

5 THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD
KNOW ABOUT THE
**REITZ FOOTBALL
TRADITION**



REITZFOOTBALL.COM

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About the Author

Dan Engler's love for Reitz Football goes back a long time. Engler played for the Panthers all four years of high school and graduated in 1996.

That summer, as the popularity of the Internet began to explode, Engler's search for Reitz Football information came up empty, so his father suggested he create a website. Engler taught himself HTML and launched the Unofficial Reitz High School Football Home Page that August.

Since then, Engler, through ReitzFootball.com, has spent the past 20 years chronicling the rich history and tradition of Reitz High School Football.

Engler and his wife, Melissa, have two sons, Logan and Micah. Engler has visited every state in the country and traveled all over the world but is proud to call Evansville and the West Side his home.

Introduction

It wasn't the question that took my wife by surprise, but rather the answer.

We were at a Reitz game this past fall, and the PA announcer had just mentioned Herman Byers Field. Nearby, she overheard a little boy, probably in elementary school, turn to his father and ask, "Dad, who is Herman Byers?"

It was an honest question, but the young father's answer is what surprised Melissa.

"I think he was a Reitz coach from years ago."

As many of you know, my wife grew up in Alabama. She didn't grow up around the Reitz Football Tradition. However, she's been around yours truly long enough to learn about Coach Byers' resume.

I know there are more important things in the world, but I thought if someone was a Reitz Football fan, it's a shame they don't know exactly who Herman Byers was, why his legacy still matters and how it has reached far beyond the football field.

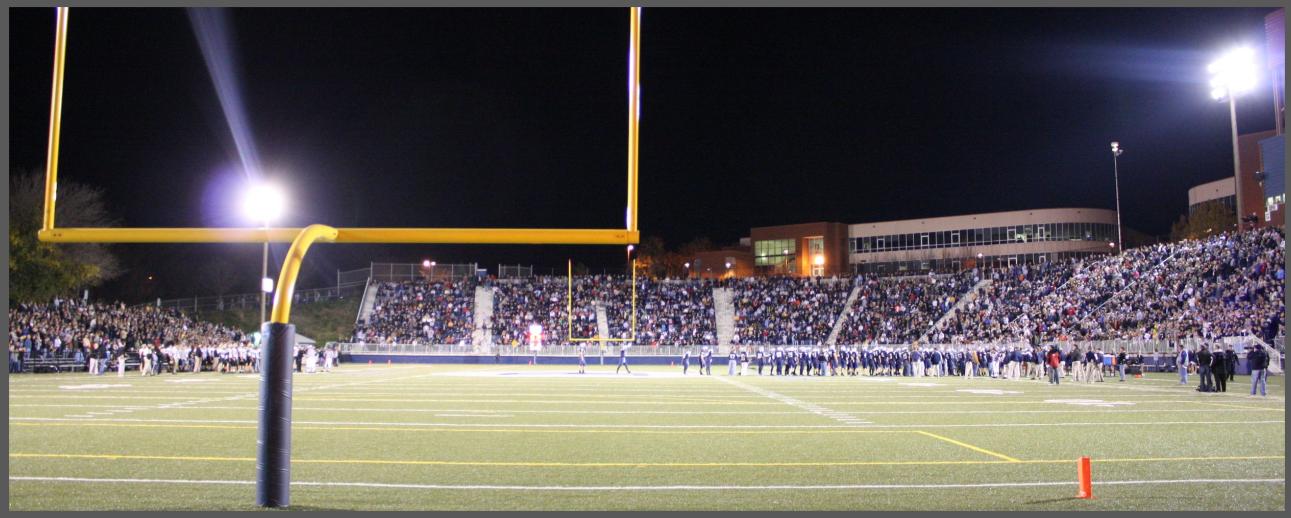
I started wondering, was there something I could do to help? If someone knew absolutely nothing about the Reitz Football Tradition, was there something I could create to help teach them?

That's how the idea was born for this book was born. I surveyed the readers of ReitzFootball.com on what they thought should be included, and in the following pages are filled those "5 Things" and some wonderful insights into why people selected them.

There were several other topics that could have easily been included, but perhaps we'll save those for another day.

For now, whether you know absolutely nothing about Reitz Football or are one of the passionate Panthers who come to every game, this book is for you. Enjoy!

