

Coach Jay Willard: Molder of Champions—Builder of Men

By Jeremiah R. Scott, Jr.

Author's Note: Jay Willard taught physical education at Eureka High School from 1927 to 1963. Coach Willard coached Eureka High football from 1927 through 1954, basketball from 1927 through 1954, track from 1927 through 1953, baseball in 1928-1929, golf 1960-1963. During this thirty-six-year-period, every male student at Eureka High School (EHS) was influenced by the teachings of Jay Willard.

I appreciate the courtesy and cooperation extended by Harriet Willard and Dorman Willard, children of Jay. They shared Jay's memorabilia with me.

Appreciation is also extended for information furnished by former students and athletes who played for Jay Bob Caviness ('30), Lou Bonomini ('35), Ernie Cunningham (38), Dr. Jack Walsh ('36), Grant Ferguson ('41), Don Hill ('46), and Fred Whitmire ('56).

I also appreciate EHS baseball coach, Bob Bonomini, for use of his master's thesis, "A History of Varsity Football at Eureka High School from 1897 to 1972."

Jay Willard was a descendant of two revolutionary war soldiers from the same company, North Hampton, Bucks County, Pennsylvania: Jonathan Willard and Robert Van Horn. Jonathan Willard's son, Isaac, married Robert Van Horn's



Jay Willard in about 1940. (Photographs courtesy of the Willard family.)

daughter, Sara. Their son, Nathaniel Willard, was the great-grandfather of Jay Willard. By 1887, the Willard family had settled in Bedford, Iowa, on the north Missouri border. Jay Willard was born there on October 9, 1898.

In March, 1908, the Willard family moved to Albany, Oregon where Jay's father became a farmer in the Oregon Willamette Valley. Jay, who started Albany High School in 1915, played end on the football team and center on the basketball team. While still at Albany High, Jay fell in love with a fellow student on the girls' basketball team, Thelma Burnett.

During Jay's sophomore year, 1917, the United States declared war against Germany in World War I. Jay left high school to join the Navy in 1917. The following

article appeared in the Albany newspaper announcing Albany High's athletes going to war:

Jay Willard and Errol Williams, two of Albany High's prominent students, departed from our fold with the expectation of joining the colors with Uncle Sam's Navy. We have heard since that Jay passed and was sent to Bremerton Training Station for the present.

Jay leaves a large hole in the athletic branch of Albany High that is hard to fill. He was captain of last year's

football team [in November of that year he broke his ankle and was out for the rest of the season] and would have been the first man on the team next season. He played on the championship inter-basketball team and the school basketball team. It was his star playing that won our game with Corvallis and helped to win all the others. To sum things up, Jay was one of the best all-around athletes that Albany High has ever produced. Willard was also president of the Sophomore class.

Jay underwent gun training with the Navy at Puget Sound and was assigned to be a gun-pointer on the *U.S.S. Pueblo* at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in March, 1918. The *Pueblo*, a cruiser carrying six- and eight-inch guns, was to protect convoys of transport ships carrying troops, supplies, and ammunition to England and France. Jay made two trips across the Atlantic on the *U.S.S. Pueblo*, protecting troop ships. He made a third trip across the Atlantic upon the *U.S.S. Western Cross*. As the ship crossed through the Strait of Gibraltar, Armistice was declared and the war was over. After his discharge from the U.S. Navy in August 1919 at Bremerton, Washington, Jay worked for a short period and then re-enrolled at Albany High School in the fall of 1920.

Jay again played football and basketball. The Albany newspaper reported "Willard, the ex-gob, played like a veteran at center and was always rolling in the baskets." That season,

the Albany High School team was invited to the state tournament at Salem which involved teams from all over the state of Oregon. Jay's team won the first two games and then played the eventual state champion, Salem, and lost. Over the course of the three games Jay's team played against the Salem team that year, he and Slats Gill, the star player for Salem, became friends.

After Jay arrived in Eureka, he sent many of his Eureka players to Oregon State College (now Oregon State University) in football and basketball. The head basketball coach at Oregon State College from 1928 to 1965 was Slats Gill.

