

**Mike Whicker's**

**Legendary  
Game Series**

**THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION**



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[www.reitzfootball.com](http://www.reitzfootball.com)

Contact: [info@reitzfootball.com](mailto:info@reitzfootball.com)

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## About the Author

Mike Whicker's roots with Reitz Football go back a long time.

Although Mike grew up in Colorado, his father was raised in Evansville. Moving back to the West Side, Whicker became a teacher and coach for Reitz and is a member of the Reitz Football Hall of Fame Committee. His two sons, Josh and Zach, were both all-state football players for the Panthers.

His love of Reitz football inspired him to pen several pieces about the program's history, which, with his permission, we have compiled into this ebook.

Whicker is a published author and was instrumental in getting the LST-325 to Evansville. His fourth book in the Erika Lehman WWII series, ***Fall from Valhalla***, will be available this summer. For more information, visit [MikeWhicker.com](http://MikeWhicker.com).

# Introduction

It goes without saying that there have been some extraordinary games throughout the history of Reitz High School Football. Perhaps, you could even say some of them have been legendary.

Several years ago, Mike Whicker thought just that and wrote some wonderful feature articles on some of those legendary games.

He covered these eight games:

- [Oct. 7, 1933 – A Gift For the Heart](#)
- [Nov. 30, 1940 – A Year of Tragedy & Triumph Under the Stars](#)
- [Oct. 1, 1948 – The Birth of a Juggernaut](#)
- [Sept. 14, 1951 – From Goat to Glory](#)
- [Oct. 27, 1960 – The Game](#)
- [Nov. 4, 1977 – The Good Fight](#)
- [Oct. 30, 1993 – A Ghostly Victory](#)
- [Nov. 2, 2001 – The Night They Moved the Bowl](#)

And now, for the first time, ReitzFootball.com has compiled the stories for all eight of these games into one collection. We've also researched and included the statistics for each one of these games, as reported by either the Evansville Courier and/or Press.

Thanks again to Coach Whicker for authoring these amazing accolades that will let the Reitz Football Tradition live on forever!

## **A Gift for the Heart**

### ***Reitz vs. Memorial, Oct. 7, 1933***

Let us return a little back. In the fall of 1933, people were looking for changes. The world was in the throes of the Great Depression. These were the darkest of days. New leaders promised new eras. The newly elected Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler, was promising to establish a New Order and put Germans back to work. In the United States, the new president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in office only seven months, was promoting to Congress an unorthodox economic plan called the New Deal. Americans wanted to escape from the gloomy realities of everyday life if only briefly. Movies were a popular outlet. In Evansville, Busby Berkeley's *Gold Diggers of 1933* was drawing the biggest crowds.

The Golden Age of Sports, born in the twenties, had become ingrained in American society. Sports were as important a relief from the burdens of everyday life in 1933 as the motion picture industry. If not able to attend, people huddled around the radio to listen to Babe Ruth hitting them out for the Yankees. Boxing and college football also had huge followings.

Evansville was no different. Besides the national sports scene, interest in local sports was high. None were followed more closely than the local high school football rivalries that had sprouted in the 20s. Before 1918, Central was the sole high school in Evansville. But by the mid-20s, the city had four: Reitz in 1918, Memorial in 1921 and Bosse three years later.

Going into the '33 season, the school on top of Coal Mine Hill on Evansville's Westside had been competitive in football, but it was Memorial and Central that had set the standards in the 20s and early 30s for local football supremacy. It was those teams most experts thought would lead in 1933. Most thought—but not all.

Prohibition was still in effect, but at Old Man Ritter's business in the Westside neighborhood of Tekoppel thoughts ran differently. Thoughts on local football, and thoughts on Prohibition, for the Ritter family had plenty of stock in Reitz football and Old Man Ritter's business was a speakeasy.

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The old man's son "Chief" had been an All-State football player at Reitz just a couple years earlier, and more of the Ritter boys would make their mark on the gridiron for Reitz in the late 30s. Also, the Reitz coach, Elmer Weber, had been known to stop by the establishment on occasion to socialize; so Reitz football was common conversation among Mr. Ritter and his patrons. Hope was high at Old Man Ritter's "social club" that '33 would be Reitz' year.

That year's Reitz vs. Memorial tilt was the third game of the season for both clubs. Each team entered the contest at 2-0, both having defeated their first two out-of-town opponents. Around Evansville, anticipation for the game was high. During that week, local newspapers carried several stories from both camps concerning preparation for the Saturday meeting.

Memorial was confident. Coach Don Ping promised Memorial fans his boys would be ready. The Tiger squad was a tough crew, led by All-State halfback Tom McGannon, who would later play football at Purdue.

McGannon's trademark was playing without a helmet, which was optional in those days. The blond star was easy to spot during games: the only player on the field without headgear.

On the other end of town, up on the Hill, Coach Weber's crew was hungry. Since 1930, Reitz had experienced a taste of success on the gridiron, and gained a measure of respect from opponents with their tough and aggressive play, but, as of yet, a great season that would set them apart had alluded them. That year's team captain, and Kiwanis Award Winner, Jim Mueller, still remembered the Memorial game vividly in 1995: "That was THE game for us. We had focused on that game since before the season. We were all close—the boys on the team. We would go fishing and camping together in the summer—it was the only thing we could afford to do—and we would lay out under the stars and talk of whipping everyone in football that fall," Mueller said. "We knew Memorial would be tough that year, and we knew we had to beat them."

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That day 7,500 people paid fifty cents apiece to witness that fall's biggest game; at that time the crowd was the largest ever in Reitz Bowl. Memorial arrived early and spent almost two hours before the game warming up. For the first time in his career, Tom McGannon was wearing a helmet! The Tigers had come to play! But where was Reitz? Just moments before kickoff, the Panthers, who at that time dressed in the cafeteria, were spotted walking down the long steps of the Bowl, in single file, through the cheering Reitz faithful, sporting brand new jerseys with large orange numerals.

Head referee Birch Bayh, whose son would later be elected Indiana's governor, greeted Reitz captain Mueller and Memorial's McGannon at mid-field for the coin toss.

The rest is history.

Unwilling on this day to except defeat, the Boys from the Hill left everything they had out on the field. Inspired performances were had by all, especially Mueller, George Freeman, Melvin Schoettlin, Fred Wunderlich and Gene Buttrum. Everybody played a role in a great team victory. Substitutes Tommy Rice and Doc Bitz came off the bench and made several key blocks that sprang Panther runners for critical first downs.

Reitz would finish the season 9-0. This was the first undefeated season in the school's history and it captured the first of what would become many state championships.

There would be other tough games that fall. A few weeks later, a tough Central High squad would fight valiantly before losing 14 to 7. Bosse also would put up a noble effort in the last game of the season, but all would bow in 1933 to the boys that had laid out under the stars and dreamed.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

October 7, 1933. A date that should be remembered by all Reitz faithful. For on that day the Reitz Football Tradition was born. The Tradition of preparing yourself to win and expecting success. The Tradition of lifting yourself up, along with others around you. A legacy that would be handed down from fathers to sons, and to grandsons. Many other young men with the dream would follow, but the boys of '33 were the first to make the dream a reality. They are the founding fathers of the Reitz football Legacy. Their gift to those who would follow can't be held in the hand, it must be kept in the heart.

