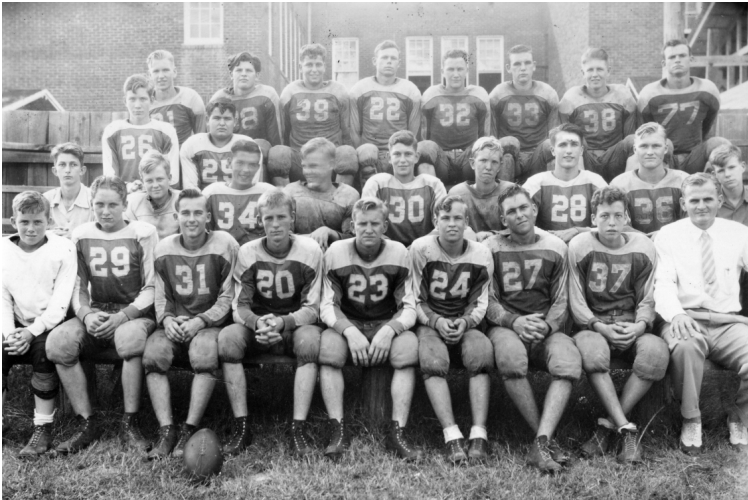


Gulf High football has had a few great years



Above: the 1941-42 and 2008-09 Gulf football teams, which both had 9-1 regular season records.

The Gulf High School football team made the playoffs this year (2014) for the third time in school history, after an 8-2 regular season record. So this seems like a good time to take a look at the history of Gulf football.

Football began at Gulf in 1930 (the 1930-31 school year). Pasco High School had a team then, as did St. Leo Academy, but Zephyrhills High School did not. There were no other high schools in Pasco County.

A Tarpon Springs baker, Bill Moutsatsos, was the volunteer coach. A photo of the team lists these players: "Carp" Carpenter, Charles DeWoodie, F. Dean, Oris Bragg, Henry Falany, James Grey, Victor Moore, Lucien Roy, B. Dean, Bill Fisher, "Preacher" Mitchell, Cecil Henderson, William Weiskopf, Francis Luikart, Gordon Fullington, Raymond Nikkari, George Marks, Melvin Knowles, Bud Clark, Corwin Littell, Frank Kauffman, Fred Kolb, James Vickers, Robert Foskett, and Buck Kelly.

Interviewed for a 1984 *Tampa Tribune* article, James Grey recalled that the team won one game. Newspaper accounts show losses to Tampa High School and St. Leo by identical 70-0 scores.

The team had second-hand uniforms, shoes that didn't always match or fit, and equipment purchased used from Clearwater High.

"Most of us were playing in the first game we'd ever watched," said Grey, of the team's first game that year. "There were only 15 of us on the team so we all went both ways.

"We had shoulder pads and thigh pads but you didn't have to wear a helmet if you didn't want to. Most of the time I didn't because it got in my way."

Grey recalled that quarterbacks couldn't throw two incomplete passes in a row. The team had to use a running play after throwing an incomplete pass.

If a team was losing, that was no problem. Just switch jerseys around and insert some of the local college kids who might be home visiting. Grey said that Largo and Saint Leo (then a high school) did that, and both came from behind in the second half to beat Gulf.

"Football those days is nothing like it was when I played. You could pile on as much as you wanted in the '30s. You thought they were going to kill you, but the worst injury I ever suffered were some broken ribs."

Grey was 5 ft. 6 inches tall and weighted 127 pounds.

In 1931 Deane DeFord, a Gulf teacher and the acting principal, coached the team. Football was played again in 1932, but there apparently was no football at Gulf from 1933 through 1937.

In 1938 football resumed at Gulf, under Coach Paul Stephens. Although other high schools continued their football programs, Gulf had not, so none of the players on the team had ever played a football game before, and many had never even seen a football game.

1938 was probably the worst year in Gulf football history. Gulf lost the first game of the season to the Clearwater Tornados by 60-0. The season included a 68-0 loss to Bushnell, a 47-0 loss to Brooksville, and a 44-0 loss to St. Leo College. A player on the team later recalled a 72-0 loss. But *Tampa Morning Tribune* sports writer Pete Norton praised New Port Richey fans for supporting the team. See his column at the end of this article.

