

**A BRIEF HISTORY
OF GYMNASTICS
IN BUTLER,
PENNSYLVANIA**



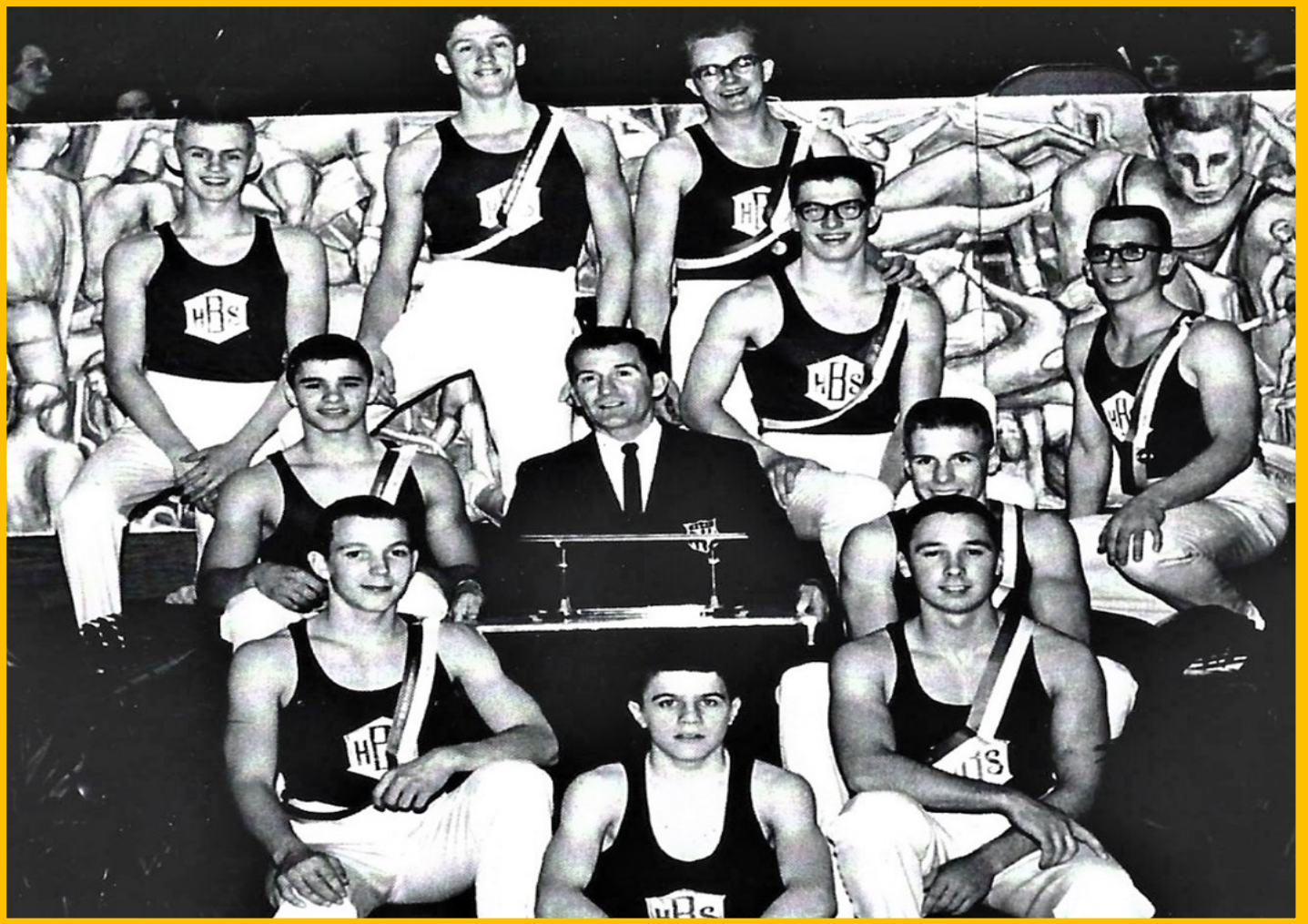




2014 Butler County Sports Hall of Fame Team Recognition Award
1970 Leeburne Girls' High School Gymnastics Team - Head Coach Fred "Bud" Cross
"The First Butler High Gymnastics Team"



At Leeburne High School, 1970-1971
Head Coach Fred "Bud" Cross
1970 Leeburne Girls' High School Gymnastics Team







**BUTLER, PENNSYLVANIA
BOY'S AND GIRL'S
HIGH SCHOOL
GYMNASTICS HISTORY**

**LYNDORA IMMIGRANTS
AND OLD-WORLD TRADITIONS**

Butler High School Gymnastics owes its historical origins to those Eastern European immigrants who settled in the Lyndora area of the city of Butler, PA. These immigrants brought their homeland traditions to the community they established in Lyndora.

One of those traditions, the European Sokols Social Organization, became the Lyndora Sokols, the first gymnastics group in Butler.

The European Sokols were a family oriented social club formed to strengthen communities, establish tradition, and celebrate a wide variety of family activities. These activities included folk music, dance, plays, stories, ethnic and religious traditions, and athletics.

The European Sokols were founded in Czechoslovakia in 1871 by Miroslav Tyrš.

The Sokol influence initially included Czech, Slovak and Ukrainian communities among others, and rapidly spread across Eastern Europe.

The Sokol Slet, a massive national and international annual gathering of communities involved thousands of participants joining together in one huge communal display of music, dance, shared ethnic traditions, mass synchronized exercise, and athletic competitions, especially track and field and gymnastics.

All participants learned age-group related compulsory exercises and performed them together on a huge field accompanied by music played by musicians of all ethnic groups.

Later, male and female athletes competed in their chosen events, with both male and female all-around gymnasts competing for a combined score in compulsory and optional routines.

Both male and female athletes were celebrated. Individual, team and combined team categories, all appropriately age grouped, provided an expansive competitive format. The International Sokol Organization still exists, and holds many international events.

As the Lyndora Sokols grew, they moved beyond social activities and added competitive athletics. Among the early forms of competition was the Sokol core of track and field and gymnastics. In the late 1940's and early 1950's Lyndora Sokols had both local and national success in competitive men's gymnastics, which at that time included track and field events.

The grueling competition lasted several days and had events ranging from sprints, distance runs, pole vaulting, long jumping, discus and shot put to flying rings, parallel bars, pommel horse, vaulting, rope climb, tumbling and floor exercise. These competitions were held in Sokol centers like Chicago, New York, Cleveland and Pittsburgh. John Gulevich, Mike Soley and Paul Uram led the talent, each winning several events with Uram winning the National Sokol All-Around Gymnastic Championship in 1950 and again in 1953.

