

Frank (second row, third from left) was part of the championship Lions' softball team of Altoona in the 1950's. Hall of Fame corporate sponsor Paul Condrin (second row, far left) was also a member of the team.

Frank Smith:

Three-sport athlete impressed with talent, integrity

By John Hartsock

His father died of diphtheria when he was a young teen, forcing him to grow up quickly.

He came of age during the Great Depression of the 1920's, when having a roof over your head, a bowl of home-made potato soup to eat at the dinner table, and simple but important intangibles like the support and love of family were the benchmarks of personal success.

Frank Smith, who died in 1991 at 78 from the effects of Alzheimer's Disease, is a member of the 1996 induction class of the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

He was voted into Blair Hall of Fame because of an impressive resume of athletic accomplishments that included nine varsity letters – three apiece in football, basketball and baseball – earned at Penn State University in the 1930's, and a career as a powerful right handed pitcher that was so suc-

cessful that he earned a tryout with the New York (now San Francisco) Giants baseball team.

But the scope of Smith's personal success extended well beyond the athletic horizon, and he is remembered more so in that realm by loved ones and associates than in any other.

Smith transcended the adversity of his young adulthood and scaled the corporate ladder to the top of his pro-

fession through his solid work ethic. That work ethic, along with his personal qualities of kindness and altruism, earned him the respect and endearment of nearly everybody with whom he came in contact.

A 1929 graduate of Altoona Catholic (now Bishop Guilfoyle) High School, Smith was compelled by economic and personal circumstances to take a job as an elevator operator at the Pennsylvania Electric Company (Penelec) before enrolling at Penn State at the age of 21.

It was a testament to his perseverance that, after graduating from college in 1937, Smith eventually became president of the esteemed Johnstown-based company in 1973.

He succeeded N. Gwynne Dodson, whose professional career paralleled Smith's. Dodson, now 87, lives with his wife, Mildred, at Clover Drive in Hollidaysburg.

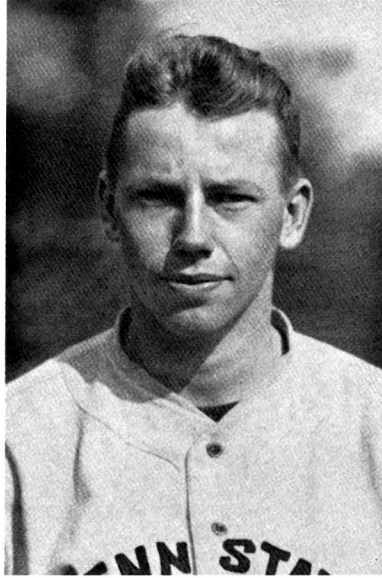
"Frank and I were associated at Penelec from 1939 on," Dodson said. "Frank was a fantastic guy. I knew him when he was going to school. He started (his professional career) as a district representative for Penelec for the business district in Lewistown in 1939. When I was taken to Johnstown as company president in 1962, Frank accompanied me there to become general manager of sales. Then he was elected company president when I retired in 1973."

"I always thought that if I could find 12 men like Frank Smith to work in my company, and I had the money to hire the other 11 in reserve, I would," Dodson said. "He was truly an outstanding individual."

One who took the path from the humble status of elevator operator in his pre-college and college vacation days to rise to the top floor of the company prior to his retirement.

"We always used to talk and laugh about the days when he dug holes and helped put in telephone poles for the line crew," said Frank's sister-in-law, Madeline Smith, who lives in Altoona and was married to Frank's brother, Robert. "I remember him as an absolute gentleman who put his best foot forward in anything he ever did. He was a very kind person. I can't think of a nicer guy than Frank

Frank Smith



Age: Deceased.

Sport: Football, baseball and basketball.

High School: Altoona.

College: Penn State.

Hall of Fame achievement: Won nine letters at Penn State.

Acceptance: Frank's widow, Emily, will accept.

Smith."

Frank's widow, Emily, who lives in Sarasota, Fla. – where the couple shared a retirement home – remembers that kindness, and still misses him deeply. The couple was married 44 years, and had no children. "He was a very, very kind and considerate husband," said Emily, a Massachusetts native who is on hand tonight to receive Frank's induction award. "I lost my father in 1962, and Frank and I lived in Hollidaysburg. He was wonderful to my mother, who had an apartment with us on the second floor. You never forget that (kindness) in a husband."

Frank Smith also gave of himself

Frank Smith also gave of himself freely to the community. He served as the national president of the American Heart Association, president of the Penns Woods Boys Scout Council in Johnstown, and was also on the board at the Johnstown (now Conemaugh) Memorial Hospital.

"He was always willing to do volunteer work for organizations," Emily said.

His athletic accomplishments at Penn State are legendary, according to his nephew David, a special education teacher in the Altoona Area School District and the high school's former varsity softball coach.

"There are pictures of him all over Rec Hall (the building which served as the hub of Penn State indoor athletics before the erection of the Bryce Jordon Center)," Dave Smith said. "He was a tremendous athlete, even well into his 50's."

A guard on the Penn State basketball team, a tight end on the football team, and a pitcher on the baseball squad, Frank Smith never lost his competitive edge – even as a player in the Altoona Inter-Service Softball League.

"He excelled in all three major sports, but he was known throughout the state of Pennsylvania as an outstanding pitcher," David Smith said. "He played in baseball leagues throughout the state in his young adulthood, and he always took his brother, and my dad, Robert Smith, along as his catcher. They were very close. Uncle Frank insisted that he would pitch only if Robert would catch.

"I can remember Uncle Frank playing softball with my dad in the Inter-Service League, and my uncle played with the same intensity at the age of 45 as the guys who were 25. He was really quite an athlete."

Frank Smith also served as a PIAA football and basketball referee, but it was his humanity that left most indelible mark on his survivors.

"He always impressed me with his integrity," Dave Smith said. "He was a self-made man who was really quite a guy."