

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. HELENA HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL, BOYS BASKETBALL, AND FOOTBALL

The First 60 Years –1908-1968, by Jim Hunt (class of 1962)

I. INTRODUCTION

First of all, I want to thank Mariam Hansen and the Historical Society for giving me the opportunity to share with you some of my research into St. Helena's High School sports history.

A little about myself. Born and raised in St. Helena. Played football, basketball, and baseball from 1958-62. Went to Cal, where I played football and studied History and Political Science. In 1966 I went back to the East Coast where I got a graduate degree at Tufts University, and then started my teaching/coaching career.

In 1976 I came back home to the Valley

spent 2 years at Justin, 8 in Calistoga, and 22 at Rancho Cotate High School in Rohnert Park. I've always loved researching and working with statistics. While coaching at Calistoga I compiled their football record book, and did the same at Rancho. When I retired in 2008 I started this project of researching St. Helena's sports records.

Because of the amount of material involved, today I'm going to cover "ancient" history, from 1908-1968.

II. THE MYSTERY

I might as well begin today by talking about what I call, "The Mystery," that is, the curiously well-kept secret of the changes in the High School's colors and mascot about 75 years ago. As I began this project, I was very, *very* surprised to discover that the original school colors were green and gold, and that the mascot was the "Thunderbird."

First, let me speak to the issue of the school colors. The data supporting the fact that the original school colors were green and gold is overwhelming and just a few examples will suffice. The December 1911 *Far Darte*, the original name of the school's yearbook, has this quote in the Athletics section:

When [basketball] is mentioned the student flies to his pennant with a spirit of patriotism and with a spirit of confidence in the Green and Gold Basketball Team.

In the April 18, 1913 edition of the *ST. HELENA STAR*, the following announcement can be found

TRACK AND FIELD MEET

Everything is in readiness for the big track and field meet in St. Helena tomorrow.

The St. Helena High School colors are green and gold. Be sure and wear them

Saturday and root for the home boys who hope to win honors on track and field...

The *STAR* of April 12, 1926 refers to the High School baseball team as:

The Green and Gold diamond-dusters...

A January 28, 1927 article in the *STAR* about a basketball win over Sonoma reported that:

The Heavies [meaning the varsity] had their new green and gold checkered suits and wore them to defeat Sonoma.

As to the timing of the changing of the school's colors, it appears as if the football team was the first to wear red and white. In a pre-season article in the *STAR* of September 23, 1935, it's stated that in their home opener against the Napa Ramblers:

The High School football team will be sporting their new black and red pants, red jerseys, and red stockings.

There is absolutely no explanation in that article, nor in any other that I have found, as to why the change in colors was made, nor was any mention ever made as to whether or not this was an official school decision, nor whether or not it was a controversial one.

Actually, the initial "red" was more of a maroon or burgundy, ala the school letter sweaters of old, **(more, and Bob Darter will gag when I say this, "Stanford-like).**

The switch to red and white for baseball occurred a couple of years later. On March 31, 1939, the *STAR* reported,

The Saints, clad in their new flashy red suits, will travel to Healdsburg next Tuesday to open the season.

There is also indisputable evidence that the High School's original mascot name was the Thunderbirds. From the beginning of St. Helena High School sports in 1908 until the early 1930s, any newspaper article speaking of the school's athletic teams used the term Thunderbirds as the nickname. Again, only a couple of examples are necessary.

The *STAR* of October 6, 1925 announced the first football league game against Vallejo with the following headline:

Thunderbirds Ready to Open Season

The *STAR* of October 4, 1929 announced the season-opening game with Napa with this lead:

Thunderbirds and Indians to Meet Tomorrow on Elementary School Grounds.

In the "High School Notes" section in the *STAR* of December 18, 1931, the following article can be found:

The "Thunderbirds" has been selected as the symbol for the St. Helena basketball teams, and will be featured at all future games. A device has been installed in the gym which will produce the sound of thunder and flashes of lightning.

Further on, in the same issue, this accompanying story can be found:

Thunderbird * * * A New Mascot

St. Helena High School has found a new mascot and name for the school teams. He is known as the Thunderbird, and in times past lived with various Indian tribes, but report has it that on hearing of our courage and prowess on the athletic battlefield he was proud to join the ranks of

St. Helena supporters... He brought one of the chants with him that was used in the old days and has permitted us to use it as follows:

Beat on the buckskin,

Beat on the drum.

