

INDUCTEE PROFILE

'Meant for basketball'

Appleman left mark on Williamsburg, Blair County

By Jim Lane

Altoona Mirror

It's been said that Williamsburg kids learn to shoot hoops as soon as they can walk.

Don Appleman did.

"We grew up with the tradition," said Appleman, who has lived almost all of his 67 years in his hometown as a student, athlete, coach, athletic director and leader of the community's summer recreation program.

Appleman is being inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2012 for his accomplishments as a player, although he's also been a successful coach for more than 20 years.

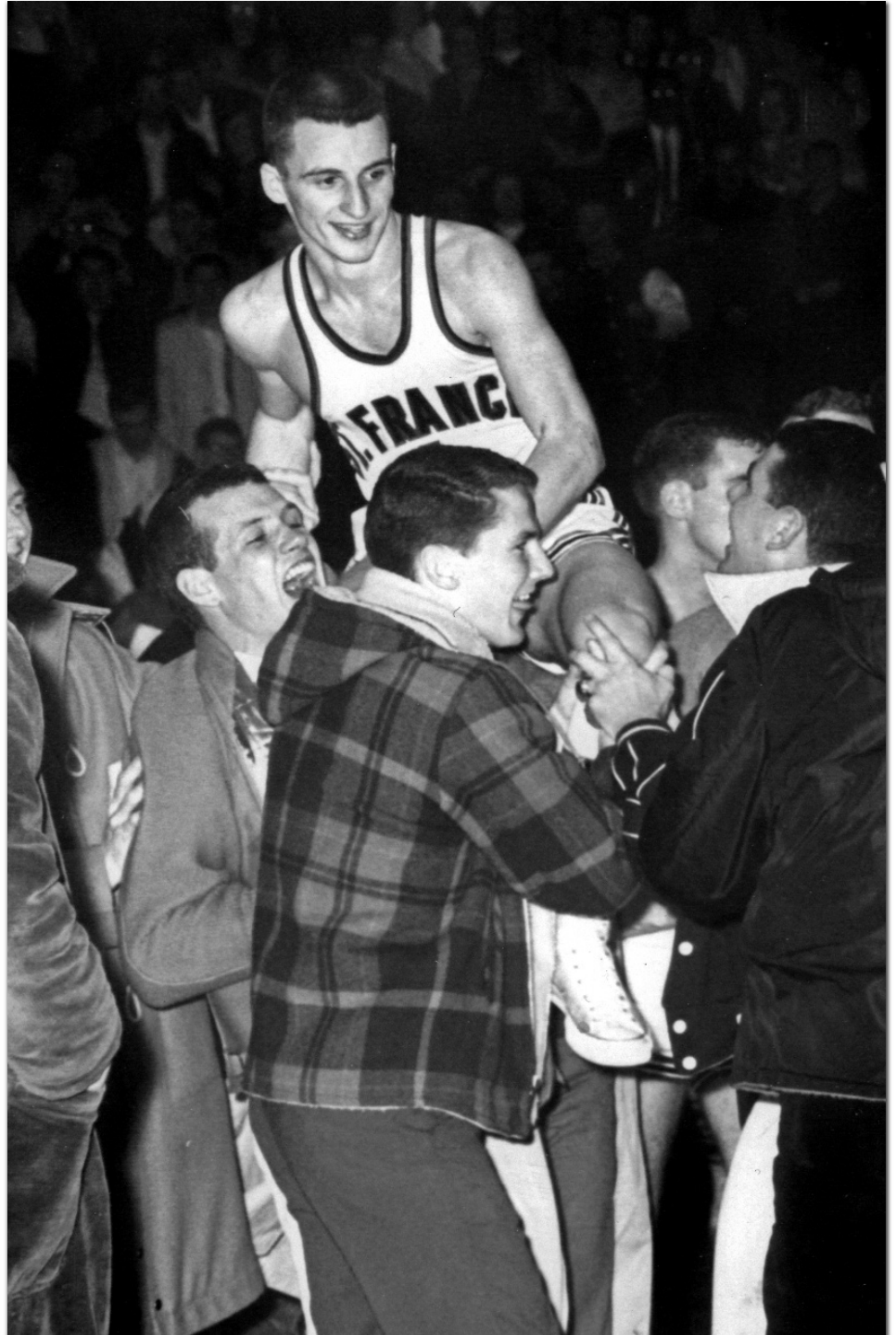
Appleman was a three-time all-state basketball player at Williamsburg, including first team as a senior in 1962, when he was named the Pennsylvania High School Player of the Year for Class B and C. He averaged 21 points per game for his high school career, which was long before the 3-point shot, and held the Blair County scoring record of 2,100 points for 33 seasons before it was broken by Central's Ben Bithell in 1996.

"When I was in grade school, the high school team started to be successful. They won the (Class C) state championship in 1958, and I kept the statistics," he noted, recalling players like Galen Hall and Eldon Lower.

