

Highlights: 1936-80

Dick James

James led the Grants Pass High football team to the 1951 state championship as running back before starring for the Oregon Ducks and Washington Redskins.

The GPHS graduate was inducted into the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame, the University of Oregon Athletic Hall of Fame, the Washington Redskins Hall of Stars, and the Grants Pass Hall of Fame.

Despite his small frame — 5-foot-9, 175 pounds — James became an All-Pro in 1961 and set a then-Redskins record by scoring six touchdowns in a game against the Dallas Cowboys.

James had 34 touchdowns and gained 3,599 yards during a National Football League career that also included stints with the New York Giants (1964) and Minnesota Vikings (1965).

James died in 2000.

Jerry Sherk

One of the greatest athletes ever to emerge from Grants Pass High, Sherk was a four-time National Football League Pro Bowl selection and a 1976 Defensive Player of the Year during 12 seasons as a defensive tackle with the Cleveland Browns.

After finishing school at Grants Pass, Sherk excelled in both football and wrestling at Oklahoma State University. He was an All-Big Eight selection for football in 1969 and an All-American as a Cowboy wrestler in 1969.

He was inducted to the Oklahoma State Hall of Honor in 2000.

Title IX

On June 23, 1972, a law was enacted in the United States that said that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

That law became known most commonly as Title IX, and it forever altered sports both locally and nationally by requiring equal opportunity in athletics.

The result has been an explosion of female participation in sports at every level. Each high school in the Grants Pass area now features girls volleyball, basketball and track and field teams.

The larger schools also feature girls teams for golf, soccer, cross country, tennis and swimming.

Russ Werner and running

Most Grants Pass High athletes associate the name Russ Werner with the track and field facility behind the school — Russ Werner Field.

The man himself, however, was a track and field coach for 34 years at GPHS — retiring in 1982 — and also coached football and basketball for nearly all of those 34 years.

In 1956, Werner led the Cavemen’s cross country team to the state team championship with 62 points to narrowly defeat Lincoln’s 72 at Lewis & Clark College in Portland.

That title was Grants Pass’ first and only title in cross country, although Werner led the Cavemen track and field teams to runner-up finishes in 1957, 1958 and 1962.

Werner handled the defense for Mel Ingram’s state championship football teams of 1948, 1951, 1964 and 1967.

He died in 1999.

A golden age of Caveman sports

GPHS won six state titles during 1960s

By Zach Urness
of the Daily Courier

In the 1960s, there were few places in Oregon with better athletics programs than Grants Pass High School.

The Cavemen won six team titles during the decade, including a three-peat in wrestling, a pair of titles in football and an unexpected championship in basketball.

“I think it was the best decade in our school’s history,” said Tom Blanchard, the quarterback on the 1964 state championship football team, a National Football League punter for 11 seasons and the current GPHS athletics director. “We had outstanding athletes, coaches, administration and support from the community. You can’t argue with the results.”

The golden age of Caveman sports is best personified with the football team’s coaching staff.

