

SPORTS

Braves grid team enjoyed banner 1968 season

By Bill Reynolds

While searching for photo albums and scrapbooks prior to a recent family reunion, former Pleasant Ridge residents Jim and Kay Frey came across an unexpected gem.

It was a plain, parcel-sized envelope filled with yellowed news clippings.

Not just any clippings, mind you.

These were from more than a half-century ago, dating to the fall of 1968.

That was among the best of times for the Freys, who now reside in Mount Vernon. Then Jim coached football and taught at La Conner High School.

That Braves' team, which went undefeated with one tie in eight games, set the standard for a program that would later produce multiple deep state playoff runs.

"It was a special group of players," says Don Misner, the team's starting center, who would go on to play college basketball and enjoy a successful high school coaching career of almost 40 years.

"It was a great mix of guys, a really talented group," Misner says. "Everything was upbeat. We all got along. There was just this great chemistry on that team."

Frey, then in his late 20s, was ideally suited to guide the Braves. He designed an offense around quarterback Tom Zimmerman fondly dubbed the "Frey-I" whose scheme relied on distributing the ball to a host of ball carriers and receivers.

"We had a lot of depth that season," recalls Frey. "Statistically, we were well-balanced."

Good thing, too, as Frey had to juggle his lineup to offset injuries to end Pat Maddox, perhaps the team's fastest player, and Claude Wilbur, Jr., among a trio of go-to backs – Rick Williams and Randy Harris were the others – who lined up behind Zimmerman.

No matter who was on the field, good things happened for the Braves.

La Conner High track teams peaking at right time

By Bill Reynolds

It was only fitting that La Conner High track teams competed at Cashmere, on the eastern slope of the Cascades, in an 18-school meet Saturday afternoon.

That's because there were a number of peak performances turned in by La Conner thinclads, whose focus now is on two major events in the next week.

First up is the Northwest 1B/2B League Meet in Mount Vernon tomorrow (Thursday) afternoon.

La Conner follows up by hosting the 113th annual Skagit County Track-and-Field Championships at Whittaker Field on April 24 and 26.

"We're right where we want to be at this point of the season," La Conner head coach Jacob Grantham said after the Braves and Lady Braves each placed sixth in at Cashmere.

Matty Lagerwey and Noah Lee won solo titles; Addie Reinstra and Josh Jolly established new personal bests; and Andre Knudson set a pair of school records to highlight La Conner's weekend mountain trip.

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MONDAY, APRIL 22
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TUESDAY, APRIL 23
Pulled Pork Sandwich, Potato Wedges, Coleslaw, Pineapple, Juice, Milk.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24
Cheese Ravioli in Red Sauce, Caesar Salad, Pears, Juice, Milk.

THURSDAY, APRIL 25
Barbecue Chicken Legs, Baked Beans, Whole Grain Biscuit, Watermelon, Juice, Milk.



FOND MEMORIES – Jim Frey, coach of the undefeated 1968 La Conner High football team, has enjoyed reading news accounts of that season in recent weeks. He and his wife, Kay, discovered the articles while preparing for a family reunion.

– Photo courtesy of Bill Reynolds

Frey's charges debuted with a 37-7 trouncing of much larger Mount Vernon High School's sophomore team.

Legendary Skagit Valley Herald sports columnist Royal "Pop" Gunn lauded La Conner's talent but lamented the fact many fans couldn't see the Braves play due to their daytime home schedule.

"They have no lighted field over there," Gunn wrote, "and must play all their home games on afternoons."

Between teaching classes and crafting game plans, Frey set to work on developing funding strategies to install lights for nighttime kickoffs.

As was the case with his team, which in that pre-playoff era finished the season ranked No. 4 among state 'B' title contenders, the light campaign proved successful. Four years later, in 1972, while then serving as La Conner High's Principal, Frey would play a lead role in ceremonies that dedicated completion of lighted Whittaker Field, still the Braves' football venue.

