

FOOTBALL HISTORY

1964 Chiefs were second-ever unbeaten team

Mel Adams-coached squad, featuring John Gasser, George Hummel, Steve Mowery and Bob Courter, among other standouts, was part of school-record 18-game winning streak

BY SPENCER WAUGH
FOR THE LOGAN DAILY NEWS

Editor's note: The following article is the second of a series of Logan High School football history stories LHS sports historian Spencer Waugh is writing for The Logan Daily News this season to commemorate the anniversaries of the greatest Chieftain football teams of all time. This story covers the 1964 Chieftain team. Waugh is continuing the process of speaking with LHS athletes and coaches from all eras and can be contacted either via email at admin@loganfootball.com or at 740-974-4531.

Fifty-five years ago, the 1964 Logan Chieftains became just the second team in school history to finish with a perfect 10-0 record. The team delivered back-to-back Southeastern Ohio Athletic League championships for the first time in LHS history.

The season was the biggest chunk of an 18-game winning streak that spanned from 1963 to 1965, a streak that still stands as the school's longest. The team allowed only 40 points during the season, still the second-fewest in school history, and set a then-record scoring pace with 338 points, which is still tenth on the school's all-time list.

"We were like an all-star team," quarterback John Gasser recalled when looking back on his junior football season. "I think I can still name every guy on that team by name."

"It was such a great team," former Chieftain head coach Dick Mikes said recently looking back on his first year as an assistant coach. "Just great kids."

But like any great team, success didn't come out of nowhere. And the roots to success started over a half a decade before their triumphant season.

Mel Adams came to coach football at Logan High School in 1957. While he's remembered today as arguably the school's greatest coach and was an inaugural inductee into the LHS Athletic Hall of Fame, he took over a program at its lowest point since Red Longley was hired in 1931.

Logan was a dismal 9-25-2 from 1953 to 1956. Not only were the Chieftains losing at a record pace, they had tied Nelsonville in 1955 and lost to the Greyhounds in '56 for the first time since 1930.

But Adams would quickly return Logan to the top of the mountain and start a string of seasons where Logan would not finish with a losing record again until 1974.

Adams arrived in the summer and, as was customary at the time, the coach was also the city pool manager, allowing him to keep an eye on his players and earn a little supplemental income. Two of the first young men he would encounter after taking the job were Gene Morgan and Lynn Strait.

They were lifeguards at the pool, and during some down time the new coach told the pair, "you know, this is funny, but when I took this job, they told me there was no talent at this school," Morgan added.

Adams' first team with Morgan and Strait went 5-3-1 and won a league title in his second season while recording a 7-2 record.

"He just changed everything," Morgan remarked, recalling the arrival of the long-time grid boss.

Bob Courter, who was one of a handful of underclassmen to start on the '64 championship team, remembered that Adams was "an educator first. He was a teacher. He expected you to perform in the classroom. He could be exacting, but he gave clear instructions and we all knew the expectations and responsibilities."

"He was a tough coach. A smart coach. A motivating coach. One of the earliest but also very best coaches I had. I respected the heck out of him," added Gasser, who went on to play collegiately for Ara Parseghian at Notre Dame.

"He was very demanding. But the kids respected that," Mikes contributed.

George Hummel, the team's star halfback, felt lucky to play with that group of athletes and for a coach like Adams.

"He allowed us to excel. I looked up to them (coaches). Not just Coach Adams, but the whole staff. I didn't know I would coach but once I started, they are the guys I emulated," Hummel added, also mentioning Jim Myers, Dick Mikes, Brooks Adkins, Marion Allen, Bob Combs and Bill Nardo.

Like any great team, the '64 Chiefs had their share of outstanding individuals. The entire backfield earned scholarships to play football

in college, end Steve Mowery was named to the All-Ohio first team. The opposite end, Bob Courter, played at the University of Wisconsin.

But the men on that team are quick to point out that what allowed them to achieve perfection was the way each and every man knew and excelled in his role.

