

KINGS MOUNTAIN SPORTS HALL OF FAME SPECIAL REPORT

Coach Shu Carlton, builder of champions, going into Kings Mountain Hall of Fame

By GARY STEWART
Editor of the Herald

Shu Carlton, the coach who turned Kings Mountain High School into one of the top 3-A football programs in Western North Carolina, will be inducted into the Kings Mountain Chamber of Commerce Sports Hall of Fame Monday, April 27 at 7 p.m. at the Kings Mountain Community Center.

Carlton will be inducted along with baseball greats Eugene Goforth and Hugh Ormand, and basketball star Otis Cole. University of North Carolina football great Art Weiner, who coached at KMHS in 1951 while Carlton was serving in the Korean War, will be the guest speaker. Tickets are \$10 each and are available at the Chamber of Commerce, Kings Mountain Herald, McGinnis Department Store and Champion's Contracting.

Carlton was fresh out of Lenoir-Rhyne College when he came to Kings Mountain in the fall of 1948 to take over the football and baseball coaching duties. Only 23 players showed up for the first day of football practice and the Mountaineers managed only a 1-6-3 record, but football fans quickly saw that Carlton was pumping some life into the sagging program.



SHU CARLTON

If Carlton brought nothing else to Kings Mountain that first year he brought discipline, an attitude that hard work results in success, and stability to the football program. In the three years prior to Carlton's arrival the Mountaineers had three different football coaches.

Carlton, who now lives in Gastonia where he coached several top-ranked 4-A teams at Ashley and Ashbrook high schools, brought an outstanding football background to Kings Mountain. From 1936-40 he was a three-sport star at Lexington High School and was an All-Southern running back his senior year. He earned a scholarship to Duke University where he played on the freshman team in 1941 and lettered on the varsity in 1942 and 1943. He

played wingback, fullback and guard.

His freshman year at Duke, the Blue Devils played Oregon State in the Rose Bowl. The game was played in Durham because of World War II. In '42 he helped lead the Blue Devils to a 6-4 record. In 1943 they were 9-1 with their only loss coming to the Naval Academy, 14-13.

Carlton played for Wallace Wade and Eddie Cameron at Duke. After the outbreak of WW II, Wade volunteered for the military and Cameron coached both football and basketball until Wade returned.

In '43 Carlton played at Duke in the Marines' V-12 football program. That was a special arrangement between the military and universities to keep college players on campuses while also training them for the military. After the season Carlton went into active duty until the War was over.

After the War, Carlton entered Lenoir-Rhyne College where he played wingback and guard for Clarence Stasavich. L-R had dropped its football program after the '41 season because of the War and was getting back into football. Carlton helped lead the team to a 5-5 record in '46. He served as co-captain in '47 and helped lead the Bears to a 6-4 mark.

During his senior season at L-R, Carlton applied for two teaching and coaching jobs -- at Kings Mountain and Forest City.

"I knew Dorus Bennett," Carlton recalled recently. "He was one of my best friends at Lenoir-Rhyne and he and Coach Stasavich let me know the Kings Mountain job was open. I came and talked to Superintendent B.N. Barnes and got the job. I have always been grateful to Mr. Barnes for giving me a chance to coach. I'm sure they had a lot of experienced coaches who applied for the job but he was willing to take a chance on me right out of college."

Jack Ruth, who will induct Carlton into the Hall of Fame, said the Mountaineers recognized very quickly that football in Kings Mountain was going to be different.

"I played four years there," said Ruth, now president of First Union National Bank in Hendersonville, "and I played for four different coaches. The coach who immediately preceded Coach Carlton was John Rudisill. He was there only one year and became principal at Bethware High School. Don Parker was my coach in the ninth grade and Clyde Canipe in the tenth.