**PAUL URAM, BUTLER HIGH GYMNASTICS'
FOUNDING FATHER.**

Paul Uram was born in Lyndora. His father worked in the steel mill and his family lived in Lyndora. Uram graduated from Butler High School where he was star athlete in football and track and field. He went on to become an outstanding quarterback at Slippery Rock College, where he earned a Bachelors' Degree in education. He also spent a season as quarterback with the semi-pro Butler Cubs football team. His next several years were spent at Millvale High School where he taught physical education, was an assistant football coach, and where he started and coached a gymnastics team. During his Millvale years he also began work on his Masters' Degree at the University of Pittsburgh.

Uram was fiercely self-sufficient, working his way through both degrees, often hitch-hiking until he could afford a car.

He quickly made a name for himself, both as an outstanding teacher, and especially as an outstanding football coach.

His reputation finally landed him a job in the Butler School District, teaching physical education at Lyndora School, and as assistant coach to Gerald Cappezuti, Butler head football coach.

In 1956 Uram founded the forerunner of the Butler High School Gymnastics program.

Uram built the Lyndora School Gymnastics Team and founded the Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Gymnastics League.

The league grew but remained independent until 1970 when the WPIAL finally recognized gymnastics as a scholastic sport.

Uram's Lyndora teams went undefeated in dual meets, tournaments and invitationals, and league championships.

In 1961 the Butler Area School District elevated Uram's team to official varsity status.

In 1961 The Butler High School Boy's Gymnastics Team went undefeated, winning the WPIGL dual meet season. The WPIGL individual and team championship meet was held at the new Butler High School in its modern gymnasium.

The standing-room-only crowd enjoyed the exciting and daring new sport and were thrilled to see their Butler team win every first place as well as the team title. Jim Curzi, Bill Erdos, Ken Musko, John Franchuk and George Jankovich led Uram's team in its legendary first season.

Paul Uram continued successfully to coach gymnastics, later assisted by his friend Chuck Williams, until resigning in 1967 to devote all his coaching time to football. During his tenure as gymnastics coach in Butler, including both Lyndora and Butler High, Uram amassed a record of 107 wins and no losses. His teams won 12 WPIGL Championships.

During Uram's final four years at Butler High, Penn State University hosted a Pennsylvania State Gymnastics Championship Meet. The meet was open to all high school teams in the state of Pennsylvania.

The goal of the event was to foster development of the young sport, increase the number of teams in the state, and encourage the PIAA to adopt gymnastics.

Uram's teams won the first State Meet but lost in 1965 to Belle Vernon. Butler had beaten Belle Vernon in a dual meet that season, but the scoring system in the state meet placed great emphasis on a points-for-place system rather than total team score. Belle Vernon had an exceptional all-around gymnast named Joe Fedorchak. Fedorchak won the all-around and two other events, adding two seconds and a third place to his scoring total. Under the points-for-place scoring system Fedorchak's outstanding performance was just enough for Belle Vernon to edge out Butler for the championship. Butler returned to win the State Meet in 1966 and again in 1967. Penn State never held the meet again, and the PIAA, after finally adopting gymnastics in 1970, did not offer a team championship until 1977.

**In an interesting sidelight,
with Uram's encouragement Joe Fedorchak
graduated and joined former Butler gymnasts
Mickey Uram, Cliff Diehl, Dave Croft,
Jerry Moore and Jim Curzi to help form an
outstanding Michigan State University team.**

**Over the course of Paul Uram's gymnastics
coaching career many of his gymnasts
won WPIGL and Penn State individual
championship medals. Many also went on
to distinguish themselves on NCAA
Division I and Division II teams.**

**Heading the list was Jim Curzi,
a three- time NCAA All-American
and the very first winner of the Nissan Award,
NCAA gymnastics equivalent
of college football's Heisman Trophy.**

With his time now devoted exclusively to football, Paul Uram, assisted by Dave McKinnis, introduced an innovative gymnastics flexibility program to football. The importance of this pioneering exercise program to performance improvement was recognized immediately and the program spread rapidly to high schools, colleges and universities and finally to pro football. Eventually the program spread to many other sports and became a foundational influence for the proliferation of professional conditioning coaches and exercise specialists.

Famous pro football coaches, including Sid Gillman, Paul Brown, Chuck Knox, Don McCafferty and George Allen, all had Coach Uram install his program.

As the program's success became more and more evident, Coach Uram accepted a full-time assistant coaching role with Chuck Noll and the Pittsburgh Steelers.

With his extensive football coaching experience, Uram expanded his coaching duties from flexibility and conditioning coach to special-teams coach with other specific assignments and even a role in scouting. Uram was with the Steelers for nine years, including all four of the Chuck Noll coached Super Bowl winning teams. Uram finished his pro football coaching career with one year as an assistant coach for the Cleveland Browns.