October 7, 1933. Drinks were on the house that night at Old Man Ritter's speakeasy.

### Reitz won 20-6

Memorial	0	0	0	0—6
Reitz	0	6	7	7—20

### Second Quarter

R - George Freeman 1 run (kick failed)

### Third Quarter

R - Gene Parrish 3 run (Freeman run)

### Fourth Quarter

R - Freeman 1 run (Gene Buttrum kick)

M - DeVault 41 pass from Tom McGannon (kick failed)

**A - 7,500 (Press) or 7,000 (Courier)**

	<b>R</b>	<b>M</b>
First Downs	12	5
Rushing yards	165	83
Comp-Att-Int	1-6-0	4-9-1
Passing yards	17	112
Punts*	7-33	8-33
Fumbles-lost*	2-1	2-1
Penalties*-yards	7-55	5-30

### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS (REITZ)

RUSHING - Parrish 78, Freeman 63, Buttrum 22, Melvin Schoettlin 2.

*Stats compiled by Evansville Press, unless annotated with asterisk, and recorded by Courier. Complete individual stats not recorded.*

*Author's note: For the game recap, a reproduction of an article appearing in the Sunday, October 8, 1933 Evansville Press is offered on this page. Written by the late Dick Anderson, it is an interesting example of the journalistic style of the day.*

**The Evansville Press**  
**SPORTS**  
**Sunday, Oct. 8, 1933**

## **REITZ PANTHERS WHIP MEMORIAL, 20-6**

WESTSIDE OUTFIT IS POWERFUL

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Parrish Leads the Way and is Given Grand Support By Mates

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M'GANNON IS STOPPED

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Tigers Score in Fourth Period With Desperate Passing Attack

By DICK ANDERSON  
Press Sports Reporter

With a roar that sent shivers up the spines of the football players in the Central and Bosse camps, the Reitz High School Panthers hammered their way to a 20-to-6 victory over Memorial's Tigers Saturday afternoon in the Reitz Bowl before 7,500 frenzied fans.

Blond Tom McGannon, Memorial's chief scoring threat, and his comrades fought every inch of the way but they had to bow to a superior team. With the score 20 to 0 against them, the Tigers opened a desperate passing attack that shoved over the lone touchdown in the fourth quarter.

### ***Article continued...***

It was up to Reitz to stop McGannon and this they did effectively after the opening quarter. In the first few minutes of the game the flashy Memorial halfback had the Panthers worried plenty. His one big run of the day electrified the fans and brought him a round of applause. Standing on his own five-yard line in punt formation, McGannon started running, twisted his way around Reitz's right end, and carried the ball to the center of the field on the 50-yard line, before he was tumbled.

That run was his last big moment. He carried the ball time after time thruout the game but he could never break into the open and he took a world of punishment from the stiff Reitz tackling.

### **A Big Day**

The Panther's Gene Parrish, running behind a big, hard working line, captured the individual honors of the day from a ball toting standpoint. He ran the ends, out thru the line, and ran back punts for a big gain in yardage. Schoettlin, Freeman and Buttrum alternated at the ball carrying job and they were mighty effective. Freeman drove into the line with a swish that could be heard yards away and scored two of the Reitz markers while Parrish got the other.

In the line, Eakins, Mueller, Hape, Owens, Wunderlich and Fulton lived up to their advance reputation and smeared the Memorial running plays easily.

Not until the Tigers took to the air did they have a chance. After Reitz scored the third touchdown, Memorial began tossing them. Hess passed to McGannon for 35 yards and he was downed on the Reitz 41. Another pass was incomplete and then McGannon passed to DeVault who caught the ball on the 15 and ran over for the lone marker. The pass was about 38 yards and Devault scampered home the remainder of the distance. The try for point failed when McGannon's kick was wide.

Just before the close of the game DeVault passed to McGannon who snatched the ball out of the air with three Reitz men at his elbows. He was flopped down hard on the 13 yard-line as the game ended.

[Click here to learn more about the 1933 season](#)

# **A Year of Tragedy & Triumph Under the Stars**

## ***Reitz vs. Memorial: Nov. 30, 1940***

Tragedy was no stranger to the world in 1940. The planet was busy engulfing itself in global conflict. This country would soon join the war, and take with it many of the young men who were engaging in much more pristine combat on the gridiron for Reitz High School.

Tragedy was also no stranger to Reitz High in 1940. Senior halfback Harry Mortis Jr. lost his life when he drowned in the Ohio River. Mortis and four of his football teammates were attempting to cross the river in a borrowed boat when it capsized. The other boys survived but the river claimed Harry.

But triumph and victory also would be a mandate for Coach Elmer Weber's Panthers in 1940, a year that would see games under the stars in Reitz Bowl for the first time. Night games were now possible thanks to newly installed lights paid for by the West Side Nut Club.

Entering the final week of the season, the Panthers boasted an undefeated record and the state's number one ranking. This set up a much awaited grudge match against perennial power Memorial, a team Reitz had not beaten since 1933.

An eager Reitz eleven took the field that day at a packed Bosse Field.

The Boys from the Hill came to play and it looked early as if Reitz might have their way with the Tigers. On the opening kickoff, speedy Jack Dezember fielded the ball at the 10-yard line and brought the hordes of Reitz fans to their collective feet when he broke through and romped down the sideline for what looked like a 90-yard touchdown run for Reitz. But Dezember, in skirting the sideline, stepped out of bounds at the Reitz 42. This would serve as an omen for this game—nothing would come easy.

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Midway through the first quarter, a hard hit by the stout Panther defense forced a Memorial fumble on its own 37 yard line. After a mad scramble for the ball, and a huge pile up, Reitz tackle Ray Gooch claimed possession for the Panthers on the Tiger 34 yard line.

With the Memorial goalpost looming, the Panthers took advantage. Jack Dezember picked up a tough four yards on first down. Dezember was called upon again and the speedy halfback came through with a sparkling 17 yard run, which put the ball on the Tiger 13 yard line.

Fullback Bob Ritter, one in a long line of Ritters to proudly wear a Reitz football uniform, punched the ball to the 10. The jack rabbit, Dezember, behind fine blocking, sliced through the line and went airborne, bringing the ball to rest on the Memorial four yard line. Back came Ritter and he pounded it down to the one, going down under a wedge of Tiger defenders. A desperate Memorial front wall turned back Dezember on the next play. The referee spotted the ball on the one foot line — 4th down. Reitz quarterback Don Savage knew this was a job for the slower, but hard-nosed Ritter. The ball was snapped. There was a ferocious surge by both teams. Ritter knew he had to deliver, and he did. When the bodies were untangled Ritter was clearly across the goal line and Reitz had the lead.

Taking plenty of time as they lined up for the conversion, Dezember booted the ball squarely through the uprights for the seventh, and what would prove to be the last, point of the game.

The rest of the game was a no-holds-barred brawl. All afternoon the Reitz defensive line would sift through to worry George Ellspermann, the Memorial passer, several times sacking him for huge losses when he couldn't find an open receiver.