Jay graduated from Albany High School in 1921 and on September 12 of that year he married his high school sweetheart, Thelma Burnett. Thelma and Jay were to share their lives until Jay's death in 1973.

In the fall of 1921, Jay enrolled as a student at then-Oregon Agricultural College, now Oregon State University in Corvallis. On September 19, 1922, Thelma and Jay celebrated the birth of their son, Dorman Burnett Willard.

On June 8, 1925, Jay graduated from Oregon State with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Industrial Arts. During the summer of 1925, Jay attended a coaches' clinic at Oregon State conducted by Knute Rockne, famous Notre Dame coach. This football seminar marked the first of several summers in which Jay attended summer school and football and basketball



The 1928 team—Jay's second varsity year. Frontline, left to right: Glenn Waldner, Ed Hash, Walter Abrahamsen, Ellis Berman, Don Gould, Bob Caviness and Geddes Harper. Backfield, left to right: Wayne Simpson, Vince Massei, Jim Massey and Bill Nixon.

seminars with famous coaches.

During the summer session at Oregon State in 1925, Jay accepted a position as a teacher and coach at Kerman, California, a small agricultural community in the San Joaquin Valley. His starting salary was \$2,300 per year. Jay taught classes days and two nights a week, drove the school bus 25 miles per day, and coached speed-ball and basketball.

Jay took a teaching position at the Eureka Junior High School for the school year starting in September, 1926. The new junior high school had been completed in August of 1926. This is the present senior high school building at Del Norte and J Streets, Eureka. Jay taught woodshop and physical education.

On August 22, 1927, Jay and Thelma were pleased to welcome their daughter, Harriet Ann Willard.

In the fall of 1927, a coaching vacancy occurred at EHS and Jay was hired to teach all of the boys' physical education classes, coach the football team, the A and B basketball teams, the baseball team, and the track team. There were no assistant coaches. The salary contract for 1927-1928 was \$2,300 annually. In 1927-1928, the high school enrollment was 515.

The superintendent of schools at that time was George B. Albee; the president of the school board was Dr. Benjamin Marshall, a local physician; and the principal of the high school was Joseph T. Glenn.

Jay coached EHS football from 1927 through 1954. During this time, his teams played 220 games, won 147, lost sixty-four, and tied nine. Jay's football teams won the Humboldt-Del Norte championship twenty-one times and were undefeated in 1927, 1935, 1952, and 1954.

