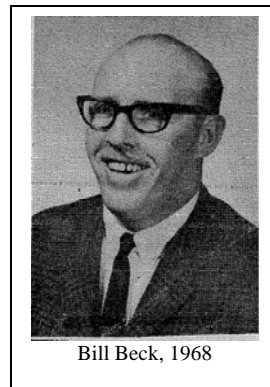


Pioneers of Penn Manor

Marking 40 Years of Comet Football

by Todd Mealy, Head Football Coach, 2007 to present

Penn Manor was tied with Manheim Central 27 – 27 with just seconds to play when Tom Herr attempted a 29-yard field goal to win the game. The kick fell short and was caught by the Barons' star athlete, Tom Roland, who returned the missed try over 100 yards for a score. As Roland ran down the field for the go ahead touchdown, Penn Manor Coach Bill Beck was praying for a miracle. "I was hoping for a ruling that he stepped out of bounds," Beck later admitted. Beck's prayer was answered. Because Roland caught the ball in his end zone, it was ruled a touchback and the ball was brought back to the 20. The game ended one play later in a tie. Two weeks later Penn Manor defeated Donegal in its last Section II contest and clinched the school's first section championship.



That was 1974 and the Comets finished the year 8-1-1. Coach Beck was voted QB Club Coach of the Year. An amazing success for the Penn Manor team as it was just the program's third year of varsity football.

November 6, 2009
150th ANNIVERSARY:

November 6, 1869 is identified as the date of the first formal football game, played between Princeton and Rutgers, but it was really just an unruly scrum between men who removed their frock coats and breeches. Rutgers won 6 to 4.



"The First Game" the artist shows players with no equipment.

Penn Manor's football history is complex. Manor Township High School (present-day Penn Manor) introduced football in 1922. The team was coached by popular local athletes, namely Frederick Pieffer and Abram Herr, and played a mix of high school and collegiate competition. The teams in the early Twenties dominated, having beaten Lancaster High School, Parkersburg Athletic Association, Thaddeus Stevens Trade School and Franklin & Marshall Academy Reserves. There were even times when Manor Township faced-off with Millersville Normal School (present-day Millersville University). The local media covered almost every move. "Manor H.S. Has Clever Eleven," read one headline. "Millersville Lads Romp Away with Grid Contest by Score of 44 to 0," reported another. Regretfully, after just three years, in 1925 football at the high school was dropped after complaints about player injuries on the field.

I have always believed that decisions create turning points – not actions – and the joint decision made by the community and administration in 1925 set the program back ages. It took thirty-nine years for athletes at Penn Manor to again strap on shoulder pads and helmets, and square off on the gridiron. A generation and a half simply wasted.

Year	Penn Manor Records		
	Record	Coach	Section
1972	2 and 8	Beck	2
1973	5 and 5	Beck	2
1974	8 1 1	Beck	2**
1975	4 and 6	Beck	2
1976	6 and 4	Beck	2
1977	7 and 3	Beck	2
1978	3 and 7	Beck	2
1979	2 and 8	Beck	2
1980	4 and 6	Wildasin	2
1981	5 and 6	Wildasin	2
1982	6 and 4	Wildasin	2
1983	4 and 6	Wildasin	2
1984	7 and 3	Tulli	2**
1985	6 and 4	Tulli	2
1986	8 and 2	Tulli	2
1987	4 and 6	Hoffman	2
1988	5 and 5	Hoffman	2
1989	3 and 8	Hoffman	2
1990	3 and 8	Hoffman	2
1991	0 9 1	Pieters	2
1992	3 and 8	Pieters	2
1993	7 and 4	Elder	2
1994	0 and 10	Elder	1
1995	0 and 10	Elder	1
1996	0 and 10	Elder	1
1997	2 and 8	Elder	1
1998	0 and 10	Maxwell	1

In 1936, Dave Neff, then student at Manor Township, spearheaded the establishment of a flag football team at the high school. Neff, the quarterback on the '36 team, lead the Comets to an 8 and 0 record. "I was not the coach [but] I was a football guy. I made the plays up and everything else," Neff remembers. The following year the team was dropped again due to lack of competition.