**Paul Uram and his wife Helen
lived in and near Lyndora all their lives.**

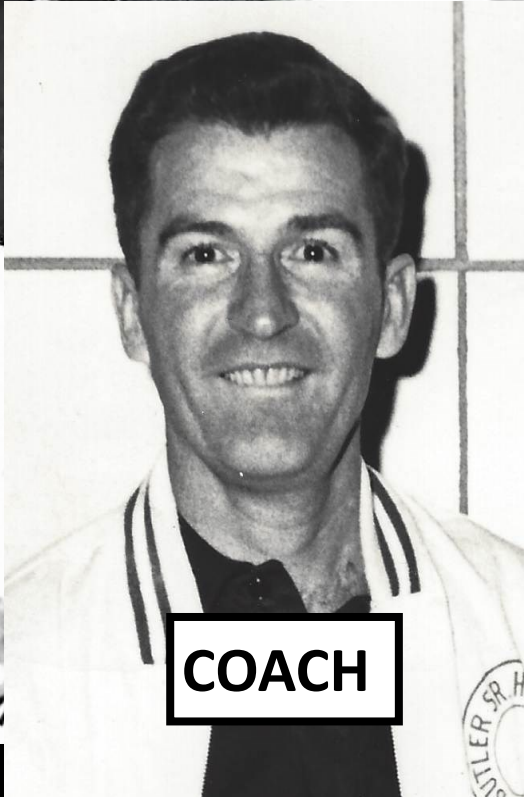
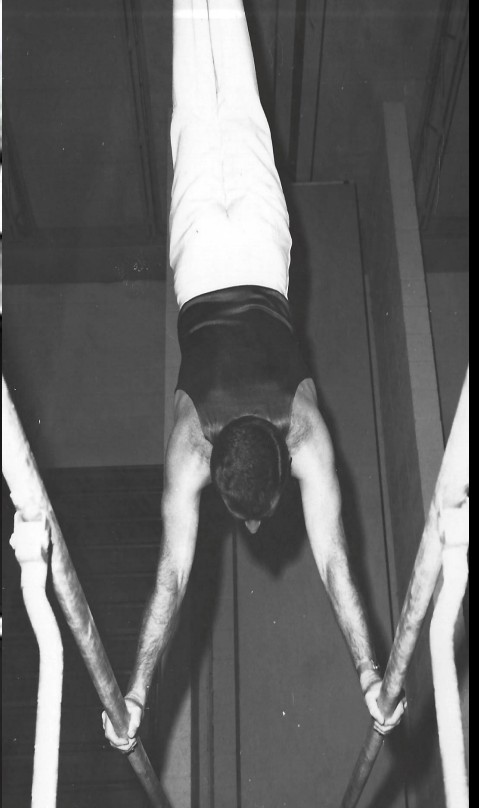
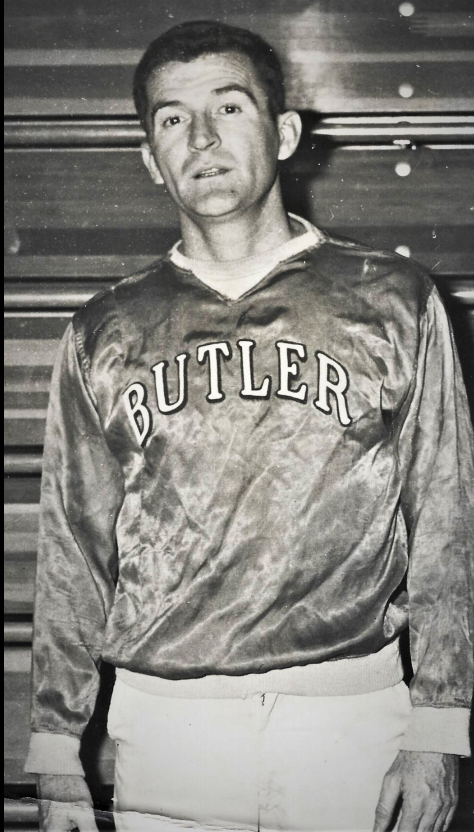
**Their son Ron and his wife Amy
made their home in Butler.**

**They blessed Paul and Helen with grand children
and in turn, great grand-children.**

Paul Uram (1926 – 2017)

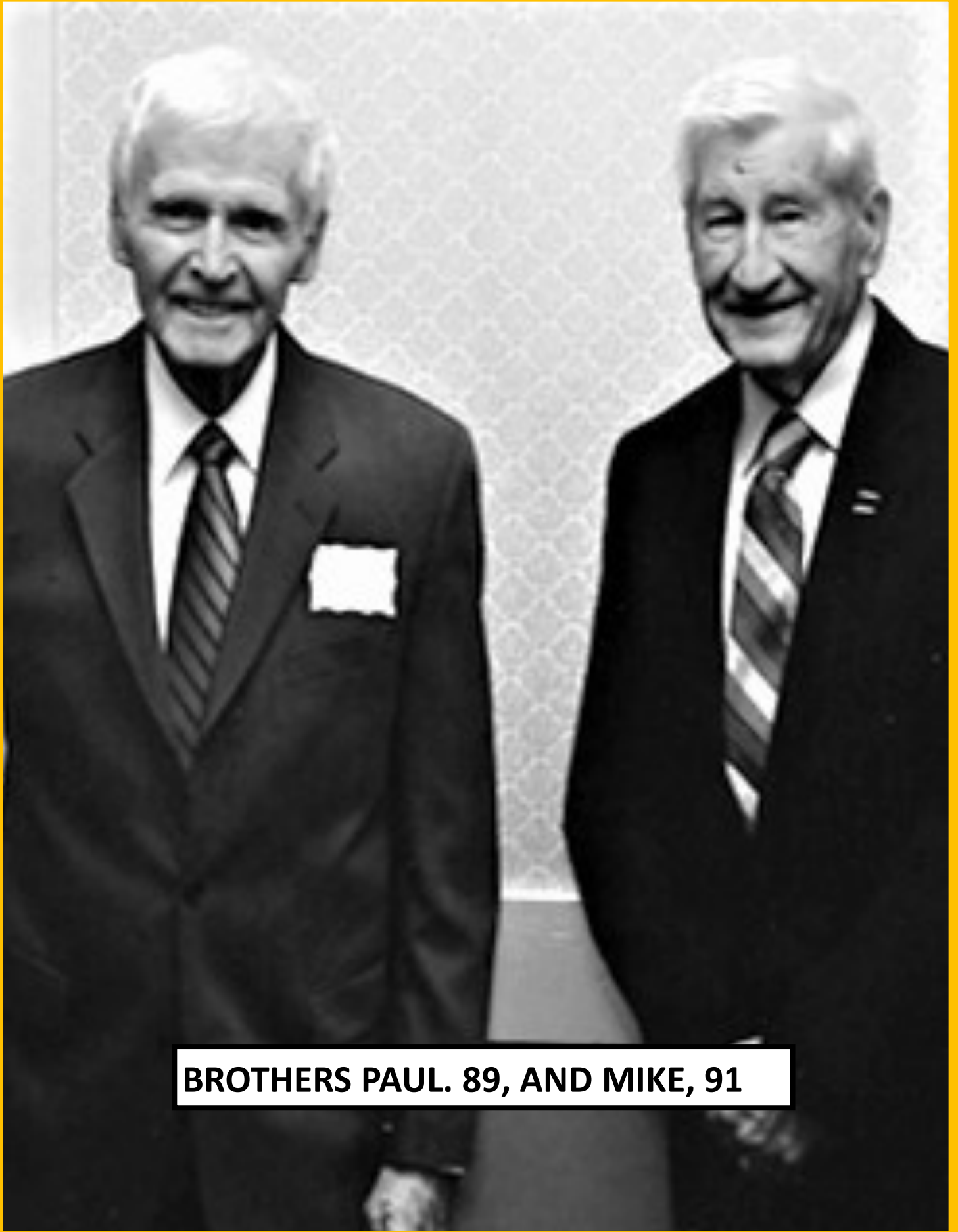
**was an inducted member of the Butler High
School Sports Hall of Fame; the Slippery Rock
University Sports Hall of Fame; the Butler County
Sports Hall of Fame; the Western Pennsylvania
Sports Hall of Fame; the Pennsylvania State
Sports Hall of Fame; the United States
Gymnastics Judges Hall of Fame; and the United
States Gymnastics Hall of Fame.**

