School Sports ‘Come Of Age’

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Sports Editor

A quick glimpse at the history of the Birmingham public school system is enough to show what a key role athletics has played in the area’s coming of age.

Sports, though not officially organized until the 1920’s, were prevalent before the turn of the century when boys from the village of Birmingham challenged other schools to rugby, or football contests.

The early games were hardly a remembrance of today’s top high school battles, but they served the purpose. No equipment was used and they were usually played in a “no-holds-barred” theory.

IT WAS in the decade before 1900 that the state’s oldest gridiron rivalry began between Birmingham and Royal Oak. Records, however, are hard to come by, but Royal Oak won, 7-6.

This bitter rivalry blossomed into an annual Thanksgiving Day contest which was started in 1915 and continued through 35 seasons until the game was canceled in 1950.

The Thanksgiving Day game was probably the best known of all the athletic endeavors, grew into one of the biggest prop attractions in Michigan. The Little Brown Jug, donated in 1924 by a Royal Oak teacher, became the trophy awarded to the winner.

THE ACORN covered the series and took the final game, Thanksgiving, 27-20.

When terminated in 1950, the contest was the oldest in the state. Only the Flint Northern-Flint Central game approaches the rivalry in longevity.

With football the main attraction in the early 1900’s, other sports started to enter the school scene. In 1902, the Board of Control of Athletics was formulated.

THE LATTER 1920’s and early 1930’s saw an amazing growth in the athletic programs. Birmingham High, Basketball, football and basketball were established sports and, in 1926, the state quarter joined the list along with track.

A year later, tennis started as a varsity sport and it was followed by golf in 1927 and swimming in 1931.

The depression of the 1930’s had a harmful effect on the growth of athletics in Birmingham schools. A lack of funds forced the school to drug golf, tennis, swimming and track. 

In 1934-35, the school board approved the reinstatement of all three sports. It was also in this year that the first sectional award was set up to honor the top student athlete.

As more high schools became cooperative, the number of athletes increased. The total budget was $11,311.56. This year, in an effort to offer something for everyone, the department has a budget of $117,950.

A YEAR AFTER the 1940’s the department became the joint ownership of the department between the schools and city. Frank Whitney became director. He resigned in 1956 and Martin took over the reins.

The current staff consists of Martin, a supervisor, secretary and 45 part-time personnel who conduct the various recreational programs throughout the year.

Birmingham’s recreation department offers activities for groups and individuals on a year-round basis. Besides handling numerous sports teams, the department also holds classes in therapeutic swimming, life saving, water ballet, tennis and ice skating in the winter.

The RECREATION department, which also sponsors dance, kite-flying contests, halloween and Christmas parties and sports tournaments, is truly one of the most active organizations in Birmingham.

Birmingham school athletics have helped many an athlete discover a special skill and prepare himself for a collegiate or professional career in sports.

Baldwin High Baseball Team in the Late 1930’s

Athletic Board dropped baseball during depression, but now there is an increasing awareness of the interest in sports, schools began handing baseball into league. Baldwin High entered the Twin Valley Athletic Association in 1939.

Birmingham received its new high school, now Baldwin, in 1936, and sports became a major part of the curriculum. A new football field was dedicated in 1934 and, in 1939, the school added a track.

GROVES HIGH, constructed in 1929, has a fine track and field, which is also used by the community.

LITTLE BROWN JUG - Thanksgiving Day trophy

TRACY HEADS LIST of Athletes

The local schools have supplied colleges and universities in Michigan and other states with a steady stream of top performers, dating back to Quentin Bredsfeld in 1934.

Bredsfeld, a top track performer for Baldwin High, set a mark of 1:56.7 in the 880-yard run that withstood 24 years of Class II competition before being broken in 1952.

TRULY AN outstanding runner, Bredsfeld went on to set new track marks at Ohio Wesleyan. He graduated from Baldwin in 1938. Probably the best known of all Birmingham athletes, and one who did much to prove his ability, is Tom Tracy, better known as "The Bcmh.

Tracy, who was a graduate of Birmingham High in 1932, was the first Birmingham player to be named to the All-State team. He was also selected to all-county, all-state, all-league and almost all-star team of the year.

A THREE-SPORT letterman at Birmingham, Tracy played halfback in football, guard in basketball and third base in baseball. He was also a sprinter on the track team and an expert diver.

After graduation, he attended University of Tennessee, where he turned in a remarkable year as a sophomore playing fullback. His junior season, he was selected as the conference’s best fullback with a 47-yard carry average.

Tracy did not school to play pro ball with the Ottawa Roughriders. He spent one year for the Detroit Lions and, later, for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

A class of girls, class in bloom, done asthma

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES WERE IMPORTANT YEARS AGO, TOO

TOM TRACY
Best-known athlete

Birmingham Royal Oak Thanksgiving game was highlight of season.

Recreation Board

Twenty-five years ago, the City of Birmingham adopted an ordinance that set up a Recreation Board. It proved to be one of the most valuable means ever carried for area residents.

Birmingham’s recreation department has developed into one of the most thorough of its kind, offering citizens no less than 59 sponsored activities, plus a host of other recreational opportunities.

SUPPORTED jointly by the city and the board of education, the recreation department, headed by Don Martin, had a total of 115,902 persons attend its activities.

The first board, in 1943, consisted of Mrs. George T. Hendrie, Mrs. William E. Eatsy, Mrs. Wilbur Johnston, Mrs. J. Quinn, Mrs. E. Newhall, Ray Palmer, Robert Lynd, Dr. Ralph Barton and Wylye Grant.

Recreational activities and facilities of that year were playgrounds at Torry, Adams, Barnum and Queen schools, swimming at the Barnum pool, music, religion, drama, art, baseball, ruffly and ice skating in the winter.

Physical Activities WERE IMPORTANT YEARS AGO, TOO

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