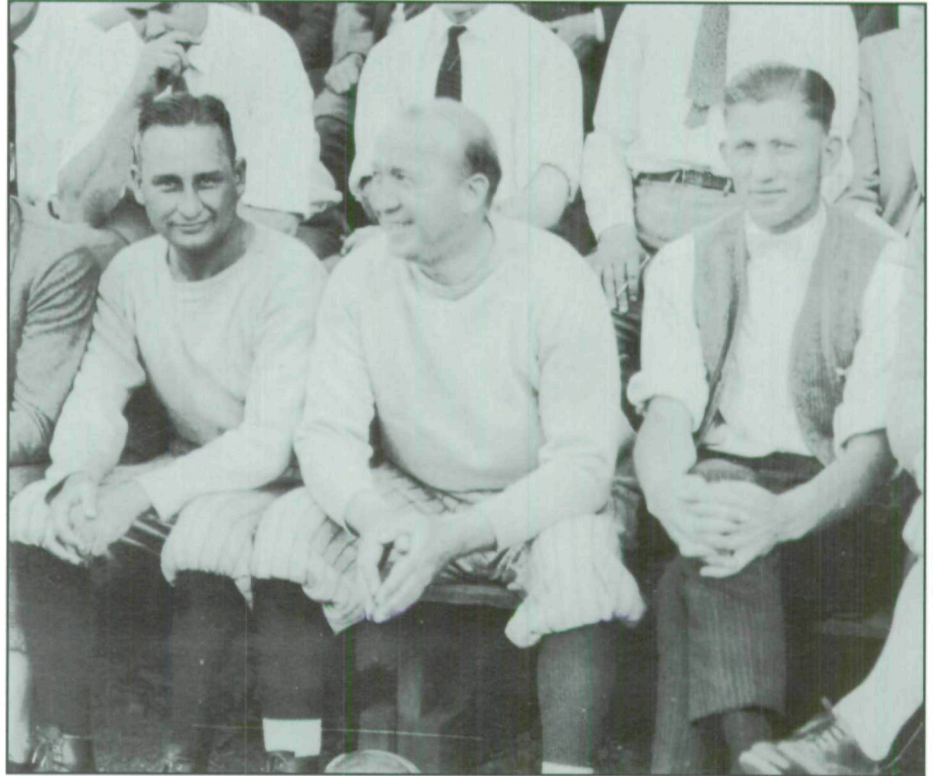
Jay coached A (heavyweight) basketball from 1928 through 1946. His A teams played 159 games, won 128 and lost thirty-one. The As won 10 championships and were undefeated in league in 1929, 1930, 1932, 1933, 1937, and 1942. From 1927 through 1954, Jay coached "B" (lightweight) basketball. His teams played 254 games, won 179, lost seventy-five, tied four games, and won ten championships. In 1928 and 1929, Jay coached EHS baseball. His teams played thirteen games, won nine and lost four, and won one championship. Jay was the head coach for EHS track teams from 1927 until 1953 and won more than twenty championships.

Jay retired from teaching at EHS in 1963.

From 1927 through 1963, a period of 36 years, every male student attending EHS was either a student in Jay's physical education classes or an athlete on one of his varsity or junior

varsity teams. Every male student for thirty-six years benefited from the role model and character of Coach Jay Willard. Jay Willard died January 12, 1973, at age 74 in Eureka.

In 1923, led by School Superintendent George Albee, EHS began building a football stadium. When it was completed in



Jay Willard, right, and Oregon State coach Paul Schissler, left, attended a football clinic in 1925 led by Knute Rockne, center.

1926, it was named Albee Stadium. Its inaugural game was on October 7, 1926, against Arcata.

According to newspaper articles, the Eureka football forecast for 1927 was dismal. Only one veteran from the 1926 team returned, and that was Captain "Pete" Pederson. The boys who turned out for the team were light in weight and were inexperienced. The starting team lineup included Robert Caviness, right tackle, 166 pounds; Donald Gould, left guard, 148 pounds; Ellis Burman, center, 165 pounds; James Massey, quarterback, 135 pounds; Geddis Harper 134 pounds; Norman Vernon, right end, 135 pounds; Jack Simpson, left halfback, 123 pounds; Joseph Sullivan, right guard, 145 pounds; Veldon Nixon, fullback, 155 pounds; James Ledoux, left tackle, 164 pounds; Captain Bill Pederson, right halfback, 165 lbs, nickname "Phantom Pete"; Vincent Massei, left halfback, 150 pounds; Glen Waldner, left end, 136 pounds; Clarence Crowe, right guard, 165 pounds

Others on the team roster were Albert Massei, Bob Curry, Corado Pinochi, Jimmy Thomas, Al McInnes, Ken Spaulding, Ken Johnson, Bob McClure and Wayne Simpson.

The Loggers won every game of their regular schedule.



The 1946 team. Front line, left to right: Charles Murphy, John Winzler, Bill Wallace, Norman Robertson, Bernie Woods, Alvar Gustafson and Joe Del Grande. Backfield, left to right: Jim Schreeve, Ted Morehead, George Carley and Les Ivancich.



The 1953 team. Front line, left to right: Harold Goselin, Bob Snyder, Bob Renwick, Orval Luster, Roger Carey, Jerry Scott and Gerry French. Backfield, left to right: Bill Anderson, Ralph Mayo, Wayne Emery and Bob Silva.

