

CCC Football

Recalling memories of program cut 34 years ago



By John William Howard
Sports Editor

There is something special about football. It's a sport that Americans understand. It moves in short spurts but takes breaks in between. People hit each other, it's easy to keep track of who has the ball and it's a chance to get together as a community. Above all, football gives opportunities for young people to do something that's constructive, active and something that will benefit them for years to come.

That brings me to something I've always wondered about. Why doesn't Clackamas Community College have a football program? As it turns out, we used to.

Back in 1971, when McLoughlin and Randall halls were still under construction and the two year old Clairmont hall housed almost the entire college, a group of young men gathered at for football practice. They were to be the first team for the first season of football at Clackamas and a part of a growing trend in the Northwest. At that time, around a dozen "junior colleges" had football teams, including Mt. Hood, Walla Walla and Treasure Valley. Those teams fed the larger division one programs like Oregon and Oregon State as well as the smaller schools in the region.

A lot of people know that Paul Fiskum has been everywhere; they know that he coached softball for 20 years. They know that he teaches numerous classes in Randall hall. They know he is an assistant coach on the men's basketball team. What most people don't know is that Fiskum was one of those very young men that pioneered football at Clackamas.

"It was fun being something that was starting brand new," said Fiskum.

The fledgling Cougars struggled in their first outing. Wrought with injuries and inexperience, Clackamas finished a miserable winless season but captured the attention of the community.

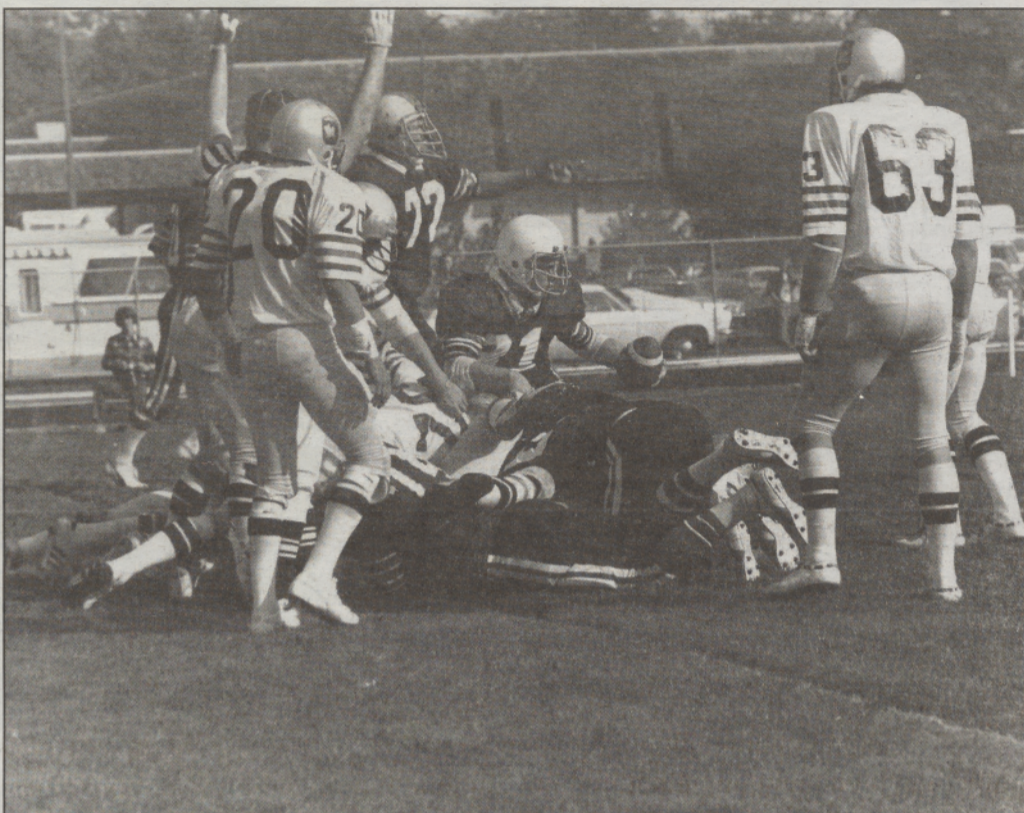
The following year, the program won its first game and continued to build. The third year began to bring some success. The team was competitive and finished around .500 in 1973, the year that Fiskum left Clackamas for what is now Western Oregon.

