

# Getting a kick out of old stories

40 years later, Seahawks, and the Shehawks, revive the memories of semipro football years

By BOB PUTNEY  
Sentinel correspondent

**S**HARING A COMMON bond, more than 100 people gathered Saturday night for the 40th reunion of the Santa Cruz Seahawks semipro football team — a team that played from 1946-58 and won a national championship in 1955.

They toasted the past, while rekindling some old friendships at the DeLaveaga Golf Lodge, and recalled the community-wide effort that ignited the Seahawks' spark, and the crowd of up to 2,500 that used to watch them play.

Sixteen charter members of the 1946 team were there. This group included Buck Dalman, Hugo Armanini, Charlie Booth, Archie Good, Ray Hedgpeth, Roy Johnson, Brad Lynn (the team's first coach), Bill Leonard, Pinky Pedemonte, Bob Seymour, Don Silva, Ernie Pinkham, Bob Loehr, Howard Dysle, Dominic Azzaro and Ed Withrow. The roster of former players totals 294; many of them — Jack Scofield, Ben Krupp and Tor Spindler, to name but a few — have since died.

Three of the Seahawks' four coaches — Brad Lynn (1946-47), Don Lynn (1948-50) and Len Beatie (1954-58) — talked about the rivalries with the Petaluma Leghorns, San Jose Packers, Santa Rosa Bone Crushers, South San Francisco Windbreakers, Madera Loggers and others in the days when players were paid the handsome sum of between \$5 and \$20, depending on gate receipts — when they were paid at all. They talked, too, about Spindler, the Seahawks' coach from 1951-53 who was killed five years ago in an automobile crash in Monterey.

Spindler's midfield disputes with game officials are legendary, but Doug James — Santa Cruz County sheriff from 1958-75 and a former player and assistant coach with the Seahawks — said the big man "had a soft heart, too."

The Dalman tradition of football excellence continues, because Jonathan and Chris Dalman — grandsons of former Seahawk line star Buck Dalman and reunion organizer Thelma Dalman — said their college careers are taking shape. Jonathan, just out of the Army, where he lost much of the use of one arm, is about to return to play football at Hartnell College, while Chris has chosen Stanford University after receiving 56 scholarship offers. Both played at Palma High in Salinas.

Among oldtimers attending the reunion was Val Marchi, who played for the Green Bay Packers in 1948 and 1949.

Also on hand was Bob Nicolaisen, who retired in 1987 after 25 years of coaching local high-school athletes. "I played for Castlemont Athletic Club of Oakland against the Seahawks when Seahawk Stadium (now Harvey West Park) was dedicated Oct. 10, 1950," Nicolaisen recalled. "It was raining like crazy that day. And I later played with the Seahawks."

Ed Withrow, at 60 the kid among charter members of the Seahawks, retired in January after 35 years working for the city of Santa Cruz. Withrow played for the Seahawks through 1952 before being stricken with polio, but time and numerous surgeries helped him conquer that disability. Saturday night, Withrow recalled intercepting a pass and running 97 yards for a touchdown against Petaluma on opening day at Harvey West Park.

"Don Lynn, our coach that year, is a pretty macho guy, but he's emotional, too, and he gave me a kiss after I scored," Withrow said, laughing. "I remember he used to give us chocolate bars at halftime, and the almonds always made me sick."

"I never gave my guys candy at halftime. I always gave them hell," said Lynn's brother, Brad, the Seahawks' original coach.

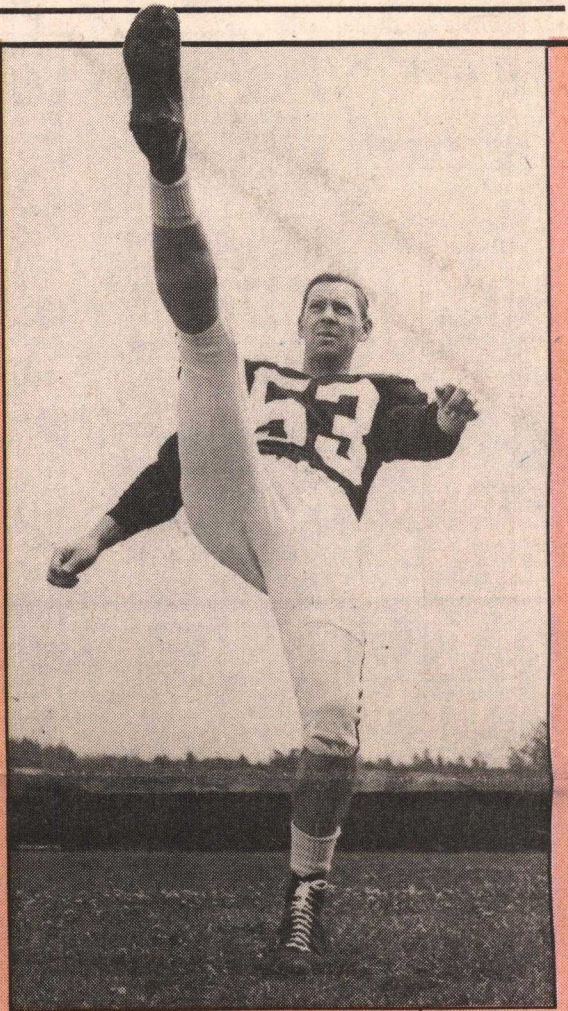
"We had some real talent, and we were considered the team to beat," Withrow recalled.

"That was a special time in Santa Cruz," said Thelma Dalman, who is working with city museum staff and with UC Santa Cruz historians to establish a museum to perpetuate the memory of the Seahawks.