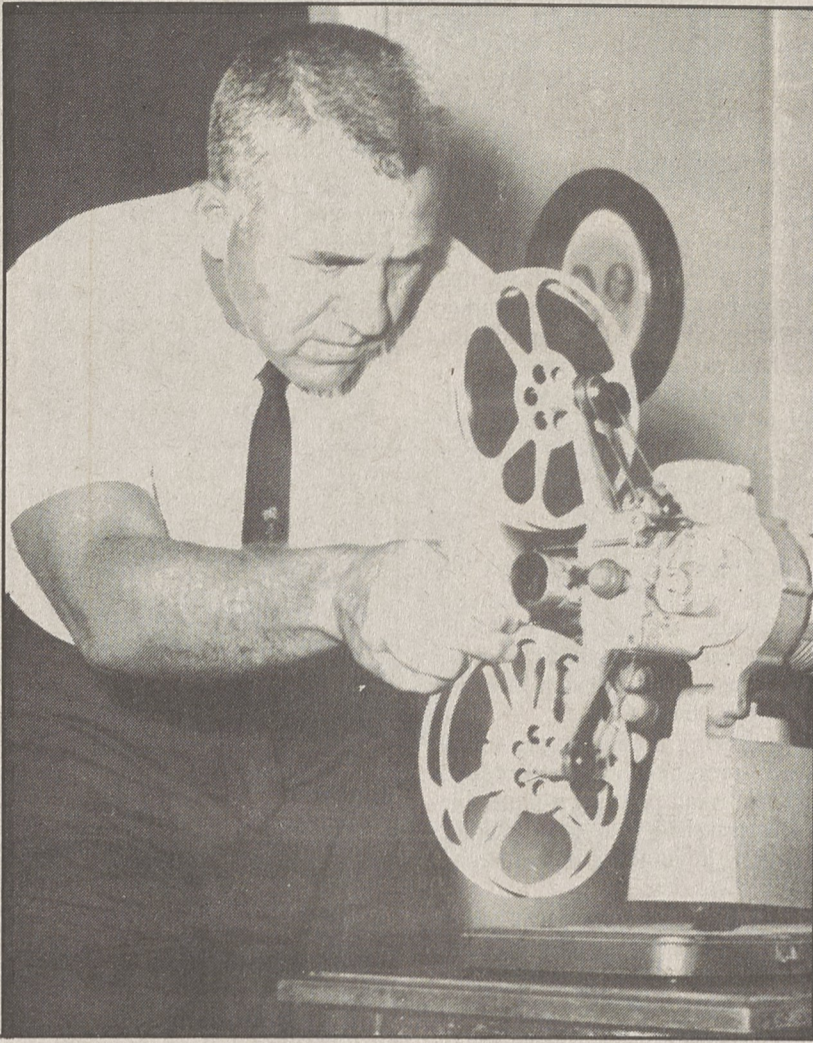
"Coach Carlton was tough as nails," he continued. "He was very intense but he certainly knew what he was doing and he knew the game quite well. He became a tremendously successful high school coach. I've often thought about him and how it must have been a shock for him to come to Kings Mountain and find only 20 players coming out for football. And, there was not a great bit of talent either."

Carlton knew some of the background of Kings Mountain football but was confident he could turn the team into a winner. "The year before they had scored only two touchdowns all season," he recalled. "There was not a great deal of interest in football."

One of Carlton's primary goals was to generate some interest. With the help of a few avid fans he organized a booster's club called the Mountaineer Club. The boosters organized a four-team midget league which played one night a week. Out of that midget league came future stars like Ollie Harris, George Harris, Ken Baity and others.

The club also helped purchase new uniforms for the team. "The uniforms when I went there were awful," Carlton said.

Basketball coach Don Parker, who at one time coached every varsity



Shu Carlton winds the tape to study one of his Friday night opponents. Carlton coached KMHS to its first football championship in 1955.

sport, was Carlton's only assistant. In 1950 the school hired Jack Sink out of Lenoir-Rhyne and he organized the school's first JV team. John Charles, another L-R product, joined the staff in '52 and '53.