Merle Bell, Leo Schultz, Bill Westfall and Stefan Dennis were singled out as underclassmen who could have played on many teams in the area but added depth and excelled on scout team during the weekly practices.

Gasser continued: "We were great friends. We played all sports together from young ages (the same group won the 1965 SEOAL baseball title that spring), we spent a lot of time together and came from similar backgrounds. It was a bunch of great guys."

Gary Derr, a pulling guard on that team, remembers that, "We just had fun, we didn't have to pump everyone up. We knew Mel was gonna chew us out for certain things — when we deserved it — but we had fun being together those 10 weeks."

Courter remembers the team having very little drama — especially compared to some of the stories you hear today.

"We wanted to compete to win," he said. "I can't single anyone out. We all had our part to play and each man did it. His (Adams) leadership made it all possible."

The Chieftains were champions in 1963, overcoming a pair of close non-league losses to Bexley and Columbus Whetstone to finish 7-2.

And while the team was littered with underclassmen, the seniors included All-Ohio selections Dick Stevens and Robbie Johnson. Johnson, a three-year starter at quarterback and four-year starter at linebacker, would later earn a starting linebacker spot for Woody Hayes at Ohio State.

So while the '64 Chiefs returned plenty of experience, there were still question marks about who would fill the holes left by graduation. A seven-game winning streak put a target on the Chieftains' back and the SEO Sportswriters Association narrowly voted Logan the league favorites over a strong Athens squad. Each team received five first-place votes.

Gasser moved from halfback to quarterback while Dale Brenning and Hummel returned at fullback and halfback, respectively. Jim Brandt, a defensive starter in '63, moved into Gasser's halfback position.

Brenning would lead the Chiefs with 1,214 yards and 12 touchdowns on 211 carries (5.8 average) and the SEOAL with 92 points (12 TDs, 10 two-point conversions) while Gasser would score 14 touchdowns and two rushing conversions to finish second in the league with 88 points. Hummel ran for 726 yards and four touchdowns on 116 attempts (6.5 average).

"Jim Brandt was the most important cog in our backfield," Hummel recently explained. "He was such a smart football player. While he was more of a blocking back, he knew how to read opposing defenses. If they were cheating to take away one running lane or another, he would adjust on the fly to open the holes for Brenning and me. I think Coach Adams knew he could count on Jim to make the adjustments for us."

Logan's split-T offense scored 338 points in 10 games and averaged 5.5 yards per play and ran the ball 500 times (out of 561 offensive plays) for 2,672 yards.

An excellent offensive line paved the way for those dominating rushing performances. Courter was an HM All-Ohio selection as primarily a blocking end while Mowery caught six passes, four going for touchdowns. Twin brothers Earl and Merl Beery played tackle and guard, respectively, with both winning All-SEOAL honors and Merl also winning All-District and HM All-Ohio selections. Guy Champ and Derr played the tackle and guards opposite with Jack Fox handling snapping chores.

"Champ and the Beerys — heck, the whole group — were excellent fundamental blockers who understood our system," Hummel recalled.

But as good as the offense was, the defense was even better.

The D allowed only 40 points in 10 games and opponents were held to just 3.4 yards per play (441 for 1,479) and managed only 77 first downs. On rushing plays, the defense was even stingier, holding opponents to 928 yards on just 305 carries (3.0 per carry). They intercepted 14 enemy passes out of 136 attempts... nearly one interception



Dale Brenning (33) turns the corner on one of Logan's bread and butter plays thanks to great blocking from George Hummel (21) during the Logan Chieftains' undefeated 1964 season.

for every 10 tries.

The defensive record is even more astounding when you consider that two of the six touchdowns the team allowed came on special teams, meaning that the defense allowed only 28 points all season.

End Mowery, tackle Earl Beery, middle guard Champ, and tackle Courter filled four of the six positions on the front line with middle guard Lloyd Simmons and end Dick Fox rounding out the forward line.