The 1938 football team included 11-year-old Wally Frierson, who weighed 79 pounds. Frierson did get some playing time, but on Sept. 23, 1938, the referee of the game against Tampa College refused to allow him to play, saying he was too small for high school football.

Oliver Daugherty coached the 1939 football team. The 1940 yearbook lists the players as: Charles Frierson, Hilton Williams, Harmon Stevenson, William Willis, Duane Hope, Wally Frierson, Ronnie Sampson (water boy), Johnny DeCubellis, Charles Fisher, Manley Lashua, Joe Littell, Kenneth Hope, Worth Littell, Curtis Falany, Napoleon Falany, Happy Clark, Dick Platt, Albert DeCubellis, Bill Grey, Claude Johnson, and David DeCubellis. (Clark later was a school administrator and a Pasco County commissioner.)

The 1940 football team began the season with big wins over several teams, including the Clearwater team it had lost to by ten touchdowns two years earlier. Describing the Clearwater game, the *New Port Richey Press* wrote:

The most sensational play of this game, and of the season thus far, was Worth Littell's 99-yard touchdown. This was undoubtedly one of the few perfect plays in football. Not one man laid a hand on Littell in his jaunt, so good was the interference. Harmon Stevenson, Right End, after taking out his man, got up and ran all the way to the goal with Littell. This was not the only time that Stevenson was heard from in this game. When a Clearwater player picked up a fumbled ball and started for the goal, who should come streaking after him but our fleet-footed little end, Stevenson, who caught him on the 10-yard line. A touchdown racked up by Falany on a double-reverse proved to be another perfect play. Falany could have run 200 yards instead of 20 yards, so well was this play carried out. New Port Richey is one of the few high schools who use the double-winged back system; there is no other high school team in the state that can run double-reverse better than our own "Bucs."

The 1940 team would have had the best record in school history up to that time and might have won the Gulf Coast Conference title, but on Nov. 20, 1940, Principal James Lanier announced that Gulf would forfeit the six conference games it had won because the school had discovered that two players were ineligible because they had left school a few weeks before the end

of the previous school year in order to go to Canada for the summer.

Coach Ralph Hood of Crystal River told a newspaper reporter, "I think the action of the principal and coach at New Port Richey is the finest gesture of sportsmanship I have seen. I am sincerely sorry to see them lose the conference championship, but I believe the lesson in sportsmanship and fair play is worth more to the boys than any conference victory. We would have much better athletics in Florida if we had more schools like New Port Richey."

Local citizens honored the 1940 team with a banquet at the Hacienda on Dec. 10.

The 1941 football team (1941-42 school year), under Coach Oliver Daugherty, had a 9-1 record, the best in school history until the 2008 team had an identical regular season record plus one playoff win. In 1941 there was no playoff system, but Gulf was declared the conference champion by a mathematical point formula called the Dickinson System. The 1941 team kept the opponents scoreless in six games and outscored its opponents 242 to 33.

Members of the team were Dave Luikart, Bryce Bliss, Jim Butler, Sam Baillie, Harland Kingsley, Manley Lashua, David and John DeCubellis, Harmon Stevenson, Claude Johnson, Sebert Parker, Don Uzzle, Duane Hope, Bob Emmons, Worth and Joe Littell, Frank Morgan, William Willis, and David Clark.

In a 1997 newspaper article, David Luikart Sr., the right end, recalled, "We had an excellent team. We beat a lot of people we weren't supposed to. I remember we beat a hotshot team from St. Pete called St. Paul. They had a 240-pound guy in the backfield and we beat them, 19-6."

The 1941 team defeated Zephyrhills 46-0. Its only loss was to Hernando, 7-2. That game was a defensive struggle with Gulf leading 2-0 in the final quarter, when the Leopards scored a touchdown.

In the 1942-43 school year football was the only sport played because of World War II gasoline rationing.