A proud Memorial squad was not without their moments. After stopping the Panthers and forcing them to punt near the end of the second quarter, the Tiger's Joe Mattingly broke through and blocked the kick. Memorial recovered on the Reitz 46. But the Tiger's couldn't take advantage against the rugged Panther defense which, as it did all afternoon, rose to the occasion.

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It was a game that would be long remembered as one of the toughest, hardest hitting games the locals had ever seen. The papers the next day would call it “a cruel affair.”

It would elevate the Panthers to a final 8-0-1 record, with a scoreless tie with Central the only blemish on an otherwise perfect season. Two players that year, Art Deig and Harold Wolf, would be accorded All-State honors. It was Reitz’ second undefeated season and would gain them their second mythical state championship.

1940. A season of tragedy and triumph for the Boys from the Hill.

### Reitz won 7-0

Memorial	0	0	0	0—0
Reitz	7	0	0	0—7

### First Quarter

R - Bob Ritter 1 run (Jack Dezember kick)

	<b>R</b>	<b>M</b>
First Downs	5	3
Rushing yards	110	-54
Comp-Att-Int	1-5-0	3-12-2
Passing yards	3	40
Punts	10-32	10-31
Fumbles-lost	2-(4?)	3-1
Penalties-yards	7-45	2-20

*Neither the Courier nor the Press recorded individual statistics.*

[Click here to learn more about the 1940 season](#)

# **The Birth of a Juggernaut**

## ***Reitz vs. East Chicago Roosevelt:***

### ***Oct. 1, 1948***

East Chicago Roosevelt High. The Goliath of Indiana high school football in the 40s. They owned the gridiron. The colossus no one could beat—don't even try, just take your lumps and be thankful if you walked away.

The Roughriders had not lost a game in four years—since 1944. They were undisputed state champions in 1945, 46 and 47—three years in a row—devouring their foes like some hungry behemoth. Many of their non-league foes refused to reschedule them after a particularly brutal beating. Roosevelt administrators were forced to scramble to find fresh martyrs to sacrifice to their football leviathan.

One program in the southern part of the state that the Roosevelt brass had an offer from seemed interesting. Evansville Reitz was already known around the state in football circles. They had won a couple of state championships ('33 & '40), and had earned a reputation as one of the state's better programs. They had a huge stadium and large gates. Plus their coach, some guy names Byers, had been trying to schedule a game with them for years. Seemed like a good opportunity to show the southern part of the state how football was really played, and collect a nice paycheck in the process.

Anticipation that week ran high in Evansville. The Panthers had drubbed their first three opponents by a combined score of 124-12. Even though it wasn't likely anyone would beat mighty Roosevelt, the locals were hoping for an exciting contest. The official gate that day was 13,587, but with many standing four and five deep outside the fences on the Hill, it was estimated that 15,000 people watched the teams take the field.

Roosevelt won the toss and elected to receive (might as well go on offense and take it to the southern boys early.) The Roughriders relied mostly on a bone crunching running game sparked by a 217 pound battering ram at fullback – Ted Toper.

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But on this fateful day, a new king of Indiana football would emerge. On this day, there would be two mighty teams in Reitz Bowl, but the mightiest would not be from up north. On this day, a new football juggernaut would be born.

The fired-up Reitz defense stuffed the powerful northerners on that first series and forced them to punt. The Panthers took over on their own 37 yard line. On the very first play from scrimmage, fullback Tommy Wilson took the handoff, burst off tackle, and stunned the Roughriders with a 63-yard touchdown gallop.

A proud Roosevelt team would not go down without a fight. Time after time they sent Toper pounding savagely into the Panther wall. But the fierce Reitz defense was too much for the northerners. Wherever the Roughriders tried to attack, the Panthers swarmed to the ball, arriving there in a bad mood.

The Reitz defenders were not the only Panthers that came to play that day. The offense put on a show of its own. Led by quarterback Earl "Pete" Fisher, the Panthers kept an exalted Roosevelt defense reeling. Although the Panthers threw the ball only twice, both were for TD's. The first on a Fisher to Malcolm Cook bomb that covered 58 yards, and the second again from Fisher to Bob Hertzberger for 52 yards. Two passes – two touchdowns – 110 yards. For the rest of the game the Panther offense put on a running clinic for the visitors. Fisher's ball handling wizardry often had the enemy defense tackling the wrong man.

When the final gun sounded the mighty East Chicago Roosevelt Roughriders had been thrashed 32-6 by the Reitz High Panthers.

The Bowl had her heroes that day. Fisher, Cook, Wilson and Hertzberger would all be named All-State. To this day their pictures hang in the Reitz locker room. Bob Yokel would turn in an outstanding game on defense. The team would go on to an undefeated 10-0 season and an undisputed state championship. However, something much greater than individual honors would come from this game. Something even greater than team honors.

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For this was the day a legacy was born. A legacy fought for and handed down from fathers to their sons and grandsons. The legacy of Reitz Football. The legacy that inspires little boys to dream of someday playing football for the "Panthers." Something pure – something noble.

Now there was a new Goliath.

### Reitz won 32-6

#3 East Chicago Roosevelt	0	0	6	0—6
#1 Reitz	6	7	13	6—32

### First Quarter

R - Tom Wilson 63 run (kick failed)

### Second Quarter

R - Pete Fisher 1 run (Malcom Cook kick)

### Third Quarter

R - Cook 58 pass from Fisher (Cook kick)

ECR - George Schuljak 31 pass from Bill Holzback (kick failed)

### Fourth Quarter

R - Bob Hertzberger 52 pass from Fisher (kick failed)

R - Wilson 6 run (kick failed)

**A - 12,000 (Press) or 11,000 (Courier)**

	ECR	R
First Downs	13	8
Rushing yards	148	234
Comp-Att-Int	9-19-?	2-4-?
Passing yards	99	110
Punts	4-36	3-36
Fumbles-lost	6-2	4-2
Yards penalized	25	20

*Neither the Courier nor the Press recorded individual statistics.*

[Click here to learn more about the 1948 season](#)

## **From Goat to Glory**

### ***Reitz vs. Louisville Flaget: Sept. 14, 1951***

The Evansville Press, in its preseason football prognostications in 1951, would declare:

**“REITZ TO FIELD ITS GREENEST FOOTBALL SQUAD SINCE 1944.”**

“The Evansville and Southern Indiana football teams that have been hankering for so many years to beat Reitz had better do it now.

For once Reitz isn't loaded.

This year's team, which Coach Herman Byers will first send into action Friday at Vincennes, will be the school's greenest since 1944, its last poor season. The opener is at 7:30pm (cdt), and the Reitz athletic office has tickets.”

Sportswriter Larry Middlemas went on to mention that the Panthers had only 5 returning lettermen and 14 seniors, a few of which, according to the coach, “might not last out the season.”

Middlemas's forecast of a down year for Reitz would prove accurate as the '51 Panthers lost that first game to Vincennes 12-14 and would go on to finish the season with a very un-Reitz like 2 wins, 5 losses and a tie — Herman Byers' worst record ever on the Hill.

But the second game of the season would long be talked about, not just because the young Panther squad would battle back to effect a tie against a highly favored opponent, but also because this day would see what might be the most bizarre ending to a game ever played on the Hill.

