

## **REMEMBERING GEORGE CHAUMP: A Legacy that Endures Through a Fruitful Coaching Tree**

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I attended the viewing for legendary Trinity Girls' basketball coach Harry DeFrank in 2007. I waited in line for over two hours with friends and admirers to share my sympathies with Coach DeFrank's family. I asked a few people, including my brother, Tommy, who were standing with me if there was a local coach who had impacted as many people, bearing witness to a funeral as compelling as DeFrank's. Someone said, "George Chaump might be the only person."

Coaches exist as cultural archetypes of our society's values. According to NCAA reports, of the [8 million high school athletes](#), less than 500,000 play at collegiate level. In reality, then, about one percent of those that play youth sports will end up in a profession that has anything to do with athletics. Therefore, lessons learned from coaches during formative high school years have lasting power that goes beyond the athletic arena.

This is a notion I learned from George Chaump, the famed coach in Central Pennsylvania that recently passed away at the age of 83. I found out about his death by a text message sent to me by my brother.

In my [2014 book \*Legendary Locals of Harrisburg\*](#), I called Chaump the "patriarch of a [football] coaching tree that runs deep" in our Commonwealth. Chaump is known most for taking underachieving football programs at Harrisburg, Ohio State, the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Marshall University, Navy, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Central Dauphin, and Harrisburg again only to turn them into championship contenders. But his biggest influence in this world has been his ability to mold a legion of coaches that strive to match his own successes on the gridiron.

Chaump is originally from Scranton. But due to a career ending knee injury at Bloomsburg State Teachers' College (present-day Bloomsburg University), he ended up in the City of Harrisburg in 1958 when his high school coach, Tom Dean, offered him an assistant coaching position at William Penn High School. He left the Capital City briefly in 1961 to serve as the head coach at Shamokin Area High School. In his first and only season leading the team from Coal Township to a 5-6 record, Chaump accepted the head coaching job at John Harris High School in July 1962. That fall he led the Pioneers to an 11-0 season. One sportswriter from the *Hazleton Standard* said Chaump "is probably counting his lucky stars." He was certainly fortunate, as one senior that season, Charles Appleberry, a 6'0" 171 pound offensive guard, was selected to play in the Big 33 game.

The intimation, however, that Chaump's coaching career flourished because he had Central Pennsylvania's most talented players at John Harris, as the writer for the *Hazleton Standard* suggested, is simply flawed and begrudging. One of his running backs, Harold Dunbar, told reporters in 1967, "his great stress on preparation and mental attitude," is

why his teams were so good. “He spends twice as much time on football as any other coach. He’s an organizer . . . He doesn’t tolerate any foolishness, and no dissipation. He’s tough, but if you mean like Bear Bryant, he’s not like that.” In short, Dunbar said the thing that separated Chaump from everyone else was that he excelled at player development. This point was reinforced by many of his players along with the editor of the publication *Harrisonian*, who wrote that Chaump’s success was due to “preparing the boys to win as many games as we could, because the American philosophy is a winning one,” and “starting with a group of boys and making them better people after they are finished.”

Chaump worked as the head coach at John Harris High School from 1962-67. His overall record was 58-4, which included a stretch of 35 straight wins between 1965-67. His teams astonishingly won the Central Penn League every season he was their coach.

Apart from Wilson West Lawn’s dominance in the Lancaster-Lebanon League from 2008-2016, no public school had established a dynasty quite like Chaump’s Pioneers. Although Wilson won nine straight Lancaster-Lebanon League Section-1 titles, the grandeur of athletes and aspiration of coaches doesn’t compare to those who played and worked for Chaump in the 1960s. In addition to Appleberry and Dunbar, his star players included Jan White, Jimmy Jones, Dennis Green, Ed Beverly, and Art “Buster” Ray. His assistants at John Harris were legends in their own right: Howard “Mickey” Minnich, James Deibler, Donald Miller, Harry Chapman III, and, among others, his equipment manager, John Grove.

