



Harry accumulated his share of awards during a distinguished coaching career.

Harry Clarke: **From the outset, coaching was his destiny**

by Bob Davis

Coaching football is all Harry Clarke Jr. ever really wanted to do. Next to playing major league baseball, that is.

But when he decided in 1943 that he didn't want to follow his father's advice and go into law and that he didn't have the talent to make the big leagues, Clarke turned his full attention to a coaching career.

A high hurdler and high jumper on the Altoona High Track team in the late 1930s, Clarke attended the University of Pittsburgh on a track scholarship, graduated in 1943 and then returned for a fifth year to earn his teaching credits. In the fall of

1944 he signed on as head coach and assistant in football and basketball at Burgettstown High under Ed McCluskey. It was a fortuitous assignment for the young Clarke.

"I firmly believe Ed McCluskey was the greatest basketball coach in America," said Clarke. "If he'd taken a college job when he was young, he would have been another John Wooden or Adolph Rupp." In 1944 McCluskey wasn't too shabby as a football coach, either.

"We were 9-0 until we lost in Glassport in the Class A championship, 26-14," Clarke said, flipping through a thick loose-leaf

folder containing all the important number of those years.

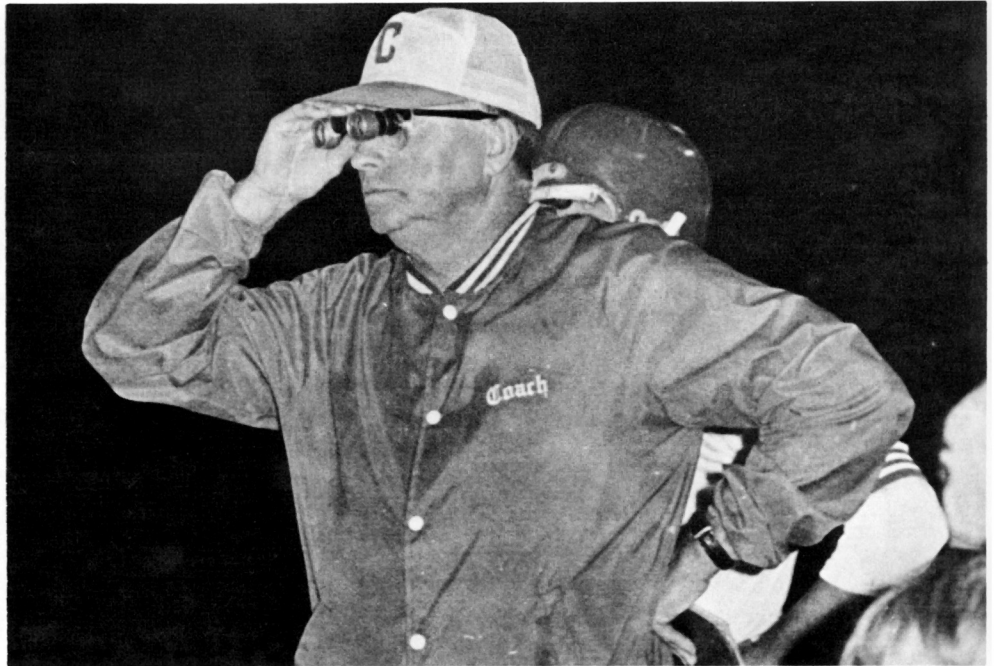
In 1945, Clarke landed his first head football post, at Verona, was beaten 7-6 in his first game, didn't notch win No. 1 until the fourth game (6-0 over West Deer), and swallowed a 3-5 season. His second year at Verona spelled more of the same and in 1947 he moved along to Midway for three years. Football was his first love but Clarke coached almost every other available sport and was also principal "and janitor," he chuckled. Ralph Felton having helped to enhance his reputation, Clarke took his act to Reynoldsville in 1950. At Reynoldsville,

Clarke coached ex-baseball great Sparky Lyle in football.

Coaching basketball for another five years and building a reputation as a football tutor, Clarke stayed at Reynoldsville through the 1964 campaign, when Reynoldsville's merger with DuBois brought on a house-cleaning of coaches. Now married and with a young son to feed, Clarke went job-hunting.

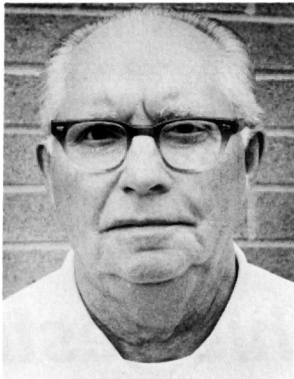
He'd tried several times unsuccessfully to return to his home, Altoona High, Tyrone, Bedford and Bellwood-Antis. To his surprise, he was elected head coach at Bellwood in 1955 — two years after he'd first applied and had received no response. He turned it down.

Running out of openings in the spring of 1965, Clarke applied at Central when Bob Holmes vacated the post after one season. Clarke came to Martinsburg for an interview, went back to his Reynoldsville classroom and was soon visited and observed by three Spring



Because of his eyesight, Coach Clarke occasionally used binoculars on the sidelines.

HARRY CLARKE



Age: 73

Sport: Football (coach), track.

High School: Altoona Area.

College: University of Pittsburgh.

Hall of Fame Achievement:
Inducted into the Pennsylvania Coaches Hall of Fame. Posted a record of 221-86-6, and won 100 games at Central High School.

Current Occupation: Retired as teacher/coach from Central School District.

Current Residence: Roaring Spring, PA.

Cove administrators anxious that he be the right man for the job. "They were all over town checking me out," Clarke said. "Then they came back to the school and pulled out a contract. Barb was teaching, too, at the time and I asked her to come have a look at it. Remember?"

He turned to his wife.

"We signed in the Home Ec. Room that afternoon."

Clarke was the right man. In 1969, Central was 10-0-0, Clarke's third undefeated season.

"I guess the three games that meant the most to me were the ones that finished the unbeaten season," he said. His 1953 Reynoldsville team went 9-0-0 by beating Brookville 19-6 and the 1964 team, which allowed only two touchdowns in a 9-0-0 year, closed by beating Brookville 12-6. Chief Logan fell 31-6 to cap Central's '69 season.

Barb Clarke, who filmed her husband's games from bus roofs, rickety press boxes, and light poles over the years, lugged 1-year-old Chip along to watch Coach Clarke's 100th career triumph in 1961. Alas, poor Brookville was victimized again, this time 13-0. The Reynoldsville quarterback in that game, Richie Gordon, has never missed seeing at least one Clarke-coached game since

and he was at Bellefonte in '75 when Clarke claimed No. 200.

Only three losing seasons in the last 32 ... an advantage of 6,196 points to 2,902 ... a 107-38 edge in shutouts ... a 220-86-16 overall ledger, including 100-32-6 at Central ... all these pluses, and what does Harry Clarke Jr. consider the most important fruit of his labors?

"Respect," he said. "I run into players I had way back in the early '50s and they say "Hi, Coach." Some of them are 43, 44 years old! I don't get upset if some of them call me "Harry" but that respect is nice. And I've learned to respect other coaches, men who are good winners and good losers. And I think they respect me.

"Ed McCluskey taught me a lot about teaching and coaching. He was a very strict disciplinarian. 'You gotta be the boss,' he said.

"All you can do is ask a kid to play as hard as you can. You've got to be able to accept mistakes, because we all make 'em. Players and coaches too. Over those 300-some games the kids played hard."

Among the top players Clarke coached at Central: Mark Raugh and Brian Gates. Both played at West Virginia. At Midway, he coached Felton, a standout at Maryland who played in the NFL.