

From The Sidelines  
(Neil L. Perry's Coverage of Turners Falls High School Football, 1965-1981)

Wid Perry  
Class of '75

My father (the late **Neil L. Perry**) joined the Greenfield Recorder-Gazette as the Turners Falls Beat reporter in 1962 (the same year **Jack Bassett** was named Head Football Coach at TFHS). Like many Recorder reporters, Neil L. moonlighted by covering Franklin County high school football games and he liked roaming the Turners Falls High School football sidelines the best.

The first Turners game Neil L. covered was on the second Saturday in November 1963 when The Northampton Devils downed the Indians, 22-8. Quarterback **Rich Wondoloski** hit End **John O'Riley** on a 12 yard touchdown pass for the only TF score that day, but it wasn't until 1965 when Neil L. consistently covered the Turners squad.

My father would sit at our dining room table on the morning of a game mapping out a football field on four pieces of graph paper (one for each quarter). During the game, he'd sketch the play with lines and jersey numbers using one of those fat multi-colored pens with the red, green, blue and black levers on top to distinguish the different teams.

**1965** - Wahconah beat Turners 14-0 at TF's Sheff Field to open the season. **Ken Brown** was the quarterback and **Tommy Currie** the running back. **Harold Fugere** manned the press booth microphone, filling in for the estimable **Charlie Galvin**.

Turners got blanked 8-0 in a frustrating loss in Athol, memorable because a section of bleachers collapsed during the game, spilling a few dozen Turners spectators to the ground with cuts and bruises. Running back **Tommy Currie** broke his leg the following week as the Indians were whitewashed in Pittsfield 27-0.

"They're using greased pigskins at Sheff Field this year," Neil L wrote after Turners lost four of six fumbles and Adams downed Turners 8-6 on October 16<sup>th</sup> (my eighth birthday). Fullback **Rich Rudinski** scored on a one yard smash after **Barry Kostanski** recovered a fumble for Turners' lone score.

"The Bassettmen were in control from the opening whistle," Neil reported when Turners won its first game the next weekend with an inspired 21-6 win over St. Joseph's in Pittsfield, with more TF fans in the stands than the hometown St. Joe's faithful. Kicker **Bob Campbell** played in the backfield because of injuries while **Don Traceski** and **Billy Stebbins** were game standouts.

Turners "held the highly rated Drury Berkshire Boys to a scoreless tie at Noble Field," ending any hopes for a Drury championship. "The tough Indians clearly outplayed the home team," Neil L. reported, with "pin point passing by Quarterback **Ken Brown** and some amazing ball hawking by Capt. **Bob Parker**."

"Turners Falls High School got untracked in the second half to overpower a tiring Northampton football team and grind out a 22-8 Booster Day win at Sheff Field," scribed Neil L. **Bob Campbell** scored the game winner with a one yard plunge.

According to Neil L's coverage, "The Bassettmen played their kind of game controlling the ball effectively and moving on the ground at a steady clip," to beat

Holyoke Catholic, 14-6. “**Rich Rudinski, Bob Campbell** and **Dave Suprenant** shared the running honors with a big assist from **John Hastings**.”

**Jim Fox** covered TFHS’ first victory over Greenfield in fifteen years, a dramatic and decisive 28-14 victory with Neil L. providing the color coverage: “Fantastic! Tremendous! Fabulous! No known adjective can describe the Cinderella story that unfolded before 5,000 screaming, leaping, laughing, and crying fans in Turners Falls Thanksgiving morning,” he wrote. This team, “undermanned, underrated, and underestimated, soundly defeated a big, powerful Greenfield team.” **Bob Campbell** “stunned the Green with a 60 yard run over, through, and around all defenders to set up the first Turners score.”

“If the game was the Cinderella story, **Barry Kostanski** was the prince with the golden slipper,” filling in for injured QB **Ken Brown**. **Coach Bassett** told his players to ‘hit hard and play clean.’ Neil L. reported that most of the players and coaches were carried off the field and there was a parade through downtown after the win. Turners finished 4-4-1 after starting the season 0-4.

For a few years in the mid-60’s, my family celebrated Thanksgiving at my maternal great aunt’s house in the eastern part of the state. My siblings and I would journey ahead in my mother’s station wagon while my father covered the TF-Greenfield show down. He’d show up hours later, sometimes after the main course had already been served. Then he’d leave early to get back to the office to write the story for the next afternoon’s paper.

Neil L. became the Northampton Bureau Chief for the Springfield Union in February 1966, but he kept his autumn (Satur)*day* job with the Recorder and continued to walk the sidelines at Turners Falls High School Football games.

**1966** – Neil L. was there when powerful Wahconah beat the Indians 28-6 in Dalton to open the season, writing how TFHS “came back to earth” after “having their heads in the clouds since last Thanksgiving when they trounced arch-rival Greenfield in the most stunning upset since David beat Goliath,” shot down by a 5’10” superman who wore a white Football uniform instead of a cape” (Wahconah halfback **Tom Reynolds** who scored three TDs).

Turners beat Athol 12-6 on a Monday afternoon rain make-up game with **Bob Dolan** covering the action for Neil L. who was performing his (week)*day* job with the Springfield Union. **Dennis Bordeaux** and **Tommy Currie** scored the Turners touchdowns.

Neil L. noted how injuries to guard **Mark Sweeney** and defensive back **Dave Duncan** in the opening moments of the second half turned the TF Tide after “fire plug **Denny Bourdeaux**” scored in the first quarter and “the inspired Indian defensive line had contained the powerful (Pittsfield) Generals throughout the first half,” only to lose 25-14. “The fourth period was a nightmare” for Turners playing at home as Pittsfield scored 12 late points to blow open a 13-6 lead.

Turners defeated Adams 16-6 on two **Tom Currie** rushing TDs with Neil L. crediting “**Leo Weznakiewicz, Bobby Campbell** and the interior line” for playing well.

The following week, Neil L. reported that “the offense, sparked by the speed of **Tom Currie**, the strength of **Bob Campbell**, the elusiveness of **Denny Bordeaux**, the glue fingers of **John Hastings**, the pin point passing of **Ken Brown**, and the fired up

charging line piled up 26 points before Head Coach **John Bassett** cleared the bench” in a 26-14 TF win over St. Josephs.

There was the gale force wind, penalties and injuries, but it was “the old Turners nemesis – fumbles – that did the Indians in and spoiled a banner Booster Day as Drury bested the Indians at Sheff Field, 7-0.” Neil L. singled out **Bobby Cadran**’s play in the tough loss.

“I just can’t believe it!” Head Coach **Jack Bassett**’s sentiments were shared by about 700 Turners fans as the tough-luck Indians had to settle for a 6-6 tie against the highly touted Northampton Blue Devils. “It was unquestionably a moral victory, but with a couple of better breaks Turners could have driven up Route 91 with a big, big win,” wrote Neil L. A key Turners fumble and a botched field goal attempt swung the momentum despite the fourth quarter heroics of **Dave Duncan** and **Tommy Currie**’s seventh TD of the season.

Behind a “rugged Turners Falls defense that has kept the Indians in every game they played,” the “powerful running of **Bob Campbell** and the elusive speed of **Tommy Currie**,” the Indians overpowered Holyoke Catholic 14-8. **Dave Duncan** “was all over the field making circus catches,” Neil L. observed.

Although Greenfield High School was seeking revenge, it was Turners Falls who whipped the Green 18-12 at Vets Field in a stunning upset as reported by **Bob Dolan**, the first time since 1937-1938 that TF beat Greenfield twice in a row – and on Athletic Director **Eddie Bourdeau**’s birthday!

Neil L.’s color story heralded the Indians teamwork, cheering “Lightning does strike twice!” as his lead. He also wrote that “The Indians simply outplayed, out fought, out hustled, and out gunned their cross-river foes” as “Quarterback **Ken Brown** was never sharper, **Dave Duncan** and **Bobby Campbell** never ran harder, **Tommy Currie** never seemed so fast, little **Denny Bordeaux** was never more elusive, and the defensive line was never more solid.”

Concluded Neil L., “Coach **Jack Bassett**, who brought this team from the depths to the heights, told the boys in the locker room at the half, ‘You’ve completely outplayed them; now go out and don’t settle for a tie.’” Turners finished the season 5-3-1.

**1967** - In the first game of the season, “Sophomore Quarterback **Artie Burke** came off the bench to spark a late game touchdown but it was too little too late for Turners Falls as the Indians fell to the Wahconah Warriors, 24-14,” as reported by Neil L. Two long Warrior runs and “some costly Indian mistakes” gave the Dalton Boys a 24-6 lead “when Burke made his varsity baptism, and he made the most of it.” **Bobby Cadran**, **Bob Tuminski** and **Jeff Heath** aided Burke, but “heartbreaking” errors doomed the Blue.

Mistakes also buried the Indians in Athol, 19-0, but “for Turners Falls, the game was an enigma,” Neil L. reported. “The Indians were never in it, but they could have taken control at any time. Their defense stopped the enemy cold, but 19 points were scored against them. Their offense moved effectively and frequently, yet they couldn’t score a point.” Turners fumbled the opening kick off (which led to an Athol score) and coughed it up three more times in the first half, plus gave up an 80 yard TD return. **Jerry Welcome** and **Artie Burke** alternated at quarterback, **Mark Sweeney** provided some hard tackling, and **Ed Miegkowski** and **Peter Powling** caused three Raider fumbles.

“There were more key plays in the Pittsfield game than in a Playboy Bunny Club and more heroes than in an Italian restaurant,” Neil L. un-politically correctly noted as Turners tied the Generals 6-6 in Pittsfield. Overall, the Generals were “simply outplayed, out defended, and out gunned,” observed Neil L. **Jerry Welcome, Bill Legere, Mark Sweeney, Pat and Tom Currie, Mark Galvis, Mike Lewandowski,** and **Pete Powling** all had big games and “**Jack Bassett** and his staff walked off the field mighty proud of their youngsters.”

The impossible dream Red Sox lost to the Cardinals in seven games a few days earlier, but the Turners Falls Indians were big winners, knocking Adams out of the undefeated ranks with a 6-0 upset win in Turners, “in one of the most savage, rock-em sock-em football games played at Sheff Field since the 1965 Greenfield slaughter,” noted Neil L. “Once again, it was the rugged hard as nails Turners defensive unit that spelled the difference.” **Mike Lewandowski, Jerry Welcome** (“the other half of the Alphonse and Gasten Quarterback Duet” with **Artie Burke**), **Jeff Heath, Dave Simanski, Gary Banash, Dave Murley** and **Jerry Bonnette** were all part of the team effort win. Turners scored on a **Burke** to **Bill Legere** TD pass.

The following week, “**Mark Galvis** took the opening kick off 80 yards for the first touchdown and scored the final one on a two yard plunge” as Turners Falls beat St. Joseph’s 20-6 in Turners. **Mark Barber, Mark Sweeny, Bob Tuminski, Jerry Welcome** and **Tommy Currie** contributed with big games.

“Footloose but not fancy free, the Turners Falls Indians skidded to a well earned 12-0 win over the luckless Drury Eleven” in North Adams “with both teams playing on a field that should have been put out to pasture for the season, the Indians had to resort to the dippy-doodle to score, which they did to perfection early in the third quarter,” according to Neil L. “The ground was like **George McCarthy’s** flower garden – you just couldn’t put your foot into it,” which accounted for a sloppy first half with several missed Indian opportunities, but **Mark Galvis** tossed a bomb to fleet **Tom Currie** for the first score and **Galvis** scored again when **Currie** blocked a Drury punt, not to mention “stalwart defense” with special kudos to **Mike Lewandowski, Jeff Heath, Ricky Dubosz,** and **Verne Holliday**.

