HUNDRED YEAR WAR

TODAY'S GAME MARKS CENTURY OF WATSONVILLE-S.C. RIVALRY

Santa Cruz and Watsonville square off on Oct. 18, 1957. The teams played twice that year, with Santa Cruz winning both games, 14-13 and 31-20.

'Each week we played, hell was raised'

Tradition, rivalry and history will be celebrated when Santa Cruz High's football team hosts Watsonville tonight in a non-league game at Memorial Field. The two programs have battled for more than a century and will exchange plaques tonight commemorating the 100-year rivalry.

Memories of those meetings still stir the emotions of players and fans alike, on both sides of the ball.

"Each week we played, hell was raised," said former Cardinals running back Phil Lynn, 90, the youngest of three brother standouts at Santa Cruz. "It was like life itself depended on it. It was the big rivalry."

JIM SEIMAS
Prep Football

The 100-year war features the two oldest schools in Santa Cruz County. For more than half of their history, they were the only two schools in the county. They are also former league rivals, competing as enemies in the Coast Counties Athletic League and later the Monterey Bay League and Santa Cruz Coast Athletic League.

The teams are still butting heads 100 years later, as Cardinals RB Quinn Garner tries to move past Wildcatz DB Eric Enriquez in the 2007 matchup.

Plenty has changed since the teams first played.

Now, the 19 miles that separates the famous surf community from Watsonville's farming community is no longer barren. Eight other high school teams reside within county limits and compete each weekend.

Rivalries have changed too, based primarily on the proximity of the opponent. Watsonville High, one of four schools in the Watsonville city limits, boasts a rivalry with nearby Aptos. They play annually in the Black and

Sentinel file

Santa Cruz's football team won two games against Watsonville in the 1958 season.

Seimas

Blue Bowl.

Santa Cruz has two closer rivals now: Soquel, which began playing in 1962, and Harbor, which first played in 1969. Harbor and Santa Cruz battle for "The Shell," and Soquel and Santa Cruz play for "The Stump."

The Watsonville-Santa Cruz rivalry was further cooled by a 2006 Central Coast Section Southern Section realignment that shifted Watsonville from the SCCAL back to the MBL. Santa Cruz, meanwhile, remains in the SCCAL.

Still, the rivalry will always live on, said former Watsonville quarterback Dave Mercer, who played in the 1962-64 seasons.

"With teams like Aptos and Harbor around now, it's probably hard for the kids to see it and feel it," said Mercer, who has coached in the area the past three decades. "But they have fathers, uncles and friends, so they probably have heard a story or two where, 'That was the game.'"

Mercer said the league change takes the emphasis off winning a big league game when the teams meet.

"That's why I didn't want [Watsonville] separated from the league three years ago," Mercer said. "That's such a great tradition."

Not everyone agrees. Even as league opponents, the rivalry wasn't always strong, players like ex-NFLer Dick Skocko said.

"Santa Cruz was very weak," said Skocko, a former Wildcatz tackle who is now 73. "Monterey was our rival."

Like the real Hundred Years' War — a battle for the French throne that lasted from 1337 to 1453 — the rivalry between Santa Cruz and Watsonville may technically date back longer than a century.

Initially, the teams began as rivals in rugby before switching to football in the

late 1920s. Cal-Hi Sports editor Mark Tennis said his uncle, a historian, dates the teams' first game to 1896, making it the second longest rivalry in the state. San Francisco's St. Ignatius and Sacred Heart Cathedral first played in 1892.

A Sentinel newspaper clipping noted a 1908 rugby game as the teams' first meeting, however, sparking tonight's century celebration.

"We talked to the kids," said Cardinals coach Bubba Trumbull. "This is a little bit of history, regardless of the exact date, it's one of the oldest rivalries in the state."

Early in the programs' histories, there were so few teams in the area that CCAL teams — Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Monterey and Salinas — played each other twice a year from 1949-'60, once at home and once on the road.

Watsonville was an unstoppable force from 1930 to 1955, under the tenure of coach Emmett Geiser. Watsonville's field is named after the famous hat-wrenching coach, who won 10 league titles and turned Watsonville into a state power.

Geiser died in 1968 at 63. The fedora he wore on game day was bronzed and sits inside the Pajaro Valley Historical Association building in Watsonville.

His tough-love tactics didn't always sit well with players, but they brought results.

"Let's put it this way, as a freshman, he was a no-good S.B.," Skocko said. "As a sophomore, he was lesser than what I previously said. As a junior, he was just no good. And as a senior, he was outstanding, because you found out he was getting the best out of you. He was doing it for you. He was just coaching in his style, a Lombardi style."

Santa Cruz won six of the seven meetings from 1956-'59, when it became a state power. For part of that stretch, talented Cardinals running back John Kirby — who went on to play at Oregon State —

was wreaking havoc on opponents.

"You have to understand," said Kirby, now 67 and living in King City, "every team in league was a rival because there were only four teams. But they were our natural rival. There was no way you ever wanted to lose to Watsonville."

From 1960-'93 — with the exception of 1976-83, when the teams didn't meet — the teams exchanged bragging rights. Santa Cruz won three straight from '67-69. Watsonville didn't dominate like it had under Geiser, but it did manage a three-game win streak from '86-88.

