

Magical Moments



In Mountie Football History

1950's

The 'bootlegger'

George Harris' 1955 play will never be forgotten

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

The score was 0-0 in the second quarter. Kings Mountain, en route to its first-ever conference football championship, was battling a strong Lincolnton team at KM's City Stadium.

The Mountaineer offense, led by All-American quarterback George Harris, approached the ball. Harris barked the signals, took the snap from center Joe Meek Ormand and faked a hand-off to sophomore fullback Ken Baity.

But Harris laid the ball on his own hip, bootlegged around end and was heading downfield for what appeared to be a 64-yard touchdown run.

The only thing was, Harris and Baity did such a great job with the fake that the Lincolnton defense swarmed Baity. The officials, thinking Baity had the ball, blew the play dead.

When they saw Harris running down the sidelines with the ball in his hand, the officials knew they had blown the call but would not change it and the ball was spotted at the point where Baity was tackled.

The Mountaineer fans were irate, but nothing compared to head coach Shu Carlton. Carlton probably would have wrung the officials' necks if the call had cost his team the ball game. But the Mountaineers went on to win 27-7.

Several years later after he retired as head football coach at Ashbrook High in Gastonia, Carlton was talking about the play one day and noted that several years later one of the officials told him that the referee got the group together and told them that before they blew their whistle again to make sure "that Harris boy doesn't have the ball." Then the official added, "I put mine in my

back pocket for the rest of the night."

That play - although not the call - was typical of the 1955 team which finished 10-1-1 overall and lost to Valdese in the Northwestern-Southwestern Conference playoff game. The Mountaineers and Forest City tied 7-7 during the regular season, but KM won a special playoff game 19-14 for the conference championship. John McGinnis scored on a 10-yard run and 16-yard pass reception from Harris, and Harris scored the winning touchdown on a two-yard quarterback sneak.

Harris, who excelled on offense, defense and as a punter and kick returner, went on to become Kings Mountain's first Shrine Bowl player and quarterback at Duke University. To this day he is the only KMHS football player to make high school All-American.

The 1955 team set the stage for the strong Mountaineer football tradition that has continued to this day.

Just a year later, Carlton's final Mountaineer team won the NWC-SWC championship with an overall 11-0-1 mark, beating Lenoir 7-6 in the championship game. Doug Rathbone scored on a five-yard run and Spook Stewart kicked the game-winning extra point. Johnny McGinnis, who was the leading rusher on the '55 team, switched to quarterback and played in the East-West All-Star game.

Under John Gamble, the Mountaineers also won a share of the 1959 SWC championship with Shelby and R-S Central.

Some other memories of the 1950's:

1951 - Shu Carlton was called into active duty with the U.S. Marines to fight in the Korean War. Art Weiner,

All-American end at the University of North Carolina, was in a contract dispute with the NFL New York Giants and agreed to coach the Mountaineers in Carlton's absence. He coached the team to a 13-7 victory over Cherryville, which is believed to be the first time KM defeated the Ironmen. The two teams had tied in 1934 and 1950. Charles Mauney blocked a punt and Bill Ruth recovered it in the end zone for the first KM TD, and Jimmy Kimmell scored the winning TD on a one-yard run.

1953 - Seeing that single-wing football was becoming outdated, Coach Carlton installed the T-formation and coached the Mountaineers to a 5-3 record. A disputed play led to a 14-13 loss to Cherryville. KM led late in the game when the Ironmen were awarded a fumble on a play that KM thought had been blown dead. The Ironmen then drove 38 yards for the winning TD.

Carlton always referred to the '53 season as the "turning point" for Mountaineer football. "The T-formation was really the thing that started us winning," he said.

1954 - The Mountaineers went 7-2-1 and set what was then a school record of 371 yards rushing in a 54-18 win over Mt. Holly. KM upset eventual league champion R-S Central 7-0 on Charlie Smith's 21-yard touchdown run. Fullback Mearl Valentine set what was then a school single game record of 865 yards rushing. Ken Cook kicked what was then a school record 33 extra points and Ken Cloninger and Dewitt Blanton played in the East-West Optimist Bowl all-star game in Asheville.

1955 - In a brilliant defensive effort which limited Shelby to just 26 total yards, the Mountaineers

gave Coach Carlton his first win over the Lions, 26-0. It was Shelby's first loss to KM since 1946.

