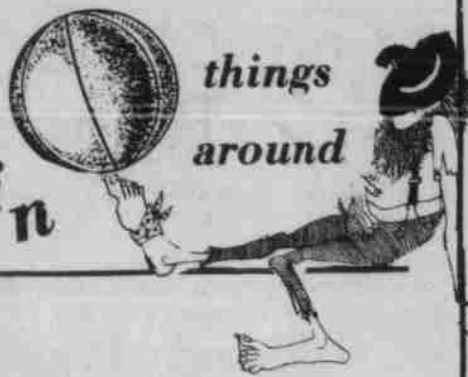


Kickin' things around



"Ye Champions of fair Lusk and ye of Swords,
"View well this ball, the present of your lords,
"To outward view, three folds of bullock's hide,
"With leather thongs bound fast on every side,
"A mass of finest hay concealed from sight,
"Conspire at once to make it firm and light."

Aye, 'twas the luck of the Irishmen who gave us what we menfolk wait for every Monday night in the fall and winter. Football. But Howard Cosell didn't figure into their thoughts when they started.

Gaelic football 'twas called then. The Irish are of the opinion that it was played there more than a thousand years ago.

An offshoot of football, the Irish mixed their style into the English version of the contest. The result is a game that tests the strength of the brawniest of men, puts acid to the thing called courage, and makes the Gaelic form of play something unique and almost alone.

And if you think American football of today is brutal, then wait a minute. Even O.J. would think twice about stepping onto the Gaelic gridiron. Ireland isn't the only place where Gaelic football is played, but the Irish seem to be the only ones who play it twice, or more.



WIL PHINNEY

Sports enthusiasts who have seen all forms of football, and judged impartially, declare that Gaelic football is the game of games if you are seeking swift-changing panoramas, brilliant speed, reckless daring, wild courage and sustained action.

Gaelic football was known to have been popular in Dublin in 1527. The old game was different than that of today. (Gaelic football is still popular today. There are clubs in the east.)

The size of the team was not limited in 1527. All the able-bodied in one town played against those of another, or parish played against parish. The size of the teams scaled between 25 and 100. Effort was made to keep them numerically even, but this rarely happened, and frequently one team had from five to 30 more players than its rival.

In some of the earlier centuries, the rules provided that a game started at a point in dead center between two rival parishes. To heck with the 50 yard line; the Irish played sometimes from the five mile line.

The team which was first to advance the ball across the boundary line of the rival parish won.

Gaelic football games in the far-flung years were very successful. We are satisfied to see Howard talking on the sidelines to Ken Stabler. Back then, there was a dancing contest among colleens as a preliminary. After that, the master of ceremonies went to midfield and addressed the crowd. The players wore caps (not helmets) from which fluttered ribbons of distinguishing color.

A master of ceremonies, in a game between Lusk and Swords, in 1721, treated the spectators to something a bit unique when he chanted the poem that leads this column. It is one of Ireland's classics, as far as athletics are concerned.

In those days, there was no rest period. Teams played until one or the other scored a goal, which ended the contest.

At the turn of the 18th century, the game was very popular throughout Ireland, and the reading of a poem or song before the battle began was still in vogue. But after the conflict began, there was no singing and nothing poetic about it.

Because punching the ball was permitted, a great many eyes were blackened, noses broken and mouths cut by players who seemingly aimed their punches at the ball, but actually drove them into enemy faces.

The real strategy of the game, as explained by an Irish player, was to mess up the other man's face as soon as possible, because a man with two swollen eyes couldn't follow the ball as well as one with clear vision. Players often started the first game of the season by getting a pair of black eyes, and that's all the eyes they had until the season was over—just black and swollen.

A hundred years ago, Gaelic football had no official name. It went by "free for all" from fans: "Rough and Tumble" in one part of Ireland; "Corner to Corner" in another part. The folks in West Kerry called it "Cad" because the ball was a leather covered cow's bladder. The very refined persons referred to the ball as a "liathoid coise."

In 1884, the men of Tipperary met those of Waterford—34 to a side—near Carrick-on-Suir. It was like a world war without the mechanical warfare. The fierce struggle ended in a scoreless deadlock when one of the contestants kicked the ball out of the neighborhood. After the players had calmed down, they decided that the game might be bettered if there were some standard rules.

