

Semipro football 'enjoyable,' serves purpose

by SCOTT NEWTON

There was a decent-sized crowd at the Oregon City Steelheads-Washington County Grizzlies game Saturday night at Tigard, a contest in which three Sandy Union High School graduates played.

Kim Johns, head coach and kicking specialist, estimated the crowd from 2,000 to 3,000. He credited publicity from area newspapers as being responsible.

An article in the Oregon Journal was discussed a lot Saturday night. The Journal had depicted the Steelheads as "fun-loving" and had them working out to disco music. Washington County was described as "well disciplined" and "regimented."

"We proved a guy with a bunch of

buddies who want to play football can go out and kick people in the behind," Johns said in a telephone interview Monday.

After the game Cal McKinnis Sr., a 1962 SUHS graduate, said, "This team here, they're getting in the papers about how they've got a lot of coaches and how they practice a lot. And we're supposed to be the ragtime (team) of the league."

"You can look up at the scoreboard and see who's ragtime."

Indeed, the Steelheads won 31-9, with the outcome in question only before the game.

Oregon City also has a 26-0 win over Puget Sound, and a 41-0 win over West Seattle, to its credit.

Highlights of the game Saturday night included two touchdown catches by Daryl Wilkerson, a 6-3 and

206-pound receiver. The two touchdown passes covered over 100 yards.

And then there was Reggie Ogburn, formerly of the University of Oregon, who was good for 102 yards on the ground and another 160 in the air as the quarterback.

All together Ogburn has run for 575 yards and passed for another 599, all in three games.

"We can play with any team in the country," McKinnis Sr. said, adding that they were ranked sixth out of 200 semipro teams in the country last year.

That regimented "stuff" doesn't win games at this level, McKinnis said. "We got a bunch of guys who've got a lot of heart, and they come out to play ball."

"And we didn't say nothing. We did

our talking on the field."

McKinnis Sr. is 38 years old. He began playing organized football when he was 12, and hasn't missed a season of semipro since he graduated from Sandy High.

Cal McKinnis Jr., 18, is a 1982 SUHS graduate. About playing with his father, he said, "It's an experience, you know? He treats me a lot different than he used to. It's more of a buddy system now."

"On the field he treats me like any other player."

Before coming to Oregon for his senior year in high school, McKinnis Sr. played for Evans City, Penn. He started on defense against this "great athlete" with a million dollar arm from Beaver Falls, Joe Namath.

Evans City (now Butler County) beat Beaver Falls that year. Evans

City's other claim to fame is Terry Hanratty, another NFL quarterback.

McKinnis Sr., a noseguard, still appears to be amazed when considering Namath's quick release.

McKinnis Sr. was asked if one season in his long career stands out. "They're all fun," he said. "Life's fun. Don't you know that?"

What about when you made all-league last season, McKinnis Jr. reminded him.

"That was all right," McKinnis Sr. said.

"He's a helluva ball player," Johns said of McKinnis Sr. "You didn't see too much going up the middle when he was in there, did you?"

Joe Johns, Kim's brother and the general manager, has a short description of McKinnis Sr.: "Spark plug."

McKinnis Jr. didn't play Saturday night as he broke the middle bone in his hand a month ago. He practiced with the injury for two weeks before getting his hand x-rayed.

"They don't know what pain is in the McKinnis family," joked Dan Martin, a former teammate of McKinnis Jr.

"I got tackled by an all-American from OIT and a linebacker from Oregon," McKinnis Jr. said when asked about his injury.

Ralph Balducci, 6-3 and 259 pounds, and Greg Milton, 6-3 and 242 pounds, respectively, were the two players he was referring to.

McKinnis Jr., a lineman at SUHS, is a running back for the Steelheads. When he got injured, in practice, the play was on the second count but the quarterback went on one. So, he took a jab step, and then took the pitch.

"As soon as I got the ball, boom, they sandwiched me," he said.

He plans to be practicing soon, however, if he's not already.

Playing with the Steelheads will give him an opportunity to prove himself, he said. Being "only" a se-

cond team all-league selection his senior year, he "didn't get a lot of looks from colleges."

He said there are a lot of good players on the team he can learn from. "I'll get a lot of experience here so I'll be ready for college," he said.

He plans to attend either Mt. Hood Community College or Clackamas Community College, and will wrestle this winter. Playing football on a college team is a goal for a year or two in the future.