The flashy Louisville Flaget Braves entered the game undefeated and highly ranked in Kentucky. Flaget's quarterback Paul Hornung (yes, that Paul Hornung) was the top quarterback in the country according to most college scouts. End Howard Schnellenberger (yes, that Howard Schnellenberger) was another big gun for the Braves. Featuring speed and talent, Flaget was expected to hand Byers' inexperienced gridders a lesson they soon wouldn't forget.

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Flaget came out with all pistons firing. Shooting their speed ball backs from a split T, the flamboyant Kentuckians awed the crowd with dazzling ball handling and a pin point passing attack. It looked early like Reitz would be in for a long day. However, despite the fact the visitors dominated statistics, the first half saw the youthful, but gritty, Panther defense stiffen when it had to. Flaget took only a 7-0 lead into intermission.

The second half saw Flaget come out hard again. The Braves Sherrill Sipes fielded the Panther kickoff at his own 10 yard line, raced into the clear at the 40 and finished the run in the Reitz endzone for a 90-yard kick return. Hornung, however, missed the kick and the Braves lead 13-0. The missed kick would prove momentous.

Suddenly the Reitz offense started to click and momentum, always a fickle mistress, seemed to sway. A flea flicker from George Brunson to Don Thomas to Dick Georgette picked up 17 yards and broke the ice for Reitz's offense. On the next play Brunson heaved a high pass downfield to Jim Aurs who snagged it on the Braves 28 and galloped toward paydirt, ending the play by dragging a tackler over the goal line with him.

On the second play of the fourth quarter, the Panthers Bob Bromm recovered a fumbled Flaget handoff at midfield. Byers' boys saw their chance and they were determined to take advantage. Brunson passed six yards to Georgette before running the ball around end for another eight. Georgette then hauled in another Brunson pass and roared down the sideline before being bumped out at the 10.

Flaget was penalized five yards for offside. Brunson first banged for one tough yard and then crashed for four more and the score. Don Wade made sure the tying kick was good.

The remainder of the 4th quarter was a seesaw battle between the teams until just over a minute remained when Flaget, who had worked the ball down deep into Panther territory, scored what looked like the game clinching TD. But an offside brought the ball back and Reitz ended up taking over.

Backed up against their own goal line, the Panthers could not move the ball. Only seconds remained in the game and it was 4th down. Reitz had no choice but to try and punt the ball out of peril.

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This set the scenario for one of the wildest endings ever witnessed by Reitz fans, 4000 of whom were there that day.

Punter Tom David, standing in his own endzone, fumbled the ball! Knowing a safety would give Flaget an immediate win, he managed to maneuver the ball out of the endzone, getting tackled just within the field of play. David, who was a two-year letter winner and a solid player for his beloved school, was wearing an oversized pair of goat horn's.

The Flaget sideline was jubilant. They had the ball on the Reitz one foot line. Hornung and his teammates rushed to line up for one last shot at the Reitz endzone as the clock ticked away.

The ball was snapped. Hornung tried to squeeze the ball over on a quarterback sneak, but met a solid wall of Reitz resistance. Hornung fumbled the ball!

To this day, many of those who were there swear time paused for just a moment. There was the ball, lying on the ground, both teams frozen and the crowd even seemed to go still. Then a savage fight for the ball. Flaget players seemed to get there first. Could they get a quick timeout and have one more go? But when the dust had cleared and the pile unstacked, one lone Panther had fought through and wrestled the ball away. Who was the Reitz hero? Tom David, the Reitz punter who had fumbled the ball away just a few moments earlier, lifted the ball skyward as the gun sounded.

Paul Hornung would go on to win the Heisman Trophy at Notre Dame and be enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Howard Schnellenberger would later be a head coach in the NFL and win a college National Championship as the head coach of the Miami Hurricanes.

But on this day they were just two more of the many opponents that have left Reitz Bowl without a win.

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### Reitz tied 13-13

Louisville Flaget (Ky.)	0	7	6	0—13
Reitz	0	0	6	7—13

### Second Quarter

F - Phil Schveri 8 run (McDonald run)

### Third Quarter

F - Sherril Sipes 90 kickoff return (Hornung kick failed)

R - Jim Aurs 52 pass from George Brunson (Don Wade kick failed)

### Fourth Quarter

R - Brunson 4 run (Wade kick)

**A - 4,000**

	<b>F</b>	<b>R</b>
First Downs	13	9
Rushing yards	187	57
Comp-Att-Int	5-12-1	6-14-1
Passing yards	70	134
Punts	3-33.3	3-31.3
Fumbles-lost	6-5	3-2
Yards penalized	50	16.5

*Neither the Courier nor the Press recorded individual statistics.*

[Click here to learn more about the 1951 season](#)

# The Game

## *Reitz vs. North: Oct. 27, 1960*

Like the rest of the nation in the waning days of October 1960, there was much talk in Evansville of the hotly contended presidential election, only a week away, between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy. Everyone had an opinion.

However, for the week leading up to Thursday, Oct. 27, another matter took over the local spotlight. For that was the day of 'THE GAME.' Everyone had an opinion on this topic also.

All that week on radio, television, and in the newspapers; in barber shops, taverns, stores and shops there was one subject that dominated conversation. Thursday night in Reitz Bowl the number one ranked team in the state of Indiana — the Reitz Panthers, would meet the number three ranked team in the state — the North Huskies.

Reitz would bring a perfect 6-0 record to the table and the state's top ranking. The Panthers featured a stifling defense that had allowed a total of just eight points in the first six games. Combining this with a bruising running game and a dangerous passing attack on offense, the Panthers had laid waste to Vincennes, 20-0; Muncie Central, 34-6; Mater Dei, 46-0; New Albany, 47-0; Central, 42-2; and Bloomington, 31-0.

North, smaller but "packing more fireworks than a munitions dump" according to Courier reporter Don Bemhardt, featured a deceptive running game and a brilliant passing attack. Along with a quick, hustling defense the Huskies were 7-0 and had demolished Mt. Vernon, 52-7; Lincoln, 41-19; Bloomington, 20-0; Bosse 27-7; Memorial, 30-20; Mater Dei, 25-7; and Boonville, 58-0.

It was standing room only at the Bowl that night, with little or none of even that left. The crowd overflowed down on to the field, jammed the aisles, packed the hillside turf at both corners and stood four to five deep along the fences. The newspapers the next day estimated the crowd at "over 14,000."

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

North put up a struggle in the first half. The Huskies, aided by several key penalties on the fierce Hilltopper defense, twice had the ball within the shadow of the Reitz goalposts. Husky quarterback Mike Volkman and runners Mike Madriaga and John Mominee were a skilled unit that had burned opposing defenses all season. But, even though they twice had the ball inside the Reitz ten yard line in the first half, the powerful Panthers would dig in and deny any score.

DEFENSE! In 1960, few had seen as ferocious a squad as the one from the Hill. The core of this defense would return as seniors in 1961 to form a legendary unit — but that is another story.

In fact, the only score in the first half was tallied by the Reitz defense. In the first quarter the Panthers Royce Neisz picked off a Huskie pass and returned it 18 yards for the score. At intermission, the Panthers held a slim 7-0 lead.

