

Hair may be thinner, waistlines larger—but Bethlehem High School's 1934 state football co-champions enjoy their reunions. This is the 1955 gathering.

*Bethlehem High School's 1934  
football squad meets yearly  
to reminisce and stimulate  
sports interest in the area*

## 22 Years Later

BY EDGAR WILLIAMS

IT WAS cold in Bethlehem on Dec. 8, 1934. At kickoff time the thermometer read 10 degrees above zero, and the turf in Lehigh University's Taylor Stadium was like macadam. But neither the temperature nor the frozen field had much effect on the football teams of Bethlehem High School and Altoona High School. They were fired up.

They were playing for the biggest prize in Pennsylvania interscholastic football: the state cham-

pionship. Bethlehem, representing the East, and Altoona, the Western entry, each had gone undefeated and untied in 10 regular-season games. When this one was over, both were still unbeaten, but tied. Score: Bethlehem 13, Altoona 13.

There were no shenanigans in the Bethlehem squad's dressing room after the game. For kids who had set their sights on a championship, having to settle for a co-championship was a let-down. Besides, many were seniors, and apparently this was the

end of the line for them as a team.

But as the players finished showering and dressing, one of them spoke up. "Let's not bust up," he said earnestly. "Let's stick together until death."

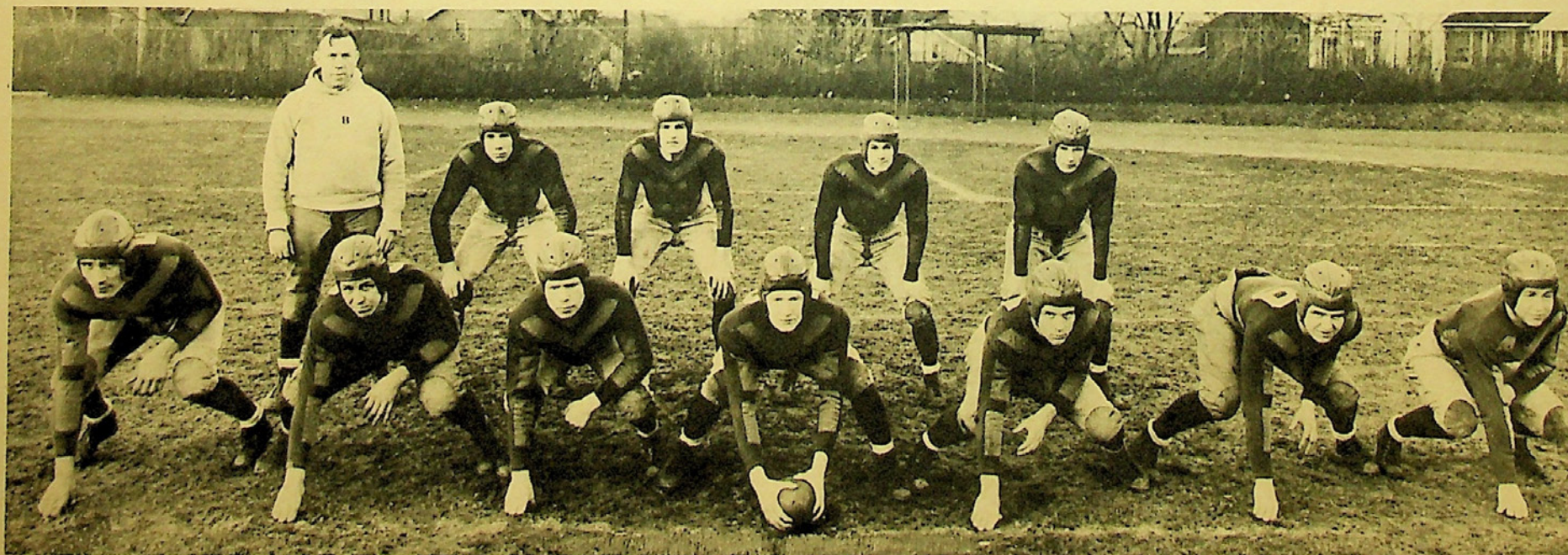
Smacking of tall corn, the suggestion nevertheless was prophetic. The kids of 1934, now averaging 40 years of age and considerably above playing weight, have stuck together. (To date, incidentally, there have been no deaths among the 46 members of the squad, 36 of whom saw service in the Second World War.