Down 14-6 to Northampton at the half (**Mark Galvis** scored the Turners TD), the Turners Falls Indians engineered a 61 yard drive that reached pay dirt when **Jerry Welcome** dove over the goal line from four yards out and **Bobby Cadran** made a spectacular catch in the end zone to tie the game with the successful two point conversion. The rain-soaked Booster Day Turners Falls band played ‘Cheer Cheer for Turners Falls,’ but then an 82 yard Northampton kick off return for a touchdown stunned the crowd. “The band stopped playing, the cheerleaders turned to watch the unbelievable, and the happy, noisy stands fell silent,” wrote Neil L. A fake point after kick resulted in a successful two point Northampton conversion and Turners was down, 22-14. The Indians later scored on a 56 yard 10 play drive with **Bob Tuminski** taking it in, but the two point conversion failed and Northampton was able to run out the clock “to send the hometown crowd silently away”.

Perhaps looking past Holyoke Catholic, Turners “took one on the chin in a lackluster performance, 8-0. The lesson? You can only play one game at a time!” So wrote Neil L, observing that “Turners had no excuses in this one. They lost it and they lost it big, despite the score.” The Turners Quarterback was decked nine times for a total

loss of 72 yards and a potential TF score was stopped by a holding penalty. A fumble and an interception stopped other drives.

Neil L. was the lead reporter for this Turkey Day (**Bob Dolan** provided the color) as Greenfield “slugged out a well deserved 12-0 Thanksgiving Day win over a determined but outplayed Turners Falls eleven on rain swept Sheff Field.”

Neil L. quoted a disappointed Head Coach **Jack Bassett** saying “I’m proud of our boys – they played a great game under extremely adverse conditions, but the Greenfield line was outstanding.” Wrote Neil L: “The Turners victory bubble burst early in the second half after they had played their cross river rivals to a stand off for two periods.” But the Indians failed to muster a first down in the second half while giving up two Green Wave TDs to prevent dreams of a three-peat. Turners finished the campaign at 3-5-1, although it could have been much different with a few breaks.

1968 - Neil L. opened the campaign covering Frontier’s 12-0 win over Ware in South Deerfield, while a guy named **Dewey Runaldue** watched Wahconah beat Turners 22-20 in the waning moments of the game, despite quality play from **Jerry Welcome**, **Bob Cadran** and **Mark Barber**, but Neil L. was back on the Sheff Field sidelines the next week when Athol blanked the Blue, 24-0, thanks to “a first period debacle un-yielded before (**Jack Bassett’s**) eyes” that gave the Raiders a 18-0 lead just eight minutes into the game.

“But the Bassettmen, who had survived last week’s heartbreaking last minute loss to Wahconah, are not the kind of team that sags under adversity. The defense gritted its teeth and doggedly dug in, determined.” **Mark Galvis**, **Mark Barber**, **Dave Murley**, and **Jeff Heath** stood out for the Indians, an “inspiring example of guts on the part of (**Bassett’s**) never-say-die team.”

It was a Booster Day to remember as Turners surprised Pittsfield 28-20 at Sheff Field. “Utilizing a short pin-point passing game, (**Artie Burke**) had completed 7 out of 12 aerials including a big one to (**Mark**) **Galvis**” after entering the game in the second period (**Mark Barber** had scored earlier in the game). “Never rattled, despite constant pressure from the Pittsfield Line, (**Burke**) had been the spark that was so badly missed by the Indians in their previous two outings.”

**Burke** hit **Barber** with a bomb for the winning score followed by **Bobby Cadran’s** two point conversion for good measure. The defense came to play too. **Mike Lewandowski** recovered a fumble to set up **Barber’s** first TD, **Verne Holliday** blocked a punt for another TF score, **Fred Momany** recovered another General fumble, **Galvis** set up his own game tying TD with a leaping interception, and second year line Coach **John Zymna’s** defensive alignment was critical. “The line hit with authority on every play from the opening whistle,” observed Neil L.

There was no by-line in the write-up of Adams shocking 40-6 win over the injury riddled Indians in the Berkshires. **Jerry Welcome’s** TD pass to **Gary Lemay** accounted for the TF score. Neil L. covered Mahar’s 20-6 win over Amherst while **Bill Mahan** covered Turners 18-6 victory over St. Joe’s in Pittsfield behind **Artie Burke’s** aerials in the rain as **Burke** threw two TD passes to **Bob Cadran** and a third to **Mark Barber**.

Neil L. probably wished he didn’t have to cover Drury’s 38-0 drubbing of Turners at home, thanks mostly to seven Indian interceptions. “Drury caught almost as many Turners passes as their own, which explains the zero part of the score,” noted Neil L. “It

was a frustrating, maddening, disoriented Turners Falls day,” although **Mike Lewandowski** had two interceptions for the Indians.

Classical High won its 17<sup>th</sup> straight game with a 26-6 victory over Turners at Sheff Field. “The only Indian score of the afternoon came on a pretty double reverse to **Bobby Cadran** late in the fourth period” and “**Jack Bassett’s** team had better start worrying about this week’s game against winless Northampton,” warned Neil L.

“Playing football the way it was meant to be played, the Turners Falls Indians rolled to two first half touchdowns and held on for an exciting 12-8 win” over the Blue Devils in Northampton just days after Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States. Fullback **Doug Lapointe** accounted for both Turner Falls scores, **Artie Burke** and **Dave Murley** had impressive games, **Verne Holliday** claimed another fumble, and **Jack Bassett** praised his squad for “a great team effort.”

**Jim Clark** had the pleasure of writing the lead story of Turners Falls’ massacre of Greenfield, while Neil’s color prose included “the impossible dream came true to Franklin County Thursday morning and when it was over thousands of joyous fans took Cloud Nine back to heavenly Turners Falls, fondly clutching a never to be forgotten 26-12 Football win over arch rival Greenfield.” He continued: “The stunning victory, so convincingly attained, was the third for the Indians in the past four Thanksgiving Day outings and ended once and for all the myth of Greenfield football superiority.”

Wrote Neil L: “A delirious **Charlie Galvin** stood transfixed muttering ‘I can’t believe it. I just can’t believe it’ as the Turners Fans erupted from the stands to engulf 38 laughing, weeping, hysterically happy blue clad football players at the final whistle.”

Freezing rain, drizzle, mist and rain coated the field with a thin layer of ice and it was 25 degrees at kickoff, but that didn’t stop **Mark Barber, Mark Galvis, and Artie Burke**. Neil L. saluted **Jack Bassett** and Line Coach **John Zymna** who “had the boys up for this one.” Turners finished 4-5 on the season, but big wins against Pittsfield, Northampton and especially Greenfield took away some of that sting.

**1969** – The new season began with another opening day defeat to Wahconah (14-7), the fifth consecutive loss to the Berkshire team despite fine efforts from **Artie Burke** and **Eddie Dion**.

“If Turners Falls Head Coach **Jack Bassett** is seen wandering the halls in Turners Falls High School this week desperately looking into lockers and broom closets, don’t be alarmed. He’s probably trying to find his football team’s ground game which disappeared a little over two weeks ago.”

That was Neil L’s lead after Athol stopped Turners Falls 12-7 in Athol. The Blue had minus six yards rushing for the game and “this put added pressure on **Art Burke** (14 of 23 for 147 yards) and his corps of pass receivers who rose to the occasion but not enough to overtake the strong Red Raiders.” **Burke** hit **Bob Suprenant** for the TF touchdown.

“Thrills are a common occurrence in area football games on Saturday afternoon, but once in a great while a truly inspired group of high school kids come up with a display of courage and talent that transcends the game of football itself” wrote Neil L. which is what happened when “the never say die Indians earned a moving come from behind 28-27 win over Pittsfield High School.”

Neil L. credited the maturity, leadership and courage of **Artie Burke, Ricky Cadran** and **Buster Martin** who went to the Berkshires “determined to show that they have a football team to be reckoned with, an explosive offense, a stubborn defense, and a will to win no matter what the disappointment during the game.”

“Led by **Burke**, unquestionably the best passing quarterback Western Mass football has seen in years,” the quarterback hit **Gary Lemay** for a TD, threw a 45 yard TD strike to **Bob Suprenant**, and then watched as sophomore **Buster Martin** – making his first varsity start – had a 45 yard interception run back for a touchdown. It was **Burke’s** strike to **Eddie Dion** with 55 seconds left that got Turners to within one at 27-26, and **Burke** himself ran in the two point conversion to win the game.

Alas, “Turn about is fair play, but, oh, it is a bitter pill to swallow” as there were “groans of despair” at Sheff Field when Turners Falls fell to Adams in a “stunning and ironic 28-27 loss,” as recorded by Neil L. **Artie Burke** threw three touchdowns in the first half, two to **Bob Suprenant** and one to **Gary Lemay** and Turners took a 19-8 lead into the locker room, but Adams scored after **Lemay** went out with an injury. A 56 yard TD run by **Buster Martin** made it 27-14 Turners half way through the fourth quarter, but it was Adams that enjoyed the late game heroics to pull out a 28-27 killer win.

The Indians squeaked out a 7-6 victory over St. Joseph’s at Sheff Field on Booster Day after giving up an early TD to the visitors. **Artie Burke** threw his 9<sup>th</sup> TD pass of the season (this time to **Buster Martin**) and **Terry Welsh** kicked the PAT to win the game. Neil L. displayed his comedic flair in this particular write up, describing such events as a parachutist missing the field with the game ball at opening kick off, the St. Joe’s kicker who could boot the ball to Griswold Street if given the chance, and a few mishandled plays that had some Stooges antics to them.

But there was nothing funny to write about the next week when Drury drilled the Indians 30-7 in the final regular showdown between the two teams in a series that started in 1942. **Buster Martin** ran in Turners’ only score.

Often times travelling to away games on the other side of the trail, we’d stop for a picturesque picnic lunch on the way. I remember plenty of sandwiches with my father in the mountains of the Berkshires when Turners played Pittsfield, St. Joe’s, Wahconah, Adams, Lee, Mt. Greylock, and of course, Drury. The trick was to beat the busses out of the lot at the end of the game so we wouldn’t get stuck behind the slow moving vehicles all the way down the mountain!

Turners bounced back from the Drury disaster with a 28-0 white wash of Frontier in South Deerfield. Observed Neil L.: “The Indians scored in every period, stopped the Redskins offense cold, and dominated play throughout, but in the end, it was the continued sparkling play of quarterback **Arthur E. Burke III** and his group of talented pass receivers” that amassed 229 yards in the air, helped out by the running of **Doug Lapointe** and **Mark Barber**. **Burke** hit **Bob Suprenant** for the first score and the Blue never looked back.

Turners Falls was ahead of Northampton 7-0 at the half when **Buster Martin** opened the third quarter with an 80 yard kick off return and that sparked the Indians to a 28-12 win over ‘Hamp. **Artie Burke, Bob Suprenant, Doug Lapointe** and especially **Mark Barber** contributed to the win.

**Bob Dolan** reported on one win Greenfield’s “*surprise* 14-6 win over Turners Falls” with Neil L.’s color saluting Greenfield Coach **Cy Desautels**, although he wasn’t

about to overlook the Turners team. “Even in defeat, Turners Falls Head Coach **Jack Bassett** couldn’t have been prouder of his team which grimly fought against a not to be denied bunch of scrappers from Greenfield and never let down despite a crippling series of circumstances.” Neil L. praised **Jerry Bonnette**, **Rick Cadran** and **Lou Kozloski** in the defeat. Turners finished a disappointing 4-5, but the Drury loss was really the only bad game of the year.

**1970** - There was no indication that **Jack Bassett** had coached his final game when the 1969 season ended, but the eight year head coach did not return for the 1970 campaign. His record was 9-18 in the first three seasons after taking over for two year man **Connie O’Doherty** in ’62, but Turners was 20-22-3 in the Coach’s final five seasons when Neil L. watched the Blue play and **Coach Bassett** (career 29-40-3) achieved instant *Legends* status by beating Greenfield three times in four seasons. **Mr. Bassett** continued to positively influence, inspire, mentor, motivate and make a difference with the students of Turners Falls High School in his role as Assistant Principal. He was, as my classmate **Andrea Sandman** put it, one of the good guys.