Despite a home schedule limited to day games, the Braves in 1968 garnered much attention. Frey's news clips show the team was covered extensively by reporters throughout Skagit and

Lee captured the boys' 200 meter dash with a 0:26.69 finish. He also placed fifth in the 100 meters in 0:11.97.

Lagerwey, a reigning State 2B champion, went 16'-6" to easily win the girls' long jump. She was also third in the triple jump (31'-7") and fifth in the javelin (88'-11").

Reinstra clocked a 0:17.67 in the girls' 100 meter hurdles, good enough for fourth place in a tough field at Cashmere. Jolly placed second in the boys' triple jump (41'-1 1/2") and fourth in the long jump (19'-3").

Knudson was sixth in the 1,500 meters with a time of 4:27.13. His second new school mark came with a 10:10.58 clocking in the 3,000 meters, which clinched eighth place on Saturday.

"It was definitely a very good meet for us," Grantham said. "And another big thing for us, knock on wood, is we've avoided injuries and are pretty healthy going into this next stretch of the season."

Host Cashmere won the boys' side of the meet. Okanogan claimed the girls' crown.

La Conner's point totals were bolstered by several other strong finishes, in addition to those produced by Lagerwey, Lee, Reinstra, Jolly, and Knudson.

Morgan Herrera placed third in the girls' shot put (31'-9 1/2") and sixth in the discus (88'-11"). Coincidentally, her distance in the discus matched that of Lagerwey in the javelin.

Mari Waltner secured fifth place for La Conner in the girls' 300 meter hurdles, finishing in 0:52.80.

In the boys' half of the meet, La Conner's Demetrius Scott placed fifth in the shot put at 39'-4 3/4". Bradey Wyles picked up a sixth place in the javelin with a toss of 134'-10".

Snohomish counties.

The most in-depth coverage was provided by the Puget Sound Mail, La Conner's newspaper.

PSM editor Pat O'Leary provided accounts that listed La Conner starters on both offense and defense, key game stats and decisive plays.

La Conner made headlines with a 20-7 comeback win over archrival Coupeville in the season's second week. In that game, Zimmerman completed two touchdown passes to Doug Wilbur – who like Misner would (Continued on Page 5)

La Conner High hopes to bring baseball back

By Bill Reynolds

La Conner High didn't field a baseball team this spring for just the second time in 30 years.

Braves coaches Jeremiah LeSourd and Andy Otis, school administrators and interested community members hope it will be at least that long before La Conner baseball is sidelined again.

"Baseball is great for the kids," stresses Greg Kennedy, whose son, Zane, played for the La Conner program all four years in high school. "I would hate to see baseball go away."

Kennedy, who has a background in community organization, is among many hopeful that the number of players increases to the point where La Conner is soon back in the game.

"It's valuable for the kids in so many ways," he says. "And it's also a good thing for the town to have a high school baseball team."

Under LeSourd and Otis, La Conner baseball qualified for post-season eight straight years between 2009-2016.

Still, it wasn't always easy.

The 2009 schedule was nearly shelved due to low numbers. Despite having just 12 players on the roster and occasionally playing with no subs available, LeSourd and Otis guided the Braves to a regional berth.

LeSourd told La Conner Weekly News that was the start of a string of successful seasons, with the Braves regularly featured on radio broadcasts as they navigated tough playoff brackets.

The numbers game began turning against La Conner once more in 2017. That season was salvaged after Otis' mom, the late

Orcas sweeps Lady Braves in league twin bill

By Bill Reynolds

The La Conner High softball team treated its home fans to several stellar defensive plays during an NW2B doubleheader with Orcas Island Friday afternoon.

The Lady Braves turned three double plays while outfielders Cameryn Stewart and Charity Jordan made outstanding catches and throws. Rya Holt made a nice stab of a line drive at second base, and catcher Karris Drake had a number of put-outs at the plate.

