

INDUCTEE PROFILE



After signing with Penn State, Bill Huber poses with Lion coach Rip Engle (left) and fellow Blair County native Galen Hall.

Leading the way

Huber's success at PSU opened doors for other locals

By Neil Rudel
Altoona Mirror

From the beginning of his football playing career, Bill Huber was surrounded by greatness.

At Our Lady of Lourdes, he was in the same backfield as Eddie Flanagan, and he was coached by Flanagan's father, Ed, a former semi-pro football player.

Bill had a larger frame than most of his teammates — so large that he needed a special set of shoulder pads to fit him.

"I ended up borrowing Steve Lach's," Huber said.

Flanagan and Lach — both former NFL players — were inducted with the Blair County Sports Hall Fame's first two classes, 1987 and 1988.

Huber, who went from Lourdes to a standout career at Bishop Guilfoyle before earning a scholarship at Penn

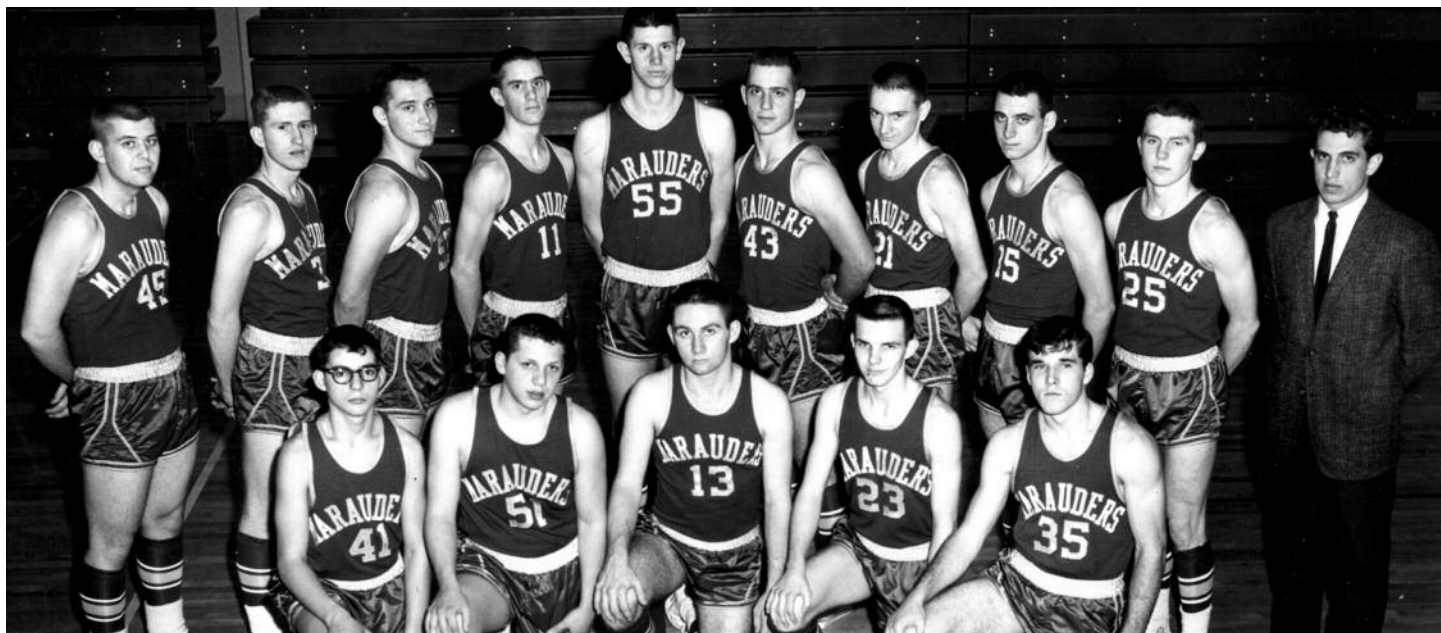
State, will be enshrined this weekend.

"I owe my roots to the parochial school system," Huber said.

Having grown to 5-foot-10 and 175 pounds and used to competing against players "four and five years older," Huber started at linebacker for BG as a freshman and was one of two ninth-graders to earn varsity letters.

"He could stuff anything coming his way, and he could run down anything around his side," former BG coach Paul Bradley said, "and on offense, pretty much anything you threw up he could catch."

Huber attended the 1959 Liberty Bowl in Philadelphia between Penn State and Alabama and that stoked his interest in playing college football. His development continued, and by the time he graduated from BG in 1962, he was considered a college prospect.



Bill (43) was part of a 1961-62 BG basketball team that was loaded with talent. Other players included, front row, from left: Bob Iuzzolino, Dick Mauk, Bill Hoff, Dave Shannon, Gene Adams. Back row: Allan Conrad, Eddie Miller, Tom Wiley, Rick Kaiser, Len Zandy, Bill Huber, Dick Moran, Joe Durbin, Mike Irwin and coach John Hyder. A total of seven of the players went on to play Division I football or basketball.

"I was thrilled about seeing competition at the collegiate level," he said. "When I got home from the Liberty Bowl, a neighbor, Al Kendall, took me under his wing and showed me the (PSU) campus. During that process, I didn't have a lot of contact with colleges."

Huber's dad, Al, a sports official, assured his son "if you're good enough, they'll find you."

And sure enough, thanks in part to West Branch coach Bob Forney providing film that was sent to Penn State, that was the case. A young Nittany Lion assistant coach named Dan Radakovich found Huber — naked.