Dan and Maurice Davin, of Carrick, spectators at the combat, and very important citizens of the community, agreed that something ought to be done to save the Irish lads for posterity. So with Michael Cusack of Clare, and some of the players, the Davins drew up a set of standardized rules, which softened the game slightly. They formed the Gaelic Athletic Association at a big meeting in Hayes Hotel, in Thurles, Ireland, Nov. 1, 1884. Since then it has been the ruling body for the sport.

There are now 15 men to a side in Gaelic football. The performers are not permitted to throw, but can dribble, as in basketball, kick along the ground, punt or punch. Inasmuch as each side is eager to advance toward the goal line, there is bristling action every minute of play, split into two halves of 30 minutes each.

One point is scored for kicking or punching the ball over the cross bars, while three are tallied for punching or kicking the ball into the net. When a team is close to the enemy goal, that action becomes hurricanic, with the advancing team using every trick to score, with the defenders calling upon all they have to roll back the assault, gain possession and start an inspired drive of their own.

Beginning in 1931, and until England went to war, the winners of the All-Ireland Championship visited the United States and played crack Gaelic teams in the country which, as a rule, are made up of "graduates" of the game, as such men played in Ireland. Most of the Americans' teams are

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Winners at dessert Thursday, clockwise from right: Wayne Seitz accepts MVP from Borgen; Mark Huddleston accepts Inspirational from Borgen; Guy Kenny, Inspirational, accepts from Randall; Tom Skow accepts Hustle award from Borgen; MVPs Maureen Healy (center) and Jackie Mollahan accept trophy. (G-T Photo)



The Gazette-Times Sports

events • column • schedule •



Dessert honors HHS athletes

Eight Heppner High School athletes packed home trophies last Thursday night. Heppner coaches and fans honored players during the winter sports dessert at HHS.

Nine awards were presented to eight athletes, highlighting a somewhat dull banquet. A quiet, yet attentive crowd witnessed five coaches praise their players and acknowledge aiding persons over the season.

Rebecca Randall, girls' basketball coach, presented awards to Maureen Healy and Jackie Mollahan, Most Valuable Player (tie); to Daria Cooper, Most Improved; and Guy Kenny, Most Inspirational.

Chris Borgen, head boys' coach, presented awards to Wayne Seitz, Most Valuable Player and team captain; Mark Huddleston, Mr. Defense and Most Inspirational; Tom Skow, Mr. Hustle; and Brian Marlin, Most Improved Player.

Also during the almost two hour patronage, JV Coach Chuck Lutsch, JV girls' Coach Hal Whitaker, and freshman ball Coach Dale Holland introduced their players and paid tribute to them.

John Sporseen served as Master of Ceremonies at the winter sports dessert. (See boxed article.)

Seitz, Huddleston share hardware

That's the word Chris Borgen pointed to Thursday night when he described his 2-18 Mustangs at the winter sports dessert at Heppner High School.

Borgen praised the efforts of his players before presenting six trophies to four different players. Wayne Seitz and Mark Huddleston needed a cart between them to carry their hardware and Tom Skow and Brian Marlin garnered in one each for their efforts.

Seitz was nabbed as the Most Valuable Player this year. The senior forward and pivot man was the most consistent player on the Mustang roster. Along with his steadiness was a continued improvement which listed among the league's top ten rebounders at the end of the season.

Seitz also was awarded the captain award. Borgen said he voted for the captain as the season progressed and he saw the individual that took command on the hardwood. Seitz filled that spot for the head coach.

Huddleston took the Mr. Defense and Most Inspirational Player award. On defense, he rates as one of the top players in the league this season. Huddleston's best performance may have been when he shut down Pilot Rock super shooter, Jeff Lavender, to two points in the first half of the contest.

An inspiration to players, Huddleston was a constant workhorse this season. Even before the ball was over the half court line, Huddleston was running his defender, tiring him out. His offensive and rebound efforts, in spite of a well hidden handicap, also served as a catalyst this year in sparking the Mustang fire.

