

# HOUSATONIC FOOTBALL



H O U S A T O N I C   F O O T B A L L

A   H I S T O R Y

1946 - 1982

Written for the Friends of Football

Edward M. Kirby  
October 30, 1982

H O U S A T O N I C     F O O T B A L L

A     H I S T O R Y

1946 - 1982

*Written for the Friends of Football*

*October 30, 1982*

This is the story of thirty-seven years of football at the Housatonic Valley Regional High School. It is not meant to be a complete history or listing of all football records. Space and time have limited the number of players and events described in this narrative.

While a considerable part of this history is from memory, it is my belief that the facts are accurate. The opinions are strictly my own.

E.M.K.

In the spring of 1946 the Regional School Board made three decisions which were to have a profound effect on the young men of the Housatonic Valley Regional High School. The first decision was to reinstate boys' fall interscholastic sports, which had been eliminated at the peak of World War II. The second decision by the Board was the choosing of six-man football as the sport to be played, and the third was the selection of Americo A. Bedini as a physical education teacher and coach. It was from these three well thought out Board decisions that football had its inception at Housatonic.

Six-man football was a wide open game. It was designed for schools with small enrollments and for that reason grew as a country sport. While it encompassed the same fundamentals in blocking and tackling as eleven-man ball, it was, in general, a much higher scoring game since all players but the center were eligible pass receivers and there were no guards and tackles. In addition the field was only 90 yards long and somewhat wider than a regular field.

Housatonic participated during that period in the Housatonic Schoolmen's League, the forerunner of the present Berkshire League. In the first game at Washington High School Housatonic was defeated 22-13. Housatonic's first touchdown ever was scored in the third quarter by Milt Clay of Cornwall to be followed shortly by John O'Hara of North Canaan scoring a second touchdown on a pass from fellow townsman Ross Grannan. The blocking and tackling of Captain Pete Marcon of Salisbury was outstanding in the game. The following week the Mountaineers put it all together in beating a strong Bethel team 38-28. By the sixth game of the season Housatonic's field was ready. The field ran diagonally across the north end of what is now the football field. The new field was dedicated with a 35-34 win for the Mountaineers. Housatonic went on to a season of seven wins and two losses, outscoring their opponents in the last three games 132-14. Hard blocking and tackling and crisp execution on offense became the trademark of Bedini-coached teams.

After a well played but losing season in 1948, Housatonic

rose to the peak in six-man football over the next four years. For two seasons in the six-man sport the Mountaineers were undefeated and in 1951 the team was rated as state six-man champs. The 1952 squad was not only undefeated at 7-0 but they outscored their opponents 418-96 and were selected in a magazine poll as national six-man champs. During the last three years of six-man ball the late Warren Clark assisted Coach Bedini in working with the teams. For the period 1946 through 1952 many single season scoring records were set, topped by Milt Clay's 170 points, Dick Thurston's 127 and Dale Prindle, who gained 120 in his senior year.

Housatonic was outgrowing six-man football. The enrollment was increasing and other schools found they could not compete against the Mountaineers. The decision was made to move to eleven-man football. The Mountaineers played an independent schedule since other nearby schools were still at the six-man level.

The 1953 football squad was the finest ever to represent Housatonic. Captains Don Piretti and Frank Testa led the Blue and Gold to an undefeated season, one in which the opposition was outscored 119-19. The first game, played at Simsbury, was scoreless at the half. But Housatonic came on the field inspired in the second half and won 13-0. The present Housatonic field was christened before a large crowd the following Saturday as the Mountaineers rolled over Williamstown 27-0. The fifth contest of the season was one of the finest games in Housatonic history, matching the Mountaineers against New Canaan High School, which was on the way to its third undefeated season in a row. Trailing early in the game 6-0, Housatonic came roaring back with three touchdowns to defeat New Canaan 19-6. While the entire team played extremely well, senior lineman Frank Perotti was singled out by New Canaan coach Joe Sikorsky as the big difference between the two teams. At the end of the undefeated season Housatonic was rated as one of the top six teams in the state in all classes. The names on this great club are many. Who of those that saw this squad can forget Pete Smith,

Jack Bristol, Dick Kelsey, John Dorizzi, Dick Cantele, Jim Hurley, Joe Nilsen, Jim Lee, Pete Strong or the rest? For his outstanding play Frank Perotti received honorable mention as guard on the All-State Team.