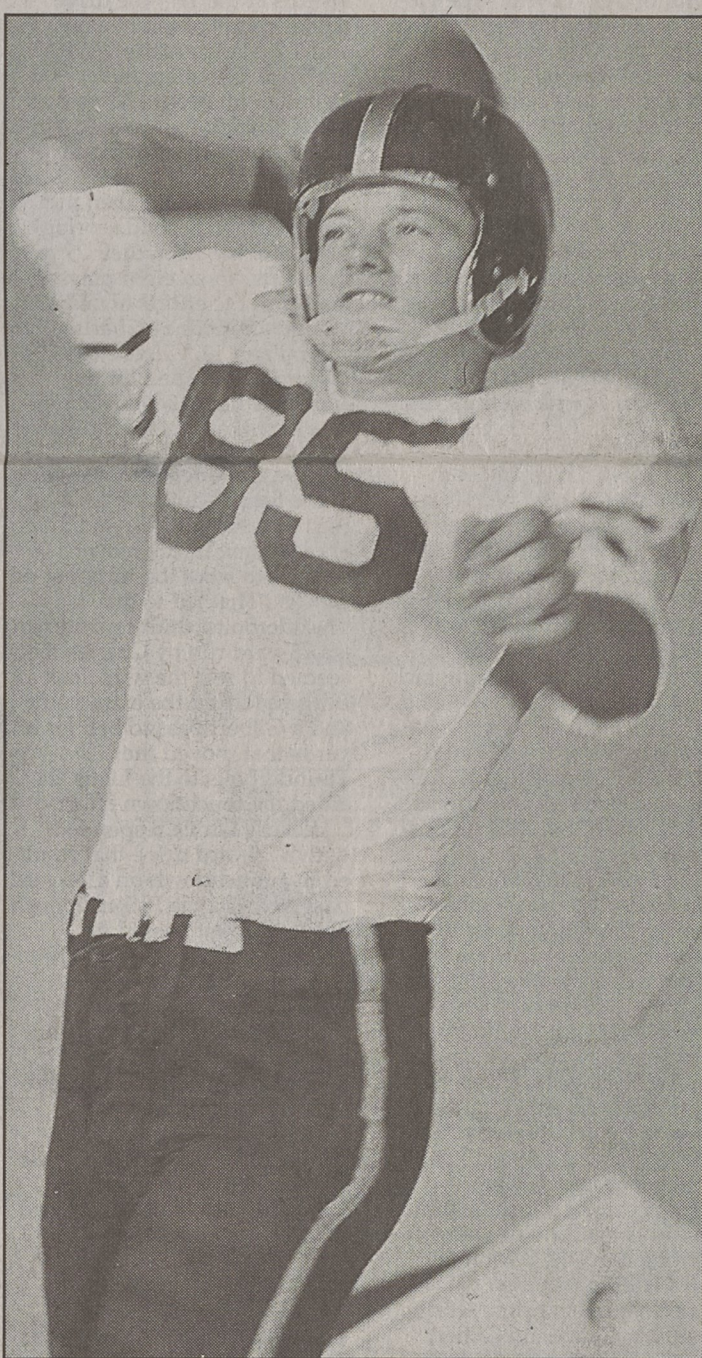
1956 - Ken Baity became the Mountaineers' first 1,000-yard rusher, gaining 1,071 yards from the half-back position. He had his first 100-yard game (155 yards in 21 carries and two TDs) to lead KM to a 12-7 win over Forest City.

1956 - The only blemish on the '56 teams' record was a 6-6 tie with Shelby. Johnny McGinnis scored KM's TD on a 64-yard run, but the extra point was blocked.

1956 - In their last regular season game, the Mountaineers trailed Belmont 12-6 late in the game. Baity scored two fourth period touchdowns to give the Mountaineers an 18-12 win and the conference championship.

1957 - Shu Carlton accepted the head coaching job at Gastonia Ashley and assistant coach John Gamble was named head coach of the Mountaineers. The Mountaineers finished 7-3 overall and lost the conference championship on a controversial call in a 14-13 loss to Shelby. Ken Baity scored what appeared to be the winning TD on a 65-yard run but it was called back because the officials ruled he had stepped out of bounds. Kings Mountain fans were so outraged that they turned the officials' car over after the game, and several fist fights also erupted. Baity went on to gain 1,289 yards rushing which stood as the school record until Kevin Mack gained 1,585 in 1979. Baity also played in the Shrine Bowl and at the University of South Carolina.

1958 - Don Gladden set a new school record of 219 yards rushing on just eight attempts and scored four touchdowns to lead the Mountaineers to a 38-6 victory over Forest City.



George Harris was an All-American quarterback for KMHS in 1955.

1958 - The Mountaineers lost the SWC championship game to Shelby 3-0 on a 10-yard field goal by Jimmy Grice.

1958 - Paul Hendricks scored from 24 yards out to give the Mountaineers a 13-7 win over R-S Central.

1958 - Sophomore Punch Parker scored on a one-yard run and Mike Ware kicked the extra point to give the Mounties a 7-7 tie with Lincolnton.

1959 - KM tied R-S Central 6-6 and Shelby 7-7 to share the SWC championship but lost a special playoff game to R-S 26-6 to see who would go to the WNCCHSAA playoffs. Don Fisher's one-yard run and Mike Ware's extra point with less than a minute to play gave the Mounties their tie with Shelby. They tied R-S on Jimmy Blanton's three-yard touchdown run.

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