

Dec. 1-7, 1969

By Tom Bodle

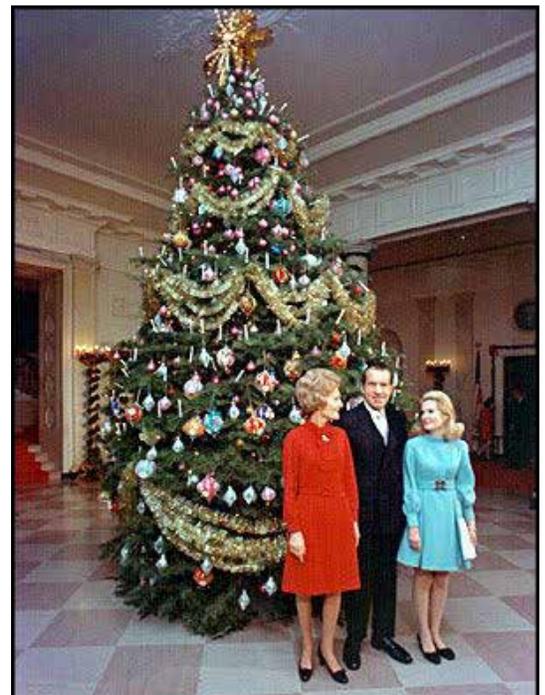
Turkey leftovers and Christmas shopping were on the menu for the first week of December, 1969. The Thanksgiving holiday officially began the Christmas season as Americans crowded shopping plazas and department stores in search of gifts to place under their Christmas trees. Santa Claus made visits throughout north-east Ohio, to street corners and toy departments, and his helper “Mr. Jing-a-ling” could be found on Halle’s 7th floor. Popular toys on children’s wish list were dolls from the “Barbie” collection and cars with race tracks from “Hot Wheels.” But, in the year of the moon landing, it was “Snoopy-Astronaut” that won the title as the most treasured item from Santa’s toy shop. The average family in the United States would spend \$360 on Christmas presents, contributing over \$72 billion to the national economy.



In Washington, President Richard Nixon, First Lady Pat and their daughter Trisha unveiled their first White House Christmas tree. A Blue Spruce from Ohio graced the “Blue Room”. Disabled workers from Florida fashioned satin balls decorated with pictures of the state flowers of all 50 states that were placed on the tree. A 65 foot Norway spruce from New York glistened as the national Christmas tree outside on the northside of the White House.

Toys and trees were also topics at St. Joe in the first week of December. The Cinema Club in conjunction with student council and several girl schools held a December toy drive. In its second year, new and used toys were collected for St. Agatha church to be distributed to needy families in Cleveland.

The senior class, through the efforts of President Bob Biscup and Vice President Ed Bestvina, promoted a Christmas tree sale. Bob and Ed had campaigned for their positions with the promise of raising enough money to underwrite the cost of our senior prom. Ed remembered that they wished “every senior would go to the three day prom event free of charge.” The Christmas tree sale would be the first major fundraiser. Ed recalled it was almost





a disaster. He and Bob had arranged with Villa Angela to use their front lawn as the site to sell the trees. They along with several seniors met the truck hauling the trees on the first weekend of December at VA. The driver insisted all money was to be paid up front or he would take the trees back. Having no money in the class treasury, a catastrophe was in the making. Bob found a phone and contacted the business owner. Somehow Bob convinced him to leave the trees on consignment. One issue was overcome, but sellers became the next issue. Hoping selling trees on weekends with only one hour shifts would encourage sellers, hardly anyone signed up. Minimum crews staffed the hours of the sale. Several classmates did duty beyond the call to fill the schedule. Expected help from Villa Angela seniors failed to materialize. The weather on the weekends was cold, damp and rainy. Ed recalls sales were pathetic. Fortunately, the weekend prior to Christmas provided a surge of tree buyers. By Christmas Eve, the entire stock of trees had been sold. A catastrophe was avoided, a promise kept, albeit through the chilled bones and sleepless nights for Bob, Ed and crew.

High school and college football seasons were completed by this first week, but professional football was reaching the climax of its season. Being "Browns Town," Cleveland was excited about its 1969 version of the Browns. The team was sitting on top of the Century Division of the National Football League. Hopes were high to participate in Super Bowl III. The Browns were thrashed by the Minnesota Vikings 51-3 on November 2nd, but were on a winning streak going into a December 7th match with the Green Bay Packers. The Pack was not as formidable as they were several years before, but had not lost to Cleveland in thirteen seasons. It was a gloomy, rainy day on the Cleveland lakefront. The stadium's turf was a quagmire of mud and grass. The Browns, behind running back Leroy Kelly's 151 rushing yards, were able to send Green Bay packing back to Wisconsin. Cleveland prevailed 20-7 to improve their record to 9-2-1.

Perhaps of greater interest to the St. Joseph community was the half-time performance at the Browns-Packers game. The Viking marching band, conducted by Norm Novak and the chorus, led by Tom Weiss were invited to perform in front of 78,000 people and a national television audience. The band's columbia blue uniforms along with the chorus' red robes provided a vivid contrast to the gloomy sky and muddy stadium field. The instrumental performance featured "Spinning Wheel," "The New World Symphony," and the "Man of La Mancha." Mr. Weiss wowed the crowd, as a soloist, in the chorus' rendition of "The Impossible Dream." The St. Joseph Music program did themselves proud on the big stage.

High school wrestling season opened on the first weekend of December. Coach John Storey led his grapplers against two of the area's finest wrestling programs, Cleveland Heights and Willoughby South. Invading the Heights gym on Friday, seniors Bill Montana and Mark Hum-

mer had important wins, but the Tigers held a six point advantage going into the final match. In a dramatic one minute pin, heavy-weight Jeff Myers downed his opponent allowing the Vikings to tie mighty Heights. The next evening, Willoughby South entered the "Purple Place" to a packed house. A dejavu evening, St. Joe trailed the Rebels by three going into the final match. Jeff Myers once again was true to the test defeating his opponent 6-2 in an exciting finale, allowing the wrestlers to tie the Rebels. Jeff's heroics earned him "Wrestler of the Week" honors in the Cleveland Press.

The basketball team entered the first weekend in December with a 3-0 record. Chanel was the Friday night opponent as the Vikings hosted their first Crown Conference game of the season. Senior forward Pat Lyons struggled against the Firebirds in the first quarter, missing ten shots. But what followed was epic. "P Ly" finished the game with 15 of 19 field goals and 11 of 15 free throws for 41 points, a school record! Jim Hill contributed 15 points as the hoopers downed Chanel 94-69. Student Council had scheduled a post game mixer featuring "New Midnight Review" after the game. It was certainly an appropriate celebration of Pat Lyons' record breaking performance.

Unfortunately the basketball team was unable to carry their momentum with them to Mansfield the next evening. St. Peter High School, a powerhouse in Ohio's smaller school division, was waiting for the Vikings and proved to be quite inhospitable. St. Joe struggled to get any cohesiveness. Only Pat Lyons played well with a 29 point performance as the Vikings went down to defeat for the first time, 86-61. For his 70 point weekend, Pat was named as a basketball "Player of the Week" by both the Plain Dealer and Press.

