

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE PANTHER FOOTBALL PROGRAM

The dates listed in this history of the Perry High Panther football program are from the articles researched in copies of The Houston Home Journal. This is no way the complete history of Panther football, but it will give the reader the more important events that led to the beginning of the “new” sport at Perry High.

- **April 8, 1953** – 38 acres owned by E. M. Akin on the Hawkinsville highway was optioned for an athletic field for football, baseball, and track. The Perry Lions Club has led a movement to start a football team by next fall (1953).
- **August 13, 1953** – Bill Chappell (sixth grade teacher) and Earl Marshall (high school teacher) are named coaches for the school year 1953 – 1954.
- **October 8, 1953** – School board pledges to buy a football field. All civic organizations will be involved in a fund raising campaign. Cost estimates to install football are \$8,000 to \$15,000. The lights may be donated by Houston Sports, Inc. (own the lights at Hickson field) if they are arranged so baseball can be played at night.
- **October 15, 1953** – Perry civic clubs voted unanimously that Perry needs football. Board promises to buy a field and football can be financed. All civic clubs started the fund raising. \$10,000 is needed to go first class; \$7,000 will fund the following:

Uniforms / balls	\$3,500
Moving lights	\$2,000
500 bleacher seats	\$1,500
Lights are donated by Houston Sports	
- **October 23, 1953** – Vernon “Catfish” Smith, a former All – American end at Georgia, told the Perry Kiwanis to put in a football program. All civic clubs meet to plan a drive to raise funds.

High schools that already have football are:

Adel, Cordele, Gray, Wrens, Wrightsville, Ocilla, Cochran, Fort Valley, Hawkinsville, Baxley, Camilla, Cuthbert, Dawson, Sparta, Eastman, Sandersville, Monticello, Eatonton, Jackson, Jonesboro, Tennille, McDonough, Pelham, Reidsville, Lyons, Vidalia, Warner Robins, Millen, Madison, Soperton, Metter, Homerville, Nashville, and Quitman.

- **October 29, 1953** - \$3,250 is collected in Perry football drive. \$1,000 is donated by Tolleson Lumber Company and Tolleson Supply (materials for the stands). All funds are deposited at Perry Savings and Loan under the name of Perry Touchdown Club. Early officers of this club are: Jack Miller (President of Lions Club) – Chairman, Buck Tolleson – Vice Chairman, Mrs. Charles Marshall – Treasurer, and Cooper Etheridge – Secretary.

The board will buy the land, the county will complete the grading, and the city will help where needed.

- **November 5, 1953** – Fund is above \$5,000. 20 acres of land is purchased from A. S. Marshall of Fort Valley for \$20,000. Board bought the land and fence, county will grade and sod the field, and the city will move the lights.
- **November 12, 1953** – Fund over \$6,000. BBQ date set. Bob Batchelor is the chief cook. 36 boys wanting to play are outfitted for practice.
- **November 19, 1953** - 1,000 expected for the BBQ. 30 of the 40 boys out for the team were outfitted and started practice. The Line coach is Earl Marshall and the Back coach is Bill Chappell.

After four weeks a scrimmage will be held. Spring practice can be held the last four weeks of school in 1954. Perry will play smaller schools (1-2 years) before playing more experienced schools. Already scheduled are Warner Robins, Macon Vocational, and Hawkinsville. Fort Valley will try to be scheduled.

- **November 26, 1953** – BBQ sold 900, netted \$425.
- **December 10, 1953** – Picture of 25 boys on Perry's first football team: Charles Davis, Julian Kersey, Jimmy Griffin, Raymond Howard, Frances Arnold, Jim Malone, Marcus Anderson, Wayne McCormick, G. H. Duckworth, Jerre Hartley, Roy Henson, Ted Dungan, Jack Riddle, Edward Peed, Fred Langston, James Lasseter, Gordon Conley, Spiegel Pitzer, Clarence Flournoy, C. J. Story, Ronnie Hall, Kenson Vance. Absent: Earl Lewis, Kay Murphy, Milton Culpepper
Line coach: Earl Marshall, Back coach: Bill Chappell
- **December 31, 1953** - \$500 raised on an auto giveaway. Total is now \$8,100. Team will practice in May 1954 (Spring practice). Coach has not been hired, but will be in place by practice. Games are already scheduled with Warner Robins, Macon Vocational, and Hawkinsville.
- **January 7, 1954** - 1,000 seats are bought.
- **February 18, 1954** – Lights moved from Hickson field to Smoak subdivision field.