**He will be remembered in the hearts of the
athletes he taught as “Coach”.**

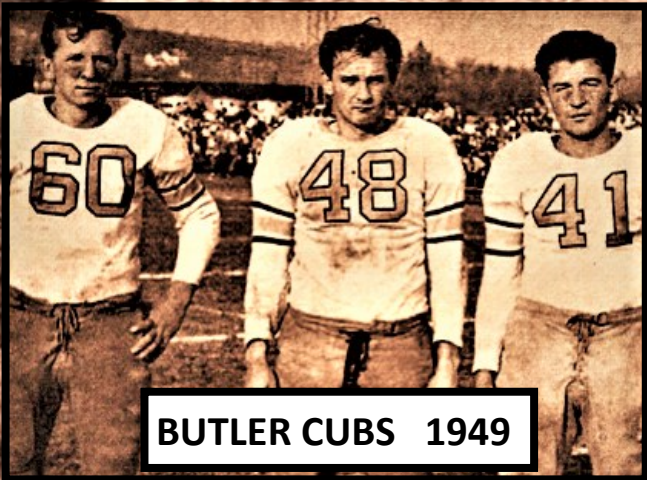




2017 AGE 91



BROTHERS PAUL. 89, AND MIKE, 91



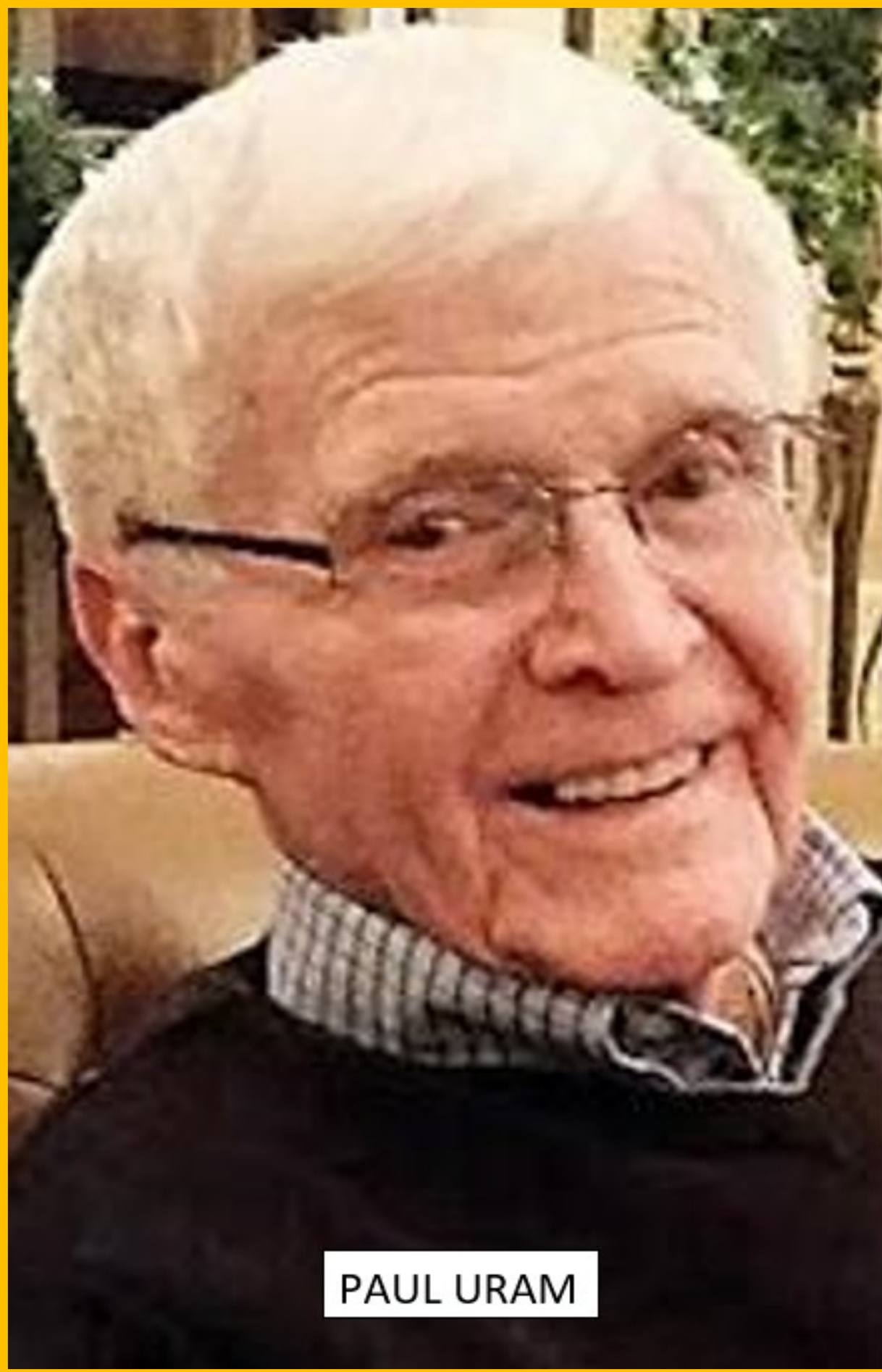
BUTLER CUBS 1949



CAPPY'S COACHES 1960

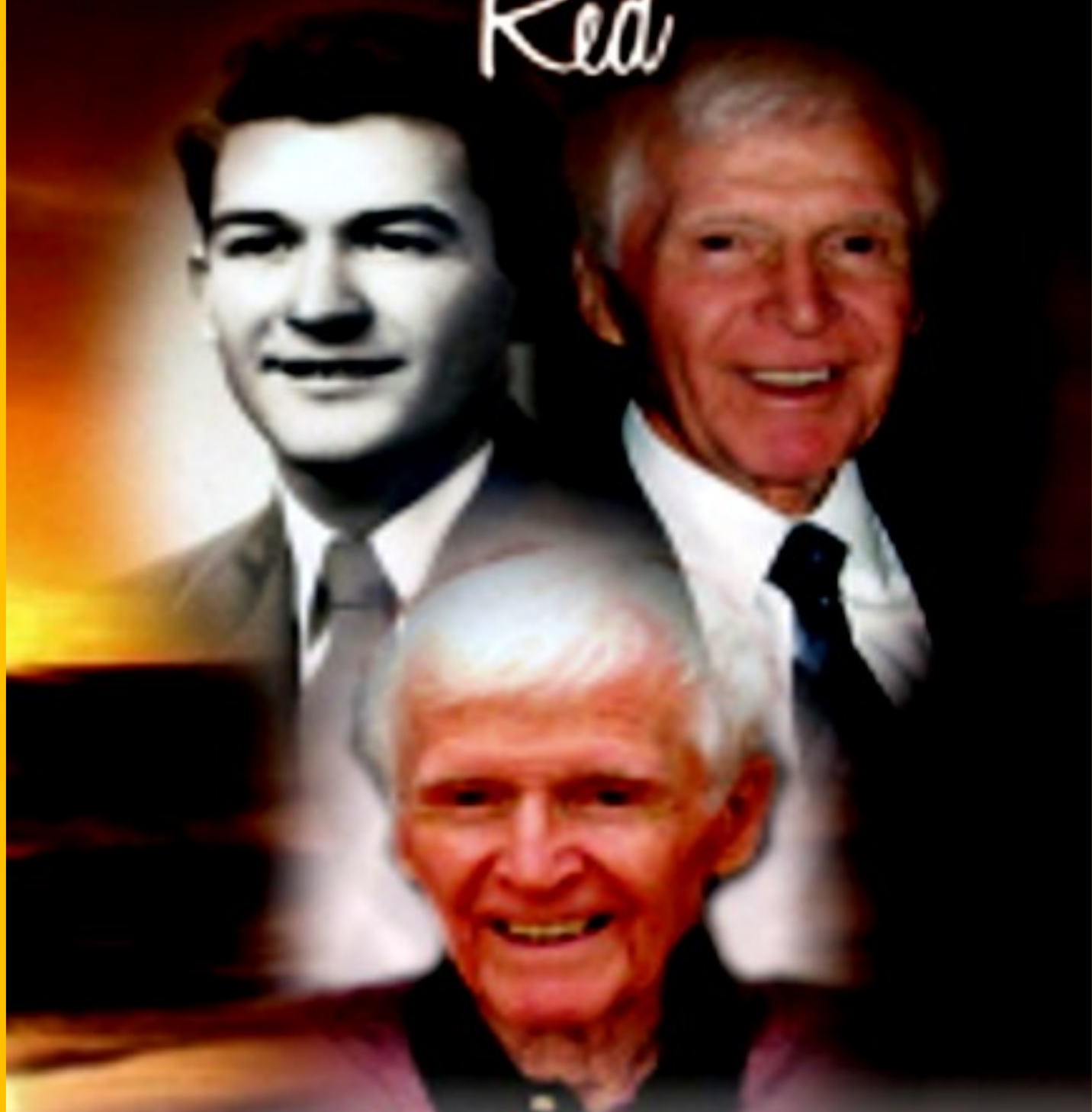


COACH URAM BROUGHT GYMNASTICS TO THE NFL WITH A FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM. COACH WORKED WITH MANY TEAMS, FINALLY STAYING WITH THE PITTSBURGH STEELERS FOR NINE YEARS AS ASSISTANT COACH. HIS COACHING HELPED THE STEELERS WIN FOUR SUPER BOWLS AND EARNED COACH FOUR CHAMPIONSHIP RINGS.



PAUL URAM

Red



Paul Uram

1926 to 2017

The Years To Follow

**After Paul Uram resigned in 1967,
Butler High School Gymnastics
continued to carry on his tradition.**

**The boys' team, coached by Dave Mckinnis
and later by Steve Heasley
and finally by Larry Byerly,
lasted until 1982.**

**The girls' team,
started as a club in 1971,
and by Toni Briggs, Carol Corman,
and Sandy Marsh,
and later coached by Dave McKinnis,
followed by Steve Heasley,
who led the team to a PIAA State Championship;
Dave McKinnis again,
and finally by Richard Pribis,
lasted until 1990.**

**The old WPIGL lasted until 1970
when the WPIAL and the PIAA
adopted Gymnastics.**

**The first Pennsylvania Gymnastics Coaches
State Meet was held at
Neshaminy High School near Philadelphia.**

The meet was an all-boys meet.

**The meet format was for
individual medals only.**

No team competition was offered.

**The second Pennsylvania Gymnastics
Coaches State Meet was held at Butler.
Again, no team competition was offered.**

**The PIAA took over the state meet
the next year but would not reinstate
a team championship until 1977. PIAA meets
were held at State Universities from that point
until dropped by the PIAA years later.**

**The third and last PIAA State Meet
held at a high school,
before the PIAA began to hold the meets
at State Universities,
was held at Butler High,
and included girls individual event medals.**

**The meet was significant
because the PIAA opened
the girls' competition
not only to high school gymnasts,
but also to club gymnasts,
and included compulsory routines as well.**

**The next year,
the fourth PIAA State Meet,
held at Shippensburg University,
opened the boys' competition
to club gymnasts.**

Club gymnasts gradually began to dominate the district, regional and state meets because they had many developmental advantages not available to high school gymnasts who could not afford private instruction.