Hi! Hi! Hi! For the Thunder Birds come!

eyes burn red with the blood of battle,

Their wild-wings roar in the medicine rattle.

Ho! Let the iron-wood war clubs crash

With thunder bolt and lightning flash!

Hi! Hi! Hi!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Rah!

Even though this *STAR* piece is certainly proof that the Thunderbird was made the official school mascot in 1931, it also raises a question, for if the Thunderbird, as we've seen, had been used as the school teams' symbol for over 20 years to that date, why was it only in 1931 being made "official"? Just another part of the mystery. That aside, the fact remains that the High School teams *were* originally called the Thunderbirds.

During the late 1920s and into the 1930s, however, the term "Saints" is used more and more often for the school's athletic teams. In fact, during those years, the two names were often used in the same news articles. For example, the *STAR* of October 27, 1934, describing a football win over Vallejo is headlined:

THUNDERBIRDS DEFEAT VALLEJO

Then, in the accompanying article, it says:

The Mighty St. Helena *Thunderbirds* proved their strength when they defeated the Vallejo Apaches to a tune of 6-0. This is the first time that the *Saints* have defeated a Vallejo team. [Emphasis added].

A May 7, 1937 *STAR* article about the baseball team has the following:

- Last Friday the *Thunderbirds* traveled over to Geyserville to face that school on its home field. [Emphasis added].
- And, later in the same article it says:
- Friday the *Saints* showed championship form. [Emphasis added].
- Finally, as is the case with the switch to red and white, I have not yet been able to discover any explanation as to when or why the use of the Thunderbird symbol was dropped. The latest year in which I've seen its usage was in 1943. After that, it was never used again, at least in any articles I've seen.

My theory about the nomenclature is this:

The term “Saints” had nothing at all to do with celestial beings, nor was it even a mascot-name. It was simply short for “St. Helenas,” or “St. Helenans.” It was just easier to say or write “Saints” rather than “St. Helenans. During the 1930s there was a St. Helena town football team that was also called the “Saints. “ As to why the term “Thunderbird” was eventually dropped, maybe it had to do with the growing wine industry here and not wanting to be associated in any way with Thunderbird wine. Well, maybe not, but it’s as good a theory as any.

III. BASEBALL

St. Helena High School began playing baseball in 1908. An article in the *Far Darter* of that year reads as follows:

A baseball team was formed at the school this year and played three games, the first was against the Wiley B. Allens Club of San Francisco (a 6-0 win), and two vs. Napa, winning the first game 10-9, but losing the second 29-1. Enthusiasm was high and there is plenty of good material for the future.

The new field in Hunt’s Grove

The first “home” games were played at what the *STAR* referred to in 1908 as “the new field in Hunt’s Grove.” In 1912, when the High School moved to its new home on Grayson Avenue, a baseball field was laid out on the grounds, and from 1913 on most of the team’s games were played there.

So far, the earliest lists of St. Helena High School baseball team members that I’ve been able to discover included the following players: Will Giugni, Victor Cole, Roy Croft, Louis and Mario Vasconi, Oliver Christianson, Elmer Salmina, Virgil Morley, Eugene Morosoli, Harvey Money, Elmer Herdle, and Beltrand Elgin.

They belonged to the SNSCAL league

The first league to which St. Helena belonged, in 1910, was the Sonoma/Napa/Solano Counties Athletic League (SNSCAL), which included 12 High Schools from those three counties In 1922, St. Helena played in the Central Division of what was called the Northwestern League (NWL), along with Calistoga, Cloverdale, and Geyserville.

In 1925, the High School baseball teams first began playing some of their home games at the “Elementary” or “Grammar School” field, and as the years passed, more and more games were played there rather than at the high school. The 1925 squad, which won the League title that year, included the following players: Dudley and Louis Duvall, Theo “Sarge” Corbella, Steve Jackse, “Pinky” Blake, and Max Harrington.

In 1935, the Saints joined the newly formed North Bay League II along with Calistoga, Cloverdale, Geyserville, Healdsburg, Sonoma, and Tomales. That League stayed mostly intact in that way until early 1960s.

In 1947, according to a 1952 article in the *NAPA REGISTER*, the legendary Al Carpy set out to make some much-needed improvements to the “Grammar School Field.” “100 St. Helenans,” the piece said, “donated \$100 apiece and Carpy Field was realized.” That year the first night game ever played in St. Helena took place on Carpy Field when the Saints squared off against

up-valley rival Calistoga. St. Helena won that game 9-2, with Alfred Harding, who later pitched in the Minor Leagues, hurling a two-hitter.

