

## 1958---THE GREATEST SEASON, PART 4

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of October 23, 2018)

Jack Bailey puts a wrap on the four-part series on the 1958 Oak Ridge Football Season!

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### THE PURPLE POUNDERS ARE COMING TO TOWN!!!:

The game had been circled on the schedule since the pre-season: The Oak Ridge High School Wildcats, undefeated and ranked # 1 in the state vs. the Chattanooga Central Purple Pounders, undefeated defending state champions. The Purple Pounders were ranked # 2 in one poll and # 3 in another poll and riding a 14-game regular season winning streak. Chattanooga Central had won state championships in 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1957.

In a personal note, my Dad and I attended the 1957 game in Chattanooga, when Central won, 8-0, in the rain and mud and defeated the defending state champion Wildcats. A memorable night!

The stage was set. Either Oak Ridge or Chattanooga Central would be the state champion for the 7<sup>th</sup> time in the past 8 years.

An estimated 14,000 people packed the stands and hillside to overflowing, the largest crowd ever to attend a game in Oak Ridge. Oak Ridge had scored 424 points on the season and had only surrendered 20 points the entire year.

Chattanooga Central had only scored 184 points but had a very stingy defense, allowing only 25 points for the season. The Purple Pounders were a much bigger, but slower, team. OR was much faster but much lighter.

It pointed toward a fairly low-scoring contest. It had been announced earlier in the week by school superintendent L. P. Cushman and Assistant Superintendent Dr. James Thomas that ORHS would not be allowed to play in a post-season bowl game, following "guidelines" the school system had followed on post-season football for the past five years.

The announcement underscored the fact that this would be the Wildcats' final game of the season and everything was riding on the outcome!

In a side note, it was mentioned that in case Chattanooga Central needed a "spiritual lift", famed Central head coach E. B. "Red" Etter could insert a backfield comprised entirely of the sons of four ministers!

Following is a thumb nail sketch of the starting lineup for ORHS, which featured its single-wing offense, as it appeared in the Knoxville News-Sentinel on November 12, 1958:

\*Left End: Evans Weber (160 lbs., 5'10", Sr.) Excels as downfield blocker. Good receiver.

\*Left Tackle: Richard Ulm (175 lbs., 5'11", Sr.) Aggressive, standout blocker.

\*Left Guard: Sam Owen (160 lbs., 5'8", Sr.) Best blocker in the line. Fast and rugged.

\*Center: Mike Brady (Captain) (170 lbs., 5'11", Sr.) Fastest lineman. Hard worker who thrives on contact.

\*Right Guard: Larry Richards (185 lbs., 6'0", Sr.) Best defender, also a standout on offense. Sharp blocker. Field goal and extra point kicker.

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\*Right End: Lewis Lanter (173 lbs., 6'2", Sr.) Exceptional pass receiver. Has shown weekly improvement on defense.

\*Blocking Back: Wilson Mills (165 lbs., 5'8", Sr.) Determined blocking back who has developed fast.

\*Wingback: Bobby Mitchell (Alt. Captain) (160 lbs., 5'9", Sr.) Perhaps hardest runner, dangerous on wingback reverse.

\*Fullback: Howard Dunnebacke (175 lbs., 5'8", Sr.) A great back. Runs and plays defense with equal dexterity.

\*Tailback: Jackie Pope (155 lbs., 5'8", Sr.) An All-Stater who does everything well. Can't be overtaken from the rear.

Coach Kermit Tipton of Johnson City Science Hill High School had a unique perspective on the big game, having lost to Chattanooga Central (21-0) and Oak Ridge (27-0.) As quoted in the Knoxville News-Sentinel on November 13, 1958, "Oak Ridge is the fastest high school team I've ever seen. Central, on the other hand, has a huge, mobile line capable of holding its own against anybody in the state."

Oak Ridge Cheerleader Captain Patsy Robinson remarked, "student enthusiasm is really built up for the big game tonight."

