

'A lot of talent' on 1959 team, says alumnus

By Vera Sloan

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In looking back over the years of football and the community as a whole, Tom Thompson, a member of the state champion Colby High School football team in 1959, said he has some good memories.

He said he especially remembers the high school football years and the two Evans brothers (Buddy and Ronnie) playing together.

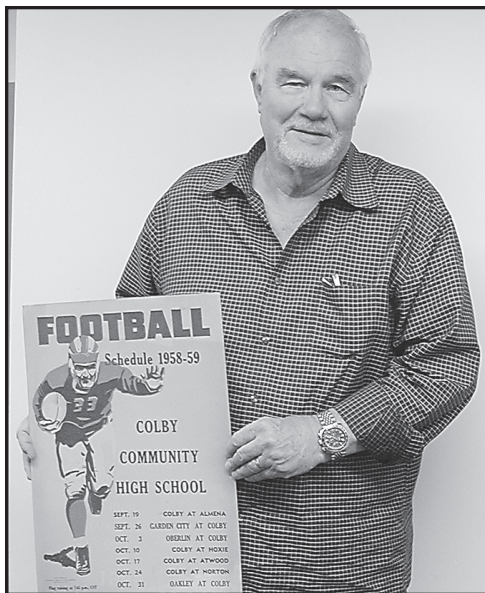
"When Ronnie wouldn't block," Thompson said, "Buddy would scold him, and I kind of think Ronnie was probably a better runner than he was a blocker."

Thompson said he believed that Bill Warner, in his book of Colby High School football history, named the 1959 football team as the best team in the history of the school.

"There was a lot of talent on that 1959 team," he said, "and a new coach brought new ideas. But that last game with Goodland was a great game. We were undefeated, but every one of us was so beat up from practice, it's a wonder we could even play."

Thompson said he remembers the Evans boys' dad as being pretty upset over the injuries from practice.

"Ron had a broken ankle and couldn't play the last two games, Harrison was hurt, and I couldn't play either, so it was sort of the 'walking wounded' that faced a determined Goodland team," he said. "If we'd all have



Tom Thompson

been well, they wouldn't have given us any trouble."

Thompson said he remembered Coach Cross as being unique in that he'd play the first string for the first quarter and get a pretty good score on the board, then he'd put in the second team, and then repeat the same thing during the second half.

"If he'd have left the first team in for the full game, I have no idea how high the score could have been," he added. "As much as 100 points, I believe. Coach would watch the pro

teams on weekends, then he'd try the plays out on us."

He said Dave Phillips would always take the kickoff and the rest of the team would put up a wall down one side of the field, so Phillips could run. He added, that Phil Harrison always kicked the extra point and nailed it every time except after the first touchdown at that infamous last game with Goodland.

"In the Goodland game, when the referee ruled that we hadn't made the first down," Thompson said, "it was Tom Hamill, who had the presence of mind to ask for a second measurement. That's when the knife came out, and they could stick the blade in the ground. The decision was the first down was good, otherwise it would have been Goodland's ball, and we'd have lost."

"The score was seven for Goodland and six for Colby down to the very last play. The coach had us signal which play we'd run by the pressure put on the ball when it was handed off. We signaled a screen play to Buddy; it worked, he scored and the game was over."

Other memories Thompson has of the school, the community and the teams was that R.L. Dennen was responsible for the nice football field, now known as Dennen Field, and how protective he was of the beautiful grass both there and at the high school.

"We couldn't walk on it anywhere," he remembered, "and they couldn't practice on the field until the night before a game, when they were allowed to run a few drills."

He said they played at the Thomas County Fair Grounds before that, on the dirt.

"Colby had the first activity bus too," Thompson said, "and Wilbur Morris kept it in good shape. I think we were pretty impressive when we pulled into another school with a special activity bus that used to be a Greyhound bus."

"Don Phillips even had a special little crow's nest at the top of the stands where he could take movies of the game. Then he'd hurry down to his theater and get the film ready to be sent to Kansas City with the film distributors who came through to all the movie houses. We always had it back in time to review before our next game, so we had game films to review when no one else did."

Many things stand out in Thompson's memories of his years as a student. Among them was the support from the community, the transition from R.L. Dennen to J.H. Nickel, and that Nickel had said how hard it was to try to fill Dennen's shoes. He also recalled that there was no problem getting teachers then, because teachers wanted to come to be a part of the Colby school system.

Thompson took over his father's furniture store business in Colby for several years after attending college. He left Colby in 1984, and has since, worked as a consultant in the furniture store industry across the nation from border to border and coast to coast, and with the furniture liquidation business.

He lives in Parker, Colo., with his wife.



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