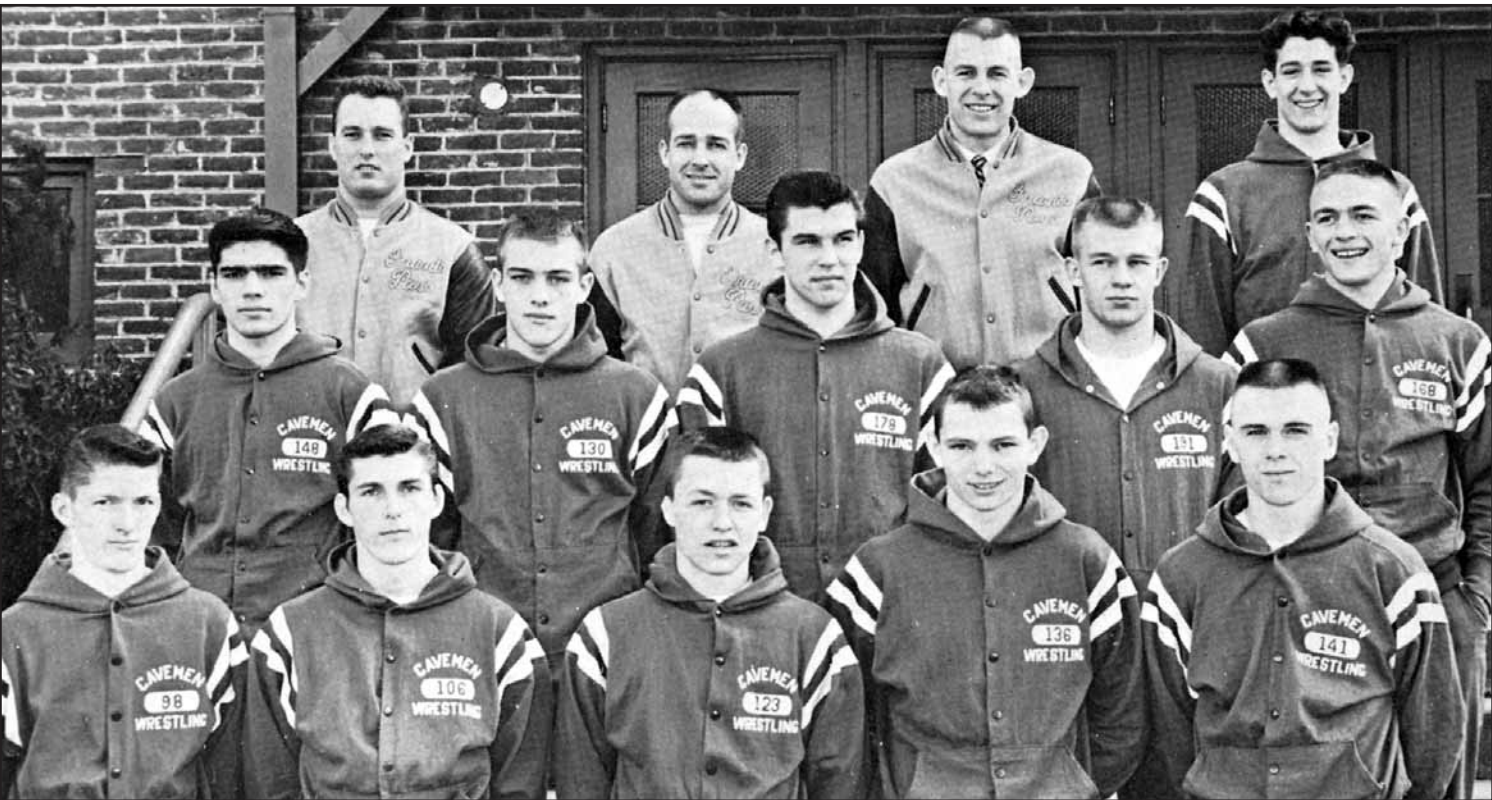
Grants Pass’ football dynasty was engineered by Mel Ingram — who coached for 22 seasons, put together a 141-50-19 overall record and won four state titles — but it was the staff he assembled that became a microcosm of the school’s well-rounded success in the 1960s.

The football team’s defensive coach was a man named Bill Ryder, who also happened to be the head wrestling coach of a team that won three straight titles from 1962 to ’64. Between 1962 and 1975, Ryder’s teams won 12 district titles and were runners-up at state in 1965 and ’66.

Winning individual state wrestling championships was more difficult in the 1960s — there were only two classifications compared to six nowadays — but the Cavemen managed seven trips to the top of the podium during the decade.

Ryder’s success was born of the iron will of a disciplinarian. Although he died in 2006, his former wrestlers still remember his toughness.

“He is one of the only people



The Grants Pass High wrestling teams won state championships in 1962, 1963 and 1964. The 1962 team is pictured here, following the district championships.

I have known in my life who had a sense of value ... a code to live by,” said Rich Fahey, who wrestled for the Cavemen from 1963 to ’65. “Bill always took the high road. In that wrestling room, we were taught the value of work, work ethic and discipline.”