He plans to pursue horticulture. He's currently working for his father at McKinnis Landscaping and Construction in Redland, and puts up hay in season.

Another SUHS graduate who plays for the Steelheads is Allen Fry, a former starter as an offensive and defensive tackle for the Pioneers.

He'll attest to the fact a lot of hard hitting goes on. "I've got bruises all over me," he said, adding that he feels he hangs in there pretty well.

He started on the special teams Saturday night.

"It's a real close team," he said, predicting they'll win the Northwest International Football League.

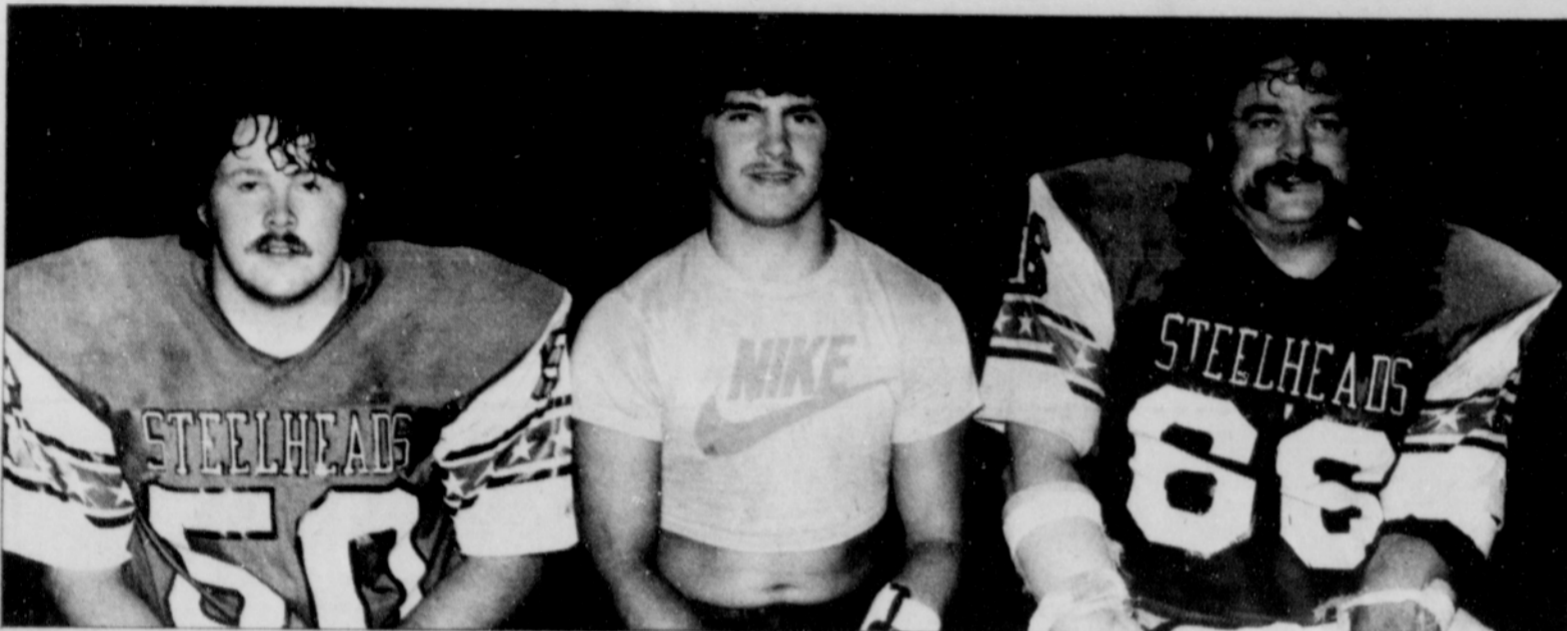
Playing semipro football is "very enjoyable," Fry said.

According to Kim Johns, who has booted (with a bare foot) 11 of 11 extra points and two of three field goals this season in addition to his coaching duties, players get a uniform and insurance for playing for the Steelheads.

He said they play to have fun and to promote amateur football, which allows someone like McKinnis Jr. to play and not lose college eligibility.

Perhaps Fry summed it up best. He said, "I'm playing because I want to."

The Steelheads play home games on Saturday nights in Oregon City beginning at 7:30. Coming home games will be Sept. 25, Oct. 16 and 23.



Allen Fry, Cal McKinnis Jr. and Cal McKinnis Sr.

Photo by Scott Newton

Scott Cuddeford

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