

# Merle Stonebraker

## Tyrone hero helped Bucknell become Eastern football power

By JOHN HARTSOCK  
*Altoona Mirror*

The late Merle Stonebraker was a ground-breaker in Tyrone's rich athletic history.

Stonebraker went by the nicknames "Stoney" and "Tarzan," both monikers that served as testaments to his iron will and strong physical constitution.

Stonebraker, who died at the age of 82 in 1990, was a tackle on Tyrone's first undefeated football team in 1924, and also coached Tyrone's 1940 team under Steve Jacobs that shared the Pennsylvania state title with Shenendoah High School of Shamokin.

The two teams played to a scoreless tie on a muddy field in Shamokin.

Stonebraker, who went on to graduate from the New York Military Academy in 1928, also carved his niche on the collegiate level at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, where he was an outstanding two-way end and was named a member of the Little All-American team in 1931.

During Stonebraker's playing days at Bucknell, the school's football team chalked up an unbeaten season and three victories over Penn State.

Stonebraker received a bachelor of science

degree from Bucknell, a masters degree from Penn State, and taught in the history department of the Tyrone Area School District for 40 years, until his retirement in 1973.

A three-sport standout — football, basketball and track — at Tyrone, he was on the Tyrone High School football and basketball coaching staffs during the 1930s and 1940s.

Stonebraker was a contributor on Tyrone's first unbeaten football team, the 1924 unit that posted a 9-0-1 record under head coach W.J. Skean.

Tyrone's team that year posted shutout victories over Saxton (70-0), Lewistown (12-0), Mifflintown (70-0), Roaring Spring (61-0), Huntingdon (14-0) and Hollidaysburg (20-0).

Tyrone surrendered only 25 total points to the opposition that year, including six in a tie with Altoona.

"I wish that I had been a little spectator way back then to watch all his athletic accomplishments," laughed the oldest of

Merle and Louise Stonebraker's three children, 61-year-old Merle Louise Stonebraker Ammerman, who still lives in Tyrone.

She appreciated her father's most important contributions, however — that of a loving father, devoted teacher, and well-respected coach.

"He was a strict but loving father who cared



Following graduation from Bucknell, Merle returned to teach at native Tyrone.

about the education of his kids," said Merle Louise, who, like her younger sister, Susan Stonebraker Thimlar (now living in Elkart, Ind.) went on to college and a career as a teacher.

Middle child David A. graduated from Williamson Trade School in Media, Pa., and now owns a construction company in Quakertown.

"He wanted to give us the best that he could," Merle Louise said of her late father. "As a teacher and a coach, he had a good rapport with the kids, and with their parents. But they knew he meant business. He was a disciplinarian."

Merle Stonebraker wore many hats during his adult days.

"He was a very busy person," his daughter Merle Louise said. "He was a (PIAA) football official as well as a coach, and he was always on the road, going to a game. He was a playground director in Tyrone for many years, in charge of six or seven playgrounds that are gone now.

"When he was in charge of those playgrounds, he was also in charge of public ice skating at Reservoir Park during the winter season," she added. "Many times, he was out there shoveling the snow himself so that the kids had an opportunity to skate."

Merle Stonebraker carried that kind of dedication over to his athletic and coaching careers. As an assistant under Jacobs in the 1940

season, he often served the capacity of scouting upcoming opponents.

Harry Sickler, a prominent Tyrone businessman who played football for the Golden Eagles before graduating in 1948, remains one of Stonebraker's biggest fans.

"He was not only a great coach, but he was a great teacher," Sickler said of Stonebraker. "He excelled in his desire to reach the students as best as he could."

Stonebraker often spoke of the 1940 state football championship game with Shenendoah that was supposed to decide the state title, but ended in a tie. Back then, there was no system to break ties, even in a state championship game.

"Against Shenendoah, the field was in such bad shape that people were sliding everywhere,"

remembered Merle Louise's husband, Don Ammerman. "On a dry field, I think (Tyrone) could have beaten them."

In 1983, Stonebraker received the Public Educator Promotion Award. In 1984, he was honored with the Tyrone Area High School Outstanding Employee Recognition Award. In February 1986, he was honored by the Tyrone Elks Club for his contributions to education, and in October 1987 he was a charter honoree of the Tyrone Area High School Monogram Club.

## *Stonebraker bio*

**Sport:** Football.

**High school:** Tyrone, 1926.

**College:** Bucknell.

**Hall of Fame achievement:**  
Earned Little All-American honors at Bucknell.

**Current residence:** Deceased.  
Posthumous award will be accepted by widow, Louise.



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