Because of the complexity surrounding football in Millersville, Penn Manor has not yet made it into the spine cracked annals. It is one of the youngest football programs in the state. Penn Manor lacks the storied history of nearly all of Pennsylvania's high schools. Berwick and Mount Carmel established their football teams 140 years ago. Harrisburg's first team was in 1886. Not much later had Steelton-Highspire and New Castle introduced their programs. Today, there are four Pennsylvania teams who fall within the top 25 winningest programs in the United States; Mount Carmel is fifth overall (755-273-59). Easton ranks eleventh (720-312-54). Berwick is fifteenth (705-293-43). And Steelton-Highspire is twenty-third (676-387-58). Penn Manor also lacks championships like Manheim Central's fifteen, Cumberland Valley's ten, Steel High's eight and Bishop McDevitt's seven District 3 titles. In forty years the Comets have won just two Section II titles (1974 and 1984), and have yet to win the Section I crown.

The Penn Manor football program began as a freshman team in 1969. "The student body for '67 and '68 was putting pressure on the school district to start a football team because everyone else around had one," Beck recalls. "Lampeter Strasburg had started a football team. And Garden Spot was on the verge of starting a team. So the pressure of the surrounding schools prompted the students to demand a team at Penn Manor."

Similar to his high school days when he organized the flag football team, Dave Neff, who in 1969 was serving as the athletic director at Penn Manor High School, led the effort to hire a coach and buy equipment. The Penn Manor administrative brain trust devised a four-year plan to establish a varsity team. Neff and his privy council decided that the first team would be made up of ninth graders, and would play a three game freshman schedule. The 1970 and 1971 teams would be junior varsity and freshman. Finally in 1972, Penn Manor would have its first varsity team.

Neff is considered by many as the "Jim Thorpe" of Penn Manor athletics. He was a star basketball, soccer and baseball

1999	3 and 7	Maxwell	1
2000	1 and 9	Maxwell	1
2001	2 and 8	Maxwell	1
2002	3 and 7	Maxwell	1
2003	2 and 8	Maxwell	1
2004	0 and 10	Maxwell	1
2005	5 and 5	Forgrave	1
2006	5 and 6	Forgrave	1***
2007	1 and 9	Mealy	1
2008	9 and 3	Mealy	1***

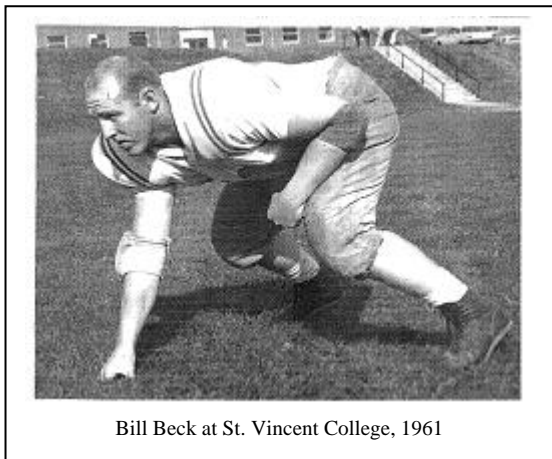
**** Section 2 Champions**
***** District 3 Playoff birth**

player while at Manor Township. In 1937 Neff played football at the University of Alabama under head coach Hank Crisp. Also on the staff in Tuscaloosa as a graduate assistant coach was Paul “Bear” Bryant. “Bear didn’t say too much,” said Neff. “He was a tough customer. He was always well dressed in suits.”

Neff started a few games at tight end for the Crimson Tide. “My biggest thrill there was homecoming,” Neff recollected. “We played Kentucky and coach had me running first team end that night.” After his first year Neff injured his knee. He hitchhiked his way home from Alabama and arrived in Millersville by Christmas 1938. He enrolled at Millersville State College in 1939 and graduated in 1943. Neff rehabilitated his knee and played on the 1939-40 Millersville basketball team that won the Pennsylvania State Teachers College Championship.

Neff became athletic director at Penn Manor in 1958. He also coached basketball, soccer and track for the high school.