The Wildcatz have restored dominance of late, winning 11 of the past 13 meetings. But the Cardinals currently hold top billing between the schools. Santa Cruz won last year's meeting 35-7 in non-league play and finished the season with the CCS Small School Division title.

While Watsonville leads the lifetime series 50-35-5, Santa Cruz has shown no shortcomings in turning out top-tier talent. The Cardinals have produced more NFL players than any school in the county — players like Al Marshall, Johnny Johnson, Obafemi and Brendon Ayanbadejo and Reggie Stephens.

Watsonville has had its greats too, boasting talented alums like Marv Marinovich, Ken Antle, Jon Zogg, Willie Selden, Jeff Skocko, Sherman Cocroft, Adrian Cordova and Shawn Benjamin.

Each of them, plus the hundreds of other players who have battled it out, has a piece of history tonight. And they always will.

"We were really rivals," said then 95-year-old ex-Cardinals lineman Hank Leibbrandt two years ago, when the Sentinel released its all-time All-County football team. "We fought like hell with them. Those were the good old days."

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100-YEAR RIVALRY

Watsonville vs. Santa Cruz

1908 – Santa Cruz, 11-0	1933 – Watsonville, 6-0	1955 (II) – Watsonville, 38-6	1980 – No game
1909 – Tie 0-0	1934 – Santa Cruz, 20-0	1956 (I) – Santa Cruz, 13-12	1981 – No game
1910 – Santa Cruz, 6-3	1935 – Watsonville, 7-6	1956 (II) – Watsonville, 27-26	1982 – No game
1911 – No game	1936 – Watsonville, 13-6	1957 (I) – Santa Cruz, 14-13	1983 – No game
1912 – No game	1937 – Watsonville, 25-7	1957 (II) – Santa Cruz, 31-20	1984 – Santa Cruz, 14-7
1913 – Santa Cruz, 14-12	1938 – Watsonville, 18-0	1958 (I) – Santa Cruz, 34-0	1985 – Santa Cruz, 49-6
1914 – Santa Cruz, 9-0	1939 – Tie, 0-0	1958 (II) – Santa Cruz, 19-7	1986 – Watsonville, 40-0
1915 – No game	1940 – Santa Cruz, 20-6	1959 – Santa Cruz, 7-6	1987 – Watsonville, 62-8
1916 – No game	1941 – Watsonville, 27-18	1960 (I) – Watsonville, 18-13	1988 – Watsonville, 35-14
1917 – No game	1942 – No game	1960 (II) – Watsonville, 7-6	1989 – Santa Cruz, 36-21
1918 – No game	1943 – No game	1961 – Santa Cruz, 19-14	1990 – Watsonville, 31-0
1919 – No game	1944 – No game	1962 – Santa Cruz, 26-20	1991 – Watsonville, 28-9
1920 – Watsonville, 9-0	1945 – No game	1963 – Tie, 26-26	1992 – Santa Cruz, 7-3
1921 – Santa Cruz, 44-6	1946 – Watsonville, 6-0	1964 – Watsonville, 27-7	1993 – Santa Cruz, 41-14
1922 – Santa Cruz, 14-0	1947 – Watsonville, 19-0	1965 – Tie, 0-0	1994 – Watsonville, 41-0
1923 – Watsonville, 15-7	1948 – Watsonville, 13-0	1966 – Watsonville, 21-13	1995 – Watsonville, 16-7
1924 – Watsonville, 28-12	1949 (I) – Watsonville, 24-0	1967 – Santa Cruz, 27-0	1996 – Watsonville, 48-14
1925 – Watsonville, 7-6	1949 (II) – Watsonville, 26-6	1968 – Santa Cruz, 34-7	1997 – Santa Cruz, 41-14
1926 – Santa Cruz, 35-0	1950 (I) – Watsonville, 20-0	1969 – Santa Cruz, 28-18	1998 – Watsonville, 32-6
1927 – Santa Cruz, 6-0	1950 (II) – Watsonville, 34-6	1970 – Watsonville, 47-6	1999 – Santa Cruz, 19-12
1928 – Santa Cruz, 13-0	1951 (I) – Tie, 6-6	1971 – Watsonville, 13-6	2000 – Watsonville, 30-14
1929 – Santa Cruz, 13-0	1951 (II) – Watsonville, 20-14	1972 – Santa Cruz, 7-6	2001 – Santa Cruz, 33-10
1930 – Santa Cruz, 13-6	1952 (I) – Watsonville, 28-0	1973 – Watsonville, 35-14	2002 – Watsonville, 28-21
1931 – No game (rain)	1952 (II) – Santa Cruz, 2-0	1974 – Santa Cruz, 7-6	2003 – Watsonville, 44-10
1932 – Santa Cruz, 9-6	1953 (I) – Watsonville, 39-14	1975 – Watsonville, 30-12	2004 – Santa Cruz, 20-8
	1953 (II) – Watsonville, 39-0	1976 – No game	2005 – Watsonville, 34-10
	1954 (I) – Watsonville, 46-0	1977 – No game	2006 – Watsonville, 16-0
	1954 (II) – Watsonville, 38-7	1978 – No game	2007 – Santa Cruz, 35-7
	1955 (I) – Watsonville, 40-7	1979 – No game	2008 – TBD