Carlton was with the Mountaineers for three years and the team showed steady improvement. From that 1-6-3 beginning the Mountaineers went to break-even marks of 4-4-1 in '49 and 5-5 in '50.

In the spring of '51 Carlton was called back into the Marines because of the Korean War. He missed the spring of '51 and all of the 1951-52 school year. Art Weiner, who had made All-American for three years at North Carolina and had played a year with the New York Yanks in the NFL before going down to injury, was persuaded to come to Kings Mountain and coach the '51 football team.

While in Korea Carlton was awarded the Bronze Medal for heroic achievement. He was cited for leaving his tank to successfully evacuate a wounded Marine infantryman from a mine field which was under intense enemy rifle, machine gun and mortar fire.

Carlton returned to Kings Mountain in '52 and found that the JV team had been dropped. He coached the varsity to a 1-9 record and reorganized the JV program.

Carlton made a big change in his coaching plan the next year and Mountaineer football really began to improve. He switched from the aging single-wing formation to a T-formation. Kings Mountain was one of the first high school teams to introduce the T.

The '53 team surprised everyone. The Mountaineers, for so long a second division team, compiled a 7-3 record. They improved to 8-2 in '54 and in 1955 went 10-1-1 overall and won the school's first-ever conference football championship. The team went 9-0-1 during the regular season. The Mountaineers tied Forest City during the regular season and those two teams met in a special playoff to determine the conference championship. Kings Mountain won 26-19 but lost to Valdese the following week in the Western N.C. High Schools Activities Association championship game.

In 1956 the Mountaineers went 9-0-1 again in the regular season and then defeated Lenoir 7-6 for the WNCSSAA championship. No other football team in KMHS history has been able to win its association championship.

"Our support those two years was tremendous," Carlton recalled. "I remember Hugh Logan, the Chief of Police, would form a caravan for all of the out of town games. Everyone would meet at City Hall and he'd turn his red light on and they'd take off. A lot of our out of town games, we had more people in the stands than the home team."

Carlton produced some outstanding athletes. His first was Ruth, who earned a college scholarship to Davidson and was a quarterback on some good teams there.

"Jack Ruth was one of the best all-around athletes Kings Mountain has had," Carlton said. "He was a good runner and passer. I wish I'd had him more than one year. Even though we didn't do too well that year he was outstanding. He played fullback in our single wing attack, and I'd rate him right up there behind George Harris as the best player I coached at Kings Mountain."

Carlton said the key to Kings Mountain's success in the mid-fifties was the play of his quarterbacks. To be effective in Carlton's T-formation, he needed a good option quarterback who could run and throw. Ollie Harris, George Harris and Johnny McGinnis fit the bill perfectly.

"Ollie Harris was our first good T quarterback," Carlton recalled. "He was an excellent passer and didn't throw many interceptions. He also got a scholarship to Davidson."

"In 1955 we weren't supposed to do as well as we did. Except for George Harris and a few others, we were really small and young. Our two guards -- Leonard Wright and Buddy Smith -- weighed about 135 pounds each. We started two sophomore tackles, Steve Wells and David Marlowe."

"George Harris was the leader of the group. He was outstanding. Johnny McGinnis, Mearl Valentic and Ken Baity were outstanding running backs. Joe Ormand, our center, weighed only 163 pounds but he was very good. Keith Layton was a sophomore end and Charles Bridges and Tony Goins, both ends, weighed about 155 pounds each. Everybody played both offense and defense."

The Mountaineers were a high-scoring machine. In fact, Bob Hoffman, sports editor of the Herald, labeled the Mountaineers Carlton's T-Model and Point-A-Minute Mountaineers. Scoring 30 and 40 points a game was common, and they occasionally put over 50 points on the board.

In '56, Harris, who was Kings Mountain's first Shrine Bowl and Prep All-American pick, was at Duke University on a full scholarship. Johnny McGinnis, who had led the team in rushing in '55, was moved to quarterback and the Mountaineers won it all.