The 1944 season included a 61-0 win over Zephyrhills, thought to be Gulf's greatest-ever margin of victory. The 1944 team also won the conference championship by the Dickinson System.

The coach during this period was Arthur H. "Red" Stevens, who also served as principal. He was a Pasco County commissioner for 18 years. Joe Semago coached the team in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

On Nov. 22, 1946, the New Port Richey Press reported, "Members of the local team had a busy day last Friday. In the afternoon the boys joined the local fire department in combatting grass and brush fires that threatened property on the northeast side of town, and this effort kept them busy for hours. Then they

changed into their football togs and tackled the hard-to-beat Dade City team.” (Gulf and Pasco had been undefeated at that point, but Pasco won the game 38-0.)

In the mid-1950s Gulf had some lean seasons. In 1953 only 8 boys reported for the first practice in August. The team had no wins in 1954 and 1955.

The team was more successful in the late 1950s and early 1960s under Coach T. Edd Webb. In 1958, the team had an 8-2 record, second best in school history, and played a post-season bowl game against Umatilla which ended in a 25-25 tie.

Player Tom Chittum ('58) recalled in a newspaper interview that he played every down on both the offensive and defensive lines.

“We had no equipment, no trainers, nothing like today’s players have. We played through injuries. Unless it was a broken bone, the coach taped us up and sent us back in,” Chittum said.

Lineman Tommie Boyd agreed. At 135 pounds, Boyd played guard on offense and tackle on defense.

“We came home bandaged up like a bunch of war veterans. But even though we lost more games than we won, we played our hardest and held our heads high. Having a victory was important, but having character was just as important,” he said.

One of the team’s leaders in the 1950s was running back Orville Williamson ('58). In addition to being Gulf’s leading scorer, Williamson played all positions on offense and linebacker on defense.

“Back then, if the coach told you to snap the ball, you did it. There was no talking back.”

“We practiced four, five hours without a water break. You were called a sissy if you drank water,” Williamson said.

During one after-school practice, the coach told Williamson to run laps around the field in full equipment. Four hours later, he was still running.

Tom Weightman, who later became the Pasco County Superintendent of Schools, coached the team in 1964, 1965, and 1966. He was an assistant principal at Gulf.

In the 1960s New Port Richey radio station WGUL broadcast the Buccaneer football games. The station was originally an AM-only station, limited to daytime broadcasting, so the play-by-play was recorded on Friday nights and played back on the air on Saturday mornings. In 1969 WGUL began broadcasting on FM and was able to air the games live.

Coaches in the 1970s included Jim Valentine, Joe Konstantinos, Jim Riser, and Jerry Young.

On Oct. 22, 1976, the new football stadium was dedicated as W. D. “Des” Little Stadium, named for William Desmond Little, who had been an important benefactor of Gulf High School. He and other community volunteers raised money and actually built

much of the stadium. The school district built only the bleachers. The volunteer committee was headed by Pete Little (Des’s son) and included principal Ed Campbell, assistant principal Art Engle, Wilma Lee, Orville Williamson, Jim Loechelt, Clarence Moody, T. Edd Webb, and Marty Paventi.

Gulf football trivia: Frank Papa scored the first touchdown at Des Little Stadium during the first JV game.

New Port Richey attorney Steve Booth, who helped construct Des Little Stadium, began his long stint as the volunteer stadium announcer of the football games at the start of the 1976 season. His outstanding work has been a feature of the Gulf home games almost every year since then.

Gulf football had some lean years in the late 1970s and early 1980s including an 18-game losing streak in the early 1980s.

Two long-term coaches in the 1980s and 1990s were Wilbur Lofton and Keith Newton. Lofton’s son Dean is currently a teacher and coach at Gulf.

Because of Hurricane Francis one football game was canceled and the game scheduled for Sept. 10, 2004, was played the next day, Saturday morning at 11 a.m. It was thought to be the first daytime football game for Gulf since a game in Tarpon Springs in 1959.

On Sept. 9, 2005, Gulf defeated Citrus 68-40. It’s the highest-scoring game for Gulf that we know of.

In 2006 under head coach Jay Fulmer, Gulf made its first-ever appearance in the playoffs.