In some areas, hybrid teams of both high school and club gymnasts began to appear, with the club gymnasts practicing at their clubs and competing on their high school teams, often taking the place of gymnasts who trained exclusively at the high school. In areas where there were club gymnasts, stronger teams appeared and dominated. The PIAA decision to open gymnastics competition to club gymnasts, *something the PIAA did not permit in any other sport*, eventually led to the demise of high school gymnastics.

Club gymnasts were permitted to train at their clubs and were permitted to take the place of high school gymnasts who could only afford to train at high school. Schools with no clubs in their areas were at an immediate disadvantage.

Schools which tried to defend their high school gymnastic programs against the dominance of clubs met with many complications and were eventually overruled by the PIAA. In the 1980's, high school gymnastics teams, including Butler's, began to disappear.

By 1985, all the boys teams were gone.

By 1989, there were only two girls teams left in the WPIAL, and they were hybrid teams predominately composed of club gymnasts.

The Dave McKinnis Years. (1967– 1987)

After Paul Uram ended his gymnastics coaching career in 1967,

Dave McKinnis was hired as boys' gymnastics coach.

McKinnis, a Butler native, had come late to gymnastics, starting as a high school senior and earning a varsity letter on the 1962 team.

McKinnis went on to the University of Pittsburgh where he was a four-year letterman, high scorer, and team captain his senior year. He then earned his Masters' Degree at Pitt and served as assistant coach to head gymnastics coach Warren Neiger.

McKinnis had the dubious task of following Coach Uram's undefeated record of 107 wins.

He managed to extend the Butler record for seven more meets before ending the streak with Butler's first ever loss at the hands of a talented Rochester team, which included two future three time All-American all-around gymnasts and one future Olympian.

It was, of course, a hard thing to live with and thereafter, McKinnis always claimed his true record at Butler High was zero wins and THE ONE LOSS.

McKinnis coached many successful boys' teams, including back-to-back undefeated WPIAL Champions in 1970 and 1971.

Many of his gymnasts won WPIAL and PIAA championships and place medals.

Many went on to successfully compete in NCAA Division I and Division II gymnastics programs, earning division, regional and national medals and honors.

Among them were some who even achieved All-American status.

Eric Swanson, an honor student at the United States Naval Academy, placed second in very close voting for the Nissan Award, gymnastics version of footballs' Heisman Trophy.

In the years 1975, 76, 77 and 81, McKinnis doubled his coaching duties by also coaching the girls' gymnastics team.