I hadn’t watched every play of the games mentioned above. I was more likely behind the bleachers playing pick up football, roaming the sidelines with my friends, or hanging out at the concession stand hoping for freebies, especially at home contests. But my attention span grew by the time I reached junior high. **Coach Bassett** was my friend **Tom’s** father. **Skip Galvin** was my friend **Jim Fitzpatrick’s** Uncle and my 7<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher. **Paul Cournoyer** was my 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher. Many of the current players were friends of my older brothers and I was starting to fantasize that maybe one day I’d be out there playing too. I was also beginning to notice that the cheerleaders sure were cute! And my father was covering the weekly contests. My job was to bring him a coffee and hot dog at half time!

The 1970 season was one of change. Not only was Turners Falls playing in the Intercounty League for the first time, but they were also playing for a new coach – **Jack Bassett’s** former Line Coach **John Zymna** was now the man in charge. The **Zymna** era got off to an impressive start when **Buster Martin** scored two quick first quarter touchdowns and then broke Frontier’s heart in the fourth quarter with a 80 yard TD rush as Turners whipped Frontier 19-6 on a 90 degree September afternoon in its Intercounty League debut. Nobody could have known the game would be the highlight of **Coach Zymna’s** rookie season as head coach.

Turners’ was “outgunned, outfoxed and outplayed” by Pioneer at Sheff Field and went down in defeat, 16-12. Turners had two fumbles and three interceptions, plus a costly 15 yard personal foul to snatch defeat from victory, despite an 84 yard TD jaunt by **Buster Martin**. The Indians only had the ball for four plays in the fourth quarter and “you can’t score if you don’t have the ball,” noted Neil L.

Forget Drury. It was Mt. Greylock of the Williamstown Berkshires that gave Turners Falls its second loss of the season, 21-0, as the Greymen turned the game into a rout in the second half.

Turners led Ware (“The Town That Can’t Be Licked”) 7-6 with four minutes left to play, but lost a heartbreaker 12-7 despite great play from the “interior line of **Bob Stebbins**, **Connie Rabashkin**, **Dave Guilbault**, **Lou Kozloski**, and **Bob Cooper**,” according to Neil L. **Rick Cadran** had the TF score.

Turners then dropped a 22-6 decision to Mahar in Orange, but Neil L. observed inspired play from “a team leader – a take charge tough guy that gets going when the going gets tough” (**Rick Cadran**). **Fran Togneri** accounted for the Indian tally with an 11 yard QB keeper.

**Al Oickle** chronicled Amherst’s 22-8 thumping of the Indians and **Jim Clark** covered Mohawk’s 14-7 comeback win in Shelburne, but Neil L. was back to watch Lee High bomb the Blue, 22-8 at Sheff Field and “now Coach **John Zymna** must regroup his forces.” Quarterback **Mike Parenteau** hit **Buster Martin** for TF’s only TD.

**John Haywood** covered his first Greenfield-Turners Classic and watched the Green Wave crush the Blue, 36-14, while Neil L. provided tongue and cheek color commentary, discussing the *red* noses of the 5,000 frigid fans at Vets Field, the *blue* feet of the numbed fans in the stands, and the *black and blue* slapped backs of happy Greenfield supporters. Neil L. also cited **Coach Zymna** “who endured the entire sub-freezing game in shirt sleeves, of all things. Maybe **Doc Higgins** can present **Zymna** with a mustard plaster with an aspirin cluster.”

It was a forgettable 1-8 debut season for the new coach, but the script writers had something in mind for the 1971 Football season.

**1971** - I was a TFHS freshman in that fall, Neil L. was back at the Recorder full time as a political reporter and columnist, and the Turners Falls Football Indians enjoyed its first undefeated season in thirty-three years. The memorable and redeeming '71 season got off to an inspiring start as **Buster Martin** scored three times in a 34-0 slamming of Frontier. Neil L. reported that TF scored the most points since a 42-12 Turners rout of Athol in 1956 when **Andy Mosca** was quarterback and **Bob Abbott** raced for two touchdowns. Quarterback **Mike Parteneau** threw for two of TF’s five TDs against Frontier, one to **Jerry Wondolski**, the other to **John Dlugosz**.

“As awesome as the offense was, the defensive unit was also something special, a quick, hard hitting, determined group led by **Bob Cooper, Dave Guilbault, Bob Bergeron, Roy Neidbala, Lou Koszloski, and Jim Semaski**,” noted Neil L.

They were already talking dynasty when Turners turned the Pioneer Panthers into Pandas by a 58-8 score. Turners led 36-0 at the half and watched as the second team scored 22 more points, but all that came after **Buster Martin, Steve Mleczo, and Mike Parenteau** blew out the boys from Northfield in the first half.

Neil L. poked fun at himself later in the week with a follow up article reporting on his Monday visit to eye doctor **Fred Milkey** after misidentifying **Fran Togneri** as starter **Mike Parenteau** in Monday’s write-up!

“For the first time in years, Turners Falls has an explosive, exciting offensive unit, a defense that has been nearly impregnable, and a super bench of talented anxious to play boys,” Neil L. proclaimed when the Indians blanked Mt. Greylock 28-0 in Turners the following week. Powertown had scored 120 points in three games and **Buster Martin** gained more than 100 yards for the third Saturday in a row, but the victory “was fashioned by a complete team effort – sparkling running by **Joe Martin** and **Bob Sabato**, crushing blocking by **Steve Mleczo** and the entire offensive line, adept ball handling and signal calling by quarterback **Mike Parenteau**, an alert defensive secondary, and game bruising tackling by the immovable seven on the defensive line.”

“With the jubilant Turners Falls band playing the victory song in the background and with the raucous Turners fans screaming encouragement to their team,” Turners overwhelmed Ware, 46-12 in Ware.

“That’s quite a team,” Neil L. quoted an impressed (injured) Ware player and why not – Turners scored seven touchdowns to up its season total to 166 points in four games, with **Buster Martin** scoring three more times and with “the (league’s) best quarterback – certainly its most underrated – **Mike Parenteau**” directing the TF Offense “with precision, quickness, daring and unqualified success.” **Jerry Wondoloski** “came into his own at flankerback”, **Bob Sabato** “wrecked havoc both rushing and pass catching and **Don Hanley** playing like a demon in the defensive secondary.” **Jim Semaski** and **Steve Croteau** recovered fumbles and **Bob Stebbins** had one of Turners’ three picks.

“They called it the football game of the year and it more than lived up to its advanced billing,” wrote Neil L. as Turners came from behind to wrestle a thrilling 20-14 victory from the previously undefeated Mahar Senators on a memorable Booster Day.

“The battle of the unbeaten had just about everything – stout defensive play, spectacular scoring thrust, a classic confrontation between the leagues two top scorers and the league’s two top quarterbacks,” Neil L. marveled.

A early fumble recovery by **Bob Cooper** set up timely heroics by flanker **Jerry Wondoloski**, who caught a 34 yard TD strike from **Buster Martin** on a half-back option, but Turners was down 14-8 in the fourth quarter when the Blue tied the game on Buster’s second option to **Wondoloski** from nine yards out. **Mike Parteneau** later hit **Wondoloski** for the clincher, a win saved by a **Bob Sabato** interception on the TF six yard line as time ran out.

**Charlie Keller** covered TF’s 26-0 rout of Amherst with **Buster Martin** scoring 20 more points, but Neil L. was back on the sidelines in Turners to watch the Indians beat Mohawk 36-6 with **Buster Martin** scoring three times (104 points in seven games!). Neil L. singled out **Don Hanley** for his stellar defensive play.

“Amid joyous shouts of ‘We’re Number One!’, they threw their fully clothed assistant coaches **Paul Cournoyer** and **Skip Galvin** under the shower Saturday, immediately after beating powerful Lee High 12-0,” was Neil L’s lead as Turners won “with a stout defense that allowed Lee a total of 26 yards rushing and six yards passing” and “by unleashing **Buster Martin** for two long scoring plays.”

A foot of Thanksgiving snow postponed the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Turners-Greenfield Turkey Day showdown, the first cancellation since 1940 (when nine inches fell) and only the second postponement in series play. Plastic covers and heat blowers were placed on Sheff Field before the storm, but the weight of the snow collapsed the covers. Turners Athletic Director Eddie **Bourdeau** was on the airwaves of WHAI at 9:00 on Friday morning asking for anybody with a shovel to show up at the field.

I was among the 100 volunteer students, players, town workers and staff that shoveled the snow to the center of the field so a Turners DPW pay loader and two jeeps and a street sweeper from Greenfield could plow the snow off the field in preparation for Turners 22-14 win on Saturday to complete the memorable undefeated season.

**John Haywood** covered the game and Neil L. turned in the color story, discussing the team’s ability to overcome **Buster Martin’s** third quarter injury with big games from **Dan Hanley**, **Fran Togneri**, and **Bob Cooper** and winning because Greenfield “didn’t figure on the Turners Falls powerful, calm, cool, and collected

defensive unit.” Neil L. singled out **Coach Zymna’s** sportsmanship letting the substitutes play and made a special mention of **Mickey Schab’s** performance.

**1972** - The team opened its defense of a undefeated season with an 8-0 win at Lee, thanks to a “near flawless performance by the Indian defense” and “a bulldozer rather than a fire truck in a fullback to be reckoned with” **Steve Mleczeko**. The game’s only score came on a quarterback sneak by **Fran Togneri** and Turners “passed their real first test with “ability, brawn, composure, dedication and execution,” according to Neil L’s report.

Turners hammered Pioneer 46-22 the following week. The starters only played about 30 minutes with **Fran Togneri** throwing a 20 yard TD pass to **Mike Beauregard** and another strike to **Dana Bessette** to get the Powertowners rolling.

“In a near perfect football performance,” Turners dumped Ware 28-0. The Blue was “a well oiled precision instrument played to perfection” by **Fran Togneri** who “has mastered the quarterback option play”. Neil L wrote that **Steve Mleczeko** was “about as fast as the Amtrack Montrealer through Franklin County and just about as easy to stop!”

Neil L. mentioned **John Gamilen’s** defensive play in the story. John was the first of my contemporaries to make it big with the team and while we had gone our separate ways by high school, I was delighted that a kid I once hung out with was making a difference for the hometown squad.

Neil L used the theme of Triskaidekaphobia in his coverage of Mt. Greylock’s 9-8 win in Turners that prevented the Indians from winning its 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive game. Although **Steve Mleczeko** had a TD run and **Billy Dion** romped in for the two point conversion, it was Greylock’s field goal with eight seconds left in the first half that was the difference as the Mountain men “manhandled” QB **Fran Togneri**. The Blue were also snake bit by penalties, miscues, fumbles, and missed opportunities.

**John Haywood** reported on Turners’ bounce back 14-6 win over Mohawk and **Walt Phillips** covered the Indians 22-14 defeat of Mahar, before Neil L. returned to witness Amherst “puncture Turners’ title bubble” with a 8-0 whitewash. The Hurricanes held Turners’ non-existent offense to just five first downs.

Neil L. wrote how “**Gary Noga** threw away his crutches last week” and “scored two TDs and a couple of extra points” while gaining 61 yards on 10 plays as Turners beat Frontier 30-6 in South Deerfield to close out the regular season. “Another injured Injun” (**Jim Semaski**) also returned to ignite the defense.

Turners fell to the **Dave Douvadjian** led tourney-bound Green Wave 18-6 on Thanksgiving Day in front of “6,000 chilled Franklin County residents gathered at icy Veteran’s Field.” According to Neil L, the crowd “witnessed feats of strength by the young warriors from Turners Falls High School who doggedly held their vaunted championship-bound Greenfield rivals to 18 hard to get points.” Turners came “to show that they were a well disciplined and a talented football team – one that could hold its own with the best”. Douvadjian and the “tergiversation of the Gods” that allowed the slippery pigskin to “bounce crazily away from the Turners boys” was the difference that day and Turners finished the season 6-3.