Chapter 1 The Reitz Bowl



The Reitz Bowl at 12,000+ strong in the 2009 Panthers' 31-10 semi-state championship win over Indianapolis Cathedral. Reitz, second in the state in all-time wins with 679, hold an 8-3 lead in the series over the Fighting Irish, who lead Indiana with 708 wins.
Photo credit, Dan Engler

The Reitz Bowl. For all those who have seen it at full capacity, its mere presence can create a polarizing response. A sense of pride, community, tradition and more is felt by those who love Reitz Football. But for those teams that must oppose the Mighty Panthers, the Bowl can create a sense of overwhelm and impending doom.

Just ask Indianapolis Cathedral in 2009. The state's top-ranked team came in expecting an easy win over the Mighty Panthers. But the Reitz Bowl had different plans, and upset the Fighting Irish, 31-10.

While players inevitably graduate, and coaches come and go, the Reitz Bowl is the glue that holds all the tradition and fans together.

Todd Yonts, Class of 1999

The Bowl Advantage

Not surprisingly, the Reitz Bowl tends to give the Panthers a competitive advantage, as Reitz is 394-131-15 (74.4%). However, away from its friendly confines, the Mighty Panthers are 680-267-30, which calculates to a slightly lower win percentage of 71.1%.

The History of Reitz Bowl

The Reitz Bowl, one of the great natural stadiums in the nation, was born by accident. Originally planned as a retaining wall for the new West Side High School, some foresight noted that with some small changes, Francis Joseph Reitz High School could have a football stadium, as well.



1924 game at Reitz Bowl, photo courtesy ReitzFootball.com

The Bowl through the years:

- 1921: The 10,000-seat Reitz Stadium was completed
- 1931: Reitz played its first night game at the Bowl
- 1959: The Panthers played their last ever Thanksgiving Day game, beating Bosse, 32-6, at the Bowl
- 1973: The new all-transistor scoreboard went into effect; it was, as all past Reitz scoreboards, a gift of the West Side Nut Club
- 1974: Prescription Athletic Turf, a method of draining and irrigation from pipes laid beneath the playing surface, was introduced to Reitz Bowl; additionally, seating, walkways and stairs were renovated and a new all-weather track was added, too
- 1976: All-metal permanent type bleachers become a reality
- 1995: Play Clocks were introduced to the Bowl
- 2003: A brand new sound system that rivals those in the Big Ten Conference was installed
- 2009: A new synthetic turf was installed
- 2011: The field in Reitz Bowl was dedicated as Herman Byers Field

Other uses for the Bowl throughout the years

- Mater Dei plays their home games
- Evansville College's home field for many years
- Refrigerator Bowl (college football bowl game in the 1940s & 50s)
- Evansville Junior Football League's annual championship game

Rudy's observations: A bit of a late bloomer, I didn't get to see my first game at the Bowl until I was a freshman. I was blown away...thousands of fans, the atmosphere and fun environment was just amazing. I got hooked and have been ever since!

The Night They Moved The Bowl

The Bowl's presence has been known to extend beyond the friendly confines of the West Side. So much so that, in fact, the Panthers were able to move the Bowl to Castle High School one fateful night in 2001.

Men, you all know about the great tradition of football here in this Bowl. This tradition was built by the great players and coaches of the past. The ground you're kneeling on has been made sacred by the blood of noble young men who have come before you. Some of these players are not much older than you are now; some are old men; some are no longer with us. But their spirits are here. The spirits of those who, like you, made the sacrifices it takes to wear that Reitz helmet.

Some people don't believe you have a shot at winning tomorrow night's game against Castle but the coaching staff believes in you," Shipp continued. "We have to go to their place which is a hostile place to play as you know. So here's what I want you to do, on one condition. I want you to take one of these plastic bags and walk to a spot on this field where you have made a great play, or, for you younger guys, a spot where you hope to someday make a great play. Take a little of the turf from that spot and put it in the bag. But here's the condition: I only want you to do this if you truly BELIEVE we can beat Castle tomorrow night. We'll take these bags of our turf with us tomorrow and sprinkle the Bowl turf on to the Castle field. Then tomorrow night, even though we might be at Castle High School, we'll be playing on our turf.

Coach Tim Shipp's speech, as retold in Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series, "The Night They Moved The Bowl"

The Panthers did believe, and upset the Knights the next day, 16-14, to win the sectional championship.

Reitz Bowl chosen as No. 1 feature of Reitz Football Tradition

When the readers of ReitzFootball.com were asked which five things should be included in this book, the Reitz Bowl was, by far, your first selection. In fact, of over ten options, 45% of the respondents chose it as their No. 1 pick.