In addition, shortstop Maya Masonholder was on the money with a handful of relay tosses.

The problem was the Lady Braves had to make so many plays.

A potent Orcas attack repeatedly put runners on base and in motion en route to convincing 13-1 and 21-3 victories to sweep both games.

With the pair of triumphs, Orcas pushed its league-leading mark to 4-1. La Conner fell to 0-4 in NW2B play and 3-8 overall going into Monday's game at 1A Sultan.

Orcas hurler Flora Lister dominated Friday's opener, limiting the Lady Braves to just one base hit and striking out the first six batters she faced.

Riley Banaszak broke up the no-hitter with a booming triple to left-centerfield leading off the home fifth. She later scored the Lady Braves' lone tally on an

Orcas throwing error.

Emma Rodgers paced the victors with a triple. Rainey Rierden and Astasia Monahan each ripped doubles.

Banaszak again led La Conner in the nightcap. She lined a single, double, and triple in three trips to the plate. Annie Whitney singled twice, and Logan Lowry chipped in a single and two RBIs.

Lister, Rodgers, Monahan and Kali Poto finished with two safeties apiece for Orcas. Together they combined to drive in seven Lady Viking runs.

Alyssa Johns and Sofia Garcia of Orcas each collected a base hit and RBI.

The game started well for La Conner when Lowry made a barehanded grab of a roller down the third first base line and threw a strike across the diamond to first baseman Rachel Drake.

The Lady Braves also turned a tough double play in the third. Karris Drake fielded a topper in front of the plate, threw to Rachel Drake at first for one out, and then took the return throw and made a sweeping tag on an Orcas runner sliding into home.

But it wasn't enough to off-set an Orcas lineup featuring equal parts speed and power.

La Conner returns home for a scheduled April 19 doubleheader with NW2B foe Friday Harbor. The game starts at 4 p.m.

Dixie Otis, stepped in to provide academic tutorials that helped enough players gain eligibility for the team to pick up its schedule three weeks into the campaign.

La Conner High also offers golf and track-and-field as spring sports for boys. Athletic Director Kathy Herrera, when faced with low numbers for baseball, endorsed a plan earlier this year to allow students to play more than one sport, LeSourd said.

But that remedy fell short.

Herrera, in what she called a difficult decision, pulled the plug on baseball in March when after two weeks only eight players had reported to practice sessions.

"It's not what I had envisioned for the baseball team this year," she said, "but I will work with the coaches and our upcoming

athletes to see if we can't make the baseball numbers come back up for next year."

For their part, LeSourd and Otis, who along with Steve Thurmond previously developed a strong youth program here, are committed in the weeks ahead to working with and encouraging younger La Conner players to continue with baseball through high school.

Kennedy applauds that move. He said Little League, Pony League, Babe Ruth and American Legion baseball all provide opportunities for players to further embrace the game and hone their skills.

"Kids enjoy sports," he said, "and baseball is a sport that has great value and teaches lifelong lessons."



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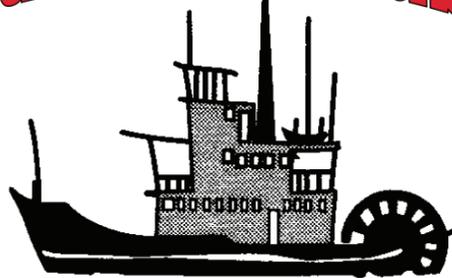
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My Old House in Okinawa, Japan

If there were a single word for My old house in Japan It would have to contain The rough futon I was sitting on mixed with the soft baby blanket on top of me. It would also need the sound of words I cannot understand on the TV, the hum of the fridge and the sizzle of the pan cooking me stir fry. It would need the smell of fresh chicken breast and the soy sauce I spilled on the floor the night before. It would need the sight of marvelous sushi on the TV show I am watching, and my dad sorting his various junk. And to finish containing it would need the taste of jalapeno lime cheetos almost burning my tongue and lastly it would need the taste of milk I was chugging down to save myself. It would have to contain all of these words

Magical
— Gracia Tanis
3rd Grade Island View Elementary
Anacortes School District

The Skagit River Poetry Foundation places teaching poets in classrooms for over 170 days each year. Here is one poem from this program of over 4,000 students from eight school districts.

