

Walt Kroll

Nominated by Lyle Lang

Walt Kroll was a legendary head football coach, an icon if you will, at Marshfield's Columbus High School for 31 seasons.

Coach (his name to everyone who knew him) was born in Menominee, WI in 1929 and raised in nearby Glenwood City, WI. While attending high school Walt was a good student and a three-sport varsity athlete.

After high school, he enlisted into the U.S. Army, was stationed in Europe, and played football and basketball as a Special Services Athlete.

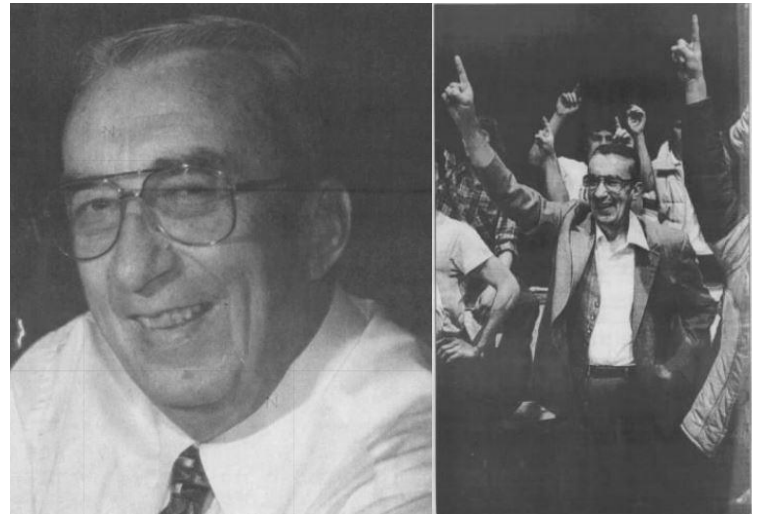
Following his discharge from the Army, he attended and graduated from the University of Minnesota, earning degrees in Physical Education as well as American History.

Coach began his career as an educator and coach with several teaching and coaching assignments throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin. Urged by a close friend in 1964, Walt applied for the job of head football coach at Columbus High School. He was hired and began his 30+ year career guiding the lives of students and athletes at Columbus. Kroll also served as the head track coach for several years, as well as Athletic Director until his passing in March of 1995.

During Coach Kroll's career, he compiled a 219-99-2 overall record and guided the Columbus Dons to 12 conference championships. He also led the Dons to numerous playoff appearances including the first-ever playoff appearance by any Marshfield football team in 1974 and 3 state football championships, including Marshfield's first-ever state title in 1980. In 1966, Coach Kroll led the Dons to Marshfield's first team state championship in track and field.

The Columbus Dons were known throughout the state for Coach's "famous" Wing-T misdirection offense, but few knew that Coach's true passion was on the defensive side of the ball. Coach found great joy in designing and teaching schemes that would nullify each opponent's offensive attack.

During Coach Kroll's time, Columbus was a member of the highly respected Central Wisconsin Catholic Conference, but Coach put the Marshfield Columbus football program on the map by seeking out and playing much larger schools to fill their non-conference schedule. The Dons took their show on the road to play the top football programs of the day such as Antigo, Cudahy, Green Bay Preble, Janesville Parker, La Crosse Central, Madison Edgewood, Milwaukee Marquette, and Milwaukee Thomas Moore. The Dons played out-of-state opponents with



perennial powerhouse programs such as Apple Valley MN, Austin MN, Dubuque, IA, Menominee, MI, Rochester John Marshal, St Thomas Academy, St Paul Cretin, and Waterloo, IA.

Many sports enthusiasts of the time remember the great games, the big victories and the tough losses, but only the players had the privilege of experiencing his practices. Coach was a believer in the old adage, "the price of success is paid in advance," and his practice sessions reflected that attitude. Rarely over 2 hours in length, the practices, although not overly tough physically, were taxing, well-organized and fast-paced. "Short and snappy," was a phrase that Coach loved to use. Coach Kroll's pre-practice preparation was incredible, with every minute accounted for and every sequence of plays scripted specifically to take advantage of the weaknesses of the upcoming opponent. Every player, down to the deepest reserve knew his position and play assignments prior to practice, and Coach demanded flawless execution of those assignments from everyone.

In addition to his coaching responsibilities, Coach Kroll served on numerous football-related committees on the state level, including the four-man committee that designed Wisconsin's first high school playoff system. He also served on the All-State selection committee and oversaw the Region 3 WISAA basketball tournament, held annually at the Marshfield Fieldhouse for many years.

Walt Kroll was honored as Coach of the Year and the WISSA Man of the Year titles many times. In 1984 was selected as the head coach of the North Squad for the Shriner's All-Star game, and in 1987 elected to the Wisconsin Football Coaches' Hall of Fame.

Due to his unique set of coaching skills, his expertise and his experience, Coach Kroll was offered many jobs that would have taken him away from the Marshfield community, however Coach chose to do what he loved most, which was working with young people at Columbus High School. Coach's best work was accomplished within the walls of the school, and it was always apparent that it was the students, the players and his "family" at Columbus that made him shine with pride.