5 Things Everyone Should Know About the Reitz Football Tradition



1940 game at Reitz Bowl, photo courtesy HistoricEvansville.com

Besides being one of the most recognizable and meaningful landmarks in Evansville, it represents FAMILY. But it is not only the "family tradition" of playing for Reitz.

Many graduates my father's age (87 years old) still remember the sounds coming from the shipyards nearby, during WWII.

I remember when football fans would knock on grandma's door asking to park in her driveway on Friday game nights. (She lived on Marion Avenue).

Students today (as well as our football boys during training) still "run the stairs". Many parents and alumni line up in cars and lawn chairs, to watch the football team practice.

Friday nights at the bowl are still huge social events, not to mention the Mater Dei vs. Reitz annual rivalry. (After all, aren't most of us westsiders related to each other?)

The bowl is one of my "happy places". Though now I live a little farther from beautiful Reitz Hill and the Ohio River, I sometimes go there to walk the double dip and just remember. I can even walk the same path my parents walked on their graduation days and literally walk in their footsteps. I feel the pride again and see my daughter's shining face as she took her place on that beautiful field the day of her own graduation!

Kathy Gilkey

What they've said about Reitz Bowl:

The Reitz Bowl is the center of activity. As a part of the marching band, we practically lived there.

One game stands out in my mind. It was raining. We played anyway. When we left the field, looked back and saw about a hundred shoes stuck in the mud.

We ran those steps for gym class. We graduated in the bowl. We celebrated in the bowl. We played and fought in the bowl. It is one of the most important things about Reitz.

Dawn Richardt, Class of 1974

Reitz Hill aka Old Coal Mine Hill [is] the beginning of a proud history of Reitz High School.

Don Counts, Class of 1960

When I mention I am from Reitz, the first thing every coach or fan says is, 'Oh, the Reitz Bowl!' The tradition of Reitz football is known throughout the region, but the Reitz Bowl is revered throughout the state.

While starting the program here in Switzerland County, I've spent a lot of time traveling to other venues throughout Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana to gather ideas, and none compare to the history, tradition, and aesthetics that are encompassed in the Reitz Bowl.

*Ryan Jesop, Class of 1994
Former player, 1990-93
Head football coach, Switzerland County*

You cannot begin to understand the depth of Reitz tradition if you have not seen a game in the Bowl.

Kelly Kissel, Class of 1982

[**Click here for more information on the Reitz Bowl**](#)

Chapter 2

The Legacy of Herman Byers



Herman Byers, the Panthers' sixth head coach from 1942 to 1968. Photo courtesy ReitzFootball.com

Of all the important elements that make up the Reitz Football Tradition, you may have noticed that only one individual received his own chapter.

In fact, it can be argued that none of the other four components of this book would hold any merit whatsoever were it not for one man:

Herman Byers.

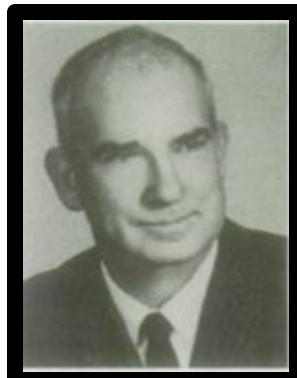
The Reitz Nation will always be indebted to Herman Byers. The legacy left by the Hall of Fame coach, who compiled a 189-51-15 record while on the Hill, produced an impact that will forever be remembered.

Born in Spencer County

Byers was born on March 20, 1905, in Gentryville, Ind. At some point, his family moved to Evansville and the future coach would become a star player for Central High School. Ironically, in 1921, Byers helped the Bears annihilate the Panthers, defeating the upstart West Side school, 104-0.

After his graduation in 1923, Byers went to Indiana University, where he was the football team's captain in 1927.

In those days, the National Football League was not a viable option financially for many, so after graduating from IU in 1928, he returned to Southwestern Indiana to become head football coach at Boonville.



Coach Byers pictured in the 1962 Reflections Yearbook

Byers becomes a coach

Byers stayed with the Pioneers for one season before taking the helm of Northwestern Indiana's Goshen High School in 1929, where he remained for 11 years and compiled a 42-50-5 record.

Byers once again returned to Evansville in 1941, where he served as an assistant for Bosse, but his legacy would officially begin when he accepted the head coaching position at Reitz.