**1973** - The new high school opened on Turnpike Road to start the school year, but the football team took to the familiar field on Crocker Avenue to play their home games. By

now, I knew most of the players on the team (including my neighborhood pals **Tom Bassett and Fran Boucher** and classmates **Rich Bastrache, Nate Bonnette, Paul Bourbeau, Frank Cadran, Beefer Crowell, John Gamlien, Zino George, Dickie Guy Tex Lehman, Mike O'Connor, Dan Pluta, Don Shebell, Tom Viens, Eddie Voudren,** and **Billy Whiteman**) and I wasn't so anonymous when it came to my father's football stories. Players were apt to question Neil L's take or, more likely, complain to me when they weren't mentioned in the write up! I also had **Coach Zymna** as my Fantasy and Science Fiction teacher and was pleased to discover that he was a top-notch educator who took teaching seriously.

Turners opened the season by surprising Lee 30-6 with **Mickey's** kid brother sophomore **Dave Schab** at quarterback. **Rick Miner** caught an 80 yard TD pass in the win.

Turners beat Pioneer 21-0 on the "broad shoulders and sturdy legs" of **Cory Saulnier** (108 yards and a TD) and "the heart and muscle" of **Dave Schab** (6 for 10 for 123 yards and 2 TDs).

**Cory Saulnier** had an 85 yard punt return to spark Turners 30-0 win over Ware. **Dave Schab** scored on a QB keeper, **Tom Carlisle** scored on a 14 yard draw play, and Fullback **Mike O'Connor** made a four yard plunge to contribute to the offense surge.

But Turners appeared to be hexed when it lost 25-6 to Mt. Greylock in Williamstown and The Blue travelled up the trail again the next week and got cuffed by Mohawk, 21-6. Three interceptions lead to two fourth quarter touchdowns for Mohawk. **Jeff Lewandowski's** fumble recovery set up **Cory Saulnier's** 20 yard run for TF's lone score.

"The TFHS played the Mickey Mouse song to tend the half time show and nothing could have been more appropriate" was Neil L's lead as Mahar won easily on Crocker Avenue, 18-0. When Neil L's write up contains more information about the band's musical selections and beautiful Queen **Kelly Sweeney's** Booster Day court than the on field action, you know the game wasn't very good. Neil L. concluded that Turners had "more turnovers than in the Pepperidge Farms' kitchen."

"Turners Falls High School fans not only to contend with 40-mile an hour northwest gales Saturday morning – they had to watch the Amherst Regional Hurricanes generate a football storm of their own as the Indians feel to an aroused Amherst Club 34-0" in Amherst was Neil L's lead. The game's low point came in the third period when tackle **Mark Urban** was taken away in an ambulance.

**David James** covered Turners 20-14 loss to Frontier while Neil L was covering Mohawk's Intercounty League title win over Mt. Greylock. **John Haywood** was the lead reporter for Greenfield's 36-6 Thanksgiving win over Turners in unusually warm 50 degree weather, while Neil L provided the color.

"The traditional Turkey Day game went from 'Oh, hell' to 'Oh, well' for rabid Turners Falls High School fans," he wrote. "Despite the pasting, the Turners Falls coaching staff – **John Zymna, Paul Cournoyer** and **Skip Galvin** – spent the entire game reemphasizing football basics to their players on the sidelines." Neil L also wrote about **Doc Giknis** taking care of the boys, **John Charron** letting people park on his Crocker Avenue lawn, **Charlie Galvin** and **Jack Bassett** attending with sideline passes, and the 3500 gathered spectators.

“That’s the nicest thing I’ve seen in high school football since I started officiating” one of the game officials said when “the entire Turners team sang the National Anthem together with gutso before the start of the game” as observed by Neil L., who also quoted **John Zymna** at the end of the game saying, “I’ve got to go see some damn nice kids” in the silent TF locker room. It was a disappointing 3-6 season after the Blue opened with a promising 3-0 start.

**1974** - I was a big deal high school senior when the season opened, but I was missing my spectator sidekick **Joe Blood** ('77) who was now in uniform playing for the Turners Blue. For several years, my next door neighbor pal and I stood together on the 35 yard line of the Turners side watching the games and now I was watching **Joe** suit up.

**Don St. Pierre** covered Turners opening season 24-0 victory over Pioneer behind touchdowns by **Frank Cadran, Rick Kidder, Rick Bastrache,** and **Mike O’Connor**, but Neil L. was there to watch Lee High pull out a “heart stopping” 14-12 dramatic win over Turners in Lee after two early fumbles put Turners in a quick 14-0 hole. **Dave Schab** capped a 63 yard drive with a quarterback sneak to get the Indians on the board and **Rick Kidder** later scored on a 17 yard scamper after Lee failed on a controversial fourth down attempt that enraged the home town faithful. With 58 seconds left in the game, Turners began a do-or-die drive on its own 28 yard line. **Rick Miner’s** catching and **Zino George’s** running got the ball down to the 15 yard line with 8 seconds left and **Coach Zymna** had to choose between a long game winning field goal attempt or a last ditch pass. The Z Man went with **Dave Schab’s** arm, but the QB’s pass was deflected at the last second in the end zone and Lee held on for the breathtaking victory.

“High school coaches traditionally lead lives of nosy desperation,” Neil L. wrote, concluding “Who says high school football coaches don’t earn their money?”

Just days after that exciting game, Quarterback **Dave Schab’s** older brother and local icon hero, defensive back and tri-captain **Mickey** lost his four year battle to cancer. “Leaves a legacy of courage” was the obituary heading and Coach **John Zymna** was quoted as saying “He always gave more than he had to”. The GCC student’s former teammate **John Little** was glad that **Mickey** made it to his wedding as his best man, although Mick was sucking ice cubes through the ceremony.

Turners had a bye week before using “speed, deception, and brute strength to hand the Frontier Regional High School Redskins a 36-0 football pasting at Sunny Sheff Field,” wrote Neil L. “Will of the Whip” **Frank Cadran** scored *four* touchdowns and “the deception came from Houdini-like Indian Quarterback **Dave Schab** who ran the confusing quarterback option play to perfection.”

Neil L. was assigned to Lee’s 36-6 win over Frontier, giving way to **Don St. Pierre** who watched Turners hang on to top Mahar 20-13 thanks to **Kevin May’s** 60 yard touchdown run and two scores by **Dave Schab**, one running and the other a 9 yard pass to **Rick Miner**. I worked on tobacco with the future super-star **May** and the fact that the kid knew my name and said hi to me on the smelly green bus made me feel important!

The following week Neil L was covering Mt. Greylock burying Frontier 35-6 while **Don St. Pierre** was the reporter for Turners’ 36-6 blasting of Amherst behind the defense of **Rick Bastrache, Rick Urban, John Gamlien, Nate Bonnette** and **Kevin May**, while **Frank Cadran, Dickie Guy, Rick Kidder** and **Rick Miner** did the scoring.

It was **St. Pierre** again recording Turners squeaking out a 14-7 Booster Day

win over Mohawk on a 20 yard quarterback keeper by **Dave Schab** and a beautifully executed **Dickie Guy** half-back option TD pass to **Rick Miner**.

**Mike Gery** watched Ware defeat Turners 17-0 to win a share of the IC Crown, thanks in part to several Turners turnovers that cancelled out fine running from **Frank Cadran** and **Joe Blood**.

Neil L. finally returned from the (Turners) missing to watch the Indians nip Mt. Greylock 8-7 as “**Kevin May** came alive Saturday to add some spark to the sputtering Turners offense,” but “offense wasn’t **May’s** only forte Saturday as the inside middle linebacker helped what turned into an awesome defensive charge.” Concluded Neil L: “It was the last varsity football game played at Sheff Field, and in the old tradition of Turners Falls, it was only justice that it turned out to be a winning one.”

Greenfield beat Turners 12-0 in the final Turkey Day game of my Turners public school career. **Bob York** covered the Green Wave win while Neil L’s color coverage focused on the Turners’ mistakes that cost the Indians a chance for an upset win. Neil L was kind enough to mention Cheerleader **Lori Bourdeau** and Statistician **Joanne Zyac** on the sidelines and saluted Coaches **Bill Budness** and **John Zymna** for their coaching sportsmanship.

The Blue finished the final Sheff Field legacy at 6-3, but Neil L. covered a career low four Indian games (he covered 87% of the TF football contests between 1965 and 1973). I don’t recall why he was absent so much that season (but I was a self-absorbed big deal senior and probably wasn’t paying attention!).

**1975** - I was taking down and packing dried tobacco from area barns while waiting to ship out to Navy boot camp when the 1975 Football season got underway, rather surreally for me. Not only was I watching the games as a high school graduate with most of my classmates off at college, but the games were played at the Turnpike Road facility for the first time. In a pre-season preview, Neil L. described the “brand new modern football field, complete with new bleachers, a new press box, a new scoreboard and, best of all, new modern locker rooms and practice fields.”

Turners Falls beat Pioneer 27-0 in the first game ever played on the yet to be named new Turnpike Road field. A traditionalist at heart who still misses the Crocker Avenue high school, I never fully embraced the Turnpike Road complex and long for the storied history and lore of the original football field.

“Head Coach **John Zymna** unveiled a hard running, bruising full back in **Kevin May**,” noted Neil L. who described two picture perfect first half touchdown runs by **May**, aided by **Rick Miner** (five catches for 100 yards) and **Rick Kidder** who had a 33 yard TD run of his own to key the win over Pioneer. **Steve Smith** wrote a side story about the first game on the new field.

“A short kick, a long kick, and a fumbled kick gave Turners Falls High School 15 easy first half points as the Indians turned the Lee High Wildcats into pussycats, 21-0” wrote Neil L., with **Dave Schab** leading the offense and **Kevin May** making “another brilliant touchdown run”. **May** and **Rick Urban** recovered fumbles, and Neil L. saluted the defensive play of **Rick Miner**, **Dave Guy**, **Rollie Kidder** and **Joe Parenteau**, along with **Danny Gavin’s** kicking foot.

**Joey Blood** recovered a fumbled punt and **Dave Guy** blocked another one as Turners dumped Frontier 27-6 with **Rick Kidder** scoring three times, including a 78 yard

kick off return. Noted Neil L: “Average high school football teams make mistakes while good high school football teams take advantage of them and thereby hangs the tale” of the Indian win.

“It only rained on Mahar Regional School’s side of the field Saturday as the Turners Falls High School Indians made believers out of the upstart Senators, 34-7,” wrote Neil L, who observed “Execution is the name of the game and Turners Falls executed so well they had Mahar Coach **Joe Spadafora** kicking the mud in despair on the sidelines,” on this rainy Saturday. I missed the game, driving to the University of Wisconsin-Superior to visit my pal **Dave Shea**, but “The Indians scored the first four times they had the ball” led “by an awesome charge by the Indian front line” and “everything was sunshine and roses for the Indian Quarterback **Dave Schab**.” **Kevin May** had a 50 yard TD run, **Rick Kidder** scored twice, and **Dave Choleva** added another tally.

Neil L. also wrote a side story that day on the new scoreboard donated by the Montague Lions Club, accepted by **Dr. Francis Sabato** from Lions Club President **Harry Gove** during Booster Day half-time ceremonies – **Terri O’Connor** was Queen and **Chris Sabato** her escort.

Maybe it was all the rain or maybe it was the leftover excitement of **Fisk’s** Game Six Homer (and the hangover of the subsequent Game 7 loss to the Reds) a few nights before, or maybe it was playing an unheard of *Tuesday afternoon* high school football game, but Turners lost a big one to Amherst 13-0, even “though a gallant Turners Falls High School football team was in this one right up to the end,” wrote Neil L. “Big **Kevin May** had “another standard afternoon”, and **Dave Dresser, Freddie Rau** and **Rick Miner** had fumble recoveries.