The highs and lows of St. Helena's baseball teams

Over the years, St. Helena has experienced its share of highs and lows in baseball competition. From 1921 through 1926, with players like Everett Giugni, Ralph Leavers, Maxwell Murray, Newton York, Theo Corbella, and Max Harrington, the school compiled a 19-2 league record, winning 5 of 6 league titles. 1933 through 1935 were also very good years, with Otto Beringer, Mike Bertolucci, Henry Rutherford, Attilio "Toch" Ghiringhelli, and Carlo Forni, who went on to play in the NY Yankees organization, leading the way, winning back-to-back titles in 1934-35.

But after that, during a long stretch of 15 years, the Saints won only two championships, one in 1939 and the other in 1947. That 1947 squad was one of the finest in SH baseball history. Led by Virgil Parodi, Jerry Morgan, Chuck Stanley, Jack Abruzzini, Dante "Sonny" Gruppo, Bob Moe, and Alfred Harding, and coached by Al Carpy, the Saints went 15-2 and won the NBL II title.

Celebrating the dynasty years

Then came the decades of the 50s and 60s, and what I call "The Dynasty Years." From 1952 through 1968, a span of 17 years, the Saints compiled an overall record of 182 wins and just 84 losses. In League play the record was even better, 122 wins against only 20 losses. The dominance actually reached its peak from 1958-68. In those 11 years, coached by Tom Giugni and then by Dick Creighton, St. Helena won 10 league championships, compiling a phenomenal 94-13 record in League play. At one point, from 1959 to 1961, the Saints won a school record 27 consecutive League games.

Memorable games

During my research I've put together some chronological capsules of memorable games and individual performances during the over 100 years of St. Helena baseball, and I'd like to share a few of them with you here.

- **May 5, 1920:** At the end of the ninth inning in this game with Napa High, the score was tied 2-2. [Note: Until 1939 High Schools played 9-inning games]. The game remained tied until the top of the 13th when St. Helena pushed across a run to take the lead. The Thunderbirds' sophomore pitcher, Everett Giugni, retired the side in order in the bottom of the 13th to secure the win. Giugni, the first in a long line of great St. Helena pitchers, hurled the entire 13 innings, and, from the 3rd inning on, held Napa scoreless and hitless for the last 11 innings.
- **April 16, 1921:** Shortstop Maxwell Murray led St. Helena to an 11-10 win over Napa with a 2-run double in the bottom of the 10th. It was Murray's fourth double of the day. The four 2-base hits in one game is still a school record after 91 years.
- **March 18, 1922:** In the season opening game against Napa, Everett Giugni, now a senior, struck out a phenomenal 21 Napa batters, striking out the side in the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 8th innings.
- **March 26, 1926:** In a 22-2 rout of St. Vincent of Vallejo, Theo Corbella hit a Grand Slam home run, the first of only 11 in St. Helena history.

- **May 9, 1930:** Entering this final game of the season, St. Helena and Calistoga were tied for the league lead, and going into the top of the 9th, the Wildcats were leading by a score of 4-1. But with one out, St. Helena loaded the bases on a single and two walks. Then 3rd baseman Charles Hamill stepped to the plate and dramatically launched a bomb to deep centerfield for a Grand Slam home run giving the Thunderbirds the lead 5-4. The stunned 'Cats were retired in order in the bottom of the inning giving St. Helena an amazing comeback win and the league championship.
- **April 6, 1934:** St. Helena beat Benicia 14-2 led by Henry Rutherford's 5 for 5 day, 3 of the hits doubles. Only three other St. Helena players have ever had 5 hits in one game, and only 2 others have ever been a perfect 5 for 5. Rutherford also had a school record 7 RBIs for the game.
- **April 26 - May 10, 1935:** Over a 27-inning span in 3 consecutive games, Saints pitcher "Toch" Ghiringhelli allowed only 3 hits and just 1 earned run. In the May 3 game against Geyserville, "Toch" pitched the first no-hitter in St. Helena history.
- **April 1, 1943:** A 16-0 beating of St. Vincent of Vallejo was led by Lou Mozzini, Ernie Nagy, and Henry "Chops" Ghiringhelli. In that game, the three-some together went 10 for 12, belting out 7 doubles, a triple, and a homerun. The best one-game, three-man batting effort ever.
- **April 12, 1946:** At the end of 7 innings in a tense league contest against Sonoma, the game was tied at 2-2. The score remained deadlocked for 7 more innings until, with two outs in the bottom of the 15th, the Saints' Jerry Morgan drew a walk. On the next pitch, he took off for 2nd base in an attempted steal. The catcher's throw arrived at the base at exactly the same moment as Morgan, and the ball caromed off the 2nd baseman's shoulder and bounced into center field. Morgan quickly jumped up and streaked for 3rd. The ball was retrieved by the Dragons' center fielder who fired it to his third baseman. Once again, the throw and Morgan arrived at the same moment and this time the ball bounced off of Morgan and rolled off into short left field. One more time, Morgan leapt to his feet, this time heading for home. The Sonoma shortstop picked up the loose ball and fired a strike to the catcher. However, in his effort to quickly apply the tag to the sliding Morgan, the ball tipped off of his mitt and Morgan slid safely across the plate with the winning run.

