

CLINTON TOWNSHIP

Chippewa Valley celebrates 50 years of homecoming

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Current Chippewa Valley football captains Patrick Briningstool, Stefan Claiborne and Nicco Moroso meet with 1965 players Rick Luchtman and Bob Konupek for a ceremonial coin toss prior to Chippewa's homecoming game Oct. 9. (Photo by Erin Sanchez)



Members of Chippewa's 1965-66 football team attend the school's homecoming game. (Photo by Erin Sanchez)

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — When the Chippewa Valley football team took the field for its homecoming game against Utica Eisenhower on Oct. 9, it was 50 years to the date from Chippewa's very first homecoming game.

More than 15 players from that 1965 team were on hand to participate in homecoming festivities this year, and also to share memories with their former classmates and teammates.

Some of those memories, 1964-65 Chippewa quarterback Bob Konupek said, include corn stalks and an unfinished high school building.

Konupek explained that when Chippewa was built, it was built in a farmer's field. That created problems for the football team.

Konupek and his teammates laid the sod for the school's initial football field, which is the current team's practice field. They weren't allowed to practice on that field however, so they played in a mowed-down cornfield.

I can still remember jumping down to do pushups and having these corn stalks push into my hands," Konupek said.

Prior to the school's first homecoming game, Konupek led his team in the school's field dedication game during the 1964 season. The Big Reds beat Harper Woods 14-6 that day.

"I remember putting the tile in the field for the drainage, and that was how the football team worked together that summer of 1964. Prior to that year, we lost every varsity football game we played because we were really freshmen and sophomores, so the big deal for us was winning that game," Konupek said. "We went into that game saying we can't lose this game, so that's a memory I really remember."

After the class of '65 graduated, Chippewa could host its first homecoming the following fall. On Oct. 9, 1965, the Big Reds knocked off Lutheran East 13-12.

"Homecoming is always a very special part of the football season, and if you're not going to win all of your games, you definitely want to win homecoming and the game where they honored the parents," Konupek said. "We weren't stellar players, we didn't win any conference championships, but we had a lot of great memories."

Konupek and his teammates were joined by about 100 alumni from Chippewa's classes of 1965 and 1966 for a weekend-long reunion celebration. Prior to the football game, there was a reception for the alumni in the current school's ninth grade center, which was the first high school building.

Ron Current, a '66 graduate, said there were a couple of unique aspects to the opening of the high school at that time.

"The bells weren't hooked up, so how we changed class is, the school secretary had a desk at the head of two wings, and they would ring the bell that would signal for us to change class," Current said. "There were no sewers at 19 Mile and Romeo Plank and Cass, so the school actually had to build its own sewage disposal system. We would be bused to other schools to use their bathrooms."

Current explained that the student population of Chippewa at the time was made up by two-thirds of "city kids" and the other third of "farm kids." The city group would be bused in from the Groesbeck and 16 Mile Road area, while the farm group had students living as far north as 24 Mile.

Those students didn't realize it at the time, but they established several traditions that the high school keeps alive today. The nickname "Big Reds" was established by the first class, along with the fight song and school colors.

"We were excited to do it, but we didn't know we were actually putting a legacy together. You don't say those things when you're doing them," Current said. "I think a lot of our members really didn't realize the significance of when we were doing this, how historic it was going to be. Even now, when we go there, it's nice to be remembered."

Konupek was joined by Richard Luchtman, the 1965 team captain, and George Thayer, the 1965 team's head coach, for a ceremonial coin toss prior to the football game.

The former team members wore commemorative jerseys for the game and walked in the homecoming parade.

The school's first student to receive a diploma, Carol Culver, was also recognized.

A military salute to recognize the members of Chippewa's first graduating classes who served in the Vietnam War also took place prior to the football game.