

## EARLY HISTORY OF MODEL SCHOOL FOOTBALL

By: Jack Dickey, MHS Class of 1958

I'm not sure just when and how Model's athletic activities started. However, it appears that Model first started out with a basketball team. I know that my uncle, Jimmy Hogan, along with others, such as Hoyt Ward and Julian Johnston were on Model's basketball team in the Nineteen Twenties. Uncle Jimmy had an old barrel hoop nailed up over the door of our smokehouse where he practiced shots. The Watters Council has pictures of his team and several pictures of the Model girls' teams.

So, the existence of Model's basketball is well documented. But, football is a different story. I have been told that Model did play some football in these early years, and that the team was coached by the late Sharon "Shagg" Williams. If anyone has more information on these early years, please contact me at: [jdickey@dickeyseed.com](mailto:jdickey@dickeyseed.com) or Ph. # 470 309-1260. However, I do know for sure and certain that the "Blue Devils" did not exist until after World War Two. The teams went under the banner of "MODEL REDSKINS" during the "prewar years". Not only is the Red Skins name depicted in some of the old photos of the teams, but the Council has, in its archives, Red Skins logo patches, Red Skins school jackets and actual Red Skins basketball uniforms. Again, this was all before the ending of WWII.

Now, here's where it gets interesting. After "The War" in 1945 Mr. Randall H. Minor was the principle of Model School. At that time there was only one school campus, located at the intersection of what's now Burlington Drive and Calhoun Road. The main building was an 'H' shaped affair. The crossbar of the H was the auditorium and movie theater (Yes, we had a movie theater. It was a full, commercial type setup, capable of showing the same movies as the "picture shows" in town... like the Desoto, Reveille and Gordon.) The two legs of the H were classrooms with the high school occupying the "Front Hall" and the lower grades, "grammar school" being on the "Back Hall". Some of the intermediate grades were located in an outlying facility called the "Block Building". That is except for Mrs. Bertha Stegall's seventh grade, which was in a room under the gymnasium... heated by a potbelly stove. The "Lunch Room" and "Home-Ec" department were in an old wooden building that had originally been the main entrance and right-hand classroom part of the original 1901 Model School about a mile down the road. It had been separated from the other half, loaded on bauxite tram carts, and pulled up to the "new school" with teams of mules. This was the Model School of which I entered first grade in 1946. That same year there was a soon-to-be-famous coach by the name of Noah S. Woodard that came to Model to start a real Georgia high school team.

One of the first things Woodard had to do was to get football uniforms for the Model Redskins. School started on September 2<sup>nd</sup> that year... exactly one year to-the-day after the ending of WWII. So, peacetime manufacturing and supply inventories had still not gotten back to normal at the time. The Redskins were going to need red football uniforms, but there were none to found... anywhere! However, there were some blue uniforms available. Nonetheless, this was a dilemma of which would be quickly solved. After all, we had just won World War II. Folks improvised and made things work in those days. The Model football team needed uniforms, and those blue uniforms were, after all, uniforms. Well, those blue uniform were bought. And, just to make everything work out with the colors and all, they

simply changed the school symbol from Model Redskins to Model Blue Devils. Isn't it strange how circumstances can dictate results? If red uniforms had been available in 1946, Model would still be the Redskins. And, the politically correct crowd would be in an uproar over such a "racist name" in that it refers to the color of one's skin! Thanks to Mr. Minor and Coach Woodard... and blue uniforms, that problem was averted a long time ago.

From the time Coach Woodard arrived, and the original Blue Devil Team was formed, it would be only seven years until Woodard had coached his Blue Devils to the Class B state champions. The field out in front of the school was lined off for a playing field. Wooden goal posts were erected at each end. There were no bleachers, let alone any electric lights for night playing. Home games had to be held after school was out in the afternoons, with the spectators either standing or sitting around the field on a grassy bank.

Past Model High principle and educator, Dr. Nevin Jones, was on Woodard's original Blue Devils team in 1946 when it played its first game against Calhoun. Nevin gives a very interesting account of those early days and that first game with Calhoun. He said that none of the Model players had ever played football, and some had never been to, or even seen, a football game. Coach Woodard, literally, had to start from scratch. Those of us who remember him, know that Coach Woodard went about doing things with a great exuberance, and shaping up a bunch of inexperienced players into a winning football team was just one of them. That was borne out by the fact that Model's very first game was with the seasoned Calhoun Yellow Jackets at their Phil Reeves Stadium in Calhoun. Model came away from that first game victoriously, and continued to beat Calhoun every year until 1955.

There were those on both sides who claimed the 1955 game was the first time Calhoun had beat Model in 20 years. This was true... sort of. It was the first time in 20 years, or 30 years, or 100 years for that matter! Fact was though, the Blue Devils had only been in business 9 years. Calhoun celebrated their win as if it had been 100 years, however. I was there. The Yellow Jackets hoisted up their 300-pound coach, Hamp Tanner, and carried him across the street, and threw him into the swimming pool. Then they proceeded to the town square where the players and cheerleaders took up quarters for the rest of the night on the courthouse steps. It was like the bringing in the new year with blowing car horns and bursting firecrackers... all night long. And, those cheerleaders kept that courthouse bell ringing the whole time. They deserved the celebration. They had beat Model!

It is interesting to note that one of those years Model had beat Calhoun was in 1952... the year that Calhoun won its state championship. Due to the two schools being in different classifications, the loss to Model didn't count against Calhoun, however. The next two seasons were to be Model's, altogether. All through the 1953 and 1954 seasons Coach Woodard and his Model Blue Devils won every single game they played, ending with the Model/Claxton contest, which gave Model its second, back-to-back state championship.

The Blue Devils had come a long way in a very short time. For those of us that were around during those formative years of Model's football... it truly was "A Season to Remember".

*JD*