1953 was also a year of change. Warren Clark had retired as Coach Bedini's assistant and Ed Kirby took over the post which he would hold for thirteen seasons. And for "Ben" Bedini it was his last season as Housatonic coach.

The Bedini Era was over. Coach Roland Chinatti, who was a standout player at Springfield College, took over the helm. While a large squad greeted him, gone were twelve senior starters from the year before. Despite the efforts of Jim Miller, Ed Tripp, Pete Lamb, Jerry Tobin, and a host of others, it was a losing season. The next year, 1955, under Co-captains Barclay Prindle and John Berti, a strong team developed. The schedule too had become stronger now, showing such powerful opponents as Pittsfield, Darien, New Canaan and Gilbert. Despite a strong showing by the senior players, the team was one game under a winning season at 3-4.

In 1956 the North Central Football League was formed. The teams participating in addition to Housatonic were Simsbury, Cheshire, Farmington, Canton and Gilbert. The Blue and Gold with a fine team enjoyed a 4-2 season with Buzz Lucier, Louis Bachetti and fullback Bob Perticone all chosen to the All-League Team, and Lucier receiving honorable mention for All-State. 1957 showed continued success in the league where the strong Mountaineer defense shut out Canton, Gilbert and Farmington. For Housatonic it was a winning season as they finished with a record of 4-2-1. The frosting on the cake was applied when Louis Bachetti of East Canaan was named to the All-State Team, the first in Housatonic history to receive that honor.

Fifty young men reported to coaches Chinatti and Kirby at the start of the 1959 season. But the opening game against Torrington gave a sign of days to come as star quarterback Steve Schneider suffered an ankle injury that kept him out of several games. The pattern continued and the ef-

forts of Co-captain Howard O'Dell and a strong core of seniors was not enough to overcome the injuries that led to a losing season. But the Mountaineers bounced back in 1960 to finish second in the North Central Football League. Led by Co-captains Paul Prindle and Eric Dean and sparked by the explosive running of Anthony Cantele, the team made a strong showing against predominantly larger schools. Cantele and Prindle, along with end Terry Wilford, were elected to the All-League Team. At the end of the school year Coach Chinatti resigned to return to Hawaii. Another era had ended in Housatonic football.

Coach Edward S. Tyburski came to Housatonic as football coach in the fall of 1961. Coach Tyburski had been a stand-out football player at Southern Connecticut State College. He and his captains, Rich Gentile and Russ Humes, looked forward to a good season but injuries again hurt the team. Only a win over Wilby of Waterbury was salvaged. For the 1962 season Robert Chumbook became assistant coach along with Kirby. After three early season losses the Mountaineers rebounded, led by Captain Joe Frazer, to defeat Berlin and Farmington. But the remainder of the schedule was strong and the team went on to a losing season. The next year, behind Captains Bob Nickerson and Bruce Delaini, the team emerged stronger and rode to a 4-4 season highlighted by a 46-14 upset of Gilbert which broke the Yellowjacket's seventeen game winning streak. Assistant Coach Al Ritchie replaced Bob Chumbook that year.

In the next season John L. Mahoney replaced Al Ritchie as assistant coach. 1964 saw the Northwest Conference (the outgrowth of the North Central Football League) growing ever stronger. After dropping close games to Farmington and Simsbury the Mountaineers won three of the last five games including a 28-14 beating again of archrival Gilbert in an all-out team effort. The 1965 team, despite spurts of superlative play, never really reached the level hoped for. Co-captains Bob Ullram and Gus Franklin sparkled on offense and Euge Delaini bolstered the defense. The season was the last for Coach Kirby, who retired from athletics to go into admin-

istration. He was replaced in the fall of 1966 by Thomas Higgins, who joined coaches Tyburski and Mahoney. The season was what seemed like two seasons for the Mountaineers who dropped the first four games then in a complete turnaround won the last three. While there were several standout players that year the real spirit was provided by the late Norm Stoddard of Kent.

In 1967 Howard O'Dell replaced Tom Higgins as an assistant coach. While the season was almost a repeat of the previous one there were some very impressive individual performances by several players including Co-captain Ray Lovell, quarterback Wayne Greene and Co-captain John Bates, who as fullback broke three Housatonic and two Northwest Conference records. John Bates' records included the most yards in one game (267), highest average yards per carry (5.6) and most total yards career (1355). The team proved it could come from behind and in the last game gave Coach Tyburski a well deserved reward for his football retirement with a 33-0 drubbing of Gilbert. Still another era had ended in Housatonic football.

