

By Craig Phillips

It is little wonder why Jim Shaughnessy is not only an athletic hero in the Oil City area, but a folk hero as well.

It comes as no surprise that his No. 68 jersey was retired after his dream football season for the Oilers in 1964.

I have yet to meet in person this living legend that sports writers used to call "Joltin' Jim" during his career, but through several phone conversations, I feel I have known the man all my life.

Friday night, during halftime of the Oil City-Franklin game at Oil City High School, Shaughnessy will be honored for his accomplishments of being the only first team all-state football player and earning scholastic all-American honors.

Shaughnessy earned 11 varsity letters at Oil City High School. He lettered four years in both wrestling and track and field and three years in football.

Amazingly, considering his heroic status on the gridiron, he did not start a varsity football game until his senior year.

"My first start of my high school career was against Titusville the first game of my senior year," Shaughnessy said. "I remember smelling the cigar smoke in the air at Mitchell Field, and I remember scoring three touchdowns."

What happened once he was inserted into the lineup at fullback for the Oilers transcends mere history - it is legend.

In just seven games, Shaughnessy rushed 137 times for 1,290 yards and 21 touchdowns. He scored 130 points and averaged 9.4 yards per carry. Oil City was 7-0 in games in which he played. Oil City's only loss that season was a 13-7 setback to Grove City with Shaughnessy on the bench with a hematoma suffered in a 249-yard, four-TD performance in the previous game at Corry.

Shaughnessy had to wait for his moment. He believed during his sophomore and junior years he could have been a starter and said, "It was frustrating. I always knew I could do it and I had a lot to prove in seven games."

His resolve was tested once again when he was one of only four first-team all-state players named by both AP and UPI, but the only one left out of the Pennsylvania Big 33 game that features outstanding seniors from the state.

“Mike Reid, Ted Kwalik, Phil Booker and myself were on both first-team all-state teams, but I didn't get picked to the Big 33 game,” Shaughnessy said. “It was political and I was disappointed.”

The disappointment was brief; however, as he went on to have a solid career at Arizona State where he earned three letters under NCAA Hall of Fame coach Frank Kush.

It was then on to Foxboro, Mass., for a tryout with the Boston Patriots.

He was cut after a brief stay in pre-season, and his athletic playing career ended without fanfare.

He returned to Arizona to teach at Kearney High School where he started a junior high football team in his second of four years at the school.

Today, he and his wife Patty have three children: James Joseph III, 4; Catherine Ann, 2 and Megan Cory, 17 months.

He is years removed from his on-field accomplishments and his brief coaching stint, but remembers vividly the good times he had competing for Oil City.

“You always remember your teammates,” Shaughnessy said. “I'll always remember the good times and know that without them I wouldn't have done anything.”

His advice to both high school athletes and students reflects the wisdom of knowing great heights of glory and the bitter taste of disappointment that often accompanies those lofty accomplishments.

“You have to have goals,” he said, “Those goals have to be very specific. They have to be long range, medium range and every day. Most people that I've met that are bored have no goals. Boredom sets in often and with regularity in those who don't have goals. Your goals have to be realistic.”

From the man who remembers his first touchdown in eighth-grade against Townville Junior High School and still has the baton he carried while anchoring the Oil City school record-setting mile relay team, it is a solid framework by which to live.

(Photo by The Derrick's Stephen West taken Oct. 25, 1996 at the ceremony honoring Shaughnessy.)

Article ran in The Derrick on Oct. 24, 1996.

Playground named for Shaughnessy

Former Oiler football great Jim Shaughnessy was in town July 23, 2014, to help dedicate a Siverly playground that was named for him.

The Siverly Neighborhood Association restored the aging playground on Pierce Avenue, the neighborhood where Shaughnessy grew up.

"This project is important to us because we heard word that the playground might be shut down," Terri Felme, association president, told The Derrick. "We didn't want to see that happen. Many of us played there as kids and we really wanted to save it."

Shaughnessy is one person who is glad they did.

"That's where I had my roots," he said. "I ran those streets, up and down those hills. To get this honor from my peers, from friends I grew up with, was fantastic and so special."

His family lived at 465 Colbert Ave.

Felme said the idea to renovate the playground came from Bud Ritchie in March 2009.

Shaughnessy -- a self-described "tough kid" -- said the playground was where he learned a valued lesson from the late Bill Applequist, an OCHS teacher.

"He told me, 'Instead of running from the principal, I'm going to teach you to break the ribbon and win medals,'" Shaughnessy said. "He told me he'd show me how to make history."

Shaughnessy would go on to earn 11 varsity letters in football, wrestling and track at OCHS. In 1964, he scored 21 touchdowns and rushed for 1,289 yards (9.4 yards per carry) in seven games, and was named first team all-state.

He later received a football scholarship to Arizona State, where he played for Frank Kush from 1967-69. The Sun Devils were 8-2 in each of Shaughnessy's seasons, and were ranked 14th in 1968 and 18th in 1969. Playing at 182 pounds, the 5-7 Shaughnessy rushed for 464 yards on 91 carries and caught a pass for 13, scoring two TDs for those teams.

"Playgrounds are special to me when I think about the things I accomplished there," Shaughnessy said. "Some kids really struggle to find out who they are and what they want to do. The playground is a great place to learn those things."

In his honor, the Siverly Association unveiled a school bell monument with a plaque dedicating the playground to Shaughnessy.

While the association was able to clean up the site -- clearing overgrown brushes and pulling weeds -- there is still more plans in the works, such as restoring the basketball and tennis courts and repairing the dilapidated fencing.

"It was really one of the nicest honors I've ever received," said Shaughnessy, who lives in the Philadelphia suburb of Paoli with his wife and three teenage children.

But he said his heart still remains in Siverly. "No matter where I travel, no matter where I wander, I'll always come back to Siverly," he said.