Byers' championships on the Hill (1942-68, 27 years) 14 city (1945, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62, 67) 13 SIAC (1942, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62, 67) 6 State (1948, 53, 56, 57, 60, 61)

New kings of Indiana High School Football

His most famous team is undoubtedly the 1961 state championship squad, which was unscored upon (see Chapter 5), but it can be argued that Byers 1948 team was the one that helped firmly cement the school's legacy throughout Indiana high school football circles.

On Oct. 10 of that year, 13,587 fans packed the Reitz Bowl to watch the Panthers host East Chicago Roosevelt, a team that hadn't been beaten in four years. The Roughriders had won mythical state championships in 1945, 46 and 47, and were projected to win another one that fall.

But on that fateful day, the Mighty Panthers were unstoppable as they repelled the Roughriders, 32-6.

On this fateful day, a new king of Indiana football would emerge.

*Mike Whicker, former Reitz football coach
From "Birth of a Juggernaut" in his Legendary Game Series*

Lasting legacy

When Byers retired in 1968, he had been a head coach for 39 years and compiled a 233-105-21 record.

Byers' three sons (George, Phil and Jim) played for their dad and were each named all-state, making their own mark on the Reitz Football Tradition.

He was an inaugural member of the Indiana Football Hall of Fame (Class of 1973) and the Reitz Football Hall of Fame (Class of 2007).

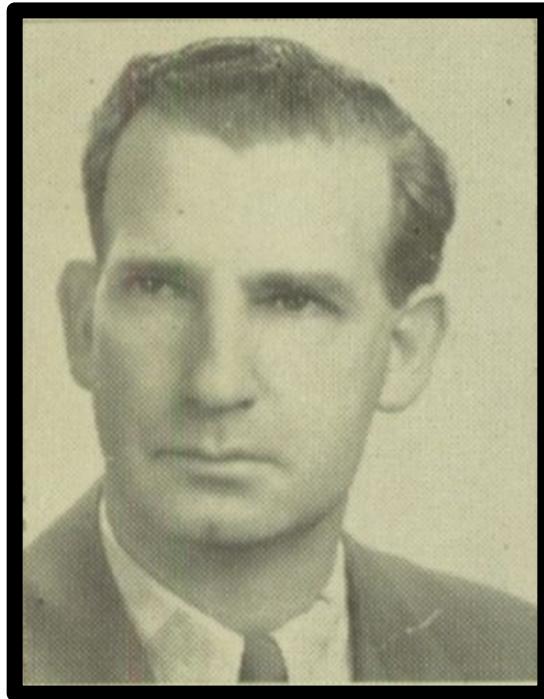
At the time of his death on Feb. 22, 1993, he was the seventh-winningest coach in Indiana high school football history. Though some have passed him in the subsequent years, he is still ranked No. 30 on the all-time list.

As noted before, the football field at Reitz Bowl was named in the Hall of Fame coach's honor when, on Aug. 19, 2011, Herman Byers Field was officially dedicated.

What they've said about Herman Byers:

"Herman Byers demanded perfection," the late Don Henry stated on Feb. 23, 1993, the day after Byers passed away. "He was a person that didn't take alibis. There was always a job to get done and there was only one way to do it. That was his way, the correct way."

*Don Henry, Class of 1951
former player (1950 All-American & All-State)
long-time assistant coach
Reitz Football Hall of Fame, Class of 2007*



Coach Byers pictured in the 1952 Reitz Mirror Yearbook

I'm proud of the way he influenced so many young men. The guys who played for him loved him. He was a great innovator and a great football coach. He helped kids prepare for life.

*Ed Wessel, Class of 1948
Former player (All-State 1947)
Played for Evansville College, Class of 1952
Former North High School Head Coach, 1976-80*

What they've said about Herman Byers:

There are a lot of things that make Reitz Football very special and VERY unique. Several of those things probably deserve to be considered for the No. 1 spot but, to me, it goes back to one important question: "How did Reitz Football become so unique?" and more specifically, "When did this happen or what took place to make it this way?"

In my opinion, that all started with coach Byers and the things that he did at Reitz. Lots of folks know about the success at Reitz in regards to state titles, city and SIAC championships, etc. but how many people realize that Byers was responsible for 6 of those state titles in addition to the 13+ city/SIAC titles and he was the coach at Reitz for almost 30 years! Throw in the undefeated and unscored upon team and it's pretty easy to see "when" Reitz became so unique in regards to its Football tradition—during the Byers Era. Throw in the fact that no Reitz coach has ever had a losing record while on the Hill [since 1925] and then people really start noticing how different things are at Reitz.