Wait! What! Tulips!

Wait! What!? Tulips!
We Gotta Go!
Look at 'Em All
Growin' in a Row

Wait! What!? Tulips!
Step on Da Gas!
Don't Worry 'Bout
Drivin' Up On Their Grass

Wait! What!? Tulips!
Slam on Da Brakes!
Gotta See Them Tulips
What Ever It Takes

Wait! What!? Tulips!
Hey You! Get Outta My Way
We Don't Care if You Live Here
Anyway

Wait! What!? Tulips!
Put Da Pedal to Da Metal
Then Stop Real Fast
My Drivin' Might Put Me
Under Da Grass

Wait! What!? Tulips!
While This Might Make
Some People Frown

Others Might Be Happy
Now That I'm Pushin' Up Tulips
Instead of Daisies
From Under Da Ground

— Rick Dole

With a nod to
Langston Hughes

Strange BUT TRUE

By Samantha Weaver

- It was one of the most influential directors in the history of cinema, Alfred Hitchcock — also known as the “Master of Suspense” — who made the following sage observation: “The length of a film should be directly related to the endurance of the human bladder.”
- In Murfreesboro, Tennessee, it is illegal to keep indoor furniture outdoors.
- The town of Llanfair in Wales is also known by its Welsh name, Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlilllantsiliogogoch. Roughly translated, this means, “Saint Mary’s Church in a hollow of white hazel, close to a whirlpool and Saint Tysilio’s Church and near a red cave.” The sign at the railway station that has the town’s name is 20 feet long.
- Those who study such things say that cockroaches can run as fast as 3 mph.
- You probably don’t realize it — and you certainly don’t notice it — but experts claim that the Atlantic Ocean is getting about 1 centimeter bigger every year, and the Pacific Ocean is shrinking by the same amount. It’s due to continental drift, they say.
- Linguists say that American English has roughly 20 swear words (depending, of course, on how one defines swearing). In contrast, residents of ancient Rome had a lexicon of about 800 so-called “dirty” words to draw upon.
- The tuatara is a lizard that can be found in New Zealand. Its claim to fame? It has a third eye, located on the top of its head.
- If you counted up all the McDonald’s, Dunkin’ Donuts, Pizza Hut, Burger King, Domino’s Pizza, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Wendy’s and Taco Bell locations in the United States and added them together, you still wouldn’t reach the number of pharmacy locations across the country.

Spring’s rituals underway

By MaryRose Denton

The dark days of February are gone, when it seemed like winter would not relent its grip. The wheel of the year creeps ever forward. The vernal equinox is also past, bringing longer days and the hope of spring.

Spring has sprung in the Valley, past its slow start, from the yellow fields of daffodils to the rainbow colored rows of tulips heralding an official kick-off.

The caption for spring can be “annual do-over,” with its new beginnings, new life and new growth. Throughout the valley, spring brings ritual patterns. Some may be personal practices observed each year, others may be communal. Regardless how the season is honored, the energy of new life blooms forward.

Some may re-organize a closet, shedding possessions which are no longer useful or bring joy. Perhaps, the longer days allow neighbors a longer evening walk with the goal of getting in shape for the upcoming summer season. Down at the La Conner Marina boaters are returning, hosing down decks, airing out cabins and raising their jibs. John and Tonya Drouillard moor their Northwind vessel in the marina. He says this time of year is for “making a checklist, changing the oil and working on projects left over the winter.” Replacing the toilet in the head of his boat is his current project. He shared this as he hoisted a toilet seat out of the back of his truck. So a new sailing season is under way, and just like in the marina, there are signs of new beginnings throughout town.