Beck, meanwhile, arrived in Millersville from Pittsburgh. He played center and nose tackle at Pittsburgh Central Catholic High School. After graduating in 1955, Beck worked in the open hearth at a steel mill and as a plaster laborer. He had intentions of becoming a juvenile detention officer. “Both were hard [and] ugly jobs that tempted me to go to school,” Beck acknowledged. Meanwhile, he played two years with the Duquesne Ironmen, a semipro football team. Soon he was accepted into Lakeland College in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He played there one year before transferring to St. Vincent College near his hometown. At St. Vincent, Beck started two years as an offensive tackle and was voted by his teammates to be a captain. During his senior year he married Isabel Mulkerin, and accepted teaching and assistant coaching jobs at Braddock High School in Allegheny County. The jobs paid \$3,400 and \$300 respectfully. Despite missing most practices at St. Vincent, Beck was able to teach and coach at Braddock during the week, and play in games Saturday afternoons for the Bearcats. The hectic routine did not impede his ability to play the sport. He was named to the Pennsylvania All-State second team and voted by his teammates as their most valuable lineman.

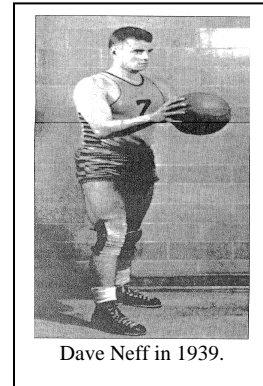


Bill Beck at St. Vincent College, 1961

Beck spent seven years at Braddock High School, coaching along side Pittsburgh Steelers legendary wide receiver Ray Matthews. Two of those years he operated as head coach.

In 1968 Beck became an assistant coach at Brownsville High School. It was after his first season at Brownsville that Beck became interested in moving with his wife and three children to eastern Pennsylvania. That spring and summer he interviewed for jobs at Council Rock, Red Lion and Dallastown.

Meanwhile, Penn Manor had been taking steps to implement its football program. “I surveyed every school in Lancaster and York [counties] to show the number of players each team had and how much money could be made,” Neff said. “In that year I can well remember there were [just] two schools in Lancaster County that ever made money at the time; Manheim Township who won a championship earlier and Ephrata who played night football, the only ones who played night football in the area.” There was much skepticism in Millersville. “Everyone else seemed to lose money with football,” Neff explains. “Plus, we had to compete with the college.”



Dave Neff in 1939.

In spite of the ambiguity, Neff kept plugging away. His counterpart, Coach Beck, remained optimistic.

The school had a total enrollment of 1,250 students. “I couldn’t believe it when I found out a school this big didn’t have football,” Beck admitted. He was anxious at first. “Now I can be a head coach at a big school. And with having to build a program from scratch it will be a great challenge.”

Actually, Beck was not Penn Manor’s first choice. In May 1969, Superintendent Elmer J. Berkebile initially hired Larry Giovacchini from Portage, Pennsylvania. One month later Giovacchini resigned, citing his wife’s job as the reason that he and his family could not move from their home. “His wife wouldn’t come,” Neff explains. “She had a good civil service job. Yes, we got her a job down at the college [Millersville], but she didn’t want to give up her civil service job up there.” Berkebile placed a few calls to friends of his in neighboring school districts. One of the superintendents that he spoke to was from Dallastown and had been impressed with Beck during one of his earlier interviews.

By August, Beck had been interviewed by Berkebile and Neff, given the coaching job at Penn Manor, and was preparing for the freshmen practice. Beck remembers watching Donegal, Lancaster Catholic, and Columbia practice to get ready for his own season.

Coach Beck’s biggest challenge was to educate the community about the game. The first year was a slow moving and methodical season for Beck and his two assistants, Lou Rampulla and Bob McConaghy. He remembers his players struggling to get dressed in their uniforms. “They put their girdle pads on backwards. Thigh pads were on the wrong side. You literally had to show them every step of the way how to dress, how to get in a stance, how to throw the ball, [and] carry the ball.” Since there was very little football knowledge on the community’s part, on October 7, before their first game, Beck held a

clinic to explain the game of football to players' parents. His clinic opened with a display of football equipment and an explanation of how it should be worn. Beck also personally demonstrated calisthenics and agility drills. The team ran through some of their offensive plays and lined up in their defensive front. Beck even had George Bensinger, a Lancaster County football official, explain football rules and why certain penalties were called.