During halftime the crowd in the Bowl watched as Kay Alexander was crowned homecoming queen. In the locker room, Herman Byers was assuring his team the second half would be different. “They’ve had their day,” was the coach’s comment about the fine Huskie first half. The coach told the team it was time for them to add their portion to the Reitz legacy.

The Boys from the Hill took the field for the second half with fire in their eyes. Reitz had to kickoff. The Panther’s Larry Hall booted the ball deep to the Huskies Steve Myers.

“When Myers crossed the 20 yard line he was rocked hard by a tremendous hit and fumbled the ball. The alert Hall picked up the ball and sprinted in for the score.

The Huskies never had a chance in the second half against the powerful – and fired up – Panthers. The second half was as lopsided as the first half was close. The overwhelming Reitz defense forced the badgered North offense into throwing four interceptions that day, and brutal tackling by the Panthers caused six fumbles—three of which were recovered by Reitz.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

The valiant North squad had heart, but not enough muscle to match up to the powerful Westsiders, and finally wilted under the Reitz onslaught. The scoreboard read 34-0 at the end of "THE GAME." It was the fifth shutout of the season for the Panthers.

Standouts that day for the Panthers, besides Neisz and Hall, were co-captains Bob Ringham and Ken Hansen. Charles Orth, Gary Hahn, Joe Goodrid and Glenn Ray also turned in outstanding games. But this was indeed a team effort. Gary Effinger, who came off the bench in the second half to spell injured fullback Don Hansen, threw for a touchdown and sparked the Reitz offense.

The players carried their coach off the field on their shoulders. Even though the outcome of the game was not in doubt after the first few minutes of the third quarter, the jubilant Reitz faithful rushed onto the field when the gun sounded, formed a giant human train, and snake danced around the field.

The next week the Panthers smashed Memorial 32-0 for their sixth shutout, and ended the season with a 47-7 butchering of Bosse. That would lock up another state championship for the proud program.

The words over the Bowl read "Home of the Mighty Panthers." Many great teams on the Hill have proved the soundness of those words. Words that surely pertain to the 1960 Reitz Panthers.

**Reitz won 34-0**

#3 North 0 0 0 0—0  
#1 Reitz 7 0 21 6—34

**First Quarter**

R - Royce Neisz 18 interception return (Larry Hall kick)

**Third Quarter**

R - Hall 17 fumble return (Hall kick)

R - Gary Hahn 8 run (Hall kick)

R - Neisz 35 pass from Gary Effinger (Hall kick)

**Fourth Quarter**

R - Hahn 1 run (kick failed), 6:29

**A - 14,000**

	<b>R</b>	<b>N</b>
First Downs	13	11
Rushing yards	233	144
Comp-Att-Int	4-6-1	2-13-4
Passing yards	72	15
Punts	2-24	0-0
Fumbles-lost	2-0	6-3
Yards penalized	94	21

**INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS (REITZ)**

RUSHING - Hahn 13-78, Effinger 9-71, D. Hansen 7-63, Glyn Pfohl 1-8, Clark 3-5, Ted Groves 1-5, DeMuth 1-3.

PASSING - n/a

RECEIVING - n/a

TACKLES - Joe Goodrid 6-1, Tom Reasor 5-0, Charles Orth 5-0, D. Hansen 5-0, Doug Harp 4-0, Effinger 3-1, Pfohl 3-0, Bill Rieber 3-0, Bob Ringham 2-0, Hahn 1-0, Groves 1-0, Houston Rolley 1-1, Ken Hansen 0-2, Paul Huff 1-0, Jerry Fendrich 1-0.

*Stats compiled by Evansville Courier. Complete individual stats not recorded.*

[Click here to learn more about the 1960 season](#)

# **The Good Fight**

## ***Martinsville at Reitz: Nov. 4, 1977***

### ***Class 3A Sectional Championship***

Highlighted with a border, and displayed prominently in the sports pages of the Saturday, Nov. 5, 1977 Evansville Courier, was a clue to the type of game witnessed the previous night in Reitz Bowl by an overflow crowd:

#### **O'Neal okay**

Martinsville quarterback Mike O'Neal, who was blasted out of commission with 7:12 remaining Friday night and carried from the game on a stretcher after the game was delayed 10 minutes, escaped the experience without serious harm.

Deaconess hospital authorities said he was "treated and released He walked out of here with his father..."

The 1977 game between Reitz and Martinsville was notably savage in the hitting regard. But violent contact is no stranger to Reitz Bowl—the motherland of the Reitz fable. She expects fierceness in her sons. It takes more than punishing tackles to log a game into Reitz legend.

It was a big game, the opening round of the state playoffs. It pitted two undefeated teams. The Panthers and Artesians both stood at a 10-0. Indeed a big game. But that alone is also not enough to sufficiently impress Reitz Bowl, for the number of big games played on her hallowed turf is legion. What was it then that placed this contest among the all time great games in the storied history of Reitz football?

A box of Ritz Crackers?

Perhaps never before, or since, has more pregame head-butting taken place in the media between opposing coaches. It started early in the week when Bill Siderewicz, the colorful Artesian coach, was quoted in the Martinsville newspapers as saying his team was to face the "Ritz Crackers" and his boys were looking forward to playing in the "Cracker Bowl."

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

It's a good bet Siderewicz had not fully pondered who he was taking on in the color department.

Bob Padgett was in his 9th year as head football coach at Reitz. The icon of Reitz football, Coach Herman Byers, had retired in 1969 and Padgett, without hesitation, had taken a job no sane coach in any sport would want—being first in line to replace a legend.

But Padgett quickly proved his worth as lord of the Hill, and under him the Reitz football mystique kept growing. His record going into this game was an impressive 77 wins against only 12 losses. His 1971 team was undefeated state champion. Even more importantly, Padgett inspired his players to achievements beyond the gridiron. A partial list of Padgett's former players reads like a Who's Who of accomplished citizenry: doctors, lawyers, teachers, captains of industry, successful businessmen and community leaders. Former players are quick to award Padgett credit for being a positive influence and helping to implant a self-confidence that has served them well. "Coach Padgett made us believe in ourselves," is a common theme among his former players.

Undeniably, Padgett's former players revere their coach, and his success in producing outstanding citizens is understandably a point of pride with Padgett himself. However, during his time on the Hill, Padgett more than occasionally found himself embroiled in controversy. Sometimes Padgett used unorthodoxed methods to inspire his team and the coach was never one to shy away from confrontation. On occasion the Reitz coach would intentionally provoke a verbal, and very public, battle in the newspapers with opposing coaches. Padgett enjoyed getting the enemies dander up, and his verbal battles in the newspapers with Central High coach Dennis Sexton are legendary.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

“I loved doing that,” Padgett said years later. “Nowadays everyone is scared to say anything in the papers, all the quotes are a bunch of baloney. Too many coaches are afraid to put themselves on the line. They ask their players to do it, but they won’t do it themselves. Football is a game of challenges. I was honest with the media. I told them what was on my mind for two reasons: it would excite and challenge our players, and it would excite our fans. Reitz fans and players are from the same mold—both like a fight. Win or lose, a good fight is what matters. Heck, we would tell them right in the papers everything we were going to do, then challenge the other team to do something about it. It makes for a great crowd!”