Chaump left John Harris in the spring of 1968 to become the quarterback coach at Ohio State University under Woody Hayes. The Buckeyes won the national title Chaump’s first year in Columbus. David Jones of pennlive.com called that season “[The year George Chaump saved Woody Hayes’ job.](#)”

After 11 years at Ohio State, Chaump toggled back and forth between the National Football League and the National Collegiate Athletics Association before returning to Central Pennsylvania in 1997. His coaching stints during that period included time spent as the running backs coach for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers from 1979-1981. He then became the head coach at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (1982-1985), where his teams earned two PSAC Western Division titles. He then worked as the head coach at Marshall University (1986-1989). Several years after the tragic plane crash that killed nearly every player and coach on Marshall’s football team, Chaump’s Thundering Herd won the Southern Conference and later lost to Southeast Louisiana by one point in the 1987 1AA national championship game. He accumulated a 33-16-1 record at Marshall. He ended his tenure as a college coach at the Naval Academy (1990-1994). His overall record as a college head coach was 71-73-2.

His return to Harrisburg came in 1997 when he accepted the head coaching job at Central Dauphin. His Rams won the PIAA 4-A District-3 title his first season. In 2003, Chaump returned to Severance Field to coach the Harrisburg Cougars. As an onlooker, it seemed and felt right. George Chaump, by then a Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Famer, was to

become the first PIAA Quad-A District-3 coach to lead a city school to a district championship in 2007.

Chaump ended his career and relationship with the capital city after Harrisburg's District-3 quarterfinal loss to Daniel Boone in 2010. I remember this game all too well. The week before, his Cougars walloped my team 75-28. The handshake between [Chaump and me appeared](#) on the front page of the *Patriot-News* sports page the day after the game.

That game made me think deeply about Chaump. For one, he has a history of beating up on Lancaster-Lebanon League teams; just ask those who followed Chaump's games against McCaskey in the mid-'60s.

But his legacy extends far beyond titles. Which is why I thought most importantly about Chaump's coaching tree. Among others, my brother and I have benefitted from Chaump's legacy in a way only our family knows: Tommy and I played for Four Chapman, who was the son of Harry Chapman III, who assisted Chaump before becoming the legendary head coach at Cumberland Valley. Indeed, many head and assistant coaches around our age are part of the Chaump coaching tree--too many, in fact, that I am afraid to miss someone if I start listing them.

I visited with Coach Chaump several times since 2015 as I was working on an unfinished project about his famed quarterback Jimmy Jones, who shined as the quarterback at the University of Southern California (1969-72) and in the Canadian Football League before returning to Harrisburg. Though not a nostalgic individual, Chaump understood the value of historical record keeping and accordingly left me several of his scrapbooks. Coach and I were members of different generations and because of that we shared different perspectives of the world. And yet as we sometimes drank iced tea, ate sandwiches, and talk about our families on his back patio, he helped me make sense of the saga of football's evolution. (My trips to his home were convenient, as he lived just a few houses away from my parents.)

My studies of the gridiron game extend back to the career of Glenn Killinger, another Harrisburg native who became an All-American at Penn State in 1921 and later legendary football and baseball coach at West Chester during the Golden Age of Sports. Chaump was a football player at Bloomsburg who competed against Killinger-coached West Chester teams in the 1950s. To me, Chaump was the puzzle piece that connected football during the Golden Age with the present era. In one sense, onlookers can see how offenses and defenses evolved from an age when iron man football reigned supreme, as players in the '10s, '20s, '30s, and '40s were barred from leaving the field. But now we have the wide-open offensive scheme and one-way player platoon system utilized by most coaches. Chaump's use of Jimmy Jones, Jan White and other student-athletes at John Harris, and later Ohio State, opened up offensive formations, which placed such a strain on defenses that coaches like Killinger in the '50s, '60s, and '70s posed the question, "Should defenses be allowed to use a twelfth player?"

Looking through his files during the last few hours have left me with this final thought: Coach Chaump's legacy lives on in the coaches of today. Coach Chaump's memory will

endure for decades on the sidelines each Friday night and Saturday afternoon as his progenies continue to work with high school student-athletes, many of which will become coaches themselves.

The former high school and college coach, who had a Hall of Fame career and attained several championships at various levels, was beloved by his players, coaching peers, and fans in each phase of his life. He has passed on to a better place, but the gift of how to develop student-athletes into young men remains to inspire us all. He has been, and will remain, one of the Commonwealth's most revered sports figures. My family sends its warmest sympathies to Connie, his wife of more than five decades, his daughters, and all of his grandchildren.