The game itself was probably even greater than the monumental build-up to the game, as it was promoted as, "the game of the year in the state of Tennessee."

Oak Ridge was held scoreless in the first quarter for the only time all season, but drove 66 yards for a touchdown late in the second period. The key play was a 19-yard pass completion from tailback Jackie Pope to fullback Howard Dunnebacke on a 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15 play.

Pope scored from six yards out two plays later. Larry Richards kicked the crucial extra point. (Oak Ridge had one touchdown called back because of a penalty and a Larry Richards field goal attempt bounced off the crossbar or Oak Ridge would have had an even bigger lead.)

Chattanooga Central took the second half kickoff and marched down the field 71 yards in nine plays for a score. The key play was a 44-yard run by Gilbert Trusley. The extra point attempt was no good and Oak Ridge maintained a slim 7-6 lead.

The Wildcats scored an insurance touchdown with 4:25 left in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. Oak Ridge stopped the Purple Pounders on a 4<sup>th</sup> down play at the OR 45-yard line and then drove 55 yards for the touchdown, with Pope gaining 50 of the 55 yards and scoring from 14 yards out. Larry Richards again converted the extra point.

Chattanooga Central took the ensuing kickoff and drove to the Oak Ridge 15-yard line as time expired.

Jackie Pope gained 178 yards on 27 carries and Howard Dunnebacke gained 78 yards on 18 carries to lead the Wildcat offense. Pope and Dunnebacke were both sprinters on Coach Ben Martin's state track champion squads in 1956-'57-'58 and used their outstanding speed to great advantage throughout the game.

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It was a very clean, hard-fought and well-played game with no turnovers and only 15 yards in penalties for OR and 5 yards in penalties for Central. Assistant Coach Don Bordinger said tackle Skippy Brinkman played the game of his life and was all over the field all night.

Head Coach Jack Armstrong exclaimed after the game, "This is the greatest bunch of boys I've ever coached. It's hard to find words to describe them."

According to Frank "Red" Bailes, Knoxville News-Sentinel sports writer, the coaching genius of Armstrong and Bordinger, two former University of Tennessee footballers, stood out. The team was a picture of precision and the new "A-formation" offense, similar to a double-wing formation was specially installed in the Wildcat offense for this game and Central was not prepared for it.

An editorial in The Oak Ridger called the game, "Ridge's Most Glorious Sports Moment Ever."

Jackie Pope finished the season with 1,571 rushing yards on 98 carries for a 16-yard average per carry. He completed 44 of 68 passes for 12 td's. He tallied 158 points, which was tops in the state at the time.

The Litkenhous rating for ORHS ended at 118.5, the highest season-ending rating ever recorded in Dr. E. E. Litkenhous' ratings and assured the Wildcats of their second state championship trophy in three years.

Jackie Pope, Larry Richards and Mike Brady were named to the All-East Tennessee first team, Howard Dunnebacke was named second team All-ET and Skippy Brinkman third team.

Pope, Richards, Brady and Dunnebacke were named to the Morristown Gazette All-East Tennessee squad.

Jackie Pope was named the East Tennessee Player of the Year by coaches in a poll conducted by the Knoxville Journal, the morning newspaper in Knoxville at the time. Coach Jack Armstrong called him, "the best running back I've seen in 10 years." Every Southeastern Conference school has shown an interest in him.

Pope, Richards and Brady were named 1<sup>st</sup> team All-East Tennessee by the coaches in the 21<sup>st</sup> annual Knoxville News-Sentinel poll. Pope received 47 votes, the highest number of votes ever recorded by an individual player in the 21 years of the poll and was named Honorary Captain.

Brinkman and Dunnebacke were named second team and Ends Evans Weber and Lewis Lanter, Backs Bobby Mitchell and Wilson Mills were named Honorable Mention All-East Tennessee in the same poll.