Almost going unnoticed in all the excitement was the fact that St. Helena's ace Alfred Harding had pitched the entire 15 innings to get the win.

- **March 28, 1952:** Going into the top of the 7th, St. Helena and Kelseyville were tied 5-5. What happened then was almost unbelievable as the Saints sent 17 men to the plate and proceeded to score 13 runs on 8 hits, 4 walks, and 2 Kelseyville errors, to win the game 18-5.
- **May 13 to May 24, 1955:** His Honor, Mayor Del Britton accomplished an amazing feat of hitting by getting a base hit in a school record 10 consecutive at bats over a 4-game span.

- **March 14, 1958:** Rich Simpson made his initial pitching start in the season opener of his Senior year against Analy, and proceeded to pitch the first perfect game in St. Helena history. Only one other Saint pitcher has ever thrown a perfect game, that was Dave Navone in 1978.
- **April 24, 1959:** Saint sluggers Fred Beringer, Tom Blanchfield, and John Ghiringhelli all hit home runs in the top of the fifth during a 10-6 win over Clearlake, the only time in St. Helena history that three players have homered in the same inning. Beringer had already homered in the fourth inning making him the only Saint ever to hit home runs in consecutive at bats. Blanchfield's round-tripper was a Grand Slam, the first of his school record 3 in his career at St. Helena. Tommy is also the only Saint ever to hit more than one Grand Slam.
- **May 11, 1959:** The Saints scored a school record 38 runs against the Geyserville Bronchos – in only 5 1/3 innings, when the Geyserville coach leapt from the bench and pulled his team off the field to end the game.
- **May 5, 1960:** St. Helena High School baseball teams have pulled off four triple plays throughout the years, but this one was the oddest of them all. In the top of the 7th inning, St. Helena had a 3-0 lead over Tomales and Saints' pitcher John Ghiringhelli was spinning a very sharp 2-hitter. But John walked the lead-off batter, Peter Bianchi, and then the Braves' Bob Titus stroked a solid double to put runners on second and third with no outs.

The next Tomales batter, Rich Poncia, hit a hard ground ball to shortstop Walter Raymond, who checked the runner at 3rd and then fired to 1st baseman Darrell Robertson for the out. Bianchi, on third, took off for the plate on the throw. Robertson threw to Catcher Tom Myers who tagged Bianchi out – a crucial double play. But, it wasn't over yet.

On the throw to the plate, Titus took off from 2nd and sprinted for 3rd. Myers then threw to 3rd baseman Tom Blanchfield, who tagged the hard-sliding Titus. Titus was actually called safe by the Umpire, but he was so incensed by what he thought was an excessively hard tag applied by Blanchfield, that he jumped off the bag to confront the Saints' 3rd baseman. Titus, though, had neglected to call time out before he left the base, and Blanchfield simply tagged him out to complete the very bizarre triple play.

- **May 9 / May 12 / May 16, 1961:** Ray Myers hit a home run in 3 consecutive games, the only SH player ever to accomplish this.
- **April 3 / April 4, 1964:** Jeff Warren (against Kelseyville), and Steve Reed (against Pebble Beach the next day), each hit a Grand Slam home run, only the second, and last, time in SHHS baseball history that this has been done.
- **1965-68:** Alan Hardin, arguably the greatest pitcher in St. Helena history, was a perfect 24-0 in League play during his four years as a starter. During his 4-season unbeaten reign, he pitched 9 complete game shut-outs, threw three two-hitters, seven 1-hitters, and two no-hitters. He also amassed 283 strikeouts, averaging 12 per game.

