

THE BEDFORD HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION ... HOW IT ALL BEGAN

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First Alumni President 1996-1997

Fall of 1966

Sometimes the seeds of something special are planted long before they sprout. Others may tell you differently, but for me the seeds for the Alumni Association were planted forty (40) years ago in the fall of 1966. That year a fiery young coach named Ray Kwiatkowski, (assisted by an all-star coaching staff which included a young man named Bill Regnier) led a talented group of seniors, juniors, and even a few sophomores through a very special season in Bedford football history. You see, after a long stint of mediocrity (and even ineptitude), Bedford won the Great Lakes League (GLL) title. But how they did it was the stuff from which great memories and alumni associations are made.

As a sophomore and one of the student managers (along with Phil Covell '67, Bruce Dull '68, Tom Hendrix '69, Mike Wachtell '69, and Mike Phillips '69), I watched up close as a great season began to unfold. I remember passing out oranges to the team at halftime while Coach Kwiatkowski gave speeches that would peel the paint off the walls and make Rockne proud. I'll never forget his halftime speech at the Rogers game, one of only 2 losses that year. The team was so fired up they nearly broke the door down taking the field in the second half.

At any rate, with the incredible talent of Dave Long '67, Chris McMacken '67, Tom ("Mouse") Johnson '67, Bruce ("the Goose") Gamby '67, Bill Wingate '67, Wayne Rumple '67, Darrell Mossburg '68, Gary Sherman '68 and many others, we pretty much steamrolled the opposition until our mid-season showdown at Rogers. Unfortunately, after a gutsy first half and stuffing speedster Dan Houston, we kind of sputtered in the second half. The leadership of Rogers QB, Rick Gockerman, and the speed of Dan Houston (who finally broke a few plays), coupled with our own mistakes finally did us in. It was a crushing mid-season loss to a GLL opponent that now had a leg up on us for the title. I think that was the first time I experienced the "agony of defeat".

But alas, the football gods were smiling down on us that year and we were given another chance. As we entered the last week of the season, we prepared for arch rival Whitmer with seemingly nothing but pride on the line. However, due to a weather-related rescheduling of our previous game with Fostoria (which Bedford won 19-12), from the traditional Friday night to Saturday night, our game against Whitmer was also rescheduled to Saturday night. But other GLL games were played on Friday night including Rogers at Clay. I still remember watching the news on Friday night and finding out that Clay had upset Rogers on a Mark

Niederhauser field goal! What a huge break for Bedford! Now, all of a sudden, we could claim a share of the title by beating Whitmer...at Whitmer...no small task, but a huge opportunity and motivator nevertheless. Needless to say, the team was jacked!

Bedford-Whitmer was always a special rivalry in those days even though Bedford hadn't done very well of late. The game was known as the battle for "The Pigskin" and it was truly the high school equivalent of Michigan vs. Ohio State. Strangely enough, however, the Michigan school (Bedford) wore scarlet and gray and played the Notre Dame fight song while the Ohio school (Whitmer) wore blue and gold and played the Ohio State fight song. To this day, I still think that's odd and proof that the world (at least in that area) is still somewhat out of tilt.

At any rate the Bedford-Whitmer battle for "The Pigskin" of 1966 had suddenly shaped up to be a classic. Whitmer was certainly no slouch that year with players like Denver Beck and Greg Wojohowski(sp). I vividly remember the intensity of both teams as they went through pre-game warm-ups. On the Whitmer side, Beck and "Wojo" were kicking and snorting like a couple of caged bulls. No way were they going to let these "hicks" from Bedford grab a title at their expense!

The game was everything you'd expect from a great rivalry. Both teams fought hard and the game came down to the last few minutes with Bedford nursing a 20-14 lead and Whitmer driving deep into our territory. They got all the way down to our goal line and everybody thought they would score, including Bill Regnier, Bedford's young assistant coach, sitting in the "crow's nest" on the Whitmer side of the field. But, fate smiled on us once again. For reasons we'll never know, instead of running the powerful Denver Beck, Whitmer decided to pass. I almost closed my eyes when the ball left the quarterback's hand. The next thing I saw was Bedford's Wayne Rumble ('67) picking off the pass ending the Whitmer scoring threat and ultimately the game. The Bedford team, of course, erupted on the sidelines. Several of us managers threw our water bottles high into the air and never found them again. Phil Covell, of course, scolded us for that later, but we didn't care.