The Most Improved Player on the Mustang team was well deserved, Brian Marlin. Marlin, a sophomore who will most

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Something he said?

Master of Ceremonies John Sporseen must have pulled the wrong trick Thursday night at the Heppner High School winter sports dessert.

Whether it was the poor weather or the poor record, fans turned out a bit apathetic for the banquet. Despite stories by Sporseen, the large cafeteria seemed to resemble a tomb at times.

Sporseen's tale was of an award. It was the most gentlemanly fan award. He said the award was for the most passive, nice fan of the year. His first line was, "I won it."

Sporseen related some of his experiences as timer, between a scorekeeper saying "The score's wrong, y'all" to watching a coach get nailed with a flimsy technical foul.

Through the ordeal, Sporseen decided to name the award and came up with "Portmanship Award." Michelle Portman, Heppner High School teacher and faculty cheerleader, was the namesake for the award.

In an effort to wake any sleepers, Sporseen came back with yet another line, his funniest of the evening.

Sporseen said that along with the Portmanship Trophy, the winner, himself, also won another prize. It was a free trip to Ruggs to see the llamas.

(Editor's Note: We vowed to ourselves after the dessert, that we would give Sporseen's routine another chance. If it went by you for a second time, you can always read it again.)

Mollahan, Healy share top spot

Jackie Mollahan and Maureen Healy shared the glory Thursday night when Heppner High School girls' basketball coach Rebecca Randall honored them with the Most Valuable Player award. Two other players were honored with trophies in the winter sports dessert.

Along with the sophomore MVP duo, seniors Daria Cooper was tabbed as the Most Improved Player and Guy Kenny was named Most Inspirational Player.

Both Healy and Mollahan deserved the award and justly shared the honor Thursday with identical trophies.

Mollahan was a first stem Columbia Basin Conference all-star and Healy was named to the second team. Mollahan was Heppner's top scorer; Healy was Heppner's top rebounder.

Mollahan finished with an 8.6 point average, most of them garnered from lay-ins. Before the season was over, teams respected Mollahan for her speed and alertness.

She also was seventh in steals in the league and sixth in the conference in assists. Mollahan was the Mustang play-maker simply because she made things go.

Healy was the second best rebounder in the league, both east and west divisions. She had a 13.1 carom average this year. She was fifth in the league in steals and 19th in scoring.

Although Healy didn't come up with the big scoring nights, her rebounding and ball thieving made up for that. She worked the boards convincingly and started many a fast break with an outlet pass.

Guy Kenny started the season as a regular. She was a constant threat from the outside from foes. She was a play-maker with steals and assists. But an injury brought her

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Mustang evaluations list hopefuls

If pre-season player evaluations hold true, then Heppner Mustang fans could see two Huddlestons highlighting the hardwood in the 1977-78 hoop season.

Underclassmen at HHS evaluated themselves by vote recently. Players were rated according to their ability and their chances of playing varsity basketball next season. Of the seven divisions of the evaluation,

Mark Huddleston, a junior forward, was tabbed as the best in four of those. Younger, but bigger, brother Howard Huddleston was tabbed in two and Ken Grieb, an honorable mention CBC guard, was picked in one.

Overall rating put Mark Huddleston first, followed by Brian Marlin, Dennis Peck, Ken Grieb, Jerry Cutsforth, Sam Myers, Bruce Young, Howard Huddleston, Dave Piper,

Gordon Hoffnagle, Curtis Sweek, and a three way tie for 12th man between Bob Miller, Mark Piper and Randy Warden.

Fellow players listed Mark Huddleston as number one in defense, offense, hustle and best all-around player. Howard Huddleston was listed first in rebounding and potential. Grieb took the top play-maker vote.

Categories and top three vote getters in

each follow: Best defensive player: Mark Huddleston, Peck, Miller; best offensive player: Mark Huddleston, Grieb Marlin; most hustle: Mark Huddleston, Marlin, Miller; best rebounder: Howard Huddleston, Myers, Mark Huddleston; most potential: Howard Huddleston, Peck, Myers; best play-maker: Grieb, Peck, Marlin; best all-around player: Mark Huddleston, Grieb, Marlin.