IV. BASKETBALL

In the "Athletics" section of the 1909 *Far Darter*, this article can be found:

Just after the Christmas vacation the boys formed a basketball team... It consists of the following:

- Kenneth Sherlock, Captain
- Albert Taplin
- Ernest Dichman
- Will Guigni
- Orville Thompson
- Heatley Decker
- Orion Squires.

Thus, was the game of basketball introduced to St. Helena High School 104 years ago. That first squad won only 3 of the 7 games they played. Then, in only its third year of competition, the Thunderbirds went 10-2, and from that season through 1923, won 11 league championships in 14 years.

In those first years of basketball, home games were played in Turner Hall

The site of the original High School founded in 1896. Even though the new, permanent High School campus was constructed in 1912, it did not include a gym and the basketball teams continued to play their home games in Turner until it was torn down in 1923. From 1923 to 1930, the school's home games were played in the then newly-constructed Native Sons Hall. Finally, in late 1929, a gymnasium was completed on the High School campus and the basketball teams truly had a "home court."

The first game played there was a 30-12 loss to a very strong town team from Geyserville, but a week later the gym was more properly christened with a 31-5 smashing of Calistoga. This new classic gymnasium, with raised grandstands and dug-outs for the players, was the home of St. Helena basketball for almost 40 years, until this current building was constructed in 1967. The "old" gym was finally, and sadly, demolished in the mid-1980s to make room for new classrooms.

- After the initial winning seasons already mentioned, St. Helena basketball fell on hard times from 1923-1936, not winning a single league title for 13 years.

When basketball fortunes began to revive

Beginning in 1936, however, St. Helena's basketball fortunes began to revive and through the 1941 season the school's teams were 28-2 in league play, the Saints' best 5-year league period in the school's history. Led by an exceptionally talented group of players, including Mel "Poppy" Eisan, Ray Bertolucci, Bob Thorsen, Jack Wilson, Frank DeLazzer, Harold "Toppa" Rutherford, and Louis San Biago, **and coached by Jack Rannells**, the teams won a school record 20 consecutive league games in capturing 3 titles in those 4 fabulous seasons.

One unbelievable game in 1944

I cannot speak here today without mentioning one, unbelievable game that took place in February of 1944. St. Helena was scheduled to host Cloverdale and the “A” game was to have huge bearing on the NBL II championship race. However, earlier in the evening, the St. Helena B’s, led by Bob “Bimmer” Sculatti’s 25-point effort, completely stole the show. Here’s how the *STAR* reported it:

- Last Friday evening, February 4, is a date to remember. Teachers from now on will require their history classes to know the date and particulars of “The Cloverdale Massacre.” It started out early in the game with a lead for the locals of 29-0. The half found the B’s leading 49-0. The game was St. Helena’s all the way, the final whistle finding the Saints with 71 points and the visitors with a 0.
- Through the 1940s and 1950s, the Saints went into another dormant period, managing to win only 2 league titles in 19 years, in 1953 and 1957.
- During the decade of the 60s, the Saints had another resurgence, and overall had some of their best seasons ever. The 1962, 1965, 1966, 1967, and 1968 teams all won League Championships, losing only 6 league games during those 5 years.

The adventure of traveling to games

Traveling to and from games in the early years of St. Helena basketball was an adventure to say the least. There were very few drive-able roads for the newly-introduced automobile, and all of those that were, were dirt, or, in winter and early spring, mud. As a matter of fact, there were only about 150 miles of paved roads in the whole nation, and certainly none of those were in the North Bay Area. Highways 12, 29, and 128 weren’t paved until at least 1929.

However, these intolerable conditions, at least intolerable to today’s travelers, didn’t seem to bother the St. Helena basketball teams nor their loyal fans. In that first season of 1908-09 they traveled all the way to Berkeley to play. At about 10-15 mph at best, and waiting for the ferry in Vallejo, as there was no bridge across the Carquinez Straits until 1927, it took them 4 hours – one way!

A six-hour trip for a Santa Rosa game

At the end of the 1917 season the Thunderbirds were to play Santa Rosa in the “Rose City” for the SNSCAL championship. It had been raining heavily for several days prior and on the day of the game the only road that was open was the twisting, rut-filled Hwy 128 north out of Calistoga. Undeterred, the team and about 20 fans, in six “machines,” took off early in the morning, slithered their way north to Geyserville, and then swung to the south through Healdsburg, finally arriving in Santa Rosa in mid-afternoon, a six-and-a-half hour trip (including, according to a *STAR* article, five flat tires and several stops for minor engine repairs). And, ultimately, all for a heartbreaking, last-second, 1-point loss. The *STAR* account of the trip also reported that they all “wearily arrived safely back home in the wee hours of the morning.”