The scene that followed the game in the stands and on the streets of Toledo and in the locker room was like something out of a movie. It was unrestrained jubilation, the "thrill of victory" if you will played out in many ways. In the locker room, players and coaches hugged and congratulated each other, many with tears of joy streaming down their faces. As we headed back to Bedford, several of us managers were riding in the back of Phil Covell's pickup truck (which by any standard of common sense was pretty stupid) screaming at the top of our lungs the old popular Bedford cheer :

"We're from Bedford, no one can be prouder,
If you can't hear us, we'll yell a little louder!!!"

And yell louder we did.

The afterglow of that victory stayed in Bedford High School the rest of the year. Everybody walked with a little extra spring in their step and seemed in good spirits. And, of course, Wayne Rumble's interception inspired one of the all-time great Goalpost headlines. I'm not sure who came up with it (Editor – Ed Licitra ('67), Sports Editor – Fred Haddad ('67), or whomever) but it was as classic as the game itself. It said, "**Rumple Steals Skin**". Pretty darn clever for a high school newspaper! When I visited the journalism room for my daughter Allison's ('04) Open House a few years back, I found that issue of the Goalpost sitting out. What a wonderful trip down memory lane that was!

I knew at the time that that game and that magical season was something I would never forget. You see, it wasn't just about football. It was about life and what it takes to achieve success in whatever you do i.e. hard work, sacrifice, commitment, belief, resiliency (to bounce back from defeat), and, of course, pride to give your best at all times and never, ever quit. Coach K talked about pride the entire season and we all learned about "Bedford Pride" in a big way that year. That pride has stayed with me and countless others throughout our lives. Somehow, I sensed that one day that pride would bring us together in a common cause.

Fall of 1990 – Déjà Vu

Fast forward twenty four (24) years to the fall of 1990. That year, the football team was coached by Bill Regnier, who had long since established himself as a legend in the wrestling world by winning numerous state titles and coaching numerous individual state champions.

Like many alumni who lived in Bedford, I followed what was going on in the schools because a. it's my alma mater and b. my oldest daughter was already attending Bedford Public Schools and my two younger daughters would be close behind. I also kept track of the sports teams.

That fall, Coach Regnier put together another special football season. And, once again, the team's fortunes came down to the last game ... at Whitmer. Once again the Mules would have to "slay the proverbial dragon" on his home turf to capture the league title. I was blown away by the coincidence and the fact that after 24 long years, history was about to repeat itself. I told my wife, "I have to go to that game." She said, "It's high school football, what's the big deal?" I said, "You don't understand. This is Bedford-Whitmer, at Whitmer, for the title ... again. It's just like 1966!" She said, "Whatever!" I went to the game by myself.

When I got there, I realized that many people had felt the same way I did. The Bedford (visitors) stands were jam packed, more so than the Whitmer side. As I

surveyed the stands for a place to sit, I noticed dozens of aging alumni stuffed into varsity jackets that no longer fit very well. Many of them were from the championship team of 1966. The Mule warriors of the past had come to cheer on the Mules of the present to see if history could repeat itself. The whole scene was kind of surreal, the atmosphere like a carnival and an “all Bedford” reunion.

Well, history did repeat itself. Bill Regnier’s Mules led by quarterback Brett Parachek and Tony Gill won 7-0 much to the delight of the hundreds of alumni in the stands. Both during and after the game as I chatted with alumni from different eras, we all agreed how special the evening was and how neat it would be if we had an alumni association. I believe the seeds that were planted in 1966 and lay dormant for twenty four (24) years were finally beginning to sprout.

Summer of 1994

About four (4) years later, my class (Class of 1969) celebrated its twenty-fifth (25th) reunion. As part of the reunion organizing committee, I emceed the events of that evening. At one point, for the benefit of those who no longer lived in Bedford, I gave an update on the state of our alma mater and Bedford Public Schools in general. As a parent who (at the time) had three (3) daughters in the system, I spoke with great pride about the resurgence of Bedford Public Schools under the skillful leadership of then Superintendent Dr. Herbert Moyer. Dr. Moyer, (who, in my opinion is the finest superintendent Bedford ever had) had brought the district back from severe academic and financial problems in the 80’s to elite status in the 90’s. The district had not only achieved NCA accreditation for all of its buildings but also financial stability and parental participation that became the envy of districts throughout the state. The PTA (which is still strong today) was absolutely off the charts during Dr. Moyer’s tenure as Superintendent. Bedford really had it going back then and I was pleased to tell my classmates about it.