The *Humboldt Times* newspaper concluded "Willard had whipped together an 11 that startled the County, walking through every squad of men, and brought the third consecutive football championship trophy to Eureka High."

Of the 1927 undefeated football starters, Quarterback James Massey played at Stanford, and Robert "Butch" Caviness and Don Gould started at Humboldt State College. Glen Waldner was later superintendent of Rio Dell Schools, and Captain Bill Pederson was the Humboldt County Sheriff in the early 1960s. Bob Caviness, a sophomore at EHS in 1927, remembers, "Coach Willard never raised his voice and never used profanity. He always tried to get the boys to do their best, and always succeeded."

In January 1928, the Eureka High basketball season began. The old gymnasium where the present Jay Willard Gym stands had been built in 1920. Jay's first heavyweight basketball game was played on January 13, 1928, and was lost to Arcata 21-15.

April 1928 saw the beginning of the Eureka High baseball season. Emil Hemenway pitched the first game for Jay Willard, striking out thirteen Arcata players. Later in the season, Eureka beat Fortuna 10-0 to tie in the league standings. The next game was played four days later in the championship against Fortuna. Eureka won 12-0. Emil Hemenway pitched the shutout.

The Humboldt County league track championship meet was held at Ferndale on May 26, 1928. Arcata took first, Eureka second, followed by Fortuna and Ferndale. Coach Jay Willard had completed his first year at Eureka High coaching all four major sports.

In 1935, Willard coached the famous "Wonder Team." Undefeated and unscored upon, the remarkable football team scored 283 points to their opponents' 0. It defeated Arcata, Del Norte, and Ferndale twice. Fort Bragg was defeated 41-0.

One of the most remarkable games of the season was the Northern California championship game on November 28, 1935 against Grant Union of Sacramento, which Eureka won 6-0 thanks to an innovative strategy by Coach Willard. After three quarters of play, there was a scoreless tie. Coach Willard placed tackle Bob Young at the fullback position and gave him the ball on every play, until the ball rested on the Grant Union three-yard line. Quarterback Boyce then faked to Young. While the entire Grant Union team went after Young, Boyce gave the ball to Zeke Sanderson, who scored the winning touchdown. Tackle Bob Pollard was elected team captain.

This team included Reco Pastori, all-around athlete, Jack Walsh (present-day physician in Eureka), Charles Moore (later Humboldt County rancher and attorney), Bob Young (who won a football scholarship to Stanford), sophomore Don Durdan who later starred at Oregon State College in the '42 Rose Bowl, and Ed Kovacovich, Eureka tire dealer. Another sophomore on the '35 team was Ernie Cunningham, later a successful high school coach.

In 1937, Coach Willard produced what many consider his strongest team. The '37 team had a backfield of Oliver

Harrison, Bill Hodges, Don Durdan, Leonard Longholm, and Ernie Cunningham. Bill Hodges later played for the U.S. Army Academy at West Point, and Len Longholm played as a starting halfback at Humboldt State College in '38, '39, '40, and '41. In '46, Longholm was offered a contract with the professional Philadelphia Eagles. He chose to teach at EHS. Don Durdan later was a national football, basketball, and baseball star at Oregon State College and starred on the 1941 Oregon State Beaver team.

The 1937 team played a schedule filled with strong opponents. After dropping their first game to Fort Bragg 13-0, the Logger axe fell with victories over Red Bluff, Grants Pass, Medford, Del Norte, Arcata, Ferndale, and Hoopa. This qualified Eureka as Northwestern Champion. A playoff game was scheduled against St. Mary's of Oakland, which was the prep school for the St. Mary's Gaels, a national college powerhouse. In the first quarter, Longholm scored the first touchdown with a 46-yard run to the goal line. The next time the Loggers got the ball, Durdan replied with a 46-yard run to paydirt. Eureka won the game 27-0.