As a player at Reitz you always hear stories about coach Byers and I believe that is something that happens every year although I don't thinks it's ever "planned" to talk about him. And when you are in the field house—everybody spends some portion of their time looking at all of those old pics of the All-State players that surround the room--- you may not know a single person on the wall but you quickly get how deep the tradition is for our Football program.

*Eddie Dietz, Class of 1988
Former player
Former assistant freshmen coach*

[He] turned the Panthers into the most successful program in Indiana.

Michael Pointer, recalling Herman Byers legacy in the Evansville Courier, on Feb. 23, 1993, the day after the legendary coach passed away

What they've said about Herman Byers:

I graduated in '63, so I was there when the '61 team was unscored upon. I don't remember, but I think that streak started the year before or either didn't end until the next season [editor's note, the 27-game win streak being referred to started the last game of 1959 and ended in 1962].

Would they have done that without Herman Byers? Probably not. A great guy, and even better football coach.

Ralph Zentmyer, Class of 1963

[Coach Byers] was the coach for 27 years while football was still a (relatively) new sport – when you coach for 27 years, you leave your mark no matter what kind of coach you are.

What makes him different, though, is during that 27 year run, he taught the game of football to several generations of young men and established Reitz as a dominant football powerhouse, creating a winning culture and tradition that still remains to this very day.

People don't expect Reitz to be average, and although Herman is long gone, that legacy still remains – the winning culture that he instilled is felt very strongly every Friday night in the fall.

Those four years I spent strapping on the silver helmet are four years I will never forget, and although I never had the opportunity to meet Coach Byers, I know that part of the reason why it was such an unforgettable experience is because of the tradition and winning culture that he created many generations ago.

*Steven Waltz, Class of 2008
Former player*

What they've said about Herman Byers:

I was born into the Reitz family in 1955. My father, Allan Horn, was the line coach for Herman Byers from 1948 until [my father's] death in 1962.

My early childhood memories included running around the practice field with my dad and running around in the "Old Field House". I also remember the after game get togethers at Coach Byers' home. He continued to have us over after my dad's death up until his retirement in 1968.

After graduation, I got to play for the University of Evansville and coach Jim Byers. It was always special when Herman would be at the games and come down and give me a word of encouragement.

*Mike Horn, Class of 1973
Former player (1972 All-State)
Reitz Football Hall of Fame Class of 2009*

(Byers) was dedicated to the game and committed to get the best out of each one of his young people. It was hard playing for him. He was able to push

*Don Hansen, Class of 1962
Former player (two-time All-State 1960, 61)
Played for U. of Illinois and the NFL*

Rudy's observations: Although I never got to meet him, the lasting impression I have of Coach Byers was from Mr. Waterman. There in the equipment room stood a life-size cardboard cutout of Herman Byers proudly displayed behind Mr. Waterman's desk. To see how much Coach Byers was respected by someone I looked up to so much, I remember thinking, "that guy must be somebody pretty special!"

"Winners never quit and quitters never win."
- Coach Byers' famous saying

[**Click here for more information on Herman Byers**](#)

Chapter 3

What it means to wear the Silver Helmet



The Panthers line up against Henderson County in their 2011 home opener. Photo credit, Dan Engler

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the team's uniform is the simplest. While the silver helmet worn by a Reitz Football player may not be flashy, donning it is a point of pride held dear by those who understand the Reitz Football Tradition.

The Silver Helmet is to Reitz High School was the Golden helmet is to the University of Notre Dame.

I just feel when you see the shine of the silver helmet, you know the Panthers are in the stadium. The same as the golden helmets the Notre Dame Irish wear.

*Darren West, Class of 1983
Former player*

5 Things Everyone Should Know About the Reitz Football Tradition

It's significant to note how much meaning is given to wearing the Silver Helmet by Bob Stephenson, who as an honorable mention All-American and All-Big Ten selection, had an extremely successful collegiate career following his time at Reitz.

What does it mean to wear the Silver Helmet of Reitz High School?

Our silver helmet is rather simple and plain and as a coach and former player, I wouldn't want it any other way! It stands for the CULTURE and TRADITION of Reitz High School. It stands for all of the players who came before us and the foundation they have laid down for us.

Culture is defined as..." the only acceptable way to behave and to perform". As coaches, we talk about doing things the REITZ way. We believe Culture beats Scheme in winning football games.

At Reitz, we Expect to Win! The Reitz Tradition is winning football Championships. We are the second winningest program in the state of Indiana behind only Indianapolis Cathedral- a school who has no boundary limits on getting players and whom we have a series winning edge of 8-4.