I also spoke about the incredible alumni gathering at the Bedford-Whitmer game of 1990 when the Mules once again beat Whitmer at Whitmer for the GLL title. My class could relate to this because we were sophomores in 1966 and many of us remembered that historic year in Mule history. I also mentioned that the establishment of an alumni association in the not too distant future was a distinct possibility.

1995

Assistant Superintendent Duane Tucker (’64) and his wife Elaine (’69) attended the Class of ’69 reunion in 1994. I have to assume that through Duane or Elaine (or both) my remarks about the schools that evening got back to Superintendent Moyer. In early 1995, he summoned me to his office and asked me if I would co-chair a citizens committee to help pass a bond issue which had just failed on the first try in September of 1994. I reluctantly agreed, but only if I had the help of a

dedicated and hard-working co-chair. Fortunately, my good friend and fellow classmate from 1969, Joann (Grodi) Smith agreed to be the other co-chair. We formed our citizens committee called the “Bedford Pride Committee” and set out to pass the bond issue.

During the 1995 bond issue campaign, I got to know Dr. Moyer and his assistant superintendents (i.e. Duane Tucker, Denzil Bell, and Janice Roberson) fairly well. Dr. Moyer mentioned his interest in starting an alumni association to me several times. He must have made it a point of emphasis with his staff too because the Asssitant Supes (particularly Denzil and Duane) were all in favor of the idea. But one thing at a time. We had to get the bond issue passed first.

Also in 1995 (as well as in years prior), a group of school officials and parents had been exploring the idea of building a new football stadium. I had been to a few of these stadium meetings in the 90’s and certainly supported the concept. The old stadium, located over a mile from the high school, had become somewhat of an embarrassment. And, as teacher and stadium advocate Ed Mazur once commented,

“The old stadium is a joke and this situation is ridiculous. Who takes a bus to home game?”

Two of the strongest advocates for a new stadium were parents and fellow Bedford alumni Gene Stock ('64) and Phil Swy ('71). Like everybody else, they knew that passing the bond issue was the district’s top priority and both wholeheartedly supported the campaign. Besides, even though a new stadium was not part of the bond issue, district officials had hinted privately that, if the bond issue passed, they would find a way to build a new one.

Unfortunately, and in spite of an incredible effort by the Bedford Pride Committee and numerous parent volunteers, the bond issue failed again in October 1995. Needless to say, the mood in Bedford was somewhat somber.

The Bedford High School Alumni Association is Formed

It seems like there is a silver lining in every dark cloud. With the second defeat of a badly needed bond issue in less than a year, many who also supported the idea of a new football stadium thought that dream would be put “on hold” for years to come. But alumni Gene Stock and Phil Swy would have none of that thinking. They basically said, “Screw it! If we can’t count on district money to fund a new stadium, we’ll just have to build it and pay for it ourselves.” Pretty ambitious to say the least.

At a Stadium Committee meeting in late 1995 (which I did not attend), Gene, Phil, Denzil Bell and many other stadium advocates including school personnel and parent volunteers met to figure out how to build and pay for a new stadium with private donations. The group decided that a “sponsoring” organization was needed to back this project and what could be better than an alumni association. So, at long last, the time had finally come. The group formed the Bedford High School Alumni Association and somehow (in my absence) elected me President.

By January of 1996, we were an “official” Alumni Association complete with a constitution, a full slate of officers and about 20 members. We officially adopted the building and financing of a new community stadium as our first special project. And, we obtained the complete backing and support from Dr. Moyer, central office administration, school personnel, and the Board of Education. The seedling planted years ago had finally popped through the soil and started to grow.

1996 – Present

Under the superb leadership of Gene Stock ('64) and Phil Swy ('71) the stadium was built and opened in 1997. It was, without a doubt, one of the finest community achievements in Bedford history. Dozens of businesses donated materials, labor and money to the stadium effort. And, countless individual volunteers donated money and time (in the evenings and on weekends) to complete the project.