It was a short week and yet another miserable rainy day, but **Rick Miner** ran back an interception for a touchdown and **Dave Dresser** did the same, with **Rick Kidder** adding a touchdown run as the Indians downed Mohawk, 28-8. “The rain and mud made it seem more like a volunteer fireman’s muster in a wayward monsoon,” wrote Neil L. I never got to read the story in that Monday’s paper – I was on a flight to Chicago and boot camp to begin my Navy career.

“Apparently, only (Amherst) Hurricanes stop Turners Falls High School this season” wrote Neil L. “Heavy rains couldn’t do it against Mohawk and howling gale force winds couldn’t do it against Ware as the 6-1 Indians blew to a convincing 32-7 football victory” over Ware, thanks to “some offensive and defensive heroics from **David Schab, Kevin May, Rick Miner, Tim Carlisle, Rick Kidder** and **Dave Guy**”. It was **Schab** who got the Indians rolling “with a stunning keeper for an 82 yard touchdown run against the wind”. Concluded Neil L: “They must teach Aremology at Turners High!”

“The seniors gained the plaudits and well they might as the high-flying Turners Falls High School Indians rolled to an easy 35-7 Inter County Football win over Mt. Greylock” with all star end **Rick Miner** scoring two TDs and all star quarterback **David Schab** completing seven of nine passes good for 181 yards as Turners jumped out to a 28-0 lead after just 25 minutes of play. **Rick Kidder** won the league scoring race with his 9<sup>th</sup> TD of the season, with added contributions from **Dan Gavin, David Guy, Rick Urban** and **Bruce Andrew**. Turners finished 7-1 in the league – but Amherst didn’t lose at all and thereby took the crown.

I was miserably surviving boot camp in Great Lakes when **Bob York** covered Turners Falls 24-14 Turkey Day win over Greenfield behind **Kevin May's** hefty 224 yards, with Neil L. providing the color coverage, covering all nine Turners games of the season for the fourth time in 11 seasons of work.

"It may have been Turkey Day in Franklin County, but it was May Day for Greenfield High School," wrote Neil L., quoting Athletic Director **Eddie Bourdeau** as saying "That's the best high school football game I've seen in a long, long time. Perfect, just perfect."

Neil L also reported on **Mr. Bourdeau's** decision to play the game in the snow and rain, **Dale Welcome's** 33 yard field goal, **John Zymna's** traditional shirt-sleeves, an injured ref, the usual fan reactions in the stands, the controversial choice not to dedicate the yet to be named field during half time (it would be years before the field was finally deservedly dedicated to **Eddie Bourdeau**, thanks in part to **Mr. Bourdeau's** successor as Athletic Director, **Paul Cournoyer**). Neil L also recognized the senior players appearing in their final game.

The impressive 8-1 season was probably one of the most underrated and forgotten campaigns in modern school history, greatly overshadowed by what unfolded in the following months.

**1976 - John Zymna** surprised many when he resigned as head football coach in April 1976, ending his six year reign. Neil L. saluted the Coach in a September *Perryscope* column, remembering "the tall hawk-faced guy packing the sidelines in shirt sleeves on cold fall Saturday afternoons," and "one of the most dedicated sportsmen and teachers" with an "enthusiasm and spirit that he brought to the game and engendered to those who played for and against him," a man who "practices discipline, hard work and self-sacrifice." Concluded Neil L, "**John Zymna** did not build just winners – he built men."

Coach Z finished with a winning record of 33-21 (32-13 if you toss out '70) with two Turkey Day wins and was laured as among the best. From my perspective, one of the reasons he was a great coach can be summed up in two words: **Joe Desmarais**.

Former TFHS football player **John O'Riley** – who caught a TD pass in the first TF game Neil L covered – was named the new Head Coach. I worked for "General" **O'Riley** who was my summer tobacco field boss the four summers I slaved in the hot fields and I also knew him as an excellent English Teacher at the high school. I was sad to see **Coach Zymna** (and **Skip Galvin**) leave, but I was happy that my summer mentor got the job. **Paul Cournoyer** stayed on as assistant coach and **Jim Koldis** would work the defensive unit for the departed **Skip Galvin**.

I was stationed in a Navy Helicopter Squadron in Jacksonville Florida when **Mr. O'Riley** made his 1976 debut, the beginning of a new era for Turners Falls Football. Nobody could have imagined what was in store for **O'Riley** and the Football Indians when the season unfolded (but think **Terry Francona**).

My parents' 25 year marriage ended, the large house on High Street was sold, four of Neil L's children were out on their own, and the long time family dog was dead. Neil L ended up in a small apartment with my kid sister on O Street and although his personal life was in flux, the constant of Turners Falls High School Football must have been a welcomed distraction, especially considering the historic 1976 season.

“The offense – with sparkling performances from **Joey Blood, Mike Brown, Kevin May** and **Dale Welcome** – will draw headlines for the 35-13 shellacking of Amherst, but it was the defense that was really impressive,” Neil L. wrote opening the ’76 campaign. That defense would include **Dave Dresser, May, Dennis Urban, Bob Allen,** and **Rollie Kidder** among others.

“The powerful Turners Falls High School scored early and often to make a shambles of a beautiful fall afternoon for the Frontier Regional High School Redskins Saturday,” wrote Neil L. “For the second straight week, the football Indians were higher than the host of parachutists that floated from the skies in the background throughout the sun-drenched afternoon as they fashioned an easy 48-0 win over the outmatched Redskins.” The writer continued: “Seven separate blue-shirted Indians scored the Turners touchdowns as Coach **John O’Riley** gave everyone but the water boy an opportunity to play.” The scorers: **Kevin May, Joey Blood, Dale Welcome, Jon Coyne, Rick Kostanski** (another one of my former neighborhood pals), **Ed Bogoslawski,** and **Kevin Bonnette.**

It was “vaulted Shepherd Hill High School Rams turn to hit their heads against the stone wall Turners defense and take a battering from the Indian offensive line as the Powertowners rolled to another easy win, 27-8,” wrote Neil L. The Turners defense was led by **Kevin May, Dave Dresser, Rollie Kidder, Ed Bogoslawski, Mike Stafford,** and **Dale Nadeau,** along with **Bob Bostley** who had two interceptions. **Rick Kostanski, Jon Coyne,** and **Mike Brown** scored, “but there were no individual stars nor heroes for Turners Falls Saturday. Every blue-shirted player did his job – blocking, tackling, running, receiving, and throwing and that’s what makes winning football teams.”

The Saturday game against Ware was rained out and **Bob York** filled in for Neil L on the Monday makeup, won by Turners 20-0 on a late surge after a slow and sloppy first half. **Mike Brown** scored in the first period, with **Dave Choleva** and **Kevin May** adding fourth period scores to open it up.

“This week it was Mohawk Trail Regional High School’s turn to take it on the chin, as they absorbed a 35-0 beating at the hands of the precision-smooth Turners Falls football machine,” Neil L. wrote about the game played on my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Neil L. called it a game of “push ‘em out offense and knock ‘em down defensive lines”. **Dave Choleva** rushed for two touchdowns and passed to **Rick Kostanski** for another (**Rick The K** would score again, as did **Kevin May**).

“The big blue football machine kept rolling in wind-swept Turners Falls Saturday as the Indians breezed to another easy Intercounty League win,” Neil L. reported, by “blowing the Palmer High School Panthers right off the field” for a lopsided 37-8 victory. Neil L. singled out **Jon Coyne’s** fantastic play at defensive end, **Dave Choleva’s** 110 yards gained on 11 carries, **Kevin May’s** three touchdowns and his defensive leadership, and **Dale Welcome’s** arm, head and foot.

**Don St. Pierre** covered Turners 39-8 field day over Pioneer, highlighted by **Rick Kostanski’s** beautiful option pass to a wide open **Mike Brown** (**Brownie** would add a second score), with two touchdowns from **Dave Choleva** and single scores from **Kevin May** and **Joey Blood.**

“When the undefeated Turners team carried Coach **John O’Riley** onto the field at the end, they carried with them a well deserved shutout and the IC League Championship,” Neil L wrote following the thrilling 17-0 win over previously undefeated

Mahar in Orange (and erasing the foul memories of the previous year's only loss to unbeaten Amherst). Turners held the Senators to a scant 28 yards on the ground and Neil L. singled out **Kevin May, Dave Dresser, Dave Choleva, Dale Welcome, and Joey Blood** for their big games.

Turners then clobbered Athol 40-6 with Neil L writing this great lead: "When **Joey Blood** replaced **Kevin May** late in the second period Saturday, the Public Address announcer solemnly noted, 'May out for Blood'. That was perhaps the understatement of the entire football season." Neil L. praised quarterback "**Dale Welcome** playing another inspired game" along with **Bob Allen, Dave Choleva, Rick Kostanski, and Mike Brown**, plus **Blood** who had two long touchdown runs both called back on penalties. **Joe** happened to write a letter to me in Jacksonville the day the story ran: "Just got tonight's paper. Your father wrote a very nice article about the TFHS team and what I did."

Turners toppled Greenfield 36-6 to complete its sensational and magical undefeated season. **Bob York** covered the game and Neil L. was the color reporter, writing about an optimistic Greenfield Coach **Bill Budness** and enthusiastic Green Wave fans who felt they had played Turners tough despite a 16 point half time deficit, only to watch mouths a-gaped as **May** made a 87 yard kick off run back TD to open the second half. Neil L made a point to mention former coaches **John Zymna** and **Skip Galvin** watching from the stands. The 10 win season was the most team wins in school history by a group **John O'Riley** called the best team ever. The combined two season record of 18-1 will most likely stand forever. (Note: The (9-0) '71 Indians scored 282 points and gave up 54, while the (10-0) '76 squad tallied 334 points and only allowed 49).

**1977** - "Turners Falls loyalists had a lot of questions answered (Saturday) as their beloved Indians began the 1977 football season with a strong 26-0 win" over Amherst wrote Neil L. as **Ed Marvell** made his quarterback debut and **Dave Choleva** racked up 141 yards on 13 carriers while scoring three touchdowns.

The story headline said that Frontier *Stunned* Turners Falls with a 0-0 tie, but Neil L. pointed out that the Tribe was lucky to escape with the moral victory deadlock after the Redskins nearly pulled out a stunning win in the closing moments. Understandably, Neil L's reporting was slanted toward Frontier for their big performance as the Turners defense was beset by penalties and untimely fumbles in a game played on a rainy Monday afternoon. It was the program's first tie since a 6-6 contest against Pittsfield in 1967.

Turners defeated Mohawk 26-14 in Shelburne but "the game was not a classic for either team." Neil L. reported that the squads combined for 8 fumbles, 8 penalties, 8 punts, 2 INTs and "a host of errors, both mental and in execution." But **Mike Brown** scored on a nine yard run, **Bob Bostley** made a 47 yard punt return for a touchdown, and **Dave Choleva** added two scores which enabled Turners to overcome "the comedy – or tragedy, depending on how you look at it – of errors."

"Football fever has returned to Turners Falls," was Neil L's lead the following week. "It arrived Saturday afternoon during one of the most thrilling high school football games seen in the Intercounty League in years – a game won by Turners Falls with 14 seconds left to play." The win came on **Lew Collins** toe – a 27 yard field goal to give Turners a 9-6 win over Ware, with help from **Dave Choleva's** 30 yard TD pass to

**Jon Coyne**, a fumbled punt recovery on Turners' 32 yard line by **Mike Brown** with one minute and four seconds to play and the subsequent successful drive that got the ball within range. "**O'Riley** didn't hesitate to call the young and inexperienced **Collins** off the bench for a last second try to salvage a victory. **Collins** calmly bent over to tie back the toe of his kicking shoe, got into position, and waited for the snap from center," and "**Collins** hit it perfectly. The fans went wild."