Many in the community shared reservations about starting up a football team. Most were concerned about injuries. In other cases, off the field crises triggered uncertainty. During the 1968-1969 school year, before Beck had arrived, violence had broken out at a number of high school football games. The carnage had been a result of developing racial hostilities that have come to define the turbulent Sixties. At the nearby high school in Lancaster city, on October 31, 1968, McCaskey's game against Steelton-Highspire had been interrupted at half time when a group of African American spectators came to blows with white city police officers. A brawl erupted on the north end of the field when, it was alleged, several officers had violently, and unjustifiably, restrained one of the fans. The game was temporarily disrupted as a paddy-wagon was brought in to detain eight persons who had been arrested. McCaskey High School was closed for a day to sort out its dilemma. That same year, after several racial encounters at their home games, William Penn-York was banned by the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) from hosting games on its own field. For two years York was forced to play every game on the road. Also, as many schools were moving to night schedules, Harrisburg, Bishop McDevitt and Steelton-Highspire school districts agreed to keep all of their home games on Saturday mornings.

One suggests that outbreaks of racial violence would not have occurred at Penn Manor freshman games, but it was a developing issue as more and more high school students were becoming politically active.

Penn Manor's freshman team in 1969 had thirty-seven players; 36 white players and Forrest Daniels, the only African American on the team. Beck admits that one of the reasons that he was looking to leave Braddock High School was to escape the racial episodes in the Pittsburgh area. The murder of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 had sparked riots in more than 100 cities, including Pittsburgh. The looting and violent confrontations left dozens of people dead and hundreds more injured. The city of Pittsburgh was placed under martial law for nearly a week. That turmoil had trickled over to Allegheny County where Beck had been working.

There were children of two African American families attending Penn Manor in 1969, the Daniels and Baber families. Despite what was happening at other schools, Beck confesses that he never had to deal with racial issues on his team. His players, nonetheless, expressed to him that they were reluctant to play city schools. "That was one of the things that I always tried to force an issue on," Beck said. "Let's scrimmage the city



Beck celebrates an upset victory over Elizabethtown in 1974.

schools [Lancaster, York, Harrisburg or Reading] to have contact with players of a different color.”

The summer and fall of 1969 also marked other ostensible events that presented themselves as diversions for launching Beck’s football team off the ground. In June, John Lennon released *Give Peace a Chance* during his “Bed-In” honeymoon in Canada. Many high school students admired Lennon and the song, and they helped it become an anthem for the anti-war movement. One month later the first U.S. troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. Also in July, the Apollo 11 module landed on the moon. Just before football camp was about to begin in August the Woodstock festival was held in Bethel, New York. Anti-war sentiments exploded further in September when news of the My Lai Massacre was revealed to the public.

Fortunately for Beck, he was just starting a freshman team. As a portion of upperclassmen were interested in debating for and against the war, his 14 and 15 year old boys were not as inclined to be distracted by worldly issues.

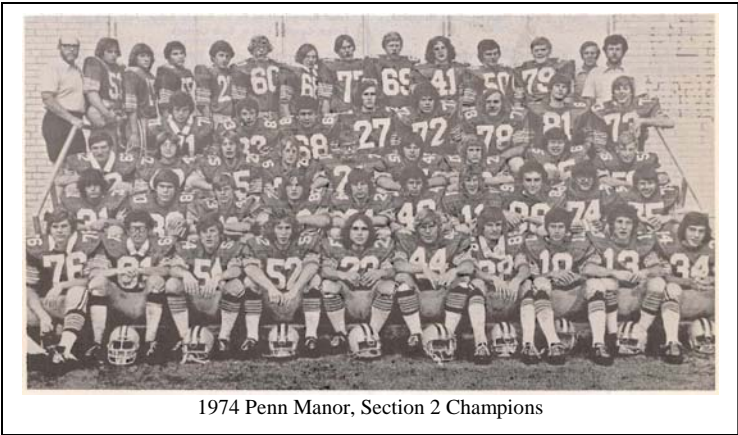
<u>1974 SECTION 2 CHAMPIONS (8-1-1)</u>		
PM		OPP
21	Elizabethtown	13
20	Lampeter Strasburg	0
12	ELCO	7
19	Cocalico	0
28	Annville Cleona	22
49	Garden Spot	7
26	Solanco	7
27	Manheim Central	27
6	Lancaster Catholic	30
20	Donegal	0