Tailback Jackie Pope and Center Mike Brady were named first team All-State and Pope was named Honorary Captain. Guard Larry Richards earned third team All-State honors

Pope was one of only five players from Tennessee named to the All-Southern team in a poll by the Orlando (FL) Sentinel. George Dykes, who played for ORHS and then Columbia Military Academy, was named Honorable Mention in the same poll. Pope was also named to The Sporting News All-America team.

The Senior Oak Ridge football players were leaders in the classroom, as well. Pope, Dunnebacke, Brady and End Larry Forrester were member of the National Honor Society. Mike Brady was voted, "Mr. ORHS",

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and served as President of Student Council. "Most Athletic Boy" was Jackie Pope, who also served as President of the Senior Class. Guard Sam Owen was selected as, "Friendliest Boy by his classmates.

Jackie Pope, Larry Richards, Mike Brady and George Dykes signed football scholarships with The University of Tennessee. Brady ultimately played at Brigham Young University, where he enjoyed a stellar career. Pope transferred to Middle Tennessee State and became an All-America running back.

Skippy Brinkman, Lewis Lanter, Sam Owen and David Fitchpatrick (who played for ORHS and Castle Heights Military Academy) signed with Ole Miss.

Fullback Howard Dunnebacke signed a football scholarship to play for The University of Kentucky.

A remarkable ten members of that team and coaching staff are now enshrined in The Oak Ridge Sports Hall of Fame: Coach Ben Martin (1986), Tailback Jackie Pope (1987), Coach Jack Armstrong (1988), Coach Don Bordinger (1991), Coach Ira Green (1992), Fullback Howard Dunnebacke (2000), Tailback Larry Mason (2002), Center Mike Brady (2006), Tackle Skippy Brinkman (2006) and Guard Larry Richards (2006.)

Pope was named to the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 2017, a long over-due recognition. He is also a member of The Greater Knoxville Sports Hall of Fame.

The 1958 team was named mythical National Champions by National Sports News Service.

An incredible team and an amazing group of young men and coaches. Hats off to the entire team as we celebrate and recognize the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that memorable team. They combined to make 1958 THE GREATEST SEASON in Oak Ridge football history.

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Thanks Jack! Wow, what a tremendous series. Your research efforts and summarization of the GREATEST SEASON conveys well the excitement that must have been felt by all who were a part of that huge and remarkable success story.

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	OAK	CHS
First downs	17	8
rushing	14	5
passing	3	1
Rushing yardage	260	160
Passing yardage	42	32
Passes attempted	6	2
Passes completed	3	2
Intercepted by	0	0
Punting average	1-27.0	3-38.5
Yards penalized	15	5
Fumbles lost	0	0

**OAK RIDGE (14)**

LE—Evans Weber; LT—Richard Ulm;  
 LG—Sam Owens; C—Mike Brady; RG—  
 Larry Richards; RT—Skip Brinkman;  
 RE—Lewis Lanter; QB—Wilson Mills;  
 RH—Bob Mitchell; LH—Jackie Pope;  
 FB—Howard Dunnebacke.

**CHATT. CENTRAL (6)**

LE—Buddy Norton; LT—Paul Chap-  
 man; LG—Robert Kelley; C—George  
 Shuford; RG—Buddy Hale; RT—Bobby  
 Locke; RE—Grady Wade; QB—Jerry  
 Tetrell Dye; FB—Gilbert Trusley.