Merl Beery and Denny Baker were outstanding linebackers while Gasser, Brandt, and Hummel formed one of the best trios of defensive backs to ever wear the purple and white. Hummel was the team's punter, averaging 37.6 yards per kick, and also returned 10 punts for an average of 17.3 yards including an 86-yard touchdown return.

The '64 season opened at home against Bexley, who had won seven straight against the Chiefs. After a scoreless first half, it looked like the jinx might continue. But a second-half blitz by the Chieftain ground game buried the Lions. Hummel was the catalyst, running 36 yards off left tackle for the opening touchdown and on the next possession gained 31-yards on the same play to set up Brenning's 4-yard score.

"Nine more to go," Adams told *The Logan Daily News*.

Visiting Maysville was the second victim, falling 34-6. Hummel ran for a 46-yard score on a sweep and returned a punt 86 yards to spark the purple and white. He ran for 110 yards on just nine carries. Gasser, Brandt, and back-up quarterback Mike Walsh all added touchdown runs.

In this era, the league schedule rotated forward one week each year, meaning you opened league play with the last team you played the season before. The 1963 season ended with a 56-6 pasting of Gallipolis, which meant the first league foe in '64 would be the Gallia Countians. The Blue Devils had been undefeated champs in '62, and in addition to two ties, the loss to Logan would be their only league defeat in '64.

Derr recalls that when the team walked down from the locker room, they turned to a scoreboard that read "Gallipolis 56, Logan 6" the inverse from the season before. Logan scored in all four quarters and limited the blue and white to six first downs, winning 44-0.

"That was the springboard. That was when we knew we were gonna be champions again," Derr remembers.

A trip to Wellston the following week ended up being the toughest test of the season for the Adamsmen. It had rained all day, turning the field into a muddy mess. On top of that, the Rockets would finish with a fine 8-2 record behind their excellent fullback Terry Ervin. Ervin would go on to play at Ohio State.

Players recall that the field was so water-logged that when they got down into a stance the mud would ooze out of the ground and cover their fingers. A pair of special teams miscues by Wellston helped the Chiefs secure a 16-0 win.

Logan notched their 12th straight win by defeating an overmatched but hard-working Middleport team 32-0. It set up one of the first championship showdowns with the Jackson Ironmen.

The Ironmen had given the Chiefs a battle the prior season, and prognosticators in the Apple City

thought the home field advantage would enable the red and white to snap Logan's victory streak. Or at least that's what Coach Adams had drilled into his team. "From the preseason, he told us that if we beat Jackson we'd be champions," Derr recalls.

Logan controlled the clock and the ball, running 70 plays against Jackson's 32. Brenning led the way with 145 yards and a touchdown on 26 carries with Gasser adding a pair of scoring runs and a scoring toss to Hummel.

Hummel injured his knee against the Ironmen. "Doc (Jack) Rauch took me to a specialist in Columbus. He was able to fit me with a brace and keep me from needing surgery. In that era, if I had needed surgery I certainly would have lost my scholarship offers. I owe a lot to him," Hummel said.

A visit from Nelsonville was next. The two clubs shared a familiarity — many of the players were friends off the football field — but the Chieftains weren't friendly hosts, belting the Greyhounds 34-6. With Hummel on the mend, Brenning and Brandt carried the load for LHS, combining for three of five touchdowns. David Miller scored and saw increased playing time in place of Hummel.

With their 14th consecutive victory annexed, the real meat of the schedule was now in front of them. Co-SEOAL favorite Athens had already dropped a pair of league contests to Jackson and Pomeroy, but was still dangerous.

Played at the old Athens High field, where McCracken Field sits today on Ohio University's campus, Logan raced to a 24-0 halftime lead before a second half letdown brought the final score to 44-22. The 22 points marked more than half of the team's season total, but did include a 75-yard kick return on a reverse by Dick Adams. Gasser scored three times and Brenning twice for the purple and white.

