

Nov. 9-15, 1969

By Tom Bodle

At the dawn of the second week of November, Vikings were scurrying about their neighborhoods seeking to beg, borrow or steal Cleveland Plain Dealer sports sections. In its third year, the "Favorite Coach Contest", was sponsored by the P.D. Ballots were printed in the sports sections over several weeks. Fans of high school football coaches would clip and fill out the ballots, then send them to the Plain Dealer. The winner would be recognized at the Plain Dealer Charity football double header on November 15th. Viking faithful wished to keep their favorite coach, Bill Gutbrod, number one. There was stiff competition for the award. Augie Bossu, the revered Benedictine coach, had his Bengals undefeated and sitting atop many local polls. Chet Rojeck had developed Euclid into a powerhouse, with only a two point loss to St. Joe to blemish the Panther's record. The battle for ballots on the eastside would be intense.

Printed in the news sections this week of the same Plain Dealer was the disturbing revelation of a massacre of Vietnamese civilians by an American force led by Lt. William Calley. This disturbing event shocked the nation and ramped up further anti-war sentiment. The atrocity was added to focal points of an already scheduled march on Washington on November 15th. Over two million protesters gathered in D.C., marching to the steps of the capital to protest the continuation of the U.S. presence in Vietnam.

Other notable events found this week in the pages of the Plain Dealer included: the inauguration of Carl Stokes for his second term as Mayor of Cleveland. Stokes was the first African-American mayor elected to run a major city. In business, Dave Thomas founded a new fast food restaurant in Columbus. He named it "Wendy's" after his daughter. In television, PBS premiered "Sesame Street". Yes it was not too late to learn our ABC's before graduation.





Returning to the halls of St. Joseph after the weekend, students were greeted with the November issue of the Norseman. The eight page edition contained a variety of school news items, reactions to the October Moratorium and a preview of the winter sports season to come. The Cross Country team was heralded for capturing the State Championship. But a plea to the football team to “make it 9-0” was what was on everyone’s mind.



Anticipation for the “big game” versus St. Edward at Cleveland stadium grew more intense with each passing day during the week. Friday was “Calm Before the Storm” day. As in the previous year spirit was gearing up to have a special climax to prepare for an undefeated season with a victory over the Eagles. The spirit committee, homerooms and some clubs plastered the hallways and gym with signs. On Friday “the calm” prevailed in the building. Two thousand people traversed the corridors, where only the shuffling of feet could be heard.

At the end of the day, the football team was asked to report to the stage, where they were seated behind the closed curtain. Quietly, students filled the gym to take their place for the rally. And then “the storm!” “Introducing the 1969 St. Joseph High School Football Team!” The band struck up “the Saints”, the curtain opened and a roar that shook East 185th street began the rally. Captains spoke. Coach Gutbrod energized the crowd. Spirit abounded. And that “Favorite Coach Contest”... Chuck Webster from the Plain Dealer teased the crowd by indicating that you can’t always win. There was nothing wrong with being second. But then he set off a frenzy by proclaiming that coming in second would have to wait, Coach Gutbrod won the contest. The gym was electric as students departed and prepared for the encounter versus St. Ed.



Saturday, November 15th was a cold and blustery day. Temperatures dipped into the 20’s as a bitter cold front hit northern Ohio. The cold, cavernous Cleveland Municipal Stadium was the scene for windswept snow as the Plain Dealer doubleheader commenced. St. Ignatius opened the event with its 12:30 match-up versus Benedictine. The Bengals and St. Joe were neck and neck in a variety of local high school ratings. Both teams were favored to win this weekend. Performances would be key for postseason accolades. Many Viking faithful arrived early to see the Senate contest. Ignatius surprised everyone by stifling Benedictine in the first half, leading 7-0 at the break. The Bengals recovered with an eighteen point second half to win the city title game 18-7.



It was St. Joe’s turn to show what they had. In what Coach Gutbrod stated “was overall our best game”, the Vikings dominated the Eagles. Bob Bobrowski scored on runs of 49 and 1 yard. Kevin Flynt crossed the goal line on a 7 yard scamper. The defense, masterful the entire season, earned its fourth shutout, even scoring on a two point safety. As the game neared its conclusion, the “go, go...St. Joe” cadence

echoed throughout the stadium. Spirited Vikings climbed to the upper deck, where they flipped empty seats to proclaim "St. Joe, #1". The 22-0 victory capped off a perfect season and an undefeated career for the class of 1970.



What a rally! What a game! But the Homecoming Dance was yet to come. After Friday's rally, the Homecoming committee and its minions took over the gym, with the goal of creating a Viking castle to celebrate the Homecoming Dance. Working late into the evening and prior to the game "the Viking Saga" was created. As guests arrived on Saturday night, some still frozen from the football game, they crossed over the castle's drawbridge. A decree greeted them, posted on the castle wall. It heralded the Viking saga of history and the modern saga at St. Joseph High School. A semblance of a Viking ship docked under the crystal ball served as the area of honor for Homecoming Queen Marcy Capadona and her court. The stage band entertained the crowd with some big band tunes and a pop band allowed the celebrants to dance the night away. It was a magical night to conclude an epic weekend in Viking lore.

At St. Joseph, the students conducted a voting campaign for Gutbrod in The Plain Dealer's Favorite Coach contest on this basis: "Win it for Coach Gutbrod as a man, not as a coach." At last count, Gutbrod was one of the three front runners.

St. Joe fullback Kevin Flynt says: "He's like Lombardi. He doesn't stand for any horsing around."

Guard, co-captain Don Dailey: "He knows there's only one way to play football — tough. So he presents a tough front. But you're never sure if it's a front or not."

Guard, co-captain Ed Bestvina: "His house is like Grand Central Station. You can always stop there for good food from Mrs. Gutbrod and good conversation."

Quarterback Bob Bobrowski: "He can get you up for anything. He could get you up to take the mud out of your cleats."

Dailey: "He deals in the human element. He takes all the specialized football knowledge from the other coaches and puts it together."

Flynt: "His pregame and halftime talks are unbelievable."

Tackle Chuck Moore: "He could have any college job in the country. But he stays here because he likes to mold men."