This qualified Eureka to play San Jose for the Northern California championship. San Jose, which had defeated all teams in the Bay Area, included Pete Kmetovic (later an All-American running back at Stanford of Rose Bowl stardom) and Chuck Taylor (later an All-American guard at Stanford and Stanford football coach and athletic director). In the first quarter Durdan broke away for a long run for the first score. Longholm went over for the second touchdown and made the conversion, bringing the score to 14-0. San Jose scored one touchdown in the second half, and Eureka won 14-7.

Halfback Ernie Cunningham (later football coach at St. Bernard High School and Arcata High School) believes that the '37 team had a more difficult schedule and ranked favorably with the '35 team. Ernie Cunningham states, "No team could keep up with the speed of Durdan and Longholm." Before the '37 season, Gordon Hadley, sports editor of the *Humboldt Times*, wrote a series of feature stories dealing with coaches of Humboldt County. Hadley wrote:

When asked who some of his star players were, Jay scratched his head and then reeled off the following names and his reasons:

Football Stars: Jim Massey, smartest quarterback; Bob Caviness, best offensive blocker; Bill Nixon, best pass receiver; Vince Massei, hardest tackler; Bob Young, best punter; Ellis Burman, best center; Bill Peterson, best open field runner; Bob Pollard, best morale builder; Al Massei, fastest guard. (He played in the other team's backfield.) Franny Moore, best blocking back; Jim Fasullo, most inspiring quarterback; Chris Tomanovich, smallest guard.

Basketball: Jack Simpson, best long shot; "Sparky" Robertson, best close shot; Earl Hemenway, fastest guard; Corky Knifund, best recovery guard; Jim Moore, best lightweight basketball handler; Red Nicol, best trick shot.

Baseball: Emil Hemenway, best pitcher.

Track: Bunny Hadley, best pole vaulter; Graham Quigg, best sprinter.

During the period from 1938 to 1951, Jay produced several outstanding major college football players. The most renowned athlete with national status was Don Durdan, who was recruited by Coach Slats Gill of Oregon State College to play basketball. Durdan was named an All-Coast point guard in 1940 and 1941, and was Look Magazine second team All-American basketball guard in March of 1941. Durdan also was a starting player on the Oregon State baseball team and a starting halfback on the Oregon State football team in 1940 and 1941.

In 1941, Durdan led the Oregon State Beavers to a victory over defending Rose Bowl champion Stanford, which included his old San Jose rivals, Pete Kmetovic and Chuck Taylor, both All-Americans. Oregon State was selected to play in the Rose Bowl game January 1, 1942, against the number one-ranked Duke Blue Devils. Duke was heavily favored. In the first quarter, Durdan ran fifteen yards for an Oregon State score. Warren Simas of Arcata kicked the first of his two point-after-touchdowns for the Beavers. In the fourth quarter, Durdan was back to punt and took an intentional two-point safety to preserve the Oregon State 20-16 victory. Ten points were scored by Humboldt County boys. After Jay retired, he reminisced to the author that he considered Don Durdan and Rich Mayo his two most prominent college players.

Jay's pipeline to Oregon State also produced End Don Campbell and Fullback Andy Knudsen ('46). Knudsen later was a teacher and successful coach.

The captain of the football team at EHS in 1942 was John Maurer. Maurer played at Menlo Junior College for one year, then played for the University of Texas in the fall of 1943, where he played in the Cotton Bowl for Texas on January 1, 1944, as an end. Tragically, John Maurer was killed during the 1955 flood at Bull Creek when a tree fell on his truck. His son, John Maurer Woodcock, was the first University of Hawaii player to play in the annual East-West Shrine game in San Francisco, then went on to play defensive tackle seven years for the Detroit Lions and San Diego Chargers.

Post-World War II spotlighted the Bay Area teams of University of San Francisco, Santa Clara, and St. Mary's, as major college powers. Bill Prentice, EHS '41, was a two-way performer for Santa Clara and played on the 1948 Santa Clara Orange Bowl champion team.

Frank Massaro played fullback for St. Mary's. What many consider to be the greatest college team of all time was the San Francisco Dons of 1951, which included Ollie Madsen and at least nine later professional players. Starting fullback on the USF team was George Carