

Coach Jack Streidl: A Plainwell Legend

By Dianna Stampfler

Ask anyone in this area to name one person synonymous with the Plainwell Trojans and more often than not, you'll hear "Coach Jack Streidl". Since 1945, he has been a fixture here, serving 40 years in the school system as a teacher, coach, role model, father figure, friend, colleague and humanitarian.

In 1937 John Robert Streidl was offered a "full ride" scholarship by the Western State Teachers College athletic department in Kalamazoo. It covered his tuition and fees of \$18 a term plus provided a job paying 30 cents an hour.

He was part of the football class that opened Waldo Stadium with a 6-0 victory over Miami in 1938. He was a starting tackle on the unbeaten 1941 team. Streidl also played intramural basketball, was a member of the track team and held heavyweight boxing and wrestling titles all four years at Western.

"He left with his diploma as one of the school's all-time playing greats [and] won the Michigan Golden Gloves boxing tournament heavyweight championship," said long time Kalamazoo Gazette sports writer Jack Moss in a 1985 article.

On December 5, 1942, Streidl married Phyllis Miller, an English major at Western and they began their long, loving life together. The day after Pearl Harbor, Jack joined the Navy to serve our country in World War II.

"I got out of the Navy on November 20, 1945," Streidl said in the 1985 Moss article. "I was hired [at Plainwell] as the varsity basketball coach, seventh and eighth grade basketball coach, baseball coach, football coach, athletic director and teacher the following Monday." The baseball coaching position gave way to track by the time spring arrived, however. That first year, Streidl led Plainwell's varsity basketball team to the regionals for the first time since 1930.

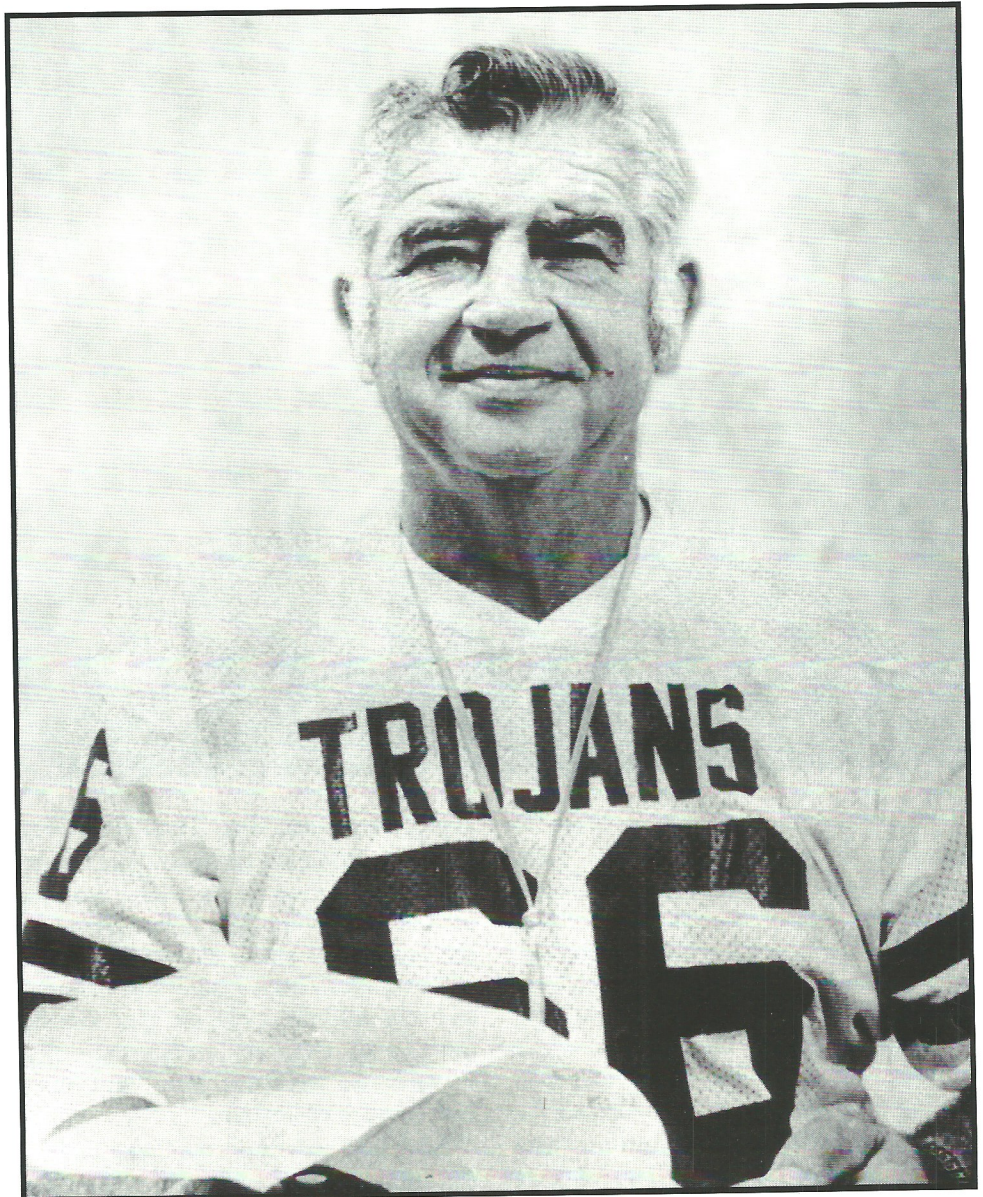
In 1951, at the age of 33, Streidl was recalled to duty in Korea. He was discharged two years later and returned to Plainwell to resume his duties as a teacher and coach. It wasn't long before he was back in the swing of things and in 1957 Streidl's basketball team went to the state