So, knowing Padgett’s fondness for a good fight, when the Martinsville coach’s now famous “Ritz Crackers in the Cracker Bowl” quote was picked up by the Evansville papers early that week, locals looked forward to the Padgett’s reaction.

This was manna from heaven for Padgett. The other guy had even started it for a change. Padgett quickly interpreted Siderewicz’s quote as a vile insult to all Reitz fans and then- ancestors. “I wish Bill wouldn’t have said that,” Padgett was quoted. “He’s insulted and challenged our fans completely. I don’t believe he knows what he has done. Our fans are the best in the state. They are loyal. I hate to see them referred to in such a derogatory manner. We’ll need an emotional response from them and I think they will have their say Friday night.” Then, with a straight face, Padgett added, “I can’t believe a coach would say something like that in the paper.” With newspapers still in hand, Reitz administrators ordered extra security for Friday night.

The verbal dual between Padgett and Siderewicz continued. The following day the Martinsville coach was quoted as saying his team was ready for anything Reitz could offer, and, when informed that Reitz was favored by 6½ points, Siderewicz flatly stated he felt his team should be favored. After all, didn’t he have the state’s top quarterback in Mike O’Neal, enough offensive weapons to conquer a small country, and speed to burn on both sides of the ball? The coach added a reference to Reitz being in the south, suggesting a gap existed between the quality of northern football as compared to southern. Padgett then suggested Siderewicz knew little or nothing about football and was making a big mistake. “They will be playing in front of twice as many fans as they ever have,” the paper quoted Padgett. “We’ll win the game!”

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

The stage was set for the battle of the unbeaten. Indiana's number one ranked Reitz Panthers versus the number sixth ranked Martinsville Artesians.

The crowd arrived early—ready to do their part. The coach had told them to. Barges wandering the Ohio River below could hear the rumbling before the kickoff. Longtime Reitz fan Charles Hess was one of the 12,600 that were there that night. “It was extremely loud,” says Hess. “I never heard a crowd that loud in the Bowl. It was constant throughout the entire game—a roar that never let up. I never heard the loudspeaker, in fact I think the announcer gave up after a while! I think the crowd was definitely a factor that night.”

Martinsville won the toss and elected to receive. A bad move from the start. Padgett chose to put the Artesians with their backs to the south endzone—the closed end of Reitz Bowl. Bob Stephenson's booming kickoff trapped the Artesians deep in hostile territory, surrounded on three sides by the thunderous sound of the contentious crowd, and on the fourth side by eleven angry young men wearing silver helmets (after the game, Siderewicz referred to the Reitz defense as, “the meanest and ugliest teenagers he had ever seen”).

The enraged Reitz defense stuffed the high octane Artesian offense, forcing them to punt. Martinsville punter Bob Payne stood awaiting the snap, alone except for the din of the crowd. Payne, who had never fumbled a snap, preceded to do just that and was immediately buried underneath a horde of swarming Panthers.

The Reitz offense was just as inhospitable to their guests as was their defense. The Panthers quickly pounded the 37 yards to paydirt in 4 plays. Orlander Guest streamed 16 yards around left end. Mick Schnell and Ron Brown added 7 yard runs apiece before Brown pounded in over right tackle for the score. After the still jittery Artesians jumped offside on the extra point attempt, Padgett decided to go for 2, and once again Brown pounded in over right tackle to make the score 8-0. Reitz could have extended their lead in the first half, but their own aggressiveness cost them, as two scoring opportunities were halted because of unnecessary roughness penalties on the Panther offense. The scoreboard continued to read 8-0 at halftime.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

The Panthers lost no momentum during the break, driving for a score on their first possession of the 3rd quarter, a drive highlighted by what many observers consider one of the all time great catches they had ever seen—at any level. Quarterback Mike Morrow hit receiver Brook Butler for a 33 yard gain to the Martinsville 11 yard line. An alert photographer captured the moment for posterity, and the photo was in the next day's newspaper with the caption "The Butler did it." No one could describe Butler's catch more clearly than Courier reporter Don Bernhardt: "a dazzling, sensational fingertip catch while stretched out in full flight." Once again Ron Brown powered in behind right tackle Steve Bennett and Stephenson converted, making it 15-0.

Martinsville, however, was not 10-0 and ranked number six in the state for no reason. Eventually their highly-touted offense, lead by O'Neal, would get somewhat untracked. In the third quarter, Martinsville moved the ball between the 25 yard lines, but, each time they seriously flirted with the Reitz endzone, the Boys from the Hill would set their jaws and deny any score. After the electrifying catch by Butler, the writing was on the wall according to Padgett. "That catch was pivotal—just super," he was quoted the next day.

The savage contact never let up. Martinsville's ace wide receiver Steve Burpo caught four passes for 96 yards but paid for each one by being summarily drilled by Reitz headhunters as soon as the ball touched his hands. Bone-jarring hits were dealt by both sides. Reitz's tough and durable fullback, Mick Schnell, had to leave the game early after being knocked out of action by a group of Artesian defenders. The Panthers repaid the favor when Martinsville quarterback O'Neal, rolling out to his left, decided to keep the ball and was hammered efficiently enough to stop the game for 15 minutes. O'Neal was carried off the field on a stretcher and taken in an ambulance to the hospital.

In the 4th period both teams tallied a score. Tailback Guest would put six more on the board for Reitz, scooting around right end for the final six yards after a time consuming drive, sparked by the hard running of Doug Phillips, who had replaced Schnell. The visitors avoided the shutout late in the game when Artesian running back Tom Warthen dove in from the two yard line.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

Martinsville's season was over. Reitz would defeat Ben Davis the following week, setting up a date in Indianapolis against Portage for the state championship. But the game from 1977 that lingers in Reitz legend is the now famous (or infamous) Cracker Bowl. "I think every store in Evansville sold out of Ritz Crackers that week," remembers Tom Turpin, Reitz' student manager at the time. "By the end of the game, crackers were being tossed throughout the crowd; they were flying everywhere." Turpin's picture was in the newspaper holding up a box on the sideline before the opening kickoff.

Bob Padgett retired after the '77 season. Perhaps too young. He left with the highest winning percentage among Reitz coaches. Today, a visitor to Padgett's business will notice hanging on the wall in his office a large, framed picture showing a caricature of Padgett holding a box of Ritz Crackers and talking to cartoon characters Dennis the Menace and Charlie Brown.

The caption reads:

"Ritz Crackers 22 – Martinsville Parmesan Cheesies 6."

His boys had fought the good fight.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

### Reitz won 22-6

3A #6 Martinsville	0	0	0	6—6
3A #1 Reitz	8	0	7	7—22

#### First Quarter

R - Ron Brown 2 run (Brown run), 4:06

#### Third Quarter

R - Brown 1 run (Bob Stephenson kick), 9:16

#### Fourth Quarter

R - Orlander Guest 6 run (Stephenson kick), 11:12

M - Tom Wathen 2 run (kick failed), 7:12

**A - 12,600**

	<b>R</b>	<b>M</b>
First Downs	16	14
Rushing yards	251	45
Comp-Att-Int	3-11-0	15-38-2
Passing yards	47	212
Punts	3-40	5-30
Fumbles-lost	0-0	2-0
Yards penalized	57	37

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS (REITZ)

RUSHING - Guest 6-83, Brown 12-75, Schnell 9-57.