When you think of successful college teams, you think of Notre Dame, Penn State, Alabama, Michigan...teams with plain or simple helmets. Like those schools, Reitz does not change helmet styles every few years to try and build excitement for our program. We don't need it...we have the Reitz Culture and Tradition!

*Bob Stephenson, Class of 1978
Former player (1977 All-State)
Played for Indiana University, Class of 1982
Longtime Reitz Football coach
Reitz Football Hall of Fame Class of 2009
Indiana Football Hall of Fame, Class of 2007*

5 Things Everyone Should Know About the Reitz Football Tradition



*The Panthers sing RHS Boys after the 2005 7-on-7 tournament.
Photo credit, Dan Engler*

Some football teams put the school's letter on it or a symbol of their mascot, or perhaps have the player's name, but not Reitz. For many, it symbolizes the "team first" philosophy that is part of the Reitz Football Tradition.

To me wearing the silver helmet meant being part of a great tradition. Reitz football has a great history of great players, and coaches. Making All-State for me was a great accomplishment. I can say I made my mark in such a great program.

I grew up with my father being a Reitz fan, just as many others did. Even as I sit here typing this I look at a picture hanging above my desk titled REITZ FOOTBALL "The Beginning". A painting of a father or coach with his arm around a little boy.

Every time I put on the silver helmet I would always get a great sense of being part of an honored tradition.

*Andy Holder, Class of 1999
Former player (1998 All-State linebacker)
Assistant freshman coach, 2001-03*

5 Things Everyone Should Know About the Reitz Football Tradition

It used to be that only the varsity and reserve players got to wear the Silver Helmet.

All I ever heard growing up was about my cousins and uncles playing football for Reitz and wearing that Silver helmet. I couldn't wait to do it, too. I wanted to be part of that Tradition.

When I was a young boy I remember that only the Varsity and JV got to wear the Silver helmet. All of us "younger" football players would look up to those older players and they inspired us to work hard to be able to get to wear that silver helmet.

It was something that if I worked real hard I could earn that right to wear the Silver helmet someday. You had to earn that right to wear it. It was like a coming of age symbol to us that we had finally made it to that level. That we had arrived. That we NOW were Reitz football players because now we got to wear the Silver helmet.

I hope this helps explain why I love the Reitz football Tradition so much.

*Larry Ellington, Class of 1973
Former player, Statistician since 1992*

While all levels now get to wear the Silver Helmet, what it symbolizes has not changed.

The thing that is special to me is seeing that fieldhouse door open up and watching over 100 shiny gray helmets running out to the middle of the BOWL just like in the 50's , 60's and 70's. To me that is an intimidating factor.

Anonymous, Class of 1983

Rudy's observations: The often repeated "it's a privilege to wear the silver helmet" was firmly ingrained into my head from the earliest of my Reitz Football playing days. Taking care of the silver helmet and the rest of my equipment was an amazing lesson in teaching us personal responsibility. The Silver Helmet, and everything it represents, was mine to look after.

Chapter 4

The Mater Dei Rivalry

Every year during the last week of the regular season, the Mighty Panthers battle the Mater Dei Wildcats. But why is this game special?

After all, Reitz has a rivalry with Central High School that goes back to 1921. The Panthers also play Reitz Memorial every year (both schools were named in honor of Francis Joseph Reitz, a local businessman who helped make the construction of both schools possible).

What is it that makes the Mater Dei game more special than any of their other rivalries? Could it be the 12,000+ fans that pack the Bowl every year to watch this game?

Or could it be the West Side Nut Club's magnificent trophy, which possession goes to the winning team for an entire year?

Maybe it's that the Reitz Bowl (more on this later) is the host of this game every year, no matter which team's home game it is?

Or what about the fact that the Reitz and Mater Dei football players have grown up together as friends on the West Side and have often played with and against each other, going back to their days in the EJFL?

Perhaps it's because of the national attention this rivalry is now receiving, as evidenced when MaxPreps.com made the game its Rivalry Game of the Week for the entire country in 2015?

It's all of these things and more.

I think it's like any traditional rivalry with a long history. Sometimes we don't mind whether or not we have a winning season as long as we beat that rival team! :-)

Carrolette Winstead, Class of 1990

Rudy's observations: One of my favorite moments every week was the speech Mr. Waterman would give after Thursday's pregame practice. It was intense, usually with some colorful language, and extremely motivating. But when we would play Mater Dei, Waterman's intensity was multiplied exponentially. He did not like those guys, and anything less than a win meant he'd be disappointed.