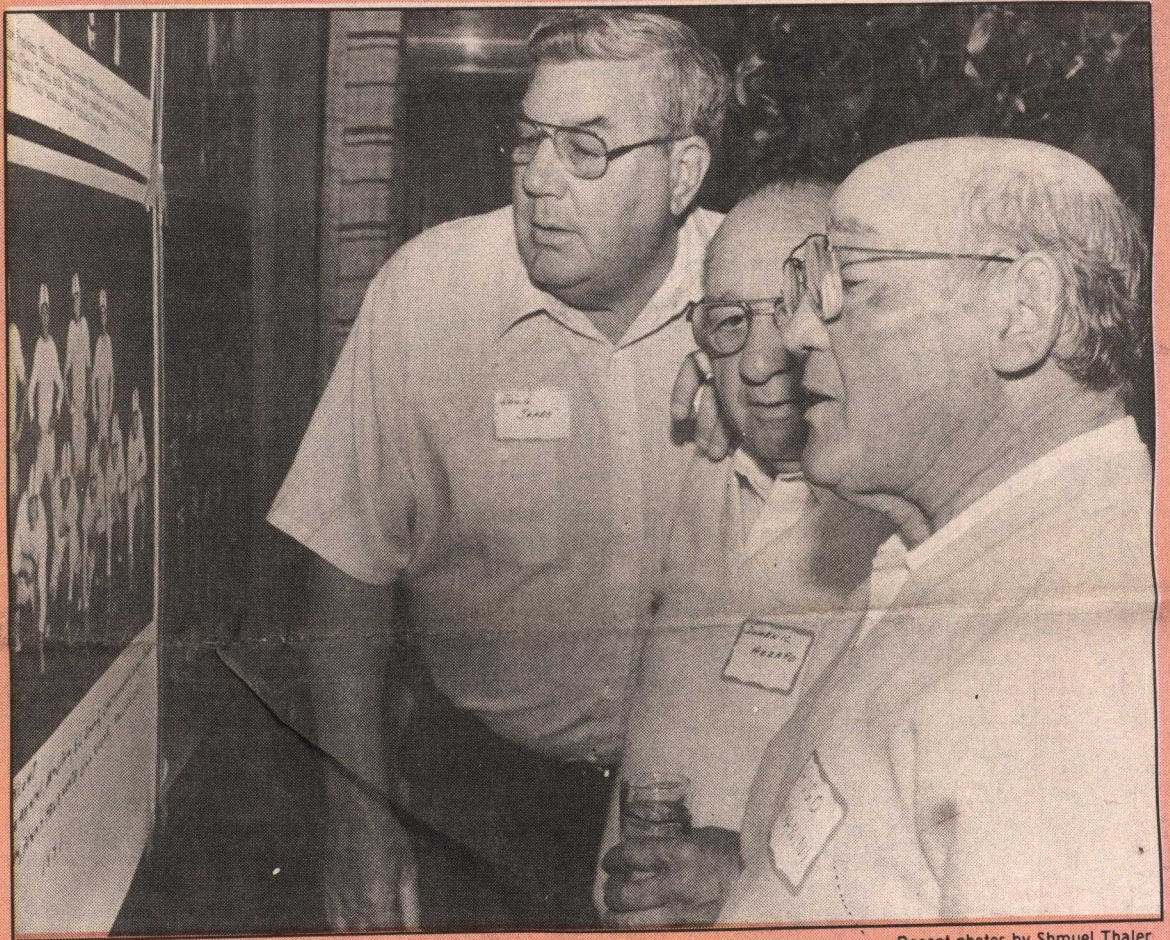
"Two tremendous things came out of this football team," she said. The team first played at Santa Cruz High courtesy of SCHS Coach Roger Baer and



Old photos draw a smile from Bob Seymour, right, with Bob and Norma Loehr.



Bob Seymour sees action, mid-50s.



Recent photos by Shmuel Thaler

Former Seahawks, from left, Doug James, Dominic Azzaro, Hugo Armanini.

through the efforts of former Seahawk president and police chief Al Huntsman and lumberman and philanthropist Harvey West, they acquired land for a stadium, she explained. Then, after the team dwindled here, Len Beatie took them in 1959 to Salinas, where they were known as the Packers. One of their players was Tom Flores, who took the remnants of that team and they eventually became the Oakland Raiders in 1960, she added.

Brad Lynn said he "enlisted the help of people like Sam McNeely, Tony Pappas and Gordon Sinclair" in getting the ball rolling to establish a semipro team here, giving of their time and money, and others called Huntsman "the Godfather of the Seahawks."

The American Legion was the Seahawks' original sponsor.

While the Seahawks practiced, their wives — who had organized a group called the Shehawks — mowed the grass and picked weeds out of the field. The Shehawks drew a standing ovation at the reunion.

"I remember the first game we played," said Brad Lynn, who coached at University of San Francisco

and Notre Dame after leaving the Seahawks. "We lost to the Santa Clara University freshmen, 7-0, but the next game we came back and beat the St. Mary's reserves, 26-7."

The three quarterbacks on the original team were Dick Fassio, Don Rodriguez and Johnny Davis. The job went to Pedemonte the next year, when the team was 8-1.

In 1955, when the Seahawks were national champions under Beatie, they "had four (college) All-Americans on the roster, and one of them couldn't break into our starting lineup," said Seymour, with a laugh.

In the 1951 Egg Bowl, the Seahawks and Petaluma "only had 1,000 less fans" than the fledgling San Francisco 49ers drew the same day," Beatie recalled.

James remembered that "the whole thing — the fans, the pep band, the Shehawks, the team — was great and the entire town had fun. The friends we made in those days have been friends for life."