PASSING - Mike Morrow 3-11-0 47.

RECEIVING - n/a

TACKLES - David Johann 8-1, Morgan Jones 4, Wayne Wargel 4.

*Stats compiled by Courier & Press. Complete individual stats not recorded.*

[Click here to learn more about the 1977 season](#)

# **A Ghostly Victory**

## ***Reitz at Jeffersonville: Oct. 30, 1993***

### ***Class 5A Sectional Semifinal***

(special thanks to Steve Ford)

It was only fitting, in what the next day's newspapers would call "one of the most thrilling finishes in Reitz football history:", that the mantra of legendary coach Herman Byers, and a player whose grandfather had played on Byers' first Reitz team, would play key roles.

Even oldtimers would be calling this 43-36 double overtime win over a talent-rich, and favored, Jeffersonville squad one of the most exciting games they had ever seen.

With 10:28 to play in the second quarter, it looked like Reitz would be lucky to stay close to the Red Devils. The Panthers trailed 21-6 after giving up touchdowns of 44, 43 and 73 yards.

"We lost our composure there for awhile and could have folded our tents then," Reitz coach Bob Gaddis said. "But we didn't."

Jeffersonville coach Bill Ware said, "We thought we had enough at halftime to win, you've got to hand it to Reitz."

Enter Byers.

"At halftime, Coach Gaddis told us we weren't changing anything," stated tackle Chris Kasinger, "and he talked about the Reitz tradition. He told us Coach Byers favorite saying: 'Winners never quit and quitters never win.' It was the first time he had said it all year. We took it to heart."

They also took it to Jeffersonville. The Panthers roared back in the second half to take a 29-21 lead with 7:42 left in regulation, but the tough Jeffersonville squad wasn't about to give up without a fight. The Red Devils tied the score late in the fourth quarter, and Reitz had to make a tremendous defensive stand on a fourth-and-1 at its own 30-yard line to ensure overtime.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

Jeff got the ball first in overtime and quickly scored to take a 36-29 lead. Reitz answered just as quickly with a 10-yard run on a keeper by quarterback Brian Vogel. Ryan Jesop's extra point tied the game and sent it on its way to a second overtime.

The second overtime saw the Panthers with the ball first. Co-Captain Josh Whicker: "When we got to the second overtime we talked again in the huddle about the Reitz tradition and all the things we had been told about Reitz football since we were little kids – Coach Byers and all the great players and teams. We felt we owed the tradition, and the people that had given us this tradition, something. We drew strength from that. We were all dead tired by the second OT, but we knew we had to win."

Whicker promptly lead Reitz into the endzone. On first down, Whicker, a two-year All-State and USA Today All-American, pulled around left end and took out three Jeff defenders with one tremendous block. This allowed tailback Chris Reed to fight his way to paydirt and a 43-36 lead.

But there was still some defense to play.

Reitz forced incompletions on first and second downs. On third down, Whicker and linebacker Mike Hahn flattened a Jeff runner for a four-yard loss. On fourth and 14, a big crowd of Reitz faithful, who had make the 100-mile trip, got a scare when the Jeffersonville quarterback found a little running room around right end. But Whicker knocked him off balance at the 10 and linebacker Andy Hape finished him off at the 5 to preserve the win.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

This game had its share of heroes. Reed and Vogel's hard running on offense and great blocking by the line. Tough defensive play by Hape, Hahn, and tackle Scott Vincent. Pressure extra point kicks and a key field goal by Jesop. Even sophomore Adam Hubbard making some great under-pressure holds for kicks was a key. All contributed greatly. But tackle Josh Whicker, who blocked a crucial Jeff extra point, forced one fumble and recovered another, made several key blocks and tackles, and was named the game's Most Valuable Player, best summed it up: "On this day we felt the mystique of Reitz football was on our shoulders, and we were ready to accept that. Lots of us have family that played for Reitz. My grandfather was on Herman Byers' first team. The Reitz tradition means something to us. It sounds funny, but when Coach Gaddis quoted Herman Byers at halftime, it felt like Coach Byers was there in the locker room talking to us. Some people said later that the ghost of Coach Byers is still winning games at Reitz. I don't know, but we all feel Coach Byers would have been proud of Reitz on this night."

# Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

## Reitz won 43-36, 2 OT

Reitz	6	6	3	14	7	7—43
Jeffersonville	14	7	0	8	7	0—36

### First Quarter

R - Chris Reed 11 run (kick failed)

J - James Harris 44 run (Robbie Lewis run)

J - Marquis Vaughn 42 pass from Harris (kick blocked)

### Second Quarter

J - Chris Lamp 73 pass from Harris (Ashley Mimbela kick), 10:28

R - Reed 61 run (pass failed)

### Third Quarter

R - FG Ryan Jesop 29, 3:46

### Fourth Quarter

R - Reed 5 run (Jesop kick)

R - Reed 5 run (Jesop kick), 7:42

J - Harris 5 run (Harris run)

### First Overtime

J - Brad Bixler 10 pass from Harris (Mimbela kick)

R - Vogel 10 run (Jesop kick)

### Second Overtime

R - Reed 10 run (Jesop kick)

	<b>R</b>	<b>J</b>
First Downs	11	7
Rushing yards	45-302	33-187
Comp-Att-Int	4-7-0	6-12-0
Passing yards	35	161
Punts	4-27.8	3-31
Fumbles-lost	2-0	4-2
Penalties-yards	9-80	6-51

## INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS (REITZ)

RUSHING - Reed 242

*Stats compiled by Evansville Courier. Complete individual stats not recorded.*

[Click here to learn more about the 1993 season](#)

# **The Night They Moved The Bowl**

## ***Reitz at Castle: Nov. 2, 2001***

### ***Class 5A Sectional 8 Championship***

The Panthers will finish the season .500; perhaps a game over .500 if they can avoid injuries and the breaks fall their way.

That's what the experts said.

Don't feel sorry for the Panthers, they won eight games when most had predicted a rebuilding season under a new coach. The opening playoff game against Castle would be Reitz's last game but they could be proud of their season.

That's what they said.

So when the dust of eleven games had settled and the upstart Panthers miraculously found themselves still alive and headed into the sectional championship game against Castle, the outcome was predetermined.

It was a game impossible for the Panthers to win.

True, the Castle Knights were bigger and faster at almost every position. The laws of physics could not be denied. Fearsome Castle was ranked as high as third in the state in many polls and deservedly so; they were an impressive group. The Reitz Panthers were unranked.

Castle had defeated the Panthers earlier in the season by seventeen points and just a week ago the Knights routed a North squad that had dealt the Panthers their worst loss of the season. All that plus the championship game would be played on the Knights' home turf.

Hold that last thought.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

### Thursday, November 1

Thursday's pregame practice, the last practice of the week, had just concluded. On the fifty-yard-line in Reitz Bowl, the Reitz players huddled around Don Waterman, the school's revered football equipment manager, who was finishing his traditional Thursday night pep talk. Twenty yards away, the Panthers' line coach, Tim Shipp, waited patiently for Waterman to finish. When the players broke and headed toward the fieldhouse, Coach Shipp called them over.