In 2007 Courtney Cohen, a kicker, became the first girl ever to play football for Gulf.

The 2008 team had a 9-1 regular season record, matching the 1941 team record, and went on to win the first of two games in the playoffs.

After Fulmer, the coaches have been Ken Hollar, Tom Carter, and Jason Messamore, the current coach.

On Oct. 3, 2014, the football field was named Girardi-Young Field, in honor of Paul Girardi, a retired athletic director and coach, and Jerry Young, a retired long-time coach. The stadium retains the name W. D. “Des” Little Stadium.

The 2014 team had an 8-2 regular season record, and made an appearance in the playoffs, for only the third time in school history. Gulf lost the game to Lakewood 30-27 in two overtimes.

Thanks to John Grey for providing the 1984 newspaper article about the 1930 team.

Real Sportsmanship (1938)

This column appeared in the Tampa Morning Tribune during the 1938 football season.

By PETE NORTON

This is the story of a football Utopia, a land where a team can lose seven straight games, have 399 points scored against it while scoring none, and still retain the solid backing of every fan, the admiration of every person in the community.

In these days of high-pressure football, when players and coaches are thrown to the wolves after each defeat, it is refreshing to run across a coach and a team like Paul Stephens, of Gulf Coast high school, New Port Richey.

Seven times this year Coach Stephens has sent his squad into action, and each time it has been beaten by one-sided scores. The season record reads, 399 to 0, and games with four strong teams remain on the schedule.

Yet the wolves are not howling at New Port Richey, the fans are not demanding a new coach and the boys are not being called quitters each time they drop a game.

In exact contrast, Coach Stephens, who introduced football at Gulf high this year, is just as proud of his youngsters as Dr. Jock Sutherland is of the Pittsburgh Panthers.

When a team has a season record of 399 points to 0, it is news. So we wrote Coach Stephens and asked a few questions about his football team.

How many boys on the squad? What are their weights? How much experience have they had?

Says Coach Stephens: "We have 21 boys on the squad. Not a single one of them had ever played a game of football until this year. Nine of them had never seen a football game until the whistle blew for the opening contest of the season with Clearwater.

"The weights of the boys run from 79 pounds to the giant of the squad, Dave Clark, who tips the scale at 175. Clark is the only player over the 155-pound mark. Seven weigh less than 125 pounds."

Who is the smallest boy on the squad? Wasn't he ruled out of the Tampa College game in Tampa?

"Walter Frierson, a back who weighs 79 pounds, is, I believe the smallest senior high school player in Florida, perhaps in the country. The officials at the Tampa College game would not permit him to play for fear he would be injured by the larger Tampa players."

How do the fans take the numerous beatings the New Port Richey team has been handed this year? Do the boys have a good time playing football, even though they lose? How is the spirit of the squad?

At this point Coach Stephens really goes to town with as fine a recommendation for football in high school as we have seen.

"The people of New Port Richey are proud of the plucky youngsters that form the football squad. They know the boys are light and inexperienced, but now they also know the kids love the game and are learning fast.

"Football was started at Gulf High as an incentive to the boys and it has served that purpose 100 per cent. The boys on the football squad attend school regularly, work harder at their lessons and in general, are better youngsters because they play football.

"Sure, the kids have a good time playing. As a sport, none of them believes football can be excelled. It teaches them to give and take hard knocks with a smile, something they can use all through life. It develops them physically and mentally.

"It is a safe bet to say the spirit of the Gulf High team is as good as that on any prep team in Florida, and that includes teams that have beaten us 10 touchdowns.

"Our youngsters are coached to play the game hard but fairly. That is all anyone can do in sports."

Wouldn't it be a great thing for the game of football if the players, coaches and fans all over the country felt about the game as do the good people of New Port Richey?

Here is a bunch of kids going into every game knowing they haven't a chance of winning, but playing their hearts out and having a grand time.

This column salutes Coach Stephens and the New Port Richey football team.

Note: On Nov. 17, 1938, shortly after this article appeared, Gulf won its first game of the season, 14-6.

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