Alas, nothing good lasts forever. The undefeated Palmer Panthers beat last year's Inter County League Champ Turners Falls, 22-0 and Neil L. pointed out that "it was **John O'Riley's** first loss as Head Football Coach at Turners and it was the team's first football defeat in 19 games." The game was a tough loss to take as "die hard Turners fans who drove the winding roads to Palmer will tell you that the 'Zebras' not the Panthers beat them Saturday." There were several questionable calls, but little doubt that the refs blew a botched Turners' third down quick punt attempt that had assistant coach **Paul Cournoyer** going ballistic on the sidelines.

The good news was that Turners beat Pioneer 40-22, but the bad news was the teams were penalized a combined 24 times. Wrote Neil L.: "If penalty flags drew detention slips instead of lost yardage, neither **John O'Riley** or (Pioneer Coach) **Bill Decker** could field a team for practice this week." With nine combined fumbles and three interceptions, "It was Halloween two days early." Despite the ghoulish game, **Mike Brown** scored three times and **Bob Bostley** twice. Concluded Neil L.: "There was no symbolism involved whatsoever when the Sophomore Class won first prize in the Booster Day float competition with its entry of Pepe LaPew!"

What a difference a week makes. "Seldom can both football coaches walk off the field after a game satisfied that their entire team played to its potential, executed near perfectly on both offense and defense, and rose to the challenge when necessity and the coaching staff demanded it," wrote Neil L, and that's exactly what happened in Mahar's "heart stopping 20-14 win over a talented Turners Falls team that did not give up until the final whistle." The score was 20-14 at the break and "the second half was poetry in motion for both sides" with **Mike Brown** almost pulling out a last minute miracle with a near circus catch of a half-back option pass.

Turners bounced back to beat Athol 21-0 the following week. Noted Neil L: "According to Noah – Webster that is – Saturday's secret work means 'to seize or stop on the way before arrival at the intended place'. A kid named **Paul Waldron** of Turners Falls High School knew the secret word Saturday. So did **Bob Bostley**, **Mike Brown**, **Dave Hastings**, and **Gary Billiel**." "The word of course is INTERCEPTION and the Turners Falls Indians had six of them outclassing Athol" with **Dave Choleva** scoring twice and **Bob Bostley** once.

Turkey Day '77 was one for the scrapbook. **Bob York** called it "one of the great ones to win and tough ones to lose" type of game, played in front of 4500 impressed fans. Neil L's color commentary put it this way: "It was the best of games, it was the worse of games; it was a game of wisdom and it was a game of folly; it was an epic of faith, it was an epic of incredibility; it was a day of light, it was a day of darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

Greenfield 21, Turners Falls 19. **Dave Choleva's** 91 yard kick off return in the opening moments stunned the Greenie faithful, but Turners fell behind 21-7 before rallying behind **John O'Riley's** battle cry – **Jon Coyne** outmuscled two Greenfield

defenders for a touchdown catch, but **Dan Newton's** successful two point conversion catch was called back on a penalty. **Coyne** scored again to make it 21-19 (the two point tying conversion failed) and **Paul Waldron's** interception with 3:15 left to play gave the home town crowd something to hope for, but time ran out before Turners could get a score. I didn't read about the great game until the mail caught up to me a few weeks later – I was embarked onboard the aircraft carrier USS NIMITZ somewhere in the Mediterranean. Neil L. covered all nine games and the '77 Indians finished 5-3-1, the lowest mark since '73 (3-6) – Turners had only lost four *total* games in the three seasons of 1974, 1975 and 1976.

**1978** - In early 1978, the Greenfield Recorder editorial board used a controversial and scandalous trial involving a member of the local clergy as a Freedom of the Press issue that went all the way to the state Supreme Court. The board assigned Neil L. Perry the thankless task of covering the sensational trial and his journalistic credibility was savaged in vicious letters to the editor and on the street conversations for his perceived salacious and inappropriate coverage, probably the most flack and heat he (and his family) took in his career.

Not long after that difficult experience, Neil L. underwent major surgery that knocked him out of commission for several months. Thankfully, come fall, there was still high school football and it must have been a relief for Neil L. to be walking the sidelines instead of sitting in a court room or stuck in a hospital room.

Neil L. missed the '78 Debut of "*O'Riley's Raiders*" (as the yearbook referred to the team that year). **Steve Smith** filled in and covered the Indian's narrow 7-6 win over Amherst. **Bob Bostley** had a nine yard TD run and **Lew Collins** made the PAT, but it was sophomore **Dan May** with the big play of the day – blocking Amherst's PAT attempt to preserve the 7-6 win.

"If Horatio Alger had written the script, the Turners Falls-Frontier High School football game might have ended differently Saturday," wrote Neil L in his welcomed return. "The rags to riches story that could have unfolded before 600 sun-drenched fans never materialized as the favored Frontier Redskins overpowered the crippled Indians, 12-0. It was the first football victory for Frontier over Turners Falls since 1973."

**Steve Bradley** (for **Ed Marvel**) and **Ken Croteau** (for **Bob Bostley**) were pressed into action, but it was the defense that held tough, led by **Dan May, Mike Little, Tim Thompson, Steve Brown, and John Shanahan**. Concluded Neil L: "Real life gridiron heroes do not stop their efforts if at first they don't succeed. Cheerful perseverance, coupled with a few weeks of good hard football practice – along with a little bit of luck – will reap significant rewards for both the Turners Falls Indians and the Frontier Redskins. Ask Horatio Alger."

"With the crowd chanting 'Loo-ee, Loo-ee' in the background, Turners Falls High School's place kicking specialist **Lou Collins** calmly" kicked Turners Falls to a 3-0 win over (Southbridge) Tantasqua – a twenty-yarder at the end of the first half that stood up. Heroics also came from "hard running by a rejuvenated **Bob Bostley**" and **Jim Bogusalwski**, "and a story book performance at quarterback by **Jeff Koshinsky** – who was thrown into the breach when injured quarterback **Ed Marvel's** replacement **Steve Bradley** got creamed midway through the first period," with a great defensive play from **Keith Newton** to end the game.

I'm not sure how many folks concentrated on Neil L's story in that Monday afternoon's paper – **Bucky Fringing Dent** hit his playoff winning homer earlier in the day, a game I watched in a barracks lounge in Jacksonville with several dozen Sailors (including Yankee fans), along with a Boston native who collapsed on the floor in agony as Yaz's knees buckled!

The Indians found themselves up against a Ware team that had won eight straight games and “the Indians just couldn't generate a sustained offense Saturday, even with the return of first string quarterback **Ed Marvell**.” The Result: Ware 20, Turners 0. Neil L focused that week's story on well known Basketball Referee **Ted Telga** from South Deerfield who was moonlighting as a football linesman and took great ribbing from the Turners Fans who made the long ride to Ware that day.

Mohawk was enjoying a 14-6 lead over the “punch less” Turners Falls Indians when the “peaches and cream day suddenly turned sour (for Mohawk) as the Turners Indians stormed from behind to gain a thrilling 14-14 tie,” according to Neil L. Turners had scored earlier when “Turners Quarterback **Ed Marvell** – who is improving every week – hit **Keith Newton** for a 20 yard touchdown strike and a short lived 6-0 Turners lead back in the second period.” And it was **Marvell** who “marched his team 85 yards in 11 plays, three of them look-in passes to **Newton**, and Turners was within two points, 14-12.”

The two point conversion attempt failed, but Turners was saved when Mohawk bungled the kickoff by turning a perceived touchback into an unwitting safety that tied the game in a bizarre fashion. Mohawk later tried a desperation 39 yard field goal as time ran out but it faded left “and the entire Turners team let out a sigh of relief.”

“For the first time this year, the Turners Falls Indians had gotten their football act together and were having a breeze against a heavily favored and highly touted football powerhouse from Palmer,” winning with by a surprising 20-8 score as “The Panthers were powerless to do anything with the rounding-into-peak-form Turners defensive line,” reported Neil L. **Jim Bogoslawski** scored on a 60 yard reverse, **Bob Bostley** added a second tally, and **Keith Newton** made an unbelievable catch in the end zone on a desperation pass as time ran out in the first half.

In a flashback to the 1960s, Turners knocked the A Conference Drury Wildcats out of bowl contention with an impressive 10-0 victory in the first match up between the teams since **Jack Bassett's** 1969 squad got drilled by the Wildcats, 30-7. **Ed Marvell** scored on a quarterback option and **Lou Collins** kicked a 21 yard field goal to seal the upset victory.

“You could tell (the FG) was good by the way **Ed Marvell** leaped into the air – hands raised over his head,” described Neil L.

“**Rick Warrington** scored for Mahar Regional School with no time left on the clock Saturday, but his spectacular end zone catch was about as meaningful as a mother-in-law's kiss,” observed Neil L, as “the resurgent Turners Falls High School Indians took a surprisingly easy 21-8 victory with them down the Millers River.” **Jeff Koshinsky** had two Turners touchdowns and **Bob Bostley** the other and “Turners not only dominated this one – they never gave the Senators a real break, holding onto the football as if it were **John Trovolta's** disco vest.”

“The handwriting was on the wall early for the Indians Saturday when the powerful Red Raiders offensive line took control of the game immediately following the

opening kickoff,” reported Neil L. on Athol’s 14-6 win over the Indians. Turners coughed up five interceptions and two key fumbles that killed drives. The Indians only score came on **Keith Newton’s** 33 yard TD catch over the middle, but the defense of **Mike Little, John Choleva, Dan May, Dan Colleran** and **Frank Dudek** continued to play well.

Bob York covered Turners Falls upstart 19-9 win over Greenfield on Thanksgiving Day as Turners survived first half fumbles and a Green field goal, along with a late Greenfield threat to win, thanks to a 93 yard TD jaunt by **Bob Bostley**, a **Jeff Kochinsky** rushing TD, and an **Ed Marvell** bootleg to pay dirt.

Here was the lead to Neil L’s color story: “The Greenfield stands began thinning out midway through the fourth quarter Thursday morning. It could have been the cold, damp, threatening weather that sent some Green fans home early. Yet, it was just as cold and damp on Turners side of the field and you can bet not one Indian fan left Veteran’s Field for any reason on this particular Turkey Day.”

It was 19-3 Turners at the time, but Turners Athletic Director **Eddie Bourdeau** said, “I don’t feel safe yet!” as he nervously paced the sidelines” because “anything can happen in high school football.”

But it was a 19-9 final and everybody from Turners, including **Eddie Bourdeau**, finally felt safe.

Turners finished 6-3-1 on the season, with tough losses to Frontier and Athol changing what could have been into what wasn’t.

**1979 -** Neil L. was named Associate Editor at the Recorder in 1979, giving the creative writer, reporter, columnist and journalist a say in some of the paper’s editorial decisions, and furthering his reputation around the newsroom as a mentor teacher and *coach* for the younger reporters. I recently came across an essay on the internet written by **Denny Wilkins**, former Recorder scribe in the 1970s and now a Professor of Journalism at a New York university. His essay in part read (forgive the brutal editing): “Neil L. Perry made himself my newsroom godfather and over time, forged me into a competent, credible journalist. He taught me the practice, purpose and values of journalism. Neil rarely spoke to me at first, but the few words he used carried much meaning. I became a better interviewer because of the first words he ever said to me: ‘You talk too fast.’ I became a better writer because he left a piece of paper on my desk with nothing but dots on it and the legend ‘These are the periods you left out of your story.’ He made me a better human being because he taught me to care more about people. Neil made me excited about a profession I entered by chance. Neil once wrote a column explaining what it meant to be a reporter: ‘Being in the newspaper business means watching history being made and not being part of it; it means being answerable to everybody but accountable to nobody; and it means being an uninvited guest at any event deemed newsworthy by the powers that be. But being a newsman also provides an opportunity to shed light where there is only darkness — an opportunity to circulate truth, or to demolish falsehood; to inform and perhaps lead, without preaching; to puncture the balloons of the sanctimonious; and to uplift the spirits of those among us who strike to overcome apathy in themselves and in society.’”