After the assumed end of the WPIAL boys' gymnastics program in 1981, McKinnis continued to coach only the girls' team. In 1982, after a year of dealing with the PIAA-created problem of a hybrid team dominated by several seniors who were dismissed early from school to travel a great distance to practice with a renowned private club, McKinnis, joined by Steve Heasley, now himself a private club owner who recognized the hybrid problem, arrived at a unique understanding. To compete on the BHS team, girls had to practice during the high school season with the high school team.

After the season they could return to the club.

The compromise successfully maintained the integrity of the high school program (a responsibility the PIAA and WPIAL failed to accept, even though they mandated no club participation in other sports). However, the hybrid program was so successful elsewhere that competition was imbalanced, and many high schools were essentially sponsoring local club gymnastic teams. By 1990, the WPIAL was reduced to basically three hybrid teams, and a once thriving high school league was gone.

**Despite the hybrid problem,
Butler High Girls gymnastics
produced several section championships
and several WPIAL second places.
Many of the girls distinguished themselves
as medal winners in both WPIAL
and PIAA competition.**

**During McKinnis' BHS coaching career,
his boy's teams compiled a 101-16 record
and his girls' teams compiled a 42-21 record.**

**Years later, McKinnis was inducted
into the Butler High School
Sports Hall of Fame
and the Butler County
Sports Hall of Fame.**

**"It was a privilege and honor
to work at Butler High School,
and to be accepted as coach
by so many teams of wonderful
and talented gymnasts.**

Thank You All!

The Steve Heasley Years. (1978 - 1982)

In 1978, Steve Heasley took over as both boys' and girls' head coach. Heasley was a native of Butler, a graduate of Butler High School in 1968, and a graduate of Slippery Rock University in 1972. Heasley was an honor student while earning his Bachelors' and Masters' degrees.

Steve Heasley started gymnastics as a ninth grader at Butler High School. He spent ninth and tenth grade with Coach Uram and Coach Williams. He competed on Coach McKinnis' teams as a junior and senior, excelling on floor exercise, and vault and earning his varsity letters.

At Slippery Rock University, coached by Steve Banjak, Steve was a four-year letterman, the 1972 team captain, a two-time recipient of the Outstanding College Athletes of America Award, and an NCAA Division II All-American.

Heasley coached the boys' gymnastics program during the 1978, 1979 and 1980 seasons. He compiled a record of 24-6, losing only to a dominant and nationally ranked Ambridge team. Heasley's teams placed second in both the WPIAL and PIAA three years in a row, each time outscored only by Ambridge.

In addition to Heasley's team success. He coached many individual WPIAL and PIAA medal winners, some going on to successful collegiate careers. Perhaps the most successful was Bill Stanley. Stanley was a two-time WPIAL and PIAA pommel horse champ. He went on to Penn State where he was a four-year letterman, a three-time EIGL pommel horse champ, and a three-time NCAA All-American. In an international meet between Penn State and the Russian National Team, Stanley scored a perfect 10.0. Two of the judges awarding the perfect score were Russians!

Steve Heasley's greatest success as a BHS coach came with his girls' teams. Heasley coached the BHS girls' team for five years, 1978 through 1982. During that time, Heasley's teams accumulated a record of 54-2. Heasley's BHS girls' teams won five consecutive undefeated Section I championships. Heasley's teams placed second in the WPIAL and PIAA in 1978, 1979 and 1980. In 1981 and 1982 Heasley's BHS girls were back-to-back undefeated WPIAL and PIAA Champs.

There were also many Section I, WPIAL and PIAA individual medal winners and champions, some going on to successful collegiate careers. Among the many high achievers was Bev Fry. Bev had a great high school and collegiate career, then went on to a highly successful collegiate coaching career and also became Athletic Director at the University of Michigan.

Steve Heasley ended his BHS gymnastics coaching career after the 1982 season.

He continued his teaching career at Butler High and also became a private businessman, founding, owning and coaching at

Heasley's Butler Gymnastics Club.

Steve began at the old Chantlers' Bakery building, moved to the Hindman building and finally to his own building.

As the PIAA hybrid approach gradually destroyed high school gymnastics, Steve kept gymnastics alive and well in the Butler community.

Year after year, Heasley's programs have produced many national caliber gymnasts while Steve continues to pursue his love of gymnastics.

Steve Heasley, himself always a high achiever, has earned much well-deserved national recognition for his work in the private world of gymnastics. At home, Steve has been honored with inductions into the Butler High School Sports Hall of Fame and the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame.

The Richard Pribis Years. (1988-1990)

Richard Pribis coached the BHS girls' team for its last three years of existence.

The site of home meets was moved from the Butler Intermediate School gym to the old gym at Lyndora school. Pribis did an outstanding job of holding the program together despite the problems of the hybrid system and the decline of high school teams.

The WPIAL by this time had very few teams and was essentially limited to North Allegheny, Montour and Baldwin. These three were unbeatable. Still, Pribis managed to schedule 33 meets over the three-year period with any teams available. Pribis' teams compiled a record of 21-12 and included some medal winners in the WPIAL Championships.

**Richard Pribis was a Butler native,
a 1968 BHS graduate and
a 1972 graduate
of the University of Pittsburgh
where he earned a Bachelors' Degree
and later a Masters' Degree.**

**Pribis started his gymnastics career
at Butler High, coached for two years by
Coach Uram and Coach Williams and
coached for two years by Coach McKinnis.
Like his close friend Steve Heasley, Pribis
was a high achiever. He was a letterman
and a medal winner in both WPIAL and PIAA
meets. At the university of Pittsburgh,
Pribis was a four-year letterman,
team captain, high scorer, and excelled
in both EIGL and NCAA competition.
He was All-East and All-American
his senior year.**

Pribis was employed as a teacher in the Butler School District. He was also self-employed as a contractor and builder.

Pribis maintained a strong interest in gymnastics as well as many other sports, initially joining Heasley in developing girls' gymnastics in Butler. Pribis started and assisted many other athletic programs in the community, eventually building a private gymnastics studio in his home.

With his wife, the former Mary Ann Herbert, herself a gymnast at Slippery Rock University, they built a Montessori School. Mary Ann has run the school for years. Mary Ann and Richard have been devoted educators and remain gymnasts at heart.

Richard Pribis was inducted into the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame.

Important Contributors.

Larry Byerly coached a BHS club version of boys' gymnastics in 1982 with the hope of somehow continuing the program. The PIAA-instituted club and high school hybrid program had however taken its toll. Butler was forced by circumstances to drop the program.

Larry Byerly was a Butler native. He graduated from Butler High where he was a four-year letterman and multi-medal winner in WPIAL and PIAA competition. He pursued his education and his gymnastics career at the US Naval Academy and then at Slippery Rock University.