<u>1974 STATISTICS</u>		
	PM	OPP
First Downs	128	98
Rushing Yds	2062	917
Passing Yds	652	998
Total Yds	2714	1915
Passes	45/105/11	63/156/16
Fumbles Lost	21	24
Yds Penalized	403	345

Beck’s ’69 freshman team finished 0 and 3, having lost to Solanco, Warwick and Conestoga Valley. “The first game we played was down at Solanco. There were five bus loads of students who went down to see a freshman game,” said Beck in amazement. Freshman games have eight minute quarters, and there are not many changes of possession during the course of a game. Accordingly, Solanco had the ball the entire first quarter, and still had it when the second began. After a Solanco score, Penn Manor’s Daniels returned the ensuing kickoff for a touchdown. It was “the first time we touched the ball,” Beck gloated. Nevertheless, Penn Manor lost 14 to 7.

It was an arduous stretch, but four years later those inexperienced freshmen became seniors who anticipated their first taste of varsity football. Penn Manor’s 1972 varsity team went 2 and 8. In 1973 they went 5 and 5. And in 1974 the Comets won the Section 2 championship.

Beck stayed on as head coach until 1979, ten years total.



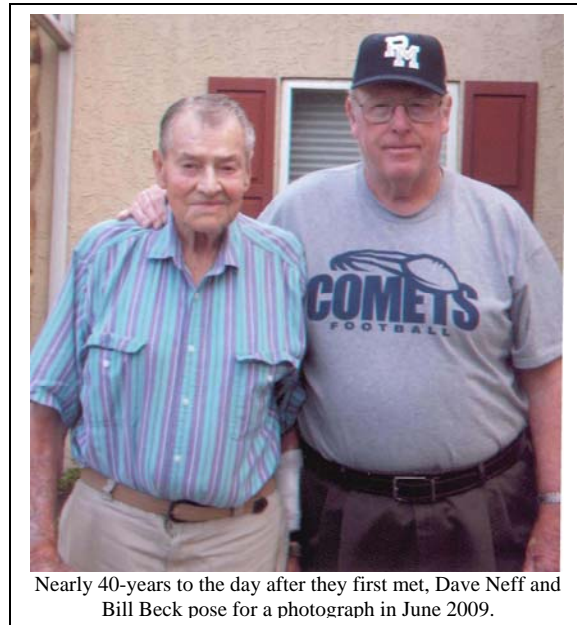
1974 Penn Manor, Section 2 Champions

After accumulating an overall record of 37-42-1, Beck stepped down as head coach so he could watch his sons play soccer and football. Mike Wildasin took over and allowed Beck to coach the freshman team.

One of the program's biggest criticisms is that its head coaches have not stuck around for long. Penn Manor has had nine head coaches in forty years. Coach Beck cut his teeth for the Comets from 1969 to 1979. Then Wildasin coached from 1980 to 1983. Dennis Tulli had three very successful years at the helm from 1984 to 1986. Wayne Hoffman coached from 1987 to 1990. Mark Pieters coached in 1991 and 1992. Bill Elder served as head coach from 1993 to 1997. Shawn Maxwell coached from 1998 to 2004. And before I was hired in 2007, Bob Forgrave made his contributions to the program in 2005 and 2006.