"We knew they'd be tough," Derr recalled. "We ran Brenning off tackle really successfully in that game. They played a roaming defense to try and neutralize our tackles. It really ended up pretty wild with all the scoring."

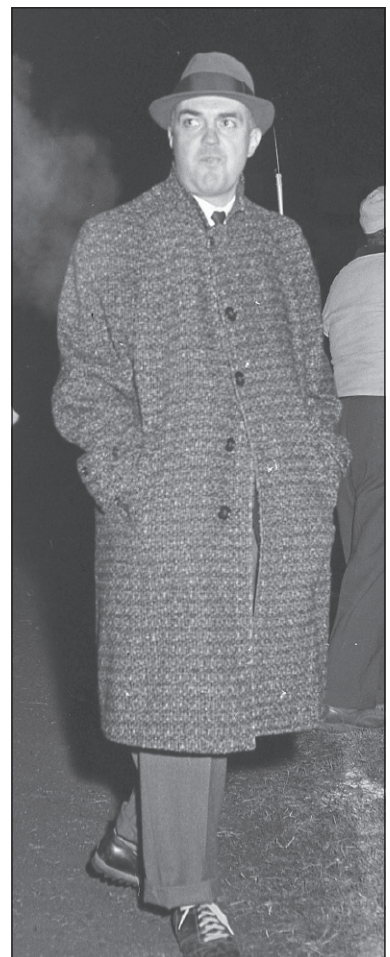
Courter noted, "There was always a special energy to beat Athens. We made special efforts. To beat them meant more... and to lose was the absolute worst."

The win over Athens set up a championship game between Logan and Pomeroy, who both sported perfect 6-0 league records. The Panthers were a bit of a surprise outfit under Coach Charles Chancey. They were not only unbeaten in the league, but also had a pair of non-league wins under their belts as well.

A near-record crowd in watched the contest. The school sold tickets at Risch's Drugstore, selling the first 320 reserved seats in just 45 minutes while another 119 reserved seats solid out in 10 minutes just two days later.

Chancey, the Panther coach, declared "We're going up there to win. We must contain their running game, and we must play error-free offensive football."

While the Pomeroy defense was as advertised, the Logan defenders were even better. The Panthers managed just four first downs and 76 yards of total offense with the Chieftains snaring three Pomeroy passes. Logan won the game 18-0;



Coach Mel Adams, pictured here parading the sidelines during a game against Pomeroy, led the Logan Chieftains to an undefeated 1964 season. Regarded as one of Logan High School's all-time greatest coaches, Adams was voted into the LHS Athletic Hall of Fame's inaugural class in 1976.

Gasser scored on a pair of runs, but the highlight was a 49-yard scamper by Hummel late in the third quarter that put the game on ice.

"Tremendous, tremendous," was the way Adams described his defense's effort that night. "The boys were disappointed with themselves last week. But they made up for it tonight."

"They play together so well, it's just impossible to single any of them out," the old grid boss added. Pomeroy never advanced past Logan's 46-yard line.

The Chiefs played one final non-league game, a 46-0 thrashing of Hillsboro on the Hilltop gridiron. It was a coronation of the champions and a 17th-straight victory for Logan's outstanding seniors.

The Chieftains won their opener in '65, beating Bexley 16-6, but the winning streak was snapped the next week in a 14-6 loss to Hilliard.

The league winning streaked still survived, with Logan beating Pomeroy 30-6, but that streak ended the next week when Gallipolis beat Logan 22-20 on the Hilltop. Athens, a juggernaut in '65, finished 9-0 overall while Gallipolis, Jackson, and Logan all finished 5-2 against league foes.

Adams left to take the coaching job at Zanesville following the 1965 season. He successfully recommended his young assistant Dick Mikes for the job.

"Even though it meant me getting my first head coaching job, I felt bad when he left," Mikes remembered. "I tried to emulate him in many ways. It meant a lot when he recommended me for the job."

Summing up that magical fall season, Derr declared "We were the best of the best. I know Logan has had some good teams since then, but from top to bottom none of them could beat us."