"He came down to recruit me at a basketball game, and he found me in the shower," Huber said. "He gave me a forearm shiver, and I reacted like he'd hoped I react — I was ready to pounce on him."

After Huber picked Penn State,

"the doors opened to other schools and they started showing up."

He visited Notre Dame, was interviewed by Pitt, and considered Arizona State, which was coached by Windber native Frank Kush, before his dad put an end to it.

"My dad told me I had made my decision," Huber said. "He had more wisdom than I did, and he felt I had made the right decision."

Huber did, too. He became a three-year letterman and two-year starter who led the team in receptions with 25 during his junior year (1964) and made 40 in his career as a tight end.

Huber performed in the last era when the players went both ways. He remembers stopping Oregon's Mel Renfro in a goal-line situation as a sophomore in 1963 and playing a positive defensive role in a win over Ohio State the same year.

"It was late in the (Ohio State) ballgame, and I could hear Coach (Rip) Engle along the sidelines yelling at me to cover the wide receiver man-to-man, which I did, and the receiver didn't catch a pass

the rest of the game," Huber said. "The receiver turned out to be Paul Warfield."

Then again, Huber joked, "but Ohio State never threw the ball, either."

Huber lettered both ways in 1963, then was switched to tight end as a junior. Prior to the switch, he also played running back, guard, line-backer and defensive end.

"I think one of the strong points of the coaching staff at Penn State is they were able to find athletes who could compete at several positions," he said. "Today it's more specialized. Back then, they were more interested in trying to find athletes. They could develop you as a player over time."

The Lions upset No. 2 Ohio State in 1964 and went 18-12 during Huber's three seasons.

"My senior year was Rip's last year," Huber said. "Rip was a great coach but more importantly he was one heck of a human being. I would live or die for the gentleman."

"He was a great mentor. The college experience was not only great for me from the win-loss column, but we represented the university and more importantly the university and the coaches truly believed we were students. To this day, I truly appreciate what that university did for me in that area."

Huber often went up against defensive end Jerry Sandusky in practice.



Huber bio

Sport: Football
High school: Bishop Guilfoyle
College: Penn State
Hall of Fame achievement: Two-year starter, three-year letterman (1963-65) at Penn State
Current residence: Montoursville

Sandusky will serve as his Hall of Fame presenter.

"Bill was a nifty football player," the Lions' former defensive coordinator said. "He had really good hands. He didn't have tremendous speed or size, but he had a great knack for getting open. He was the same way as a blocker. He got himself in good position so the running back could cut one way or another. He hands were really good, and he was always able to find an opening in the secondary."

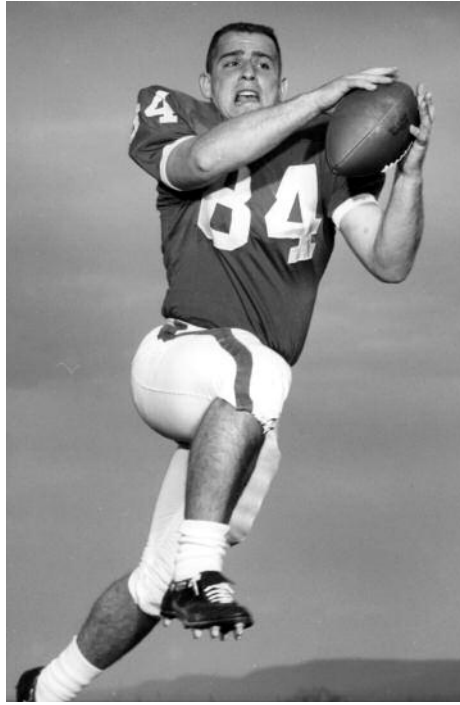
Sandusky also enjoyed Huber's "dynamic" personality.

"Bill was always laughing and had a good time and we'd have fun in the locker room," he said.

Joe Paterno said Huber, in addition to tangible contributions, was good for team morale.

"Bill was a real hustler," Paterno said. "He wasn't the biggest guy at his position, but he was tough and he was a lot of fun. He was a good personality and a good football player."

Huber's favorable impression led to the recruitment of several other Altoona players in the 1960s such as former high school teammate Mike Irwin, who was followed to PSU by Gerry Sanker, Mel Frye, Mike Reid and John Ebersole and Johnstown greats



Bill led the Nittany Lions in receptions as a junior in 1964.

Steve Smear and Jack Ham.

"I feel very honored and fortunate to be maybe one of the first to venture to Happy Valley," Huber said. "I never in

my wildest dreams thought it would be a continual flow of athletes out of our region for a number of years afterward. Did I have influence on fellows going there? I hope I did."

Irwin, who captained the 1966 team, felt that was the case.

"Huber could do it all," Irwin said. "He was fundamentally sound as far as blocking and tackling. He had good hands, and he was pretty versatile athlete."

Huber and Irwin were teammates at BG and fellow backfield mates Tom Wiley (Purdue) and Bill Hoff (Buffalo) also went Division I.

"At that time, we had a lot of good players," Irwin said. "The fact that he did well kept the door open for me and other athletes coming out of Altoona."

Today, Huber, 66, is vice president of finance for Muncy Homes, Inc., and lives in Montoursville. He and his wife, Pat, have two children.

The former Marauder and Lion is humbled by his Hall of Fame induction.

"I don't think words can really explain my true feelings," he said. "It's truly an honor for me, but more importantly it's an honor for my family — and that family includes all the prior athletes I competed with or against."

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