Byerly continued his education at Ohio State where he earned a Doctorate Degree. Byerly continued his gymnastics enthusiasm by becoming a NCAA judge, finally attaining international qualification. He has been a dedicated gymnastics judge for years.

John Franchuk, a Butler native, graduate of BHS and the University of Pittsburgh where he earned his Bachelors' and Masters' Degrees, served as assistant coach to Coach Mckinnis for four years. Franchuk was an original member of the pioneering Lyndora team. He worked tumbling, rope climb, flying rings, high bar, vaulting and was exceptional on parallel bars.

Franchuk was a four-year letterman at the University of Pittsburgh. In his senior year he was named to the All-East team and earned All-American status by placing fifth on the parallel bars in the NCAA Championships at Penn State.

John Franchuk was a tremendous assistant coach, playing an extremely important role in Coach McKinnis' coaching development. He was a very good teacher and the gymnasts enjoyed his coaching.

Jim Curzi, a Butler native, graduate of BHS and graduate of Michigan State University where he earned his Bachelors' and Masters' Degrees, served as assistant coach to Coach McKinnis for one year. Curzi, along with Bill Erdos, Ken musko and John Franchuk, formed the nucleus of the original Lyndora team. Curzi was an all-around performer who also tumbled and worked flying rings. He was the team leader, high scorer, winner of many medals and championships.

Curzi's career at Michigan State was legendary and marks the beginning of many Butler gymnasts who had outstanding NCAA careers. Curzi's achievements are far too many to list here, but they include multi-year and multi-event All Big Ten and NCAA All- American honors. Curzi was the very first winner of the prestigious Nissan Award, gymnastics' equivalent of football's Heisman Trophy. The voting was unanimous.

After serving as assistant coach to George Szypula at Michigan State University and serving as assistant coach to Charlie Pond at the University of Illinois, Curzi taught at Reavis High School in Illinois and then briefly at Butler High. Curzi was inducted into the Butler Sports Hall of Fame, the Western Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame and the Michigan State University Sports Hall of Fame.

Curzi served as assistant coach to Coach McKinnis for only one year. It was a significant year because his knowledge and experience added new vitality to the program.

Charles “Chuck” Williams was assistant coach for Coach Uram for six years.

He played a vital role not only at the varsity level but also in developing kids from the Junior High. Williams came to Butler already an experienced coach. He started and coached a successful Moniteau High School gymnastics team and was a valuable assistant football and track coach there.

Williams helped develop many outstanding athletes including Dick Madison, an all-around athlete who excelled in football at West Virginia University and was inducted into the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame. Chuck was beloved by many Butler gymnasts, especially those he started in the Junior High, bringing them to the varsity practice and team.

Williams graduated from Slippery Rock where he earned his Bachelors' Degree while participating in many sports, excelling at soccer. He later earned his Masters' Degree and had a long teaching and coaching career at Moniteau and Butler. He was for years an excellent assistant football coach at Butler High.

He is in the heartfelt Sports Hall of Fame of the many gymnasts and football athletes he coached.

Toni Briggs, Carol Corman and Sandy Marsh.

**These three women were really
the true beginning of the
Butler High Girls' gymnastics program.**

**Toni Briggs and Carol Corman started
a girls' gymnastics club at the Intermediate
School and kept it going for three years.
Sandy Marsh continued the program for
another year until the program became
a varsity team. These women coached
Butler Girls Gymnastics for only a short time
before moving on. Records of club members
and exhibition meets are unavailable,
but the contribution of these three women
was and remains important.**

Ray Miller. Ray Miller is and always should be a legend in the annals of the Butler High School sports program. Ray Miller was an athletic director supreme back in the days when athletic directors at BHS were called faculty managers. Ray Miller taught classes all day and then spent all of his own time organizing and overseeing the entire varsity schedules, equipment needs, travel plans, physicals, gym and grounds care, publicity, uniform distribution, care and cleaning and much more. His was a demanding, singular, selfless and very personal devoted effort for years.

Over the years Ray Miller worked diligently to foster BHS sports. After years in the difficult role of faculty manager, he finally was given the official title of athletic director with an office all his own. Later when he became an assistant principal, he continued his work with the athletic program, helping it in every way possible.

Ray Miller is included here not only because of his legendary role in the BHS sports program, but also because he was directly and personally responsible for bringing Coach Uram's Lyndora gymnastics team to BHS and giving it full varsity status.

Ray Miller budgeted the purchase of gymnastic equipment, arranged for a workout area, scheduled meets, contracted judges and secured the new varsity sport. In addition, he organized and ran every home dual and championship meet.

Ray Miller helped organize, served as an athletic director and eventually was inducted into the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame. His work at Butler High School as a champion of BHS sports, and especially gymnastics, must never be forgotten.

Ed Hepe. Ed Hepe probably thought his athletic days were over when he was drafted and had to go to the Navy right out of high school. As it turned out, after the service, and marriage, he went on to Slippery Rock College and became the old man on several athletic teams. Hepe's touchdown kickoff return from deep in the endzone remains as a record that will never be broken.

After earning his Bachelors' Degree, Hepe wound up teaching at McDonald High School where he carved out an exceptional coaching career in football, basketball and track. His teams and individual athletes were winners at league, district and state level. Many of Hepe's athletes went on to highly successful collegiate careers. Perhaps the most successful of Hepe's athletes was Marty Schottenheimer who went on to become one of the greatest coaches in the history of the

In 1961, Hepe came to BHS as the new head basketball coach. He immediately formed a cross country team and had instant WPIAL and PIAA winners. His basketball team also became a winner. Hepe then added assistant track coach to his coaching duties.

Years of success followed.

Hepe's successful coaching and his enthusiasm for Butler high sports gained him wide recognition and popularity in Butler.

He soon was offered the position of athletic director at Butler High.

He immediately set out to boost and increase the Butler High sports program.

Hepe added sports for boys and girls, including the Butler High Girls Gymnastics Team.

Hepe is included here because, being a close friend of Coach Uram, and a patron of all sports, he really liked gymnastics.

When Ray Miller became assistant principal, Hepe was the obvious choice to become the new athletic director. Hepe's support of Coach Uram and Coach McKinnis was invaluable. Hepe also gave critical assistance to both Uram and McKinnis in finding college opportunities for BHS gymnasts.

In the middle 1970's, Hepe stopped his coaching duties to devote full time to the ever-increasing demands of athletic director. He also developed an organic malady which made his life more difficult. Despite his burdens, he worked to expand the varsity program to include more sports, especially for girls.

Among the new varsity sports, Hepe was directly responsible for the addition of girls' gymnastics.