Yet another member of the football coaching staff was a man named Gordon Prehm, who also happened to be the head basketball coach.

Prehm was responsible for leading the Cavemen to their most unexpected state championship in 1962.

The Cavemen didn’t enter the state playoffs that season as favorites to win the title. In fact, their final record of 18-8 is the third-lowest winning percentage (.692) among teams to take home a state basketball title.

Their run began with a 48-44 first-round victory against Baker before they hammered McMinnville in the second round 69-48. Grants Pass used a late-game basket to beat Astoria and then knocked off Marshfield 62-54 at McArthur Court in Eugene to claim the improbable state title.

“Basketball was not a headline sport then,” said Prehm, who is now 85 years old and

Decade of winners

1960s GP state titles

WRESTLING: 1962, 1963, 1964
FOOTBALL: 1964, 1967
BASKETBALL: 1962

Wrestling champions

1960: Bill Cole, Grants Pass (275)
1961: Gary Stevens, Grants Pass (148)
1962: Clayton Kreiger, Grants Pass (157)
1962: Mike Nicholson, Grants Pass (98)
1963: Mike Furlong, Grants Pass (98)
1966: Steve Agee, Grants Pass (98)
1966: Mike Grant, Grants Pass (141)

lives in Shelton, Wash. “The football team had won state championships, and wrestling had won some ... it felt good that basketball got some recognition.”

There were other football coaches who found success, including Russ Werner, who won a state title with the cross country team in 1956, and Ron

Maurer, who was a baseball coach and teacher at GPHS for 35 years.

But at the highest rung of the football coaching ladder always has been Ingram. The Old Gray Fox of GP football already had established his legacy by the time the 1960s rolled around, but he added two more titles before retiring in 1968.

“I wouldn’t say that I was afraid of him, but I definitely knew my place,” Blanchard said. “He was not a guy whose players called him by his first name. There was a ton of respect, and by that point (1964), he already had that huge reputation that you knew about before you ever started playing for him.”

The 1964 title team actually came into the season with tempered expectations because they followed a 1963 group that many thought had more talent.

Led by Blanchard and a slew of talented players, the Cavemen defeated Roseburg by virtue of attaining the most first downs — which was the tie-breaker at that time — after the teams finished the game in a dead heat at 7-7.

The Cavemen then beat Grant High 20-6 in the semifinals and capped it off with a 7-0

victory against Corvallis in the state championship game.

The team finished with a 10-1-1 record.

Grants Pass’ football team won its final state championship — it hasn’t won one since — during its co-title season in 1967.

Led by quarterback Steve Endicott, the Cavemen went 9-0-3 overall and won the title with one of the most unorthodox playoff runs in Oregon high school history.

In the semifinals, the Cavemen defeated South Salem because they gained more total yards in a game that ended with a score of 21-21. The title game was called a tie at 14-14 against Jesuit.

The decade ended in high fashion for the city of Grants Pass when Blanchard (University of Oregon) and Endicott (Oregon State University) faced off in the 1969 Civil War. More than 42,500 people filled Autzen Stadium in Eugene in the largest gathering for a sporting event in Oregon history at the time for a showdown between two former GPHS quarterbacks.

Oregon State won the game 10-7, but more than anything else, it put a bow on a decade of athletic glory at Grants Pass High.

Life in the fast lane of local horse racing

By Jeff Duewel
of the Daily Courier

Don Jackson sat in his recliner and combed through his memories, gathered over 84 years.

Horse racing photos and honorary plaques fill a wall, leading to a huge television in the same spot he and wife Dolores placed their first television in the mid-1950s.

“We used to have people over for ‘rasslin,’ ‘Gunsmoke’ and Lucille Ball,” he said.