Penn Manor has a forty-year record of 132 wins, 241 losses, and 2 ties. The Comets have played a total of 375 games and has a winning percentage of 36 percent. During that time Penn Manor has had six winless seasons. Twenty-three seasons with four wins or less. And during a disastrous stretch of eleven years in a row, 1994 to the start of the 2005 season, the Comets suffered through years of three wins or less. Included during that stretch was a 33-game losing streak that was featured on ESPN. The last section title for the Comets came in 1984. And before the 2008 season, it had been sixteen years since Penn Manor had a winning record. Needless to say, the program has always been on hard times.

Bill Beck and Dave Neff have been here through it all. They have become the logo of Penn Manor football and athletics. Beck has been a part of the program, serving as an assistant coach in some fashion for every head coach except Tulli. And Neff, ninety-one years old, still finds a way to make it to games. In fact, the field house at Comet Field is named after him.



Nearly 40-years to the day after they first met, Dave Neff and Bill Beck pose for a photograph in June 2009.

Penn Manor now has second and third generation players. Although the football IQ of the players has increased, the demand to play the sport has remained stagnant. Numbers are still very low. Outsiders still call the school "Penn Manure" – a school known more for the agriculture program and its proximity to the Amish than anything else. The program is still finding the right formula to establish a consistent winning tradition. Some facets are there, such as Penn Manor's bitter battles with archival Hempfield, its grueling off-season training which accumulates to nearly three hundred hours committed and eighty miles ran during the spring and summer, new uniforms, new turf practice field, yearly team camp to West Virginia University, the scheduling of top-of-the-line 7 on 7 competition, the addition of a full-time strength and conditioning coach, the

establishment of new standards, a new football logo, our annual Blue-White scrimmage, and the introduction of a first class booster club.

The 2008 football season was the most successful in the program's history. The team achieved its first winning record in Section 1 and its highest finish in the league – second. Penn Manor had its first ever nine-win season and picked up its first playoff victory.

Yet still missing is the mystique that all successful programs carry with them. The current coaching staff recognizes this and has taken strides to improve the program. The 2009 team motto is “Building Tradition.” Coaches have been brought on staff who played for successful high school and collegiate programs. Coach Barry Hawkins was an All-State lineman and Big 33 player from Donegal. He went on to play at West Virginia University. Scott Lackey assisted Bishop McDevitt teams that won two District 3 titles in 1995 and 1996 and one state championship in 1995. Lackey also won a share of Mid Penn titles as a high school football and baseball player at East Pennsboro, and played in two District championships. Darryl Daniel played on the 1991 Conestoga Valley team that won a District 3 title and lost in the state championship. Daniel also caught passes from Donovan McNabb as a wide receiver at Syracuse University. Coach Chris Maiorino played for the University of Millersville under the lead of Gene Carpenter. Russ McDonnell, our strength and conditioning coach, is a world-class weightlifter who once finished third in the 2004 Olympic trials and declined an offer to lift for the Irish Olympic team. Also, Mike Treier, who played for the 2008 Penn Manor team, and one who follows a moderate line of Treiers who have strapped it on for the Comets, has recently been added to the staff.

<u>2008 SEASON RECORD (9-3)</u>		
PM		OPP
14	Solanco	13
17	Lampeter Strasburg	0
31	Exeter	3
31	Hempfield	14
9	Reading	6
23	McCaskey	0
20	Manheim Township	19
7	Warwick	27
0	Wilson	42
39	Cedar Crest	7
42	Dallastown (D3 Playoffs)	7
10	Cumberland Valley (D3)	42
<u>2008 STATISTICS</u>		
	PM	OPP
Points	243	180
First Downs	187	149
Rushing Yds	2228	1675
Passing Yds	1005	1179
Total Yds	3233	2854
Passes	73/170/12	73/184/4
Fumbles Lost	8	13
Yds Penalized	415	386

In spite of the new faces and the continuous uphill climb, Bill Beck and Dave Neff have remained on the staff and part of the community. Everyone should admire their loyalty, hard work, consistency and resilience. They are the beasts of the program – a duo that has been fueled by attitude and aura. It is their *culture* that Penn Manor needs to grasp onto and use to define this program in our pursuit of tradition.