"Men", Shipp began, "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."

There were no smiles. No chuckles. No one thought the idea silly. With somber faces and in dead silence every player took a small bag from the coach and walked to a different part of the field to gather his piece of the hallowed turf.

The underdogs believed.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

### Friday, November 2

Before the game, the sprinkling of the turf took place as planned while the Castle players looked on bemused. Daniel Woods, a sophomore who just three weeks earlier had been assigned the job of kicking extra points and field goals for the Panthers, sprinkled his turf on the ten-yard line near the south goal of the Castle field. The other Reitz players also emptied their bags of Reitz Bowl turf on the Knights' field.

It turned into a notably savage affair, this game with the Knights. Strong young men from both teams would be helped from the field. Three of Castle's huge defensive linemen would leave the game, victims of a relentless pounding from a smaller but fierce Panther offensive line.

Reitz's Aaron Gabe, who had fought back from a shoulder injury early in the season had the same shoulder pop out of joint. Most who suffered an injury like his would have gone to the hospital on a stretcher, but Gabe insisted he be taped up and he returned to the game. But Gabe was not the only tough guy in a silver helmet.

Nick Hart, the Panthers' quarterback, played the game while fighting off a concussion received in the Harrison game a week earlier. There were others. Reitz's head coach, John Hart, commented on his team's toughness.

"I have never been around a tougher group of kids then this bunch," Hart said. "Some of the stuff they play with is almost unbelievable. In a game earlier in the year, our center, Brian Gaiser, received a bad cut on his hand. With the new 'blood rule' a player has to leave the game until he is cleaned up. Brian didn't want to come out so he packed mud in the cut so the officials wouldn't see it. Zach Whicker received a deep gash in his forehead one day in practice. Blood was all over the place. That night at home Zach super glued the gash shut so he wouldn't have to get stitches and possibly miss practice. Kenneth Tidwell has played half the season with a broken hand. Ryan Lacey played two or three games on a badly sprained ankle that most people couldn't walk on without crutches. Ryan Sexton has had stitches but never missed a beat. The list goes on and on. These are guys you don't want to make mad in a dark alley."

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

### 4th Quarter

It was a jubilant place...the Castle side of the field, that is. The players on the Castle sideline and their supporters in the stands hugged and slapped backs. After being behind for the entire game the Knights had just scored to take a 14-13 lead, the one point difference being a badly missed extra point kick by Reitz's Daniel Woods after the Panthers' second touchdown. Only two minutes remained on the clock. Things looked bleak for the Panthers.

On the Reitz side of the field things were much different. The fans in the stands were in silent shock. Their boys, the huge underdogs, had fought and scrapped and somehow outplayed the talented Knights and led on the scoreboard until just a few seconds ago. On the sideline, tears flowed from the tough guys. Todd Mattingly, who had played his heart out, seemingly had nothing more to give and wept openly. Zach Whicker, a lineman who had fought stomach flu all week and had not eaten in two days, had earlier collapsed on the sideline from dehydration but returned to play the entire game. He too stood weeping. But the Boys from the Hill had not quit all season. They would not quit now.

Castle lined up to kick off.

The 'pooch kick' was a kickoff that Castle had used at various times during the season. It was a short, high kick aimed at the opponent's sideline and designed to limit returns. So far this season the pooch kick had worked well for Castle. But John Hart and his coaches had prepared their boys well. The Panthers had worked on returning the pooch kick every day that week in practice. The coaches knew where the pooch kick would come down and they had just the right guy there waiting for it.

Todd Mattingly gathered in the ball on the Reitz 31-yard line, at the spot where Zach Whicker had sprinkled his bag of turf from Reitz Bowl. After receiving several key blocks from teammates, Mattingly somehow found enough left within himself to streak up the left sideline and break into the clear. The Panther running back made it all the way to the two-yard line where he was bumped out of bounds as he dove for the end zone. The Panthers were only two yards from pulling off the season's biggest upset.

Two very long yards.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

Castle High School was not ranked among the top teams in the state for no reason. The Knights dug in and denied the Panthers their end zone for three plays.

### **Fourth down.**

The clock showed four seconds left in the game. The Panthers were behind by one point...the extra point that Daniel Woods had earlier missed at the other end of the field. This field goal would be kicked at the south end of the Castle field. The very nervous sophomore placed his kicking block down over the exact spot he had earlier sprinkled the turf from Reitz Bowl.

As Woods lined up to kick, a hush fell over the Reitz faithful in the stands. Reitz players on the sideline knelt and held hands. The coaches fretted. Not only was a sophomore kicking the ball, a sophomore would be doing the snapping. The Knights took their places, determined to block the kick.

Chris Elliott snapped the football perfectly and it was placed on the tee by the sure-handed senior, Jared Eckert. The Knights charged forward but the Reitz wall held. Woods' foot met the ball and his kick sailed high and true. Final score: Reitz 16, Castle 14. The underdog Reitz Panthers, who were suppose to win five games in 2001, six if their luck held, were Sectional Champions.

David had defeated Goliath.

Despite objections from the Castle PA announcer, the Reitz fans flooded onto the field. Even Mrs. Settle, the Reitz principal, was seen hugging one of the coaches on the field.

The game will go down in history as one of the biggest upsets in Reitz history and one of the legendary games of Reitz lore, strengthening still the Reitz football tradition.

It was done with a bunch of tough guys and a new head coach who returned to the players the joy of the game. It was done with undersized but scrappy players like Matt Chipps and Jared Eckert, members of a defense that held the Knights to fourteen points when that season they had averaged thirty-five points a game.

## Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

It will forever be known as “The Night They Moved the Bowl.”

The 2001 Boys from the Hill took a little piece of home with them to Paradise and played their way into Reitz football immortality.

The boys believed they could win, Coach Shipp.

### Reitz won 16-14

Reitz	7	6	0	3—16
5A #6 Castle	0	7	0	7—14

### First Quarter

R - Todd Mattingly 2 run (Daniel Woods kick)

### Second Quarter

C - Ray Everhart 2 run (Shipp kick)

R - Mattingly 9 run (kick failed)

### Fourth Quarter

C - Everhart 48 run (Shipp kick), 2:20

R - FG Woods 20, 0:04.9

	<b>R</b>	<b>C</b>
First Downs	11	12
Rushing yards	59-211	12-246
Comp-Att-Int	0-3-0	1-3-0
Passing yards	0	6
Punts	6-32.2	5-29.6
Fumbles-lost	5-1	4-4
Penalties-yards	4-55	3-35

### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS (REITZ)

RUSHING - Mattingly 26-101

*Stats compiled by Evansville Courier & Press. Complete individual stats not recorded.*

[Click here to learn more about the 2001 season](#)

# Mike Whicker's Legendary Game Series: The Ultimate Collection

Again, we want to give a huge **THANK YOU** to the Panthers' own Mike Whicker. As we mentioned earlier, our favorite local author has been gracious enough to let ReitzFootball.com share these stories with the entire Reitz Nation and we can't thank him enough.

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