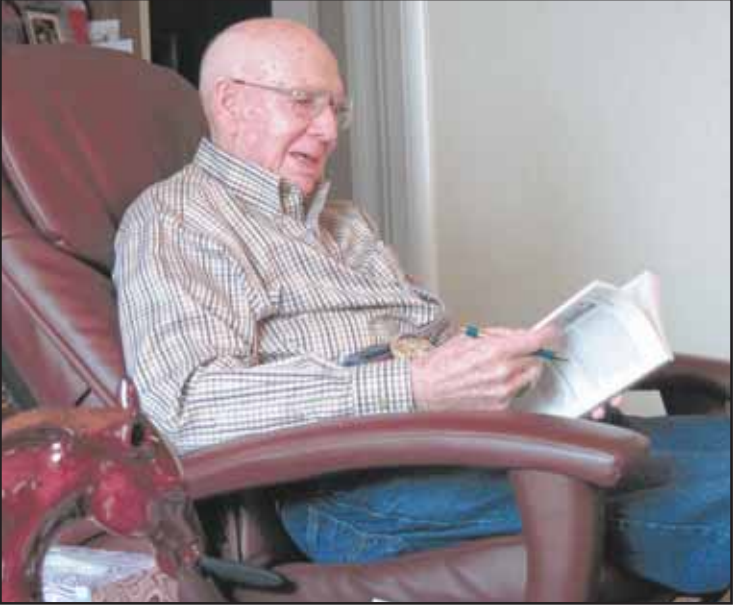
“We had to wait six months after we got the TV for the signal.”

Jackson was reflective, recalling peers who long ago died and his wife, whom he lost to cancer 1996.

“I’m old and feeble now,” The man known for his great thoroughbred sire Flying Lark, which led the nation in wins in 1982, started poor but found prosperity as the nation regrouped after World War II.

By 1940, Jackson was 15 years old and already hardened from work, either picking hops for 1½ cents a pound (“All the high school kids around here took a turn at picking hops”) or delivering Daily Couriers on his bike with John Reinhart on Upper and Lower River roads, where his folks scratched out a living during the Great Depression.

They mowed hay behind a team of horses, and piled it onto wagons, since there were no balers around, and sold corn ears for a penny to hop pickers, and tomatoes for a



JEFF DUEWEL/Daily Courier

Don Jackson looks back on years in business and horse racing in Grants Pass.

penny a pound.

He dug foundations at Camp White.

In 1942 he witnessed what he called one of the greatest inventions, hydraulics, which turned loose tractors, bulldozers and dump trucks.

By 18 he was working seven days a week, in a time when Grants Pass had more than 30 service stations — when they used to check oil, wash all the windows and pump only 10,000 gallons a month, Jackson said.

“I think I worked for all of them.”

Jackson got a big break in 1950, when Shell Oil let him uproot the station at Sixth and

sent day Ringuette Street, where the Texaco is now. That included the tanks and the pumps too — at no charge but the hauling.

Don and Dolores had saved their money, and he planted the station on 5 acres he bought for \$5,000.

Don’s Shell prospered because he owned everything, and people began to buy fuel at the edge of town, especially logging companies and their families.

Jackson said when he started, downtown stations were pumping 10,000 gallons a month, but it wasn’t long before he was pumping 50,000 to 60,000 gallons.

He started buying property, including a 160-acre ranch along the Applegate past Murphy for just \$15,000. By 1965 he had leased his station back to Shell and started raising race horses.

He helped get racing started at Grants Pass, with his partner Doc Wood the veterinarian.

an.

Pari-mutuel betting came along in the 1960s, the races expanded beyond just the fair, and the new track was built in 1969.

“Today things are slow at Jackson’s Flying Lark Ranch, as horse racing has faded some, taken over by people punching video screens in smoky casinos and playing state lottery games. His hopeful second coming of Flying Lark, the stud Gold Meridian, died unexpectedly a few years later.

But the man with the fedora and the Jack Russell terriers still likes to stay involved with the Southern Oregon Horse Racing Association. He helped bring new dirt to the track with a \$70,000 donation last year.

He’ll be there come summer at the Don Jackson Racing Facility where they’ll christen the new track.

“I believe I’ve lived in the best of times,” Jackson said.

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