"John McGinnis was an outstanding option quarterback," Carlton noted. "I took him to Greensboro with me for the East-West all-star game. He was a real good high school quarterback."

After that outstanding '56 season, Carlton was selected as the Kings Mountain Junior Chamber of Commerce Young Man of the Year.

While in Kings Mountain, Carlton was selected to coach in three North Carolina all-star games. In 1949 he was assistant coach in the Shrine Bowl. In '54 he was head coach in the East-West Optimist Bowl in Asheville, and after that outstanding '56 season he was chosen as head coach in the East-West game. His teams won all three games.

Carlton compiled an overall 46-30-6 record in eight seasons at Kings Mountain and was the first Mountaineer coach who served any length of time to have a winning record.

After the '56 season Carlton accepted the head coaching position at Ashley High in Gastonia. In 16 years at Ashley and Ashbrook he posted a 115-47-9 record and won seven conference championships. He was head coach of Shrine Bowl team in 1964.

Carlton said leaving Kings Mountain was a tough choice because of the friends he had made and the tremendous strides the football program had taken.

"But coaching 4-A football was an exciting opportunity, and the pay was a little better," he said. "I thought the competition would be a lot tougher but I had been at Ashley for three years before I had a team that I thought could beat Kings Mountain."

"Our '55 and '56 teams were very good," he went on. "In fact, we played West Mecklenburg and East Mecklenburg both years and beat them. In the '55 game with East Meck, we had been scheduled to play Forest City the Friday before and it was rained out. It was rained out again Saturday and we had to play them on Monday night. We were scheduled to play East Meck on Thursday night in Charlotte and called and asked them if they'd move it to Friday so we would have time to prepare for them. They said they just couldn't do it, and we went over there with just Tuesday and Wednesday to prepare for them and beat them 27-0."

"We pretty much went from a team in '48, '49 and '50 that was getting beat by all the good teams in the conference to one in '54, '55 and '56 that was beating them all."

Carlton said Kings Mountain players, even when they suffered through losing seasons, always gave a great effort in practice and in the games. That hard work and dedication, and the innovative T-formation, turned the Mountaineers into one of the strongest football teams in the area.

"The T-formation was really the thing that started us winning," he said. "Prior to the War everybody ran either a single wing or double wing. My first year at Kings Mountain I don't recall anyone, except maybe Hendersonville, that ran the T."

"When I came back from the Korean War I realized that things were changing and we wanted to change too," he said. "We began to improve rapidly. For us, the T-formation was the sensible thing to run. We didn't have real big kids and weren't blessed with a great deal of speed."

"Ollie Harris, George Harris and Johnny McGinnis really headed us in the right direction. They were responsible for a great deal of our success."

In Carlton's last six years as a high school football coach in Gastonia (1967-72) his teams won five conference championships and lost only two conference games. For his career in Kings Mountain and Gastonia he compiled an overall 161-77-15 record.

After retiring from coaching, Carlton served five years as principal of Ashbrook High School (1973-77) and was director of athletics for Gaston County Schools from 1979-84. In 1983 he was selected Athletic Director of the Year by the North Carolina High School Athletic Directors Association. He retired in 1984.

Now 71, Carlton's involvement in sports is usually on the golf course or fishing lake, or a mountain hike with his wife, Louise. But he continues to love all sports, especially high school football.

With his induction into the KM Hall of Fame April 27, he will have entered two Halls of Fame. He was inducted into the Gaston County Sports Hall of Fame in 1969. He has also been nominated for the North Carolina High School Coaches Hall of Fame, an honor which will come in time and will write the final chapter of the story of one of the coaching legends of North Carolina football.



Coach Shu Carlton, right, goes over some plays with Ollie Harris Jr., Don McCarter and Ronnie Layton (left to right) during 1953 football season at Kings Mountain High School.



Players Ken Cloninger and Charles Smith and Coach Shu Carlton, left to right, get some plays straight on the sidelines of a KMHS football game in 1954.