played at Asheville's Woodfin High in the years before consolidation. "That's back when there were 21 [secondary] schools in Buncombe County," he said. "It didn't become the six that you know now until '55-'56. Enka showed up in '56."

After a short coaching stint at Marion High he was called to military duty. He came to Enka in 1957 as a teacher and assistant football coach under Roy Phillips, and later Bill Stanley.

"We were very fortunate to have the Enka plant," said McElrath, "which meant we had a lot of people there at Enka. And we were a very strong football place. We didn't have a town . . . so it was a different set-up with the community."



COACH MCELRATH LED the Jets' football program seven years after the first Enka High School was built on land donated by American Enka Corporation. The new school stands on Enka Lake Road in the adjacent community of Candler, N.C.

"It's been so long ago, I've forgotten how much fun we had," he said. "In '62 I took over a group of wonderful athletes, led by probably one of the best football players that's ever [played for Enka], Terry Brookshire, who unfortunately has passed away. He was a wonderful, wonderful player. He played tackle and linebacker. At [North Carolina] State he played nose guard.

"When he'd tackle somebody I said, '*Merry Christmas.*' He was a tough, tough guy."

Brookshire led the Jets to a 6–3–1 record in 1962 and the program's first victory over neighboring Canton High, a strong program coached by Boyd Allen.

"I had some good teams," said McElrath. "Enka was so powerful at that time, not because of me, but because of the players.

"Jim Fox (see chapter 29) was my [first] quarterback," he said of the future Rosman coach, "and he was a great quarterback. And come the '63 season, what did Jim do? He went out and lifted weights, and he gained 30-something pounds and was muscle bound. So he couldn't perform. I had to move him [to] guard. It just killed me. He was lifting on his own—we didn't lift back in those days. All he could do was hand off the ball, and we needed something more."

Fox lined up at halfback on occasion, but the main ball carrier in McElrath's early years was faster.

"I had such a speedster in Bob Collins," said McElrath. "And I had a real good guy as a wingback, Rudy Herren. He was almost as fast as Bob Collins but he wasn't as quick, so we ran a lot of reverses with him. But Bob was a wonderful halfback. He was a senior at the time, and I had a line that was unbelievable—it was great from the word go, wonderful trappers . . . they just did their job.

"That was a wonderful season in '62 and [again in] '63. The first time we beat Canton in '62, we beat them by running a reverse on a punt. Bob Collins just took off like a flash, and he was gone.

"We were playing Erwin [in '63] and Rudy broke his hip. The team just went down. It was a bad-looking situation and the team lost, because Rudy was a wonderful guy and a good leader."

The 13–7 defeat was the Jets' only loss to the Warriors during the McElrath years.

"It's been so long ago, I've forgotten how much fun we had."