Score by quarters:

OAK RIDGE	0	7	0	7—14
CHATT. CENTRAL	0	0	6	0—6

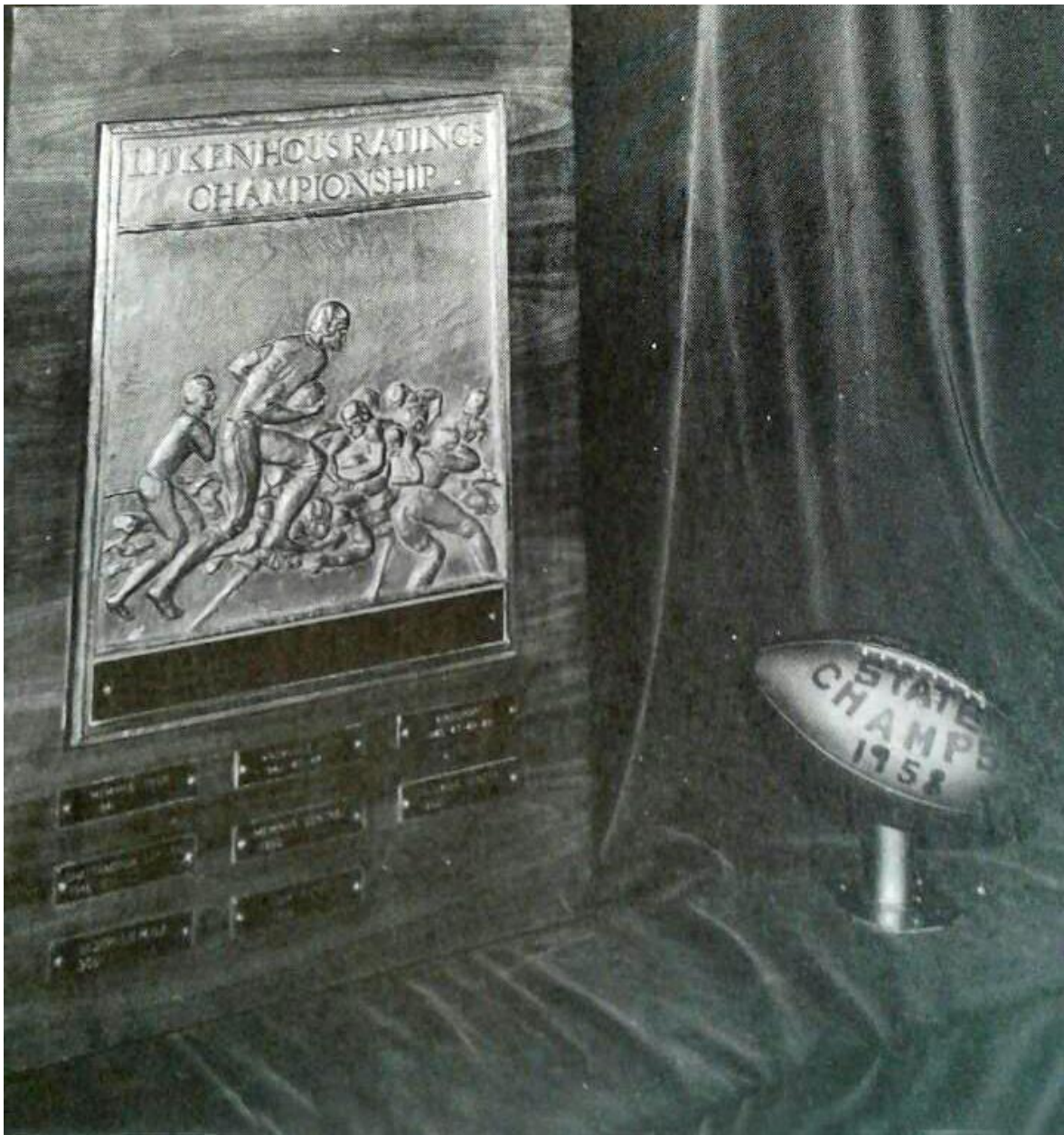
TOUCHDOWNS: OAK RIDGE—Pope  
 2 (8, 14, runs), CHATT. CENTRAL—  
 Summers; RH—Butch Harless; LH—  
 Oak Ridge—Richards 3 (placements).

Statistics of the Oak Ridge versus Central game



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The Litkenhous State Championship trophy