Growing up, Appleman admired coaches Bill Casper and Bill Rhodes. Casper coached the Blue Pirates' state championship team in 1958 but left to coach in Pittsburgh when Appleman was a freshman.

"He was so charismatic, a phenomenal personality and a great motivator," Appleman said. "We were devastated when he left."

Dick Buckley took over the program Appleman's sophomore season and the Pirates began to have success again.



Don Appleman is carried from the court at the Jaffa Mosque after leading a St. Francis victory.



Don was the leader of Williamsburg's 1961-62 team. Team members include, front row, from left: Jerry Hoy, Don, Allen Reed, Dan Defers. Back row: Manager Melvin Wyland, Duane Tate, Wayne Loose, Bob Kagarise, Larry Ross, Coach Dick Buckley.

"Don Appleman was meant for basketball," Buckley said. "He was one of the very, very best, a guy you could always rely on. Could you imagine him with the 3-point shot? He was a leader by example and just a great, great player."

"Dick Buckley was my inspiration to coach," Appleman said. "We had the greatest respect and love for him. He was a gentleman and an iron-fisted disciplinarian."

Appleman's junior year the Pirates lost only three games, including the Class C state championship to West

Reading. Appleman was the only returning starter as a senior and the Pirates finished 18-6, losing to Gallitzin in the District 6 finals. He was named the state's top small-school player and became only one of a dozen players to score 2,000 points.

Others in the 2,000-point club at the time were Len Chappell, Tom Gola, Wayne Hightower, Wilt Chamberlain and Don Hennon. Except for Hennon, all were big men.

"I sneaked in there," said Appleman, a 5-foot-7 scoring machine. "My size gave me some problems in college because I was always playing

against guys six or seven inches taller."

Appleman considered St. Francis, Duquesne, Davidson and Juniata before deciding to go to Penn State. Unfortunately,

he contracted mononucleosis at Penn State and then transferred to St. Francis.

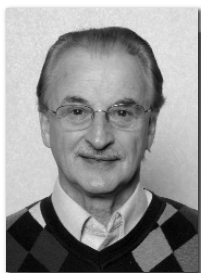
"I had to sit out a year and then played basketball two years and some baseball, too," he said. "I was lucky to play for a Hall of Fame coach in Doc Hughes. John Clark was his assistant, and I learned a lot from him."

Clark, now retired and living in Florida, remembers Appleman as "a very good kid."

"He was quick and a hustler," Clark said. "To score that many points you have to have talent and expertise. He was very bright and a hard worker."

Appleman averaged double figures both years at St. Francis, and had a 32-point night against St. Vincent. He also scored 16 at Louisville.

"I played with Sandy Williams, who was as good as St. Francis ever had," Appleman said. "I played against (Duquesne's) Willie Somerset and Larry Brown, who was with the AAU Akron Goodyears. I also played with and against Norm Van Lier in various post-season tournaments around the state.



Appleman bio

Sport: Basketball
High school: Williamsburg
College: St. Francis
Hall of Fame achievement: Two-year letterman at St. Francis held Blair County scoring record for 30 years.
Current residence: Williamsburg

I had tremendous respect for him.”

Following graduation, Appleman began his teaching and coaching career at Central High School.

“It was a great place to start, and I owe a lot to them,” Appleman said.

“Joe Conlon was the head coach and I was his assistant the first two years. Joe is a special person. He knew how to handle people.”

Appleman then became the Dragons' head coach for six years, winning the school's first Mountain League title in 1972.

When Charlie Funk, who succeeded Buckley, left Williamsburg to take another coaching job, Appleman was hired as the head coach of the Pirates boys program in 1978. Under Appleman, the Pirates won several Juniata Valley League championships, a couple of District 6 titles and recorded six consecutive 20-win seasons.

When his son, Christian, graduated in 1985, Don left coaching until Williamsburg asked him to return in 1989. He held the boys position until 1992 when he left the bench again. When his brother, Jeff, who had a successful run as the Lady Pirates coach,



Don still enjoys attempting hook shots.

stepped down, Don returned to coaching again, and he recently completed his 10th season.

Despite being one of the smallest schools in the state, Williamsburg has forged one of the best basketball tra-

ditions in District 6. The Pirates have played in eight state championship games — six boys and two girls. The boys were state champs in 1958 and 1966 and the girls won the gold in 1997. The school has sent eight players — four boys and four girls — to Division I college programs.

“We've had phenomenal teachers and coaches,” Appleman said. “It's always been like a family — inspirational and motivational. We were lucky to have such great people when we were growing up. They looked after us, taught us discipline, hard work and how to respect the game.”

Appleman also credited his late parents, Don and Annabelle.

“They were sports-minded and took us everywhere,” he said. “They were so focused on me, my brother (Jeff) and sister (Linda) all of the time.”

Appleman is humbled by his selection to the Hall of Fame.

“It's going to be nice to share it with my family,” he said. “Debbie (wife) has been such a great partner and Christian and his family have been great. I'm really looking forward to the night. It'll be fun.”

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