The fall of 1968 brought a new head coach, a former standout Housatonic athlete, to the Blue and Gold football team. Howard O'Dell, co-captain of the 1959 club was named football coach to be assisted by Coaches Mahoney and Higgins. Coach O'Dell inherited a young team but one that was ably led by Captains Jon Higgins and Pat Deneen. It was a year of experimentation that will be long remembered by the fine young men who participated. The high point of the following season, 1969, was the play of AFS exchange student and imported rugby player Ross Gard who had games with 181 yards and 254 yards gained. Co-captain Ed Nelson, along with Gard, supplied the team spark while Tracey Stoddard was named Most Valuable Player.

1970 saw the return of Roland Chinatti as head coach for a rebuilding year, one that saw Joe Downey chosen as Most Valuable Player. The following year, under Coach Chinatti assisted by Ron Dower and Bob Gutzman, was difficult too, though Brian Casey and Howard Chinatti were named All-Conference.

While the play was spirited, the Northwest Conference had become extremely competitive. By 1972, no longer competing as a football member of the conference, the Mountaineers pulled within one game of .500. Major victories were scored over Pine Plains and Mount Everett Regional behind Captains Craig Faedi and Walt Arbo and the offensive play of quarterback Howie Chinatti. With the graduation of his son, Coach Chinatti retired once more with many years of dedicated service to Housatonic football.

Brian Strathman was named coach for the fall of 1973, a season of defensive difficulties. But participation was high and for the first time Housatonic fielded both a junior varsity and a freshman team. The next season, under Coaches Strathman and Dower, the team improved in both offense and defense though the record didn't always show it.

Coach Michael Guy arrived at Housatonic as head football coach for the 1975 season. Coach Guy, a former defensive back for Southern Connecticut State College, was assisted by Coaches Dower and Michael Rubino. It was a season of success with a strong senior group that established a record of 5-3-1. "Cricket" Trotta was chosen Most Valuable Player, ably assisted by quarterback Dave Holst-Grubbe and running back Tom Bunce. A year later the record was even better. Coach Guy, now assisted by David Bayersdorfer and Bill Gilson, developed the strongest Mountaineer squad in years, one that posted a 6-1-1 record. The scoring was led by two explosive backs, Bob Pequignot and sophomore John Ongley. The high scoring offense was directed by quarterback Mike Dodge and in five games the defense held Housatonic opponents to one touchdown or less. Jeff Lloyd set a new record for both single game and season unassisted tackles. The Mountaineers put fine back-to-back seasons together. But the best was yet to come.

In 1979 Coaches Guy, Bayersdorfer and Dower were greeted by a talented senior group. This fine squad would win more games than any Housatonic football team since the 1952 team and finish with a 7-1 record. Sparking the offense were again Bob Pequignot and John Ongley. Ongley as a junior set a record

of 1066 yards gained in a season. The runners and defense were supported by a strong, aggressive line. Lineman Ed Ustico was voted Most Valuable Player and the Mountaineers finished fourth in the state in the Class S ratings. Elected to the Bi-Valley League All-Star Team were Phil Ghi, Mike Mulligan, Bill Rice, Pequignot, Ustico, and Ongley.

With many seniors graduated from the 1979 powerhouse the next season was bound to be more difficult. But after a slow start the 1980 team became stronger and finished with a 3-5 record. John Ongley again led the offense.

1981 was truly a year of rebuilding. The team, with Roland Chinatti Jr. replacing Ron Dower as an assistant to work with Coaches Guy and Bayersdorfer, was green. The team won only one game but the spirited sophomore group created hope for the coming years.

The present season, 1982, began with Rich Guy, Michael DeMazza and Mark Hickey as assistant coaches along with David Bayersdorfer. Bill Hogan and Francis Perotti had been elected captains. The prospects looked good but key injuries in pre-season workouts and early games have hurt the team. Yet the Mountaineer squad has improved each week and shows the potential of finishing strong and becoming even better next year. Interestingly, almost as in years past, the names of nine players on the present team are those of players or coaches from past teams. One co-captain is the son of one of Housatonic's greatest linemen and another the son of a former coach, the nephew of three outstanding players, and the brother of a linebacker and defensive captain. Such is football at Housatonic. Not only does it have tradition, it's often a family affair.