In February, 1920, the team and their fans motored over to Dixon for the SNSCAL East Division Championship game. The *STAR* reported that, “After various road adventures and changes because of engine trouble, the team arrived in Dixon in two sections, one by machine and one

by rail.” The *STAR* also stated that “several players were required to stay the night as they had no way to get home.”

V. FOOTBALL

The September 19, 1924 edition of the *STAR* carried the following article beneath the front page headline reading:

RAH FOOTBALL! ST. HELENA HI!

Some of the fellows about school suggested having a Football team. Mr. Waterman, Athletics Coach, had given his approval, and a football was obtained and practice started... After a large amount of discussion, a Student Body meeting was held and speeches were made in favor of football. After the meeting two petitions were circulated among the students and presented to the Board of Trustees. The Board voted to give approval, and the Student Body promised to put the gridiron in shape and can already be seen working on the field like a gang of ranch hands.

Competing in the North Bay League

With the sanction of the Trustees, the high school then petitioned to be allowed to compete in the North Bay League with Analy, Napa, Petaluma, San Rafael, Santa Rosa, Tamalpais, and Vallejo. All of these schools were much larger in enrollment than St. Helena, and all of them had many years of experience in football competition, but there were literally no schools of St. Helena’s size who played 11-man football. At a special League meeting called to discuss the matter, there was heavy opposition, but ultimately approval was given and St. Helena High School began playing football.

That first team of 1924 had a starting line-up as follows: Theo Corbella; Carl Jursch; Frank Duvall; Louis Mossi; Bob Lizzio; Joe Knapp; Tom Walters; Max Harrington; Joe Vasconi, Bill Becky; and Joe Lovering.

The Thunderbirds got off to a rough start; many kids had never played football before

The initial season was rough. The young St. Helena kids, none of whom had ever played football before, lost at Ukiah 20-0 in a non-league game to open the season, and then lost five league games -- the first four to Analy, 20-6; San Rafael, 61-0; Napa, 73-0; and Vallejo, 88-0. In the “School and Campus” section of the *STAR* the week following the Napa debacle, a student reporter sardonically wrote the following account of the game:

From the first toot of the whistle Napa slashed through our team like a warm knife through so much butter... The game was a regular Class A No. 1 slaughter without even a grease spot left where St. Helena ought to have been and the score running up like a frightened thermometer out for an altitude record. Man after man, knocked out, dragged out; nothing to do but to crawl back to St. Helena and forget it.

And then the fifth league defeat, came at the hands of Santa Rosa, 144- 0. There was no report of that game in the *STAR*, and only a very short article about the rout appeared in the *PRESS DEMOCRAT*. The story didn’t have much to say about the game except to acknowledge the fact that:

The St. Helena team was heavily outweighed and substantially overmatched, and 60-yard runs for touchdowns were not uncommon.

Even though week after week crushed on the scoreboard, and battered and bruised physically, the eager St. Helenans never quit and received high praise all season long from opposing coaches, players, and fans for their determination, sportsmanship, and never-say-die spirit. In the November 14, 1924 issue of the *NAPA DAILY JOURNAL*, Napa High's Head Coach, Harold Johnson, was quoted as saying:

I can't say enough about the grit and pluck of those St. Helena boys, they just wouldn't give up no matter how bad it got.

The first touchdown ever scored by a St. Helenan (or "Saint," if you prefer), and the only one scored that whole season, came on a 4-yard run by Theo Corbella in the 1924 game with Analy. The first win came in the season opener of 1925, a 12-7 defeat of the Vallejo "Ramblers," the term used in those times for a school's second team. St. Helena's first win against another true varsity team came in the first game of the 1926 season with a 32-0 defeat of Martinez. The first league win came that same year in a 14-13 thriller over Analy.

St. Helena athletes began to catch on

After only three years of competition, the 1927 team became the first to have a winning season by going 6-3, one of the wins a very sweet 18-7 revenge defeat of Santa Rosa.

