

Jim Curry:

Among Altoona's 'greatest of the great ones'

By Jim Lane

Altoona Mirror

Jim Curry isn't sure he belongs in the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

"I don't know if anybody deserves to be set apart. Athletic talent is God-given," said Curry, who will be a member of the eighth induction class.

"People like Bob Clarke, Herky Betar, Coach (Jim) O'Donnell, and Earl Strohm, they should be in the Hall of Fame," Curry said recently. "Without them, I never would have made anything."

Clarke ran a heating business in Altoona years ago. O'Donnell and Betar, who later became AAHS principal for many years, were the basketball coaches, and Strohm was football coach.

"We were poor growing up, and those guys looked after me," Curry continued. "They made a difference in my life. They were special. They're Hall of Famers."

Jim Curry was one of Altoona High's finest all-around athletes in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

As a sophomore, in 1958, he was a star on the basketball team that got to the PIAA state finals. He quarterbacked the 9-1 football team in 1959, a squad that Strohm always called one of his finest.

Curry was a versatile football player. He was a quarterback and kicker and earned all-state honors. He was equally at home on the basketball court and reportedly performed the first 360-dunk ever by an Altoona player. He also was a two-time MVP at the Cambria County War Memorial Tournament, at the time the finest tourney on the east coast.

"I'd say Jim Curry was one of the top two or three athletes we ever had at Altoona High," Herky Betar said. "You remember certain kids – Mel Frye, Tom Kerns, guys like that – but Jim Curry was the most outstanding of all. He had the ability to do whatever was necessary for a team to win.

"He's easily one of the top two or three athletes ever," Betar continued. "To me, Jim Curry and Mike Reid were the greatest of the great ones."

Curry was good enough to attract college offers in two sports.

"(Coach) Duffy Daugherty had me convinced to go to Michigan State as his quarterback," Curry said, "but Coach Blackburn at Cincinnati talked me out of it. When I



Cincinnati saw Jim's versatility and made him a receiver.

went to Cincinnati, they took me to a debutant ball. I didn't even know what it was. They dressed me up in a tux, Oscar Robertson gave me his shoes, and that sold me."

Curry had both highs and lows at UC. He was caught in a coaching change, was switched from quarterback to

Blair County Sports Hall of Fame '98

end, and even quit the squad for awhile. He went back as a junior and became one of the Bearcats' all-time leading receivers.

Curry was good enough to be drafted by the NFL Dallas Cowboys, but Tommy McDonald and Buddy Dial were the Dallas receivers, and he was released. The Chicago Bears picked up his waivers, but he didn't report and went back to Cincinnati.

"I played a year with the Canton Bulldogs in the (semi-pro) Continental League," Curry said. "I had some contacts from the NFL and AFL, but I didn't want to bounce around anymore."

Curry, who has a degree in physical education and history, went to work for Standard Oil in Cincinnati. After a couple of years with Frazier Products, which marketed home-care items, he started his own building restoration business.

"We specialize in historical buildings," he said. "Anything significant in Cincinnati, we've done."

Curry had one son, Shane, to his first marriage. Shane, who became an All-American defensive lineman at Miami and then a first-round draft pick of the Indianapolis Colts, was killed in 1991.

"Shane was sitting in his truck when, for no rhyme or reason, this 15-year-old kid shot him," Jim Curry said. "It was the most profound experience of my life. I can't think of any loss that can

come close to losing a child.

"But, I believe everything is predetermined for you. You can't look back. He beat me to heaven, that's all."

In his son's memory, Jim founded the Upper Room/Shane's place.

"It's a foundation for Shane," he said. "We do civic and community things for kids. We have a soccer league in conjunction with Head Start. There are over 300 kids involved and we try to help them resolve problems."

"One reason I started the foundation was to give kids some values. It's the condition of today's society that makes kids the way they are. You can't blame them. We need to look at ourselves."

Like Bob Clarke and Herky Betar and his other Altoona coaches, Jim Curry is making a difference through the foundation for his late son, Shane.

Curry, who has a sister (June Moore) and brother (Cal) still living in Altoona, is happy to be coming home for his induction to the Hall of Fame.

Jim's wife of 18 years, Janice, and their 13-year-old daughter Raven will accompany him, and Oscar Robertson, a friend since his days at the University of Cincinnati, will be his presenter.

"I have many fond memories of Altoona," he said. "Even though we were poor, it was wonderful. It's a great town. I'm very honored, very flattered, and humbled by it all."

Jim Curry



Sport: Football.

High school: Altoona Area, 1960.

College: University of Cincinnati.

Hall of Fame achievement: Set several Cincinnati records as a receiver and was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys. Was two-time MVP of Cambria County War Memorial Tournament.

Current occupation: Owns construction company.

Current residence: Cincinnati, Ohio.

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