Meandering through the neighborhood on 2nd up to 4th Street finds gardeners getting out and preparing their plots. The WSU Master Gardeners have been fielding calls. Questions range from “what is this strange insect?” to “what’s the best way to clean up winter damage?” to “how best to grow legumes in the garden?”

A ritual extending into the fall is the weekly Wednesday answer session at the WSU Extension grounds, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. April-October.

John Christianson of Christianson Nursery finds gardening is “more popular today than ever before. There is a new generation of gardeners”. People come into the nursery with concerns regarding their shrubs and trees. He cautions, “Be patient with the winter damaged plants, don’t jump the gun on replacing them. They may look tired or dying but they will revive and have new life”. Right now the irresistible Daphne is the springtime favorite because of its flowers’ scent.

Hope of renewal and resurrection are essential to

everyone, whatever their religion, or not. The vestiges of winter have departed. Nature is in a lively and colorful state of renewal.

For many who grew up in the Valley, like John Christianson, the plants and flower blooms, especially the tulips, signify the start of spring. For others, it is the Easter holiday, the culmination of many spring rituals, celebrating re-birth, promising a season of new life and growth.

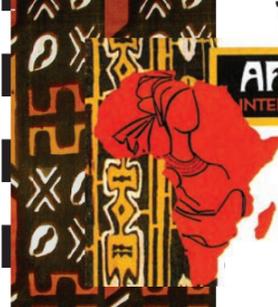
“Leading up to Easter is a time of reflection. I never put out my Easter decorations until the Saturday before,” says Charlotte Burnham, a lifelong practicing Catholic. The Easter rituals are significant to her, solidifying the spirit of the season. As she ritually decorates her home for Sunday she feels the tide of new beginnings for the year.

This coming week ends the Lenten observance. The royal (Continued on Page 6)



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1968 . . . (Continued from Page 4)

be recruited to play college basketball — and Williams provided a TD run for La Conner’s third and final score.

La Conner followed with successive 13-6 and 7-6 victories over Chimacum and King’s Garden.

Those were intense, physical games. Against Chimacum, which at the time sat atop the State ‘B’ polls, defensive end Randy Brigham and linebacker Ed Shutt recorded double digit tackles.

The twin triumphs set up a mid-season pairing with the Snohomish High sophomores, whose varsity team was then a state powerhouse.

La Conner would settle for a 13-13 tie in that contest, its lone non-win.

At least on paper.

“We actually scored the winning touchdown in that game,” Misner insists. “But a referee threw a flag and said that we ran an illegal play. Of course, we thought the

call was bogus. That tie might’ve cost us being ranked No. 1 at the end of the season.”

The Braves closed with consecutive wins over Darrington, Granite Falls and the Marysville sophomores, finishing with a 7-0-1 mark.

After the final game, Frey was praised in an anonymous letter to the Puget Sound Mail.

“If anyone deserves a trophy,” the letter writer stressed, “it’s our own Mr. Frey.”

The accolades would continue. At a La Conner Rotary Club meeting, Superintendent of Schools Leroy “Butch” Maxwell introduced Frey as the “best coach west of Pullman.”

Frey deflected the attention to his players.

“It’s been said,” he pointed out, “that good players create good coaches.”

“I’d love to honor those guys,” he told La Conner Weekly News recently. “They’re a big part of a proud tradition and I think it would be great for our players to connect with those alums.”

Consider first-year La Conner High Athletic Director Kathy Herrera a fan, too. Earlier this school year she helped coordinate the unveiling of a banner at Landy James Gym honoring the 2018 Lady Braves’ state 2B championship volleyball team.

“I would like to do something to honor them,” Herrera said of the ‘68 Braves. “I don’t know if it’ll be a banner, but I’ll try my best.”

Still, no matter how that plays out, there’s no doubt 1968 was a banner football season for La Conner.

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