Overall, throughout its first 28 years of football, St. Helena compiled a very respectable 109-96 won/lost record. In 1935, led by Andy DelBondio, Bob Bergendorff, Mike Bertolucci, Virgil Galleron, Henry Rutherford, and "Toch" Ghiringhelli, the team went 6-1-2, losing only in its last game of the season, 9-0 to Williams. The 1944 squad completed the first perfect season in St. Helena history, going 7-0. That team, coached by Ralph Ingols and led by Matt Spear, Lou Mozzini, Jess Torres, Frank Fontana, Andy Anderson, Bob Sculatti, Charlie Nagel and Al Wood, allowed only two touchdowns during the entire campaign, both of them scored in the last game of the season by St. Vincent of Vallejo.

The next 16 years, from 1952 to 1968, the Saints were in their Dynasty mode

During those great years, St. Helena won 109 games and only lost 25. In league play the record was even better, with 64 wins against just 11 losses, winning 11 championships, and never finishing lower than 2nd. At home on Carpy Field, the Saints were almost literally unbeatable, winning 54 games out of 61 overall, and not losing a single league game, going 28-0-2.

The 1955 team, led by Bob Pestoni, Roland Vierra, Ed Bowers, and Paul Padilla, was the second St. Helena team to achieve a perfect season, going 8-0.

And then there was "The Streak"

Of course, no mention of St. Helena football would be complete without bringing up "The Streak." In 1960, legendary coach George Davis arrived in St. Helena and proceeded to lead the Saints to five consecutive undefeated seasons, going 45-0. Davis left St. Helena at the end of the 1964 season, but the Saints of 1965 won their first game to up the winning streak to 46 games. The following week, however the Saints were tied by Vanden High School 0-0, ending the winning streak. But, the '65 team then went on to win their next 6 games to bring the unbeaten string to 53 games before finally losing to Cloverdale in the last game of the year. As far as I know, both of those marks are still California State records for a public school.

I'm going to end this talk today with a few capsules of some of the greatest individual performances and a couple of the most exciting games in SH football history.

- **Oct. 5, 1929:** For five years St. Helena High School football teams had suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of the much larger Napa High School, the first three of them by scores of 73-0, 62-7, and 70-0. In 1929 that all changed.

After a hard-fought 3 quarters, the Thunderbirds' Allen Nichelini scored a touchdown to give them a 14-12 lead, the first time St. Helena had ever been ahead of a Napa team. Late in the 4th quarter, though, Napa drove to the St. Helena 28, and, with about two minutes left in the game, seemed to be on its way to a winning score.

The T'Birds' defense stiffened here, though, and dumped Napa ball carriers for a couple of losses. On third and 15 from the 33, and just 0:30 seconds left, the Indians' QB dropped back and fired a pass to his right. Nichelini, however, cut in front of the Indian receiver, snagged the ball out of the air, and raced 72 yards down the sideline for a shocking, game-clinching touchdown.

In that game, Nichelini, who went on to win All-American honors at St. Mary's, and then played pro ball for four years, 2 with the Chicago Bears, and 2 with the LA Bulldogs, scored all of St. Helena's 21 points.

- **Sept. 30, 1932:** Harry Managhi had a school record 5 interceptions in a 13-0 win over Vacaville, returning one of them 62 yards for a touchdown.
- **Nov. 4, 1933:** In a 13-0 victory over Healdsburg, Otto Beringer booted a school record 74 yard punt.
- **Oct. 13, 1934:** St. Helena had never beaten a Vallejo varsity team, giving up an average of 44 points per game in the six games between the two schools while scoring only one TD.

The first 3 quarters were scoreless, but then with 3 minutes left to go in the game, the Thunderbirds took over on the Vallejo 40 after a bad Apache punt. Quarterback Bill Wolf ran for five yards, and then tossed a pass to Bill Bergendorf for 5 more and a 1st down on the 30. Wolf then passed to Harry Seghetti at the 18. Only a minute was left now. Then Wolf, on a keeper, skirted his right end, dodged two would-be tacklers, and scampered the remaining 13 yards for a touchdown just as the gun sounded ending the game.

- **Oct. 16, 1936:** In a 37-0 rout of Calistoga, Aldo Micheli ran for 192 yards and 3 touchdowns.
- **Oct. 13, 1943:** With two touchdowns by Lou Mozzini and one by Matt Spear, the Saints led 19-7 at the end of the third quarter. Late in the game, though, Armijo scored to close the gap to 19-14. On their next possession, the Saints were forced to punt. Armijo took over on their own 44 and began to move the ball toward the St. Helena goal. The Indians were sharp in their pass attack and reached the Saints' ten yard line with about a minute left and no time-outs. A second down pass gained five yards. On third and goal from the five Armijo's QB fired a strike to his wide-open receiver in the end zone, but

the ball was dropped. Finally, on fourth and goal from the 5 and only seconds left in game, Saints' defensive back Jack Brayton intercepted a pass in the end zone to preserve the win.