5 Things Everyone Should Know About the Reitz Football Tradition



*The Golden Nut Trophy awarded by the West Side Nut Club to the winner of the annual Reitz vs. Mater Dei game circa 2008.
Photo credit, Dan Engler*

While Mater Dei first played football in 1949, the first game between the West Side foes wasn't until three years later. Reitz dominated the early part of the series, winning the first six encounters before the Wildcats finally earned a victory in 1958.

Beginning in 1970, the West Side Nut Club began awarding a trophy to the annual winner. The trophy, called the Golden Acorn.

Reitz leads the all-time results 44 games to 20

Year	Final score	Year	Final score	Year	Final score	Year	Final score
1952	W 19-7	1968	L 0-12	1984	L 20-41	2000	L 21-42
1953	W 19-7	1969	W 14-0	1985	L 6-14	2001	L 31-38
1954	W 19-0	1970	W 24-0	1986	W 35-6	2002	W 14-7
1955	W 39-0	1971	W 12-0	1987	L 15-22	2003	W 24-14
1956	W 27-0	1972	W 31-13	1988	L 14-21	2004	L 36-42
1957	W 33-0	1973	W 19-7	1989	W 28-14	2005	W 28-14
1958	L 8-12	1974	W 21-6	1990	W 44-14	2006	W 28-7
1959	L 0-1, forfeit	1975	W 32-0	1991	L 0-28	2007	W 34-0
1960	W 46-0	1976	W 35-14	1992	W 44-7	2008	W 26-0
1961	W 42-0	1977	W 38-6	1993	W 31-6	2009	W 59-0
1962	W 52-0	1978	W 21-7	1994	L 0-21	2010	W 41-21
1963	W 20-7	1979	W 34-0	1995	W 21-6	2011	L 18-34
1964	W 14-0	1980	W 7-5	1996	W 24-10	2012	W 42-35
1965	W 26-0	1981	W 23-14	1997	L 6-14	2013	L 14-16
1966	W 21-7	1982	W 21-14	1998	L 14-21	2014	L 21-28
1967	W 13-6	1983	L 0-10	1999	L 24-27 OT	2015	L 28-29



The Golden Acorn Trophy sits on the Panther sideline awaiting the winner of the 2006 West Side Nut Club Championship game, which Reitz won, 28-7. Photo credit, Dan Engler.

Chapter 5

1961: The Year of Perfection



Coach Byers is carried off the field after the Reitz Football team just finished the season undefeated, untied and unscored upon. No team in Indiana has been able to repeat this feat. Photo from 1962 Reflections Yearbook

What is perfection? A quick Google search defines it as:

per·fec·tion

noun: the condition, state, or quality of being free or as free as possible from all flaws or defects

When it comes to football at any level, this is tough to achieve. At the time of this writing, the 2015-16 football season saw the Denver Broncos win the Super Bowl and NFL championship with a 15-4 record. At the college level, the Alabama Crimson Tide finished 14-1 following their College Football Playoff title.

Perfect seasons are much more common in high school, especially before Indiana's playoff began in 1973. This year, only two of the six state tournament champions finished undefeated.

5 Things Everyone Should Know About the Reitz Football Tradition

But what makes the 1961 edition of F.J. Reitz football team is that not only were they undefeated, they went untied and unscored upon.

Think about that for a second...

No one scored on the Mighty Panthers all year.

No one.

They were free from all flaws or defects. They were, quite literally, perfect.

Ultimate Perfection

While there have been some amazing teams across the state since 1961, no team in Indiana, and to our knowledge, the nation, has duplicated this feat since.

I picked that part of Reitz history as #1 because it probably will never be repeated, and can't be topped ever again in Indiana High School football, by any team.

Ron Deig, Class of 1969

It is interesting to note, however, that a few other schools were able to attain this perfection before the 1961 Panthers, including, in 1903, city rival Central, known then as Evansville High School. The Indiana Football Coaches Association website lists the following teams who went unscored on while playing at least six games::

1902: South Bend (7-0-1)
1903: Evansville
1904: Elkhart
1911: South Bend (6-0)
1913: South Bend (6-0)

1918: Kentland (7-0)
1920: Wabash (8-0)
1922: Gary Emerson (9-0)
1923: Gary Emerson (9-0-1)
1945: Portland

1961: Reitz (9-0)

But the question remains: How were these teenage kids from the early sixties able to cement their legacy in the history books?