On Friday night, the eve of the 22d anniversary of its title game with Altoona, the team will hold its annual reunion dinner in Bethlehem. Attendance will not be perfect, for reasons of geography. Twenty-four of the former players still reside in Bethlehem, as do the team's coach and assistant coach. The others are scattered throughout the U. S., from Atlantic City to Pasadena, Calif. Still, some of the out-of-towners will be there, and those who can't make it will send \$5 annual dues.

The dues are important because

this is more than an organization of old football players who get together to reminisce and compare waistlines. For the 1934 squad, regarded as the greatest in Bethlehem High history, now is devoted to promoting interest in scholastic football in the Lehigh Valley.

In recent years, the Valley's "Big Four"—Bethlehem, Allentown, Easton and Phillipsburg, N. J.—have not been members of a football league, because there is no league for them to play in. The schools played each other for



The 1934 first eleven. At left rear is Coach Leo Prendergast. Unbeaten, untied in the regular season, the team was tied by Altoona in the title game.





**Arpad Kery, who played end on the team, is a Bethlehem policeman.**



**A lineman on the 1934 squad, Wilmer Behler is an artist, has won national recognition.**

what was loosely termed the "Big Four championship."

Two years ago the situation was discussed at a meeting of the 1934 Bethlehem squad. "These teams should have a trophy to shoot for," somebody remarked. "Let's establish a trophy and present it to the Big Four winner each season."

The group obtained the approval of the four schools, then went shopping for hardware. The result was the "Bethlehem High School 1934 State Co-Champions Trophy," a handsome bronze cup, 31 inches high and costing \$150. It was put up for grabs for the first time last season, and Phillipsburg High won it. The first school to win the trophy three times will have permanent possession.

At last year's reunion dinner, Leo Prendergast, now an assistant football coach at Bethlehem High, who was head coach in 1934, told the group:

"I was proud of you as a team, and I'm prouder still that there never has been anything of a disgraceful nature connected with any of you. You boys have led your old coach to believe that perhaps a little character-building went along with the blocking and tackling."

Not only have the squad members kept their noses clean but they have been fairly successful in many fields. Typical are Wilmer Behler, a guard on the team, who has won national recognition as an artist; Ben Suess, an end, now president of a Bethlehem manufacturing firm; Larry Rosati, the quarterback, who was head football coach at Moravian College and Muhlenberg College before joining the planning department of Bethlehem Steel, and Marvin Fritchman, a back, who operates a charter airline at Rochester, N. Y.

Seventeen of the men are connected with Bethlehem Steel in capacities ranging from plant guard to salesman. Others in the group are a Bethlehem detective and two policemen, one of whom

is Arpad Kery, an end on the team, who is president of the organization. Also included are a chemical engineer, a manager of a plumbing supply house in Atlantic City, a manager of a textile firm in Allentown, a beverage distributor in Corpus Christi, Texas, a manager of a department store in Pottsville and a chief petty officer in the U. S. Navy.

Kery, incidentally, takes an ear-banging whenever the group gets together. In the championship game with Altoona he dropped a pass in the end zone on the conversion attempt after Bethlehem had scored its second touchdown. Had he held it, Bethlehem would have won, 14-13. His teammates never fail to remind him about it.

But it was Kery who scored that second touchdown, making a neat grab of a pass to do it. "Of course," says John Quigg, the center, who went on to football stardom at Lafayette College, "we conveniently forget that when we kid Arpy."

In addition to Quigg, who was named All-Pennsylvania collegiate center while at Lafayette, members of the Bethlehem co-champions who played college football were tackle Joe Ungerer, who starred for Fordham in the 1941 Cotton Bowl game; back Joe Kush, Syracuse; back Phil Chovan, Clemson; guard George Strunk, Franklin & Marshall; guard Bill Hersh, Tennessee, and Rosati, Suess, back John Burkhard and back Jim Fritchman (Little All-American fullback in 1941), Moravian.

At each reunion a team photograph is made, and sometimes this presents a problem. In 1954, for example, Quigg, a salesman, was late in arriving after returning from Pittsburgh. Russ Kembel, secretary of the organization, who was Quigg's substitute in 1934 was placed in the center position for the photograph.

"Holy smokes!" Kembel exclaimed. "After 20 years, I've finally made the first team."