- **Oct. 7, 1955:** Midway through the 4th quarter against Vacaville, St. Helena's fullback George Steinauer scored on a 6-yard run to give the Saints a 13-6 advantage with 4:00 left in the game. After receiving the kick-off, the Bulldogs were forced to punt and St. Helena took over on its own 44 with two minutes remaining. A strong run attack produced two first downs and, with the ball on the Vacaville 35 and only 0:15 seconds left, the Saints had only to hold on to the pigskin to secure the win. For some reason, however, and much to the dismay of St. Helena fans, the Saints' Roland Viera attempted a pass. An alert Tom Berra of Vacaville picked it off on his own 20 and headed for the St. Helena goal looking as if he would surely score an easy TD to win the game. 71 yards later, however, as time expired, Steinauer and Ed Bowers were able to catch Berra from behind and drag him down on the Saints' 9 yard line to save the game.
- **Oct. 23, 1959:** Toward the end of the third quarter, in a crucial league game with Cloverdale, the Eagles led 13-12. The Saints were backed up deep in their own territory when, on a 3rd and 8 play, QB Walter Raymond appeared to be trapped in the backfield by a swarm of Eagle defenders. But, while in their grasp and being pulled to the turf, he flipped a desperation toss to Tom Blanchfield who then sped his way to an incredible 80 yard TD run. Raymond's PAT kick was good and the Saints had an 19-13 lead.

On their next possession, the Eagles scored again, and, adding the extra point, led 20-19 with only 2:10 left in the game. The Saints received the kick-off and on first and ten from their own 31, were flagged for clipping and were pushed back to their 16. Raymond then passed to Ray Myers for 19 yards, and Joe Torres ran for 5 more to give the Saints a 3rd and one at the 30.

Raymond then handed off to Blanchfield who broke through the right side of the line and then darted and dodged and zigged and zagged down the field 70 yards for a go-ahead touchdown, and the Saints led 25-20 with just 0:40 left. The SH defense was able to hold the Eagles after the kick-off and the Saints celebrated another nerve-wracking win.

In that game, Blanchfield gained 236 yards rushing on only 6 attempts, an average of 39.6 yards per carry. He also caught 7 passes for 127 yards, and returned 6 kicks for 106 yards. His total all-purpose yards added up to 469, still the school record.

- **Nov. 3, 1959:** Quarterback Walter Raymond completed 19 of 24 passes for 321 yards and 5 touchdowns in a 45-6 win over Tomales, both of the marks school records at that time.
- **Oct. 27, 1960:** In the infamous 80-0 rout of Tomales, Tom Blanchfield scored a school record 8 rushing touchdowns and kicked 7 PATs for the amazing total of 55 points, which, of course is the school record, and still stands as the Redwood Empire record.

- **Sept. 24, 1964:** In a 20-6 win over Vanden, the Saints' Dan Heflin returned two pass interceptions for 100 yards, both of them for touchdowns. Both marks school records. The two interception returns for TD mark was later tied by Jeff Brink in 1976.
- **Oct. 21, 1965:** The Saints traveled to Lakeport to face the Kelseyville Indians. Since the final game of the 1959 season, the Saints had gone 50 consecutive games without a loss, and in the 5 previous meetings between the two schools, Kelseyville had not been able to score a single point against the St. Helena defenses.

During the first half, the Indians took total control of the game and stunned the Saints by taking a 13-0 lead into halftime. The St. Helena hadn't been behind by *two* touchdowns since November of 1959!

In the second half, though, the Saints scored two touchdowns to cut the score to 13-12 with just under five minutes left in the game. After forcing the Indians to punt, the Saints drove to Kelseyville's 32 where, with only 0:45 remaining, quarterback Jody Beitler launched a desperation pass to a streaking Ron Grams for the crucial TD that gave St. Helena an 18-13 win.

- **Oct. 13, 1966:** In a 44-28 shoot-out win over Lower Lake, quarterback Jed Cooper threw for 396 yards, breaking Raymond's mark of 321 set in 1959. Cooper averaged 39.6 yards per completion, and passed for 6 TDs. All three totals are still school records.

[Now, before we leave today I'd like you to help me give a rousing tribute to all the young men who have played for St. Helena High School throughout the years. If you'll find the sheet of paper you were given, you can all join me in repeating the "Thunderbird Chant."]