In the late 1970's, Hepe's health declined but despite several surgeries, the persistent effects of medications, and the general related decline of endurance, tolerance and efficiency, he pushed on until he finally retired.

Hepe loved gymnastics. John Daller, a former BHS gymnast and Slippery Rock University All-American inducted into the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame, married Hepe's daughter Nancy. They were both gymnasts, and they presented Hepe with a gymnast grand-daughter who did her gymnastics at the University of Pittsburgh.

Like Ray Miller before him, Hepe achieved legendary status at BHS. Ed Hepe was inducted into the Butler high School Sports Hall of Fame, the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame, the Slippery Rock Sports Hall of Fame and the Western Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame. Ed Hepe will never be forgotten.

Mike Surkalo.

Mike Surkalo was a distinguished sports writer for over half a century. For forty of those years Mike was Sports Editor for the Butler Eagle. Mike's daily sports section included his own column, stories, photos and results of every sports activity in the community, personalized articles which featured local talent and achievements and extensive collegiate and professional coverage.

His work was revered not only in Butler but also the entire Western Pennsylvania area.

When Coach Uram's Lyndora gymnastics program was just beginning, Mike gave it full coverage on the Eagle sports page.

Mike's outstanding coverage of Butler gymnastics continued through nearly all the years of the sport's existence.

His coverage of both dual meets and championship meets was always exceptional and memorable.

On the two separate occasions when Butler hosted the PIAA State Meet, Mike's coverage was so complete and compelling, creating such local and regional interest that it single-handedly promoted full capacity crowds.

Mike's enthusiastic coverage of Butler High gymnastics generated a large fan base creating large crowds at dual meets. He wrote many articles about individual and team achievements and he also followed Butler gymnasts in their collegiate careers.

Over the years, many gymnasts have kept personally valued scrapbooks of Mike Surkalo's articles and photos.

Mike Surkalo joined with Merrill Moses as founding fathers of the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame. Mike was later inducted for his unparalleled role in building and strengthening the Butler sports community.

Thousands of Butler coaches, athletes and sports figures owe Mike and his memory their gratitude. BHS gymnasts especially.

Concluding Remarks.

This brief history of Butler High School gymnastics is far from complete.

Hopefully, many details will surface as visitors to this website add their stories and accomplishments. The goal of this website is to invite reader participation and recreate BHS gymnastics history in a personalized way.

Over the thirty years of boys' gymnastics and the sixteen years of girls' gymnastics there were many exciting dual meets, Section, WPIGL, WPIAL and PIAA championship competitions. There were also many exhibitions, invitationals and tournaments.

Records of these events are incomplete.

In addition, there are no individual or team scoring records because every year the rules and the judges who administered those rules changed, making comparisons unfair.

However, there are many great stories and memories. There is a wealth of information readers can add. Please do!

The most important historical fact is that the BHS program was always for the gymnasts. The competitions were always second to the practices. The practices produced an unforgettable and legendary community of enthusiastic gymnasts.

While winning was celebrated in the local sports world, the practices were the real reason gymnasts came back every day. The practices were filled with challenges and opportunities to learn. Gymnasts quickly learned the importance of learning and that learning was its own reward.

Learning one skill soon led to learning another and then another. Learning happened in every practice and every gymnast learned something new every practice. Gymnastics is all about learning: flexibility, strength, speed and endurance; agility, quickness and balance; fundamental skills, intermediate skills and advanced skills; routine parts, whole routines and never-miss routines, then on to a better routine; and always form, form, form.

Every practice involved a struggle to learn. Frustration was just an expected part of learning. There was no room for discouragement. Courage was part of facing the difficult process of the time it takes to learn. Quitting was never an option.

Gymnastics was a self-teacher and its lesson was how to learn. Holiday practices were extra special and college gymnasts, home for vacation break, anxiously came to the gym just to be in the place where they first learned how to learn.

Practices were also called workouts because gymnastics was hard but rewarding work.

Gymnasts were often called disciplined because they worked so hard, but the truth of the word discipline is that it really means the process of learning.

BHS gymnasts have taken that process of learning forward to successful lives.

Gymnastics, like life, is continual learning and continual growth. Coach Uram always said,

“Do what you can do and do it well!”

Then he would encourage and help you to learn a bit more.

The process of learning was not meant to have an end. The old gymnastics concept of a perfect ten was simply meant to mean nobody is perfect. There’s always room for improvement. That’s the gymnastics state of mind.

To all those former BHS gymnasts who read this, all your former coaches wish to thank you for the privilege of sharing the learning process and the wonderful sport of gymnastics with you.

A General Summary of Team Records.

COACH URAM:

!07 Wins – 0 Losses. 12 consecutive undefeated seasons. 12 consecutive WPIGL Team Championships.

3 State Championships and one second place in the four Penn State sponsored Pennsylvania Gymnastics State Meets.

6 High School Team Championships in the Cleveland Swiss Turner Invitational.

COACH MCKINNIS:

Boys' Teams: 101 Wins – 16 Losses.

2 consecutive undefeated seasons.

2 consecutive undefeated WPIAL Section Championships. 2 consecutive undefeated WPIAL Championships. 8 WPIAL Section second places. 8 WPIAL second place finishes. No PIAA state team competitions offered in his tenure.

Girls' Teams: 42 Wins – 21 losses.
1 undefeated Section Championship.
9 second place finishes in WPIAL Section.
3 third and 7 fourth place finishes in WPIAL.

COACH HEASLEY:

Boys' Teams: 24 Wins – 6 Losses.
3 second places in WPIAL Section.
3 second place finishes in WPIAL.
3 top four teams in PIAA.

Girls' Teams: 54 wins – 2 losses.
4 undefeated WPIAL Section Championships.
2 undefeated WPIAL team championships.
3 WPIAL second place teams.
2 undefeated PIAA State Champion teams.
3 PIAA second places.

COACH PRIBIS:

21 wins – 12 losses. 3 third places in WPIAL
Section. 3 Fourth places in WPIAL.

**COMBINED TEAMS
HISTORICAL RECORD:**

349 wins

57 losses.

**All other Butler High
gymnastics programs
existed at the
non-competitive
club level.**

Although the records are incomplete, at least 144 BHS boy and girl gymnasts are known to have competed on NCAA Division I or Division II college gymnastics teams.

By the mid-1990's the rapid development of private clubs and their immediate tie to the US Olympic program had taken a severe toll on NCAA mens gymnastics programs.

Only about twenty of what was once over a hundred team collegiate program still existed.

Club gymnasts dominated those teams and no true high school team existed.

Paradoxically, even though the effect of private club gymnastics also destroyed the girls high school teams, the popularity of women's gymnastics boomed at the NCAA level.

Club gymnasts completely dominated the expansion of women's NCAA gymnastics.