

Mearl Valentine to be inducted into Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame

(Second in a four-part series on the 2014 Kings Mountain Hall of Fame inductees. The induction ceremony will be held Saturday, May 3 at 6 p.m. at Central United Methodist Church. Tickets are \$15 and are available from Hall of Fame committee members and at the door).

There is probably no one who has been active in Kings Mountain sports longer than Mearl Valentine. Valentine has been either playing or volunteering in sports since the late 1940s, and he has been involved in many of them since their beginning.

Valentine was one of the first in line to play when midget football was organized in the late 1940s. He was a standout fullback/linebacker on Kings Mountain High's first championship team in 1955.

As a junior, Valentine was the team's leading rusher with 865 yards and a per carry average of 6.4 yards, almost unheard of in that day of "three yards and a cloud of dust" football. At that time, he was the school's all-time leading rusher.

In '55, he led the rushing in the season opener but was injured and missed some playing time. When he returned to action he saw some running time but concentrated on linebacker, where he was one of the leading tacklers on a team that finished 10-1-1 overall and was Southwest Conference champion.

He also played four years of varsity basketball and baseball at KMHS, and his senior year was chosen to participate in the prestigious Kiwanis Classic All-Star Basketball Game. His career game high was 35 points. He also led the hitting for the baseball team. Coach Fred Withers actually offered to hold him out of the last game of the season to ensure his .400 average would be the best in the conference, but Valentine refused. He got two hits to preserve his average.

Football was much different in Valentine's day. One thing that stands out in his mind is that the team learned a new defense every week, depending on what plays their opponent ran the prior Friday.

"We would do our dummy scrimmage every Thursday," he recalled. "One week we were playing R-S Central which was picked to win the conference. They had an All-American running back, Max Thacker, and a guy Padgett that went on to Duke. We went out Thursday to run the dummy scrimmage and some people didn't know what their defense was. Coach Carlton got so mad he threw the balls into the stands and walked off the field. He didn't talk to us again. He didn't even come into the dressing room before the game on Friday.

"But we came out to play and everybody locked down on defense. They were on our four yard line with a first and goal and we held them.

Later we drove 70 yards for a touchdown and beat them 7-0.

"Coach Carlton was a great coach. He was a disciplinarian. He made sure you did what you were supposed to do."

Valentine and other youngsters around town were very happy when they learned that the "Mountaineer Club" had organized and was going to sponsor a city midget football league.

"Some businessmen organized midget football in four schools - West, East, Central and Parkrace - and anyone in grades six, seven and eight could play," he recalled. "We played on Saturday night and rotated around. We played maybe eight games a year. There was no weight limit like there is in Pop Warner today."

Valentine recalled that the West team was sponsored by Gurney Grantham, who owned Victory Chevrolet, and they had first-class equipment. "We had new uniforms and cleats unlike everybody else," he said.

Several years later, Valentine was the first president of the current KMHS Booster Club, which was organized in the late 1970s when Dan Brooks became Mountaineer football coach. Valentine was a charter member and served as president for seven years.

"Charlie Carpenter gave me the minutes of the original Mountaineer Club and they were put in with the memorabilia of Central School," Valentine said. "It included records of injuries, broken teeth and other things. The Mountaineer Club would insure us and the businessmen would buy our equipment."

Valentine said college was not in his post-season high school plans, so he helped organize, coached and even refereed local youth football, baseball and basketball games.

"Somewhere along the way I took some seventh and eighth graders and formed a midget team," he recalled. "We played Clover Junior High School two games. It was hard to find midget teams to play. There weren't even JV teams in high school when I played. We usually had 28 to 32 players and everybody played both ways."

JV football was added at KMHS when Fred Withers came from Sumter, SC in to take over the baseball program. He assisted Shu Carlton and Don Parker with the varsity.

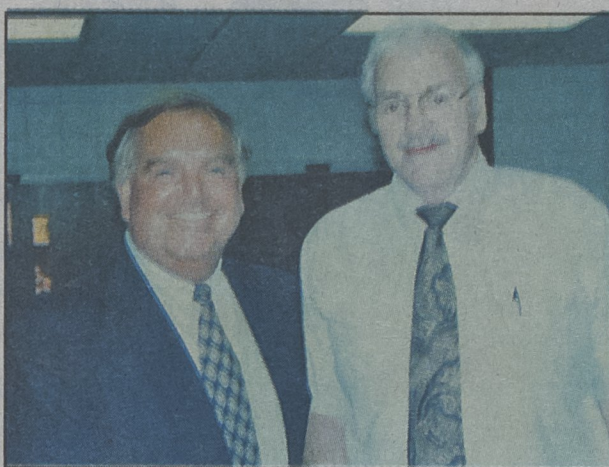
After Valentine's senior year, Withers asked him to help coach the JV team but the Optimist Club was being formed and they came up with the idea of having football under the Pop Warner program.

Although the Pop Warner teams weren't sponsored by schools, they carried the school names of East, North, West and Central and drew their players from those neighborhoods.

"At that time Charlie Harry of Grover was organizing a midget team," Valentine recalled. "We set it up with him and some busi-



Mearl Valentine meets former pro football great Roman Gabriel (top) and former New York Yankee second baseman Bobby Richardson at previous Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremonies.



nessmen to take a team down there every Thursday night and play them. The Kings Mountain teams would alternate, playing in Grover on Thursday but we'd also play here every Saturday night. The first time we played at Grover (at Brice Harry Field) we laid it off and it was only 80 yards. But what was good for one team was good for the other."

