

COMMENTARY

Sad good-bye to DeVilbiss' Page Stadium

BY DAVE HACKENBERG
BLADE SPORTS COLUMNIST

It is gone now, just a pile of rubble being loaded into dump trucks. Only a forlorn-looking scrubby field -- the hallowed ground where Jim Detwiler and John Dresser and Terry Crosby ran roughshod through and around would-be tacklers long before the goalposts were removed -- and a couple lonely soccer nets remain.

Page Stadium has been a dead-man walking for years. All that was left were the south stands and ramshackle press box, and as the I-475 expansion and interchange project intruded not-so-gently within a pooch punt of the old joint it had become an eyesore.

I'd wondered for months why they didn't just knock it down out of respect for the ghosts and the greats. Then, late last week, with no warning, with no pomp or ceremony, the Grim Reaper and his wrecking ball showed up. And now that it is gone, there is some sadness. I mean, shouldn't we at least say good-bye?

If the DeVilbiss High School building was, and is, a taste of Jeffersonian architecture that could have landed on the campus of the University of Virginia as easily as on Upton Avenue in Toledo, then Page Stadium was a touch of the Ivy League with its red brick and concrete construction and its tunnel entrances.

Back in the day, before the opening of Start High School diluted its district and before the I-475 bypass first sliced a ribbon like a stake to the heart through the DeVilbiss neighborhood and sent traffic buzzing behind the Page Stadium press box, the city's best football and most dominant track and field teams called this place home.

Henry A. Page Stadium opened in 1934 -- the dedication game pitted the Tigers against old Point Place High -- and it seated 7,769 fans in identical north and south grandstands fully stretched between goal-lines, plus bleachers behind both end zones.

That seating wasn't always enough for the DeVilbiss Night Relays that would draw standing-room-only crowds in the 1940s, when the Tigers started a streak of six straight City League track and field titles among the nine they won in 13 years.

And it was never enough when legendary coaches Hilton Murphy and Dave Hardy built a football juggernaut in the 1950s. They'd bring extra bleachers in and set them over the track, in front of the grandstands, for Thanksgiving Day games against Libbey. In 1962, the end of the road as it turned out, Hardy's last team hosted Alliance, which started the season ranked No. 1 in Ohio, and Central Catholic, which ended the year as state champion, and those games drew 9,000-plus and 10,085, respectively.

Start High opened in 1962, Detwiler's final year, and DeVilbiss' seniors had the option of staying regardless of which side of the new district line they lived. All stayed, and the sixth-ranked Tigers enjoyed a last hurrah. Then night football ended in the city, and the lights came down. With the exception of the fine Crosby-Farley Bell teams of 1973 and '74, well, nothing ever seemed the same again at old Page Stadium. And after DeVilbiss closed in 1991, nothing was the same in a neighborhood once so affluent that opponents taunted the school's

athletes as "cake-eaters."

Dale Pittman witnessed the transformation. He played for Murphy in the 1950s, coached under Hardy, was head coach of those city title teams in 1973-74, and was DeVilbiss' athletic director until his retirement in 1989. He spent summers mowing and watering the grass in the stadium, repairing or rebuilding the press box whenever the graffiti artists or arsonists got to it.

And last weekend he stopped by, the final grandstand half demolished, half standing, drawing its last breath.

"What a history," Pittman said.

Gone now, but not forgotten.

Contact Blade sports columnist Dave Hackenberg at: dhack@theblade.com or 419-724-6398.

Copyright 2012 The Blade. By using this service, you accept the terms of our [privacy statement](#) and our [visitor agreement](#).

Please read them.

The Toledo Blade Company, 541 N. Superior St., Toledo, OH 43660, (419) 724-6000

To contact a specific department or an individual person, [click here](#).

The Toledo Times ®