Because of the numerous in-kind contributions of labor and materials, the original loan we took out to build the stadium was only \$1,000,000 for an asset which today is worth well over \$2,000,000. Thanks to the ongoing fundraising efforts of the Alumni Association and the fulfillment of pledges by both individuals and businesses, the loan balance is now less than \$300,000. Our goal is to pay off the loan by the fall of 2007 as we celebrate the ten (10) year anniversary of the stadium's dedication.

As the Bedford High School Alumni Association's first special project, the stadium project was much more than just a brick and mortar success story. It was a community revival of sorts, a reawakening of the spirit of “can-do”, believing, working together, giving until it hurts ... and then giving a little bit more. It was a special time in our community's history and, in my opinion, spawned a string of other successful projects and events from which we all benefit today. These include:

- The renovation of our old run-down stadium into a world-class soccer facility.

- The eventual passage of a downsized school bond issue in 1998 from which the high school was expanded and Monroe Road Elementary was built.
- The overwhelming success of charitable fundraisers such as the Heart of Hope and, more recently, the Relay for Life, which, incidentally, is held in the Bedford Community Stadium.
- The opening in March of 2005 of the brand new Francis Family YMCA which was also built with private dollars.

The stadium project and the accomplishments that followed are proof positive that success in Bedford depends more upon community inspiration and participation than taxation.

The Alumni Association Today

As for the Bedford High School Alumni Association, we are alive and well today, ten years after our humble beginnings and a huge goal. I am proud to say that there is much more to us than the stadium project. We have long since established the Bedford High School Hall of Fame to which we have now inducted 47 members including the eleven we just inducted at our recent Hall of Fame banquet. Included among that distinguished group are Chris McMacken '67 and Dave Long '67, both now deceased and both key members of the 1966 GLL championship football team. In addition, we've established the Chuck Faller Alumni Scholarship which provides scholarships to two (2) deserving Bedford students each year. We also sponsor a cookout every spring to provide hamburgers and hot dogs to graduating seniors at the Senior Relays events. We set up a tent at every home football game and ring the bell every time Bedford scores. We have hosted numerous fundraisers and special events and, every year since our beginning, by tradition, the Alumni president speaks at graduation. Certainly, we already have a full plate, but we have much more we'd like to accomplish for our alma mater.

What Can You Do?

I'd like to make a special appeal to our alumni body particularly to those of us in the "baby boom" generation (i.e. born between 1946 and 1964). Baby-boomers this is our time. Most of us are well into the second half of our lifetimes and the question is no longer "What will we become?" but rather "What will we leave behind?" What will be our legacy?

I know from working in the Alumni Association how many Bedford graduates have gone on to do great things. Some may already be enshrined in our Hall of

Fame, but many many more have made us proud simply by being great wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, workers and citizens. Certainly, we will all be remembered in some fashion by our families, friends, co-workers, etc. But, when you think about Bedford High School, you might ask yourself how you would like to be remembered. Is it enough to be a faded picture in a dusty old yearbook? Or do you want something more?

The Bedford High School Alumni Association gives you many opportunities to leave a lasting contribution to the place which gave us all our start in life. Whether it's a lifetime membership, a brick for the stadium, or a donation to the band, music department, science department, theatre arts, the stadium, vocational department, art department or whatever, you can leave your legacy to your alma mater. And we're not just talking money either. Your time and your talents are just as important to us.

To preserve the health, vitality and traditions of Bedford High School and our great community, we certainly want Bedford alumni to come back, even if only for a short visit. But we need more than that. We also need you to give back in whatever way you can. We have already proven how powerful and beneficial that can be and yet we have barely scratched the surface of our potential.

What will be your legacy to Bedford High School? I hope you will think about this carefully in the weeks, months and years ahead. And I hope you will join us in some capacity to secure the traditions, the excellence and the future of our alma mater.

On behalf of the Bedford High School Alumni Association, I wish you all the best in your lives and your careers.

Onward, always to the end ...

Steven R. Lennex '69

Note: For more information about the Bedford High School Alumni Association (including how to join, how to participate, or how to contribute) you may contact Chuck Faller at (419)-290-6382, Steve Lennex at (734)-856-8032, or Gene Stock at (734)-847-6358. Or, you may send correspondence to the following address:

Bedford High School Alumni Association
1623 W. Sterns Road
Temperance, MI 48182
Attention: Alumni Secretary