Valentine later got into coaching youth baseball and basketball. "I really enjoyed working with the smaller kids," he said. "You had more options in letting them play."

When John Henry Moss was first elected mayor in the early sixties, he established a City Recreation Committee. Valentine was one of the charter members and served as its chairman for many years. During Moss's 23-year tenure as mayor, the city's recreation program grew by leaps and Valentine was one of the driving forces.

"We went over to Gastonia to see their walking track," Valentine recalled. "We had already talked to Doc and

Beulah Mauney about using their field on Highway 161 (behind Tommy Ellison's Grocery) and they agreed to let us use it."

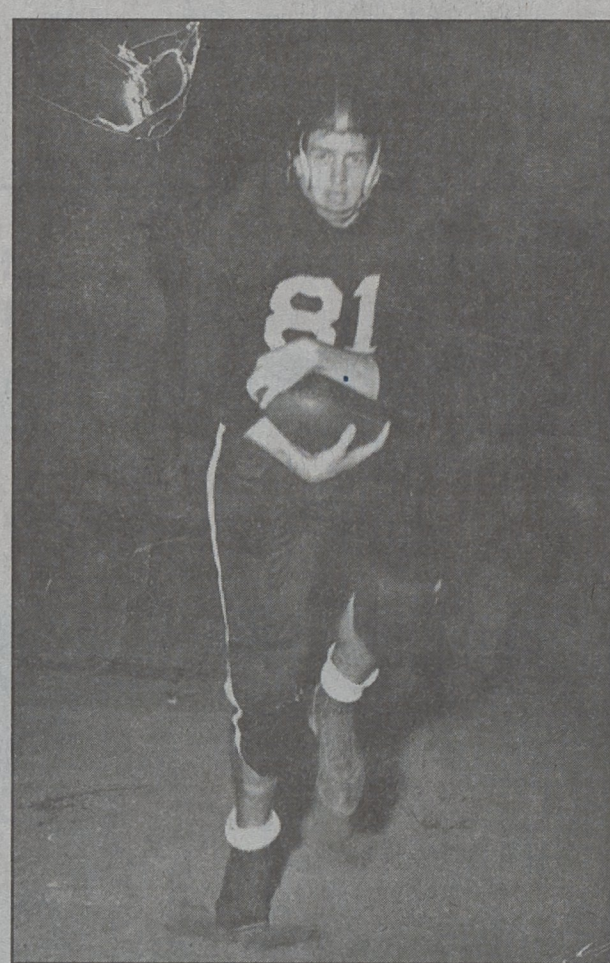
As it turned out, there would not be adequate parking so Moss and Valentine began looking at the old Burlington Mill property near the Community Center (now the YMCA) and that site was chosen.

"They donated it to the city," Valentine said. "There was an old airplane there and we had to get it moved. That walking track has been very useful."

Valentine remembered that the original Mountaineer Club and the current KMHS Booster Club and the KMHS athletic programs were very beneficial to each other.

"When we played at the old City Stadium (which will be dedicated as Shu Carlton Stadium Sunday) the Mountaineer Club ran the concession stand and got all the money to finance midget football," he said. "It's almost like today in that they use their proceeds to assist the (KMHS) teams."

One of Valentine's proudest moments as a booster was when he got the



Mearl Valentine was a bruiser at fullback for the 1954 and 1955 Kings Mountain Mountaineers.

idea to build a handicap seating section at John Gamble Stadium.

"It feels good to go by and see the people with disabilities watching their favorite sports programs that are being held at the stadium," he said. "They're very appreciative to be able to sit in a decent place to watch the games."

Valentine, along with Charlie Burns and others, was instrumental in organizing and Old Timers football game at KMHS which drew some of the school's all-time greats to come back and play a group of student athletes. "Charlie and I coached. We were smart enough not to play," he chuckled. "But the fans and players really enjoyed it."

With the advent of the YMCA in the 1990s, the City Recreation Committee ceased to exist but Valentine was one of the charter members of the YMCA Advisory Committee. He was Board Member of the Year in 2000 and was the KMHS Booster of the Year three times.

Valentine has been a member of the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame committee since its inception in 1988 and is a past re-

ipient of its Distinguished Service Award. Although he is no longer coaching youth sports, you'll still find him in the press box at every Mountaineer home football game and in the stands at most volleyball and basketball games.

He has been spotting in the press box since Denny Hicks took over as head coach in 1983. He has worked with four different PA announcers - Bob Smith, Perry Champion, Rick Francis and Jay Rhodes. Joe Hord now helps Valentine with the spotting duties. Jake Dixon, the scoreboard operator, has been up top as long or longer than Valentine.

"We have a good time up there," he said. "All of the guys have been up there a number of years and we work well together. Keith and Kirk Falls (of Linwood Restaurant) provide the food so we eat good. It's dry and it's warm."

Valentine said he looks forward to getting a new press box in the near future, and that's in the Cleveland County Schools' plans.

"I just hope it has an elevator," he chuckled.

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Beth Winget
KMIS Teacher
of the Week!

Mrs. Winget is a 6th grade math teacher who grew up in Shelby and Columbia, S.C. She says she enjoys working at the school because "the staff is very caring and friendly. If you need anything all you need to do is ask. Everyone works together to support the children in their education." Winget is a graduate of Winthrop and Clemson Universities who has 29 years of teaching experience. Winget, who is married with three grown daughters, has also taught kindergarten, 2nd and 5th grade.

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