Walking the sidelines of Turners Falls High School football continued to be something my father greatly enjoyed doing too.

“Oh, the joy – and agony – of high school football, especially on opening day!” was the first sentence Neil L. typed for the ’79 season. “The Turners Falls-Amherst football game started off badly for the Indians when an overzealous Turners fan looked at the Amherst team warming up on the sidelines and yelled, ‘Go Back to Ludlow!’”

Amherst 30, Turners 6 – with **Ed Marvell** scoring the Indians’ only touchdown.

“**John O’Riley’s** big and inexperienced boys from Turners Falls, smarting from an opening day 30-6 shellacking at the hands of the Division II Hurricanes from Amherst rolled to a 15-0 Inter County League victory” over Frontier in South Deerfield, partly because “pride and practice go a long way in high school football.” Neil L. observed “The loyal poncho-clad, plastic wrapped football fans who braved Saturday’s pelting nor’easter watched the Indian offensive line jell into a cohesive unit, giving Quarterback **Ed Marvell** the few precious seconds he needed to find an open target for his bullet-like passes,” including a four yard TD pass to **Jim Murley**. “If the popular Turners Falls quarterback keeps it up, he’ll soon be known as ‘*Marvellous Ed*’ along Avenue A.” **Lew Collins** kicked a 26 yard field goal and the defense got interceptions from **Paul Waldron** and **Mitzi Croteau**.

“The Turners Falls faithful who made the long ride behind all those early fall foliage viewers puttering along Route 9 to the Brookfields and beyond Saturday saw one of the most exciting – and rewarding – football games played by their Indians in years,” reported Neil L. “Stunned by two quick Tantasqua Regional High School touchdowns in the opening minutes, the Indians gamely held on through the first half before nearly snatching a victory from defeat in the final seconds of a patented high school football thriller.”

Down 12-0, the Indians fought back, “ignited by a 32 yard scamper from scrimmage by **Mitzi Croteau**,” capped by **Ed Marvell’s** one yard rush for the first Turners TD, only to quickly give up a 45 yard TD run to the opposition, causing a TF player to moan ‘We haven’t gotten a single break,’ to which “Assistant Coach **Paul Cournoyer**, ever the teacher, turned away from the game to tell the boy, ‘You don’t get breaks, son. You make breaks.’” **Paul Waldron** later scored for Turners after **Jim Murley** made a big interception to make it 18-13 Tantasqua, but “despite gutsy runs by **Croteau** and **Waldron**, Tantasqua’s **Jim Hurley** slammed the door on hopes for a Turners upset when he slammed **Marvell** to the turf on fourth down with 1:11 to go. Great play. Great game.”

“It’s an ill wind that bloweth no man to God.’ They teach it in English Literature classes at Turners Falls High School, but the lesson was driven home in particularly cruel fashion to Head Coach **John O’Riley** and his emotionally-charged football players on the playing field this weekend,” Neil L. wrote. The “near gale that swept across the Montague Plains Saturday afternoon” held up a **Lew Collins** valiant 39 yard field goal attempt and held back **Fran Welcome’s** punt that resulted in a Ware run back for a game-tying TD and then “the pitless breezes pushed and lifted and blew” Ware’s PAT “just over the goal post cross bar for the 22-21 Ware win.”

With **Tom Thorton’s** six yard TD catch, two **Jim Mayrand** touchdown runs, and three PATs from **Lew Collins**, “The Indians had a 21-7 (third period) lead and hopes for their second Intercounty League victory were brighter than Team Doctor **Albert B. Giknis’** rainbow-colored beret. But an oval football takes some strange bounces,

especially when the winds of the Gods forsake you.” (A successful two-point conversion by Ware proved to be the difference).

A late Mohawk 60 yard touch down pass was called back on a penalty and “Turners had a narrow 13-6 win to take back over Greenfield Mountain,” observed Neil L. **Jim Murley** blocked a Mohawk punt for a great defensive touchdown and **Jim Bogoslawski** ran in the other score, but the focus of Neil’s report was on the hard luck team from Shelburne.

“A 40 yard touchdown bomb from **Ed Marvell** to **Jim Mayrand** in the second period. A 15 yard chip-shot point after touchdown kick by **Lew Collins**. A bull-like plunge by **Jim Bogoslawski** from the one yard line in the third quarter. A picture perfect 30 yard field goal by **Lew Collins** near the end of the game. It all added up to 16 points for Turners Falls High School – surely enough to win most high school football games,” wrote Neil L., but “knowledgeable football fans know defense is the cement that holds this 1979 Indian team together” with the likes of **Dan May, Frank Dudek** and **Gayle Williams**. Turners 16, Palmer 6.

Holyoke Catholic made its Intercounty League Debut in 1979, but it wasn’t the same football program that Turners played in the 1960s – the Indians beat HC 14-8 the last time the two teams met, in 1966. In 1979, it was Turners Falls winning, 35-0. Wrote Neil L.: “In high school football, when you are good, sometimes you wind up warming the bench” while the second team plays. **Ed Marvell** was good before he sat – 8 of 12 for 190 yards, including a 26 yard TD pass to **Jim Mayrand** and **Jim Bogoslawski** added two touchdowns. **Lew Collins** kicked a 36 yard field goal, **Mitzi Croteau** added a 3 yard TD dash, and one of the bench players (**Tony Martin**) got to make a 59 yard TD run of his own.

“Yes, in high school football, when you are good, you sometimes end up on the bench,” Neil L. concluded. “But you are part of the team and Saturday the Turners team did itself and its coaches proud.”

While Ware was beating Athol 17-6 to win a share of the Intercounty Crown, Turners was thrashing Mahar 3-8 with Neil L’s story focusing on the woeful Senators who watched one of their players being taken off the field on a stretcher with 30 second left in a terrible game, an awful way to end a long day. **Lew Collins** kicked a 31 yard field goal, **Ed Marvell** tossed a 40 yard TD to **Jim Mayrand**, **Mitzi Croteau** enjoyed a 55 yard TD jaunt, **Jim Murley** danced 24 yards for another score, and **Paul Waldron** had a three yard TD run in the blow out, with the defense of **Warren Bradley, Dan May, Frank Dudek, Gayle Williams, Fran Welcome, Mark Pellis** and **Waldron** doing another great job.

Turners’ hopes for a share of the IC Crown were lost when Ware rolled over Palmer 38-12, and while Turners beat Athol 16-8, the Indians still weren’t going to the dance.

“For three nail biting periods, Athol played Turners to a standstill with only **Lew Collins**’ 26 yard first period field goal the difference,” wrote Neil L., even though “little 5’ 4” **Ken ‘Mitzi’ Croteau** ducked under the huge Raider line early in the second period and scored from the two yard line” to give “Turners a 9-0 lead before Athol had even gotten untracked.” Athol made it 9-8 “and were emotionally and physically read to take control of the game” but “they hadn’t reckoned on the vaulted Turners defensive line.” **Croteau** scored again to make it 16-8 and “the Athol and Turners defenses controlled the

game from that point,” although players from both sides got into a shouting, pushing, and pulling match in the fourth quarter.

**Bob York** covered Greenfield’s 35-7 destruction of Turners on Thanksgiving Day, with Neil L’s color story headline called ‘*The Angels Cried Too*’. It was vintage Neil L. Turkey day writing: “If rain is really tears from heaven, the angels joined Turners Falls football fans in mourning during the annual Thanksgiving Day game against arch rival Greenfield Thursday. The murky fog that descended upon the Montague Plains during the first half when the score was 21-7 against the home team degenerated into a steady drizzle toward the end of the 35-7 rout. And, although many of the Turners rooters had left the stands before the final whistle in the one-sided game, not one blue-shirted football player had quit. Yes, some wept at the end. The tears and downcast eyes came from disappointment that a long and hard 10 game season had suddenly gone bad. But there wasn’t a whimper to be heard or seen on the silent Indian bench or later in the locker room.”

Neil L also noted that “All available regular and special police officers were at the game, but, despite the usual brown bags and funny smelling cigarettes being passed around, the huge crowd was well behaved this year.” He also mentioned that **Murph Togneri** hosted the team’s steak breakfast that year and that the pre-game crowds cheered school field goal record holder **Lew Collins** during pre game warm ups.

It was the first lopsided Turkey day Turners loss since the 36-6 drubbing in ’73 and the ’79 squad finished 6-4 for the year with Neil L covering all 10 games.

**1980** - The tide was turning as the new decade began. The huge football crowds of the previous generations were thinning out as other interests and priorities sapped the football faithful. Neil L. must have seen the changes coming because he paid tribute to the legacy of Turners Falls in an October 1980 *Leisure* feature: “I don’t know how it is in other football-mad towns, but in Turners Falls, everyone thinks he can play the game.

Bartenders, mill workers, store clerks, town employees and Turners Falls High School alumni, male and female of every age, know football strategy – and they freely comment on the ability or lack of some of the high school coaching staff on Saturday afternoons.

Everyone in town knows all the football plays and how they should be run and, on Saturdays, they joyfully praise high school players when they execute well – and watch with exasperation when they don’t.

And everyone in Turners Falls knows all the football rules, no matter how obscure, and they don’t hesitate to “help out” any football official who dares invoke the rules against their favorites.

Some rabid fans torn between a host of leisure-time activities in Franklin County, actually pass up the weekly Saturday afternoon Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts just to be on the sidelines to give high school coaches, players and officials the benefit of their years of football knowledge.

In Turners Falls and every other area town where competitive sports are played, high school football has become rousing family entertainment, weekly group therapy, and an old fashioned community bacchanal rolled into one.”

And there was still a season to be played. Here’s how Neil L began his first write up of the ’80 season: “Coach **John O’Riley** unveiled two secret weapons as his

rejuvenated Turners Falls football team shocked Division II Amherst Regional High School 7-6 Saturday. The host of loyal Turners fans that braved the light morning mist and the heavy traffic in and around the University of Massachusetts discovered that unsung and untried sophomore quarterback **Jay Crofton** has the poise of a veteran, the instincts of a pick-pocket, and an innate football talent that can be developed in coming weeks. The Turners faithful also discovered the hard running, hard hitting and crisp blocking of unheralded senior fullback **John Partridge** is the perfect complement to the weekly scat back heroics of 5-4 **Ken Croteau**. But despite the offensive surprises pulled off by **O'Riley** and his crew, it was the celebrated Turners defense and offensive line play that dominated the game and gave the Indians a huge morale boost."

**Croteau** was "up to his old tricks, ducking under, around and over the huge Amherst defensive linemen. The Turners sparkplug gained 132 yards in 20 carries and got up and asked for more every time as he totally frustrated Amherst. **Croteau** scored his team's only touchdown from eight yards out in the first quarter as he whirled and danced through the Amherst defense with mayhem on its mind but lead weights on its feet."

Unfortunately, there was a different outcome the next week. Wrote Neil L.: "The Mahar Regional High School Senators played rock and roll with the Turners Falls High School Indians, belting out a solid 23-14 Inter County League victory in the process" with fumbles recovered by **Mark Sirum, Ken Little, Jim Murley**, and **Ken Croteau** keeping the game within reach for the Indians. **Murley's** first period four yard TD run gave Turners an early lead, but the Blue couldn't stop Mahar's large fullback and **Mitzi Croteau's** 2<sup>nd</sup> TD run wasn't enough against the bigger and stronger Senators.

It didn't get much better in Week Three as "the high flying Mohawks easily beat back the challenges of Turners Falls High School, 26-6" as reported by Neil L. with the Indians' lone score coming "on a 60 yard launch from quarterback **Jay Crofton** to **Jim Murley** late in the fourth quarter when the game was already tucked away."