finals, having lost only one game all season.

"We had the best basketball team in Plainwell's history," said 1959 PHS graduate and fellow Plainwell Athletic Hall of Fame inductee Norm Young. "Coach Streidl was our coach. He was, simply put, the best coach ever. We played our hearts out for him. He had the ability to inspire

was 1948. He spent the better part of his teen years helping his mother keep their family of eight children and their Cooper farm together. His schooling suffered, until he met Jack Streidl.

"Jack had a keen sense of awareness for potential in people, especially when it came to sports," Aukerman said. "He encouraged



the best efforts out of his players. I personally believe that was his greatest attribute. He was the most influential man in my life, next to my own father. This man taught me many values beyond the realm of sports."

At age 10, Don Aukerman lost his father to an unexpected heart condition. The year

me to try out for football. He helped me to realize that despite my circumstances, I could excel. He taught me to believe in myself. He had the awesome ability to motivate anyone who played a sport for him.

"Jack was a disciplinarian. He had the

ability to make any person feel worthy. Whatever the sport, everyone's contribution made a vital difference in every game. His own life and love for his family was also a testament to us. We all knew of his love for his wife Phyllis. We would always smile when he came into the gym with her lipstick on his face."

Football teams under Streidl went on to win nine Wolverine Conference Championships, including the 1973 team which also went undefeated. In 1975, the high school football stadium on Starr Road was named after Streidl.

The night of October 5, 1984, Streidl reached one of the greatest milestones in his professional career. A 22-8 victory over Comstock gave him his 200th football win. He added two more to that count by the end of the season, retiring the following June with 202 football wins overall. At the time, he was one of only a handful of Michigan prep coaches to accumulate 200+ wins and the first to do so all in one district. During his 40 year tenure at Plainwell, Streidl's teams -- basketball, track and football -- won 75 percent of the games played. He recorded more than eight straight Wolverine Conference titles in track alone.

On October 17, 1980, Streidl was inducted into the WMU Athletic Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, the event conflicted with a Plainwell/Vicksburg game and he had to leave before the awards ceremony.