- **April 1, 1954** – Herb Legrande St. John hired as the Perry Grid Coach. The former 5' 9" 215 lb. All-American at Georgia due to begin work in August. The football fans said "The Saint's" selection is the start of an outstanding football program at Perry High. St. John was introduced at a chapel program at Perry High. He said, "I am a man of few words. I think we'll all get along fine." He is married to the former Barbara Lanneau. She and Coach St. John both are natives of Jacksonville, Florida. Practice will be held by Chappell and Marshall in about 2 weeks.
- **April 22, 1954** – Panther football schedule and roster is released.
- **April 22, 1954** – Spring practice is being held now by Chappell and Marshall.

Partial list of the boys who answered the first call for practice:

Marcus Anderson	William Harrison	David Moulder
Francis Arnold	Jerre Hartley	Kay Murphy
Robert Chesney	Bobby Horton	Virgil Peavy
Milton Culpepper	Raymond Howard	Spiegel Pitzer
Charles Davis	Julian Kersey	William Price
Kemp Dorsett	Hamp Kicklighter	Jack Riddle
Ralph Dorsett	Fred Langston	Donald Simmons
Ted Dungan	James Lasseter	James Stewart
G. H. Duckworth	Earl Lewis	C. J. Story
Clarence Flournoy	Jim Malone	Ted Thames
Eugene Ford	Wayne McCormick	Trenton Turner
Ronnie Hall	James Mealer	Jimmy Wilson
	Franklin Middlebrooks	

- **July 15, 1954** – A contest for naming the football field is sought by the Home Journal until September 1.
- **July 29, 1954** – St. John moves to Perry on Saturday. Boys will go to camp in West Georgia at Warm Springs on August 15.
- **August 5, 1954** – Summer camp will be at Bar Rest Ranch near Warm Springs next week. 30 boys are expected to leave on Sunday, August 15. Coach St. John and his family are living on Sewell Circle.

- **August 19, 1954** – 26 players and 1 manager (Johnnie Gallemore)

Rudolph Adams	Julian Kersey
Francis Arnold	Fred Langston
Jimmy Beatty	James Lasseter
Ed Beckham	Jim Malone
Charles Davis	Franklin Middlebrooks
Gene Ford	Johnny Mobley
Ronnie Hall	Kay Murphy
Percy Hardy	Virgil Peavy
William Harrison	Robert Pitzer
Jerre Hartley	C. J. Story
Bobby Horton	Trent Turner
Raymond Howard	Kenson Vance
Danny Hughes	Jimmy Wilson

- **September 2, 1954** – The positions of all the team are given:

Quarterbacks – Jimmy Beatty, Kay Murphy
 Left halfbacks – William Harrison, Charles Davis, Bobby Horton
 Right halfbacks – Percy Hardy, Rudolph Adams
 Fullbacks – Raymond Howard, Gene Ford
 Centers – Danny Hughes, Kenson Vance, Jim Malone
 Guards – Fred Langston, James Lasseter, Jimmy Wilson, Trent Turner,
 Johnny Mobley
 Tackles – Virgil Peavy, Earl Lewis, Francis Arnold, Joe Griffin
 Ends – Ronnie Hall, Jerre Hartley, Ed Beckham

- **September 9, 1954** – From a picture here is the 1954 Perry High squad:

Coaches: St. John, Chappell, Marshall Manager: Johnnie Gallemore

Rudolph Adams	Jerre Hartley	Jim Malone
Francis Arnold	Roy Henson	Johnny Mobley
Jimmy Beatty	Bobby Horton	Kay Murphy
Ed Beckham	Raymond Howard	Virgil Peavy
Gene Ford	Danny Hughes	Robert Pitzer
Ronnie Hall	Fred Langston	Trenton Turner
Percy Hardy	James Lasseter	Kenson Vance
William Harrison	Earl Lewis	Jimmy Wilson

- **September 9, 1954** – Perry High to open with Hawkinsville. Starting line-ups are given:

Ends – Ronnie Hall, Jerre Hartley

Tackles – Virgil Peavy, Earl Lewis

Guards – James Lasseter, Fred Langston

Center – Jim Malone

Quarterback – Jimmy Beatty

Halfbacks – William Harrison, Percy Hardy

Fullback – Raymond Howard

Reserves: Beckham, Wilson, Mobley, Turner, Griffin, Arnold, Pitzer, Moulder, Vance, Hughes, Adams, Horton, Davis, Ford, Duckworth, Murphy.