Then came Ware. "The Turners Falls High School Indians' game plan worked to perfection Saturday," Neil L. reported, "But, as Robert Browning noted in Merrie England long ago, 'human plans and projects often come to naught,' especially when the pigskin is slippery, the gridiron is wet, and your opponent is big, quick, opportunistic – and undefeated."

Turners hung tough into the third period. Ware didn't get on the board until there was only 1:26 remaining in the first half and "Behind by only 7-0 at the half, an underdog Turners team had ideas of an upset when it took to the field for the third quarter," but Ware scored 14 big third period points on its way to a solid 28-8 win, with **John Partridge** scoring on a six yard run for Turners only score.

Neil L's game report for Turners big 36-8 win over Frontier focused on the Redskins. A 66 yard TD catch by **Tom Thorton** and touchdown runs from **Jim Murley** and **Mitzi Croteau** powered the Indians to the lopsided victory.

"During the past couple of decades the quick-kick – like such plays as the 'Statue of Liberty' and the 'shotgun' – has been relegated to the status of a trick, to be used only in desperate situations," wrote Neil L. "But the Turners Falls High School Indians revived the little-used surprise quick-kick play Saturday and elevated it to the status of an art while scoring a thrilling 7-6 upset victory over a powerful Ludlow High School team in Intercounty League Football play. Confronted by a wind-whipped deluge blowing in

their faces and an unyielding Ludlow defense on the ground, the Indians thrice went to the quick-kick on third down deep in their own territory, knocking Ludlow back on its heel and effectively keeping the Lions at bay. In the second period, **Jim Murley** quick-kicked 51 yards into the wind from his own 15 yard line. He did the same thing in the third period, this time quick-kicking 41 yards from his own 16 yard line. But the play that broke the heart – and the spirit –of the Ludlow Lions was **Murley's** surprise 46 yard third-down kick to knock the Lions away from the Indians goal line for the final time late in the fourth period. Led by the running of slippery **Ken Croteau**, who gained 126 yards in 13 carries in the first half, the Indians took it to the bigger Lions for the first 20 minutes, despite the deplorable weather.” The big play was “a fourth down touchdown from **(Jay) Crofton** to **Owen Jander** from three yard out. **(Mark) Pelis** then calmly kicked what proved to be the winning point.”

“They used an old Irish blessing in Holyoke’s Springdale section years ago,” wrote Neil L. “It went something like ‘may the wind be always at your back and may you be in heaven 24 hours before the devil knows your dead.’ Saturday, at wind-swept Alumni Field overlooking Springdale, Turners Falls High School was pushed all over the field by a lighter but swifter Holyoke Catholic football team. Nevertheless, the Indians had a 20-0 Intercounty League victory safely tucked away on the team bus before the football gods that watch over the Gaels realized their pockets had been picked by three guys named **Croteau, Murley and Little.**” Also, the big Turners front four of **Gayle Williams, Ron Mosca, Joe Zewinski** and **Mark Sirum** gave the Gaels quarterback a fearful beating. **Ken Croteau's** 37 yard scoring jaunt gave TF a quick 6-0 lead, **Jim Murley** capped a 68 yard five play drive with a 42 yard TD run, and **Ken Little** “went over the middle, broke to the left sidelines and raced untouched 53 yards for the Indians final score.”

Humorous side note: **Murley** was called “*Hurley*” throughout the game by the Irish-oriented public address announcer.

It was **Murley** who got all the press in the Palmer game the next week. Wrote Neil L: “Somebody better find out what the **Murley** family had to eat last week and then give the recipe to Coach **John O’Riley** of Turners Falls High School. Senior halfback **Jim Murley** rolled up a season high 220 yards in rushing for the Indians Saturday as they scored their second straight 20-0 Intercounty League football victory, this time over a big but outmatched Palmer High School squad. **Murley** set up the first Indian touchdown in the second quarter, scored the second later in the same period, and was denied another touchdown when he fumbled on the Palmer one foot line following a 49 yard run early in the fourth quarter. He then scored the final Turners touchdown when he recovered a Panther fumble in the Palmer end zone late in the fourth stanza.”

“It was a bittersweet afternoon for 11 Turners Falls High School football players Saturday,” observed Neil L. “The Indians, improving every week, displayed a disciplined defense, balanced running, and effective passing while recording an easy 20-7 football win over the Red Raiders of Athol High School. The Intercounty league victory was the Indians fifth straight and brought their season record, after a sputtering 1-3 start, to a respectable 6-3.” He continued, “But for the members of the TFHS Class of 1981, Saturday marked the last home game of their high school football careers and they made the most of it.” **Jim Murley** “continued his heroics by gaining 103 yards on 15 carries, latched onto a **Jay Crofton** aerial, and scored all three Indian touchdowns. He also

contributed a host of individual tackles and threw in a timely pass interception for good measure. **Ken Croteau, Murley's** 5 foot four inch senior backfield sidekick – when not out in front blocking – gained 75 yards on 14 tries and stood about six feet tall in the Indian secondary. Fellow seniors **Ken Little, Harvey Atkins, Dave Hastings, Tom Newton, Owen Jander, John Partridge, Steve Brown, Mike Ryan, and Carl Dunn** all contributed to the 20-7 win. Senior Co-Captain and all-star guard **Dan May** who missed the entire season with a leg injury incurred this summer, led the cheers from the sidelines.”

**Bob York** covered Greenfield's exciting 21-12 Thanksgiving Day win while Neil L's color story ran under the headline '*This one was one of the best ever*' Here's how some of his write up went: “The Indians couldn't wait to get their hands on a football Thursday. Many of them engaged in an impromptu game of catch in the TFHS parking lot before suiting up. They arrived at Veteran's Memorial Field in a **Frank Kuzmeskus** school bus complete with a 'Ringo's Raiders' banner. 'Ringo', like 'Mr. O', is a nickname for Turners Falls Head Coach **John O'Riley**. The Greenfield cheerleaders welcomed their team with a huge paper sign that pictured a blue TFHS rat tied with rope and labeled 'Wrap the Rat'. While the fans, helped along by 'pocket warmers' in brown bags, were in a carnival mood even before the game began, the football players on both sides were dead serious. Each was all business during the pre-game warm ups, and each exuded confidence as the opening whistle approached. Some players on both sides periodically egged their cheering fans on by waving their arms over their heads and motioning with their index fingers that their team was Number One. For the first time in recent memory, TFHS Assistant Coach **Paul Cournoyer** failed to go into the 'Cournoyer Crouch' during the toss of the coin at mid-field. The crouch – actually a kind of squat – is a quiet, reflective, almost prayerful moment for Cournoyer before the excitement of the game begins.”

(Greenfield scored first to lead 7-0, but **Mark Pelis** answered on a six yard TD pass from **Jay Crofton**. A huge Green fumble with 1:13 remaining in the half allowed **Crofton** to hit **Pelis** from four yards out with no time remaining to give TFHS a 12-7 lead. But Greenfield's defense stopped a couple of key Turners' drives and the Green managed to score twice in the second half to seal the victory).

“And when the Indians' first string quarterback **Jay Crofton** was nailed on the Greenfield sidelines and forced out of the game early in the second period, there were some not-so-quiet prayers coming from under all those blue parkas, blankets and overcoats in the Turners stands. They were answered when the substitute quarterback, little freshman **Brian Jurek**, hit **Owen Jander** with a 17 yard pass, **Mitzi Croteau** raced 27 yards downfield, and **Crofton** came back to hit **Mark Pelis** for a touchdown. From that point on, both the Green and the Blue knew they were in for a classic football battle. They played the game on an icy, slick field that frequently caused backs on both sides to lose their footing.” Also: “**Sue Henry** and **Kim Rivet**, co-captains of the Turners cheerleaders, almost lost their voices in leading the cheers as the boys in blue came back onto the field for the second half.” Neil L. quoted proud TFHS Athletic Director **Eddie Bourdeau** saying: “We had a shot at it. Both sides played their hearts out. A great game.” And the long time Turners football writer concluded: “Emotionally exhausted fans from both Greenfield and Turners would add 'Amen'.”

Turners finished an impressive 6-4 after that 1-3 start with Neil L walking the sidelines for all 10 games.

**1981** - There hadn't been many true Turners football tragedies during Neil L's era. Players were occasionally lost to injury while others went missing for disciplinary or academic reasons, but the courage of **Mickey Schab** ('73) who gallantly played with the cancer that would eventually claim his life a month after his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday was the toughest human drama Turners football fans had to endure.

In the spring of 1981, a talented, popular and well liked Turners Falls football player took his own life, sending shock waves through Indian Nation. Neil L was forced to write what he told me was the toughest column of his career addressing the issue of teen suicide while trying to pay homage to the fallen player ("He was in the same mold as a long line of young Turners Falls men who distinguished themselves on the high school football field – men like **Cannon Novak, Bull Martin, Art Burke, Mickey Schab, Joe Sheff, Buster Martin, Kevin May, the Sicard Brothers, Walt Kostanski, Hennick Welcome,** and hundreds more"), but the piece did not play well, most understandably with the boy's family, and I don't think my father quite saw Turners Football the same after that tragedy.

Covering football was Neil L's welcomed diversion and happy escape from the stresses and controversies of being a reporter, columnist, and editor, but when the confusing and shocking death of a beloved football player spilled over from the sports page to the front page, a part of my father's football innocence was lost.

Not many probably noticed when **Bob York** covered the first game of the 1981 season because it was a Monday afternoon make up game, but when **Chris Woodcock** took to the sidelines for Turners Falls 26-20 win over Mahar the following Saturday, an era had come to an end.

The Recorder underwent editorial and management changes in the Fall of 1981 and my father was among those unceremoniously shown the door, ending his tour as Associate Editor, Political Journalist and Columnist and, perhaps most importantly, his long career as a Turners Falls football writer after 16 consecutive seasons (present for 130 of the 148 games played during the span, including all 16 Turkey Day contests).

He watched **John O'Riley** make that 1963 catch against Northampton two weeks before President Kennedy was killed and he covered his last Turners Falls football game with Ronald Reagan enjoying his first year as President. A lot of history both on and off the field took place in the years Neil L. covered Turners Falls football, but he seemed to keep the game frozen in memory, tradition and lore on the sports pages no matter what was taking place on the front page.

My father covered many state and national political figures and knew most of them on a first name basis. Pols like **Ted Kennedy, Frank Sargent, Mike Dukakis, Ed King, Tip O'Neil, Silvio Conte,** and **John Olver** to name a few, but in his heart I think Neil L. Perry was just as happy and pleased to cover and know guys like **Jack Bassett, Eddie Bourdeau, Paul Cournoyer, John Zymna, Skip Galvin, John O'Riley** and **Jim Koldis** on the Turners Falls football sidelines. The worse part about losing his job at the Recorder was giving up Turners Falls High School football cold turkey without a final farewell. I'm sure had he known the Turkey Day '80 write up would be his last, he might have written it differently.

**Walt Kostanski** was gracious enough to host a testimonial dinner for Neil L. held at St. Kaz, where so many **Cannon Novak** Award Banquet dinners have been held over the years, many of which Neil L attended. Neil L had covered both of Walt's sons (**Barry** and **Rick**) who played ball for the Indians. The focus was mostly on Neil L's political reporting with several politicians taking humorous jabs at the popular columnist, but I wished representatives from his football life had participated with some cheap hits of their own!

Neil L. served as Editor of the Westfield Evening News for three years and died unexpectedly at the age of 56 in February of 1985. He was professionally eulogized as "the best journalist I ever met", "a superb reporter, one of the best (The Recorder) has ever seen," "personable, compassionate, and dedicated," and "human in what can be a very dehumanizing profession," but I like to remember him best walking the sidelines with his clipboard. Whenever I think of Turners Falls High School Football, I see my father.