"The fourth year they were really, really good: 6-3," said Fiskum. "They had a bunch of guys go play Division-I. They had two guys go play at Oregon, two guys go play at Colorado State ... it was really coming on."

While the football team built on each successful season after another, the college board of education and the president of the college were working against them.

According to John Keyser, former CCC president and author of "Transforming Lives: a history of Clackamas Community College," the board was worried that the local taxpayers would begin to disagree with the number of players coming from out of the area and uncomfortable with the expense of football.

If the taxpayers didn't pass the annual budget levy for the college because of their gripes with the football program, then the college would lose much



Clackamas Community College football players celebrate a touchdown against Wenatchee Valley College. Clackamas played football at Pioneer Stadium in Oregon City until the program ceased to exist after the 1977 season.

needed money. Those fears, in combination with a general thought that Clackamas shouldn't have football to begin with meant that the program struggled to be stable from year to year.

"It was controversial in some people's minds to have football ... the whole time football existed, there was a fairly vocal group that felt like, 'Hey, we shouldn't be having football,'" said Fiskum. "Unfortunately one of the ones who never wanted football was our college president. He never really wanted it and he never really supported it."

The 1977 season saw rivals Mt. Hood winning the NWAACC championship and the very existence of the newly successful Clackamas football program was called into question yet again.

After much debate, the decision came down from the board of education: 4-3 in favor of elimination of CCC Football. That meant the loss of a team that brought around 70 athletes to the school and filled Pioneer Stadium in Oregon City with supporters. It wasn't just a community college sporting event. It was college football, as far as Clackamas County was concerned. A pep band and a cheer squad greeted fans that came out to watch the top players from their respective towns play at the next level with the chance to move on.

Now, the echoes of that bright and vibrant football culture have all but faded, except for a few envelopes of pictures and in the memories of those that participated. Several members of the music faculty played in the

pep band and former players and recruits are sprinkled all over the area.

One such recruit was Ron Chappell, who now is the head football coach at West Linn High School. While he decided to go to Western Oregon, he said that many of his teammates came from Clackamas and that he had visited and liked the campus and program at Clackamas. He also said that many of his players, given the opportunity, would love to play football if CCC had a team.

Fellow head coach Steve Coury from Lake Oswego High School also had good things to say about a community college football system in Oregon.

"If we could give kids an opportunity to compete at the junior college level it would be a great option for them," said Coury, who played college ball at Oregon State. "A lot of times a kid needs another year of growth and maturity ... a good football program would give them the chance to grow and improve as a player and student. That is something we no longer can offer our kids in the state."

Sadly, in the years after Clackamas cut their football program, the other community colleges dropped theirs as well. Mt. Hood held on for a few years but eventually there were only four teams remaining. Then football was gone, as were the fans, the cheerleaders and the band. The necessity, however, still remains.

Coury said, "I believe this is really needed here, if done right."



Paul Fiskum (center, with crutches) takes in a college football game at Pioneer Stadium in 1971. Fiskum was injured in his first season as a Cougar but got a medical red-shirt and returned to play during the 1972 and '73 seasons. Clackamas Community College football games regularly filled the stadium and were covered by *The Oregonian*.

1976 NWAACC Football Standings

	W-L	PF	PA
East Division			
Spokane Falls	6-3	158	122
Walla Walla	6-3	151	124
Columbia Basin	5-4	247	164
Wenatchee Valley	3-6	126	185
Yakima Valley	1-8	80	279
West Division			
Mt. Hood	9-0	382	86
Clackamas	5-4	131	141
Grays Harbor	5-4	221	219
Treasure Valley	3-6	91	209
Olympic	2-7	95	151

League Champions: Spokane Falls

Spokane Falls 19, Mt. Hood 7

All photos contributed by Paul Fiskum