Mythical State Champs

The Panthers battled through nine grueling games in 1961, holding each opponent scoreless, to earn their eighth mythical state championship.

The victims:

9/8: Reitz 53, Crawfordsville 0	10/21: Reitz 46, Bloomington 0
9/16: Reitz 66, Muncie Central 0	10/27: Reitz 26, North 0
9/22: Reitz 42, Mater Dei 0	11/4: Reitz 33, Memorial 0
9/30: Reitz 26, New Albany 0	11/10: Reitz 55, Bosse 0
10/13: Reitz 21, Central 0	

State, SIAC A & City Champs (9-0)

I was a freshman the year this happened. I had never experienced such a unity and excitement for something that had no prize at the end. We knew we were the best in the state and proved it. We had the best players that looked like pros, big guys. Herman Byers was a King.

It was our UN year. Unbeaten, Untied, and Unscored upon. Best high experience.

Sharon Ham Schapker, Class of 1964

To clarify, there was no playoff in Indiana until 1973. Just like college football did until recently, teams would play tough competition from all over, hoping to impress enough voters. The mythical state championship would then be awarded to the team that finished No. 1 in the final poll.

And remember, the ‘mythical’ tag is not an insult. While some fans nowadays erroneously think otherwise, mythical simply was a way of saying the team won through a poll instead of on the field. It was a common term used, so unless the papers were jabbing teams for decades, being the mythical champion was not a knock.

What they've said about 1961's perfect team:

What makes Reitz Football special to me is that I was a part of something. I moved to Evansville from Columbus, Ind. I was familiar with the mystique that surrounded Reitz Football. My blood (Doug Harp) died in Viet nam shortly after serving Reitz Football in 1961, the undefeated team.

I came here with the utmost respect for this high school and for all of the players who came before me. I had no idea how deeply this tradition ran. As I have aged, I now realize that I was a part of a dream to some, and a memory to others.

Chris Harp, Class of 1992

I graduated in 1960 and joined the Army so I was not around to see the 1961 team. I was in Germany when they played.

An undefeated team is a remarkable feat but Reitz has accomplished that a number of times. To go unscored on is fabulous.

The 1961 team epitomized what the football program is about. At Reitz, it is a total effort that includes everyone that has ever attended Reitz. I am 73 and still have season tickets and believe it is my responsibility to attend the games in good and bad years.

*Wayne Hettenbach, Class of 1960
U.S. Army Veteran*

It's a simple answer on why I choose the 1961-62 undefeated season [as the No. 1 thing people should know about the Reitz Football Tradition]. It was my senior year. It just seemed that everything was golden. I hated leaving that school. It was the only stable thing in my life at that time.

Sandy Blandford Jones, Class of 1962

What they've said about 1961's perfect team:

I was a sophomore student at Reitz High School during those football days and winning a Mythical State Championship was a big deal.

As you know, Reitz high school football has changed enormously. My thoughts are, in those days, it was pretty much all single wing offense with a run priority which makes it almost impossible to have that year's record duplicated.

The players on that team were dedicated to hard work and a team first before individual efforts to win football games. That year's team was an example of what could be accomplished with dedication to team goals: a total team effort.

If you look back on that team, there were many players that were not real athletic however, hard work and well trained my Herman Byers paid off for them.

I just think the 1961 Reitz High School Team should always be remembered as an important part of Reitz Football Tradition.

Mark Schnarr, Class of 1964

*Proud Reitz Football father of Marc Schnarr and grandfather of
Mason & Carter Schnarr*

Rudy's observations: While I was not around to see this team, it's become the stuff of legends. How could they not let anyone score on them...all year!?! It just cemented what was expected of us as a Reitz Football player and the amazing tradition we had become a part of.

[**Click here for more information on the 1961 team**](#)

5 Things Everyone Should Know About the Reitz Football Tradition

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this book. This has been a lot of fun to create and I hope it's helped you learn more about and have a deeper understanding of the Reitz Football Tradition and the 5 Things Everyone Should Know!

1. The Reitz Bowl
2. The Legacy of Herman Byers
3. What it means to wear the Silver Helmet
4. The Mater Dei Rivalry
5. 1961: The Year of Perfection

Were there any not on this list that should have been? Any you'd like us to dig deeper into? We would really love to hear from you. Visit **ReitzFootball.com**, click on the **Contact** button and tell us!

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Thanks and go Panthers!