In her 1981 autobiography, *Confessions of a Sexagenarian: The Life and Loves of a Small Town House Wife*, Phyllis wrote: "When it came time for the awards, I got to

accept his and to give his acceptance speech. I must say that it was better than he would have given. He'd have just said 'Thank you very much' and sat down, while I felt free to brag about him for a while. I was unhampered by modesty and seized the opportunity to let them know

and walls of plaques and trophies adorning his house, the latest being his June 2004 induction into the National High School Athletic Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

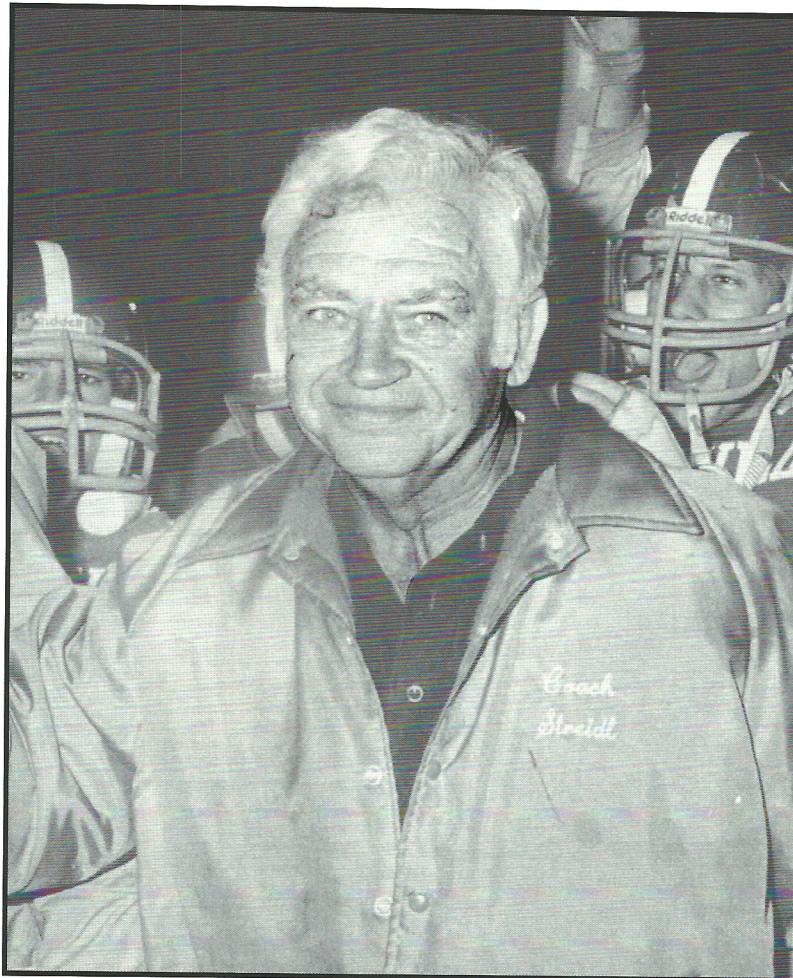
Wins and accolades aside, what really makes Jack proud is his family and his wife's ability to raise all those kids while he

was fighting wars and battling on the football field. He and Phyllis raised eight children of their own. They lost their beloved Diana to cancer, just months after she delivered her third child. Those three young children then found solace in the arms of their grandparents, who raised them until each had graduated from Plainwell High School. In all, Jack and Phyllis raised 11 children over the years. All have gone through college and live successful lives. Today, they are the proud grandparents of 22 and great grandparents of 10 (with more on the way).

Although it's been nearly 20 years since he retired, the legend of Coach Streidl still resonates in the halls and gymnasium at Plainwell High School, in the stands of the stadium and throughout the City of Plainwell.

On most Friday nights, August through October, you'll still find Coach

Streidl down at the football field that bears his name. He'll be sitting in the front row of the bleachers, close to the 50 yard line, with former coaches and friends by his side. Those who played for him still come up and shake his hand, reliving the glory days as if they were yesterday. Former players and students still yell out "Hey Coach" and there's never a doubt to whom they're calling.



how wise they were to have picked such a worthy recipient for their nice award."

Over the years, Streidl has been inducted into the Michigan High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame, Michigan High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame, Upper Peninsula Hall of Fame and Plainwell High School Hall of Fame. Streidl has a string of accolades to his name

To preserve the countless stories for future generations, a group of dedicated volunteers has teamed up to create a documentary called "Coach: The Jack Streidl Story." Scheduled for release in 2005, the piece will focus on the life, love, legend and lessons of Coach Streidl. The group is still collecting stories, so if you have one to share, or want information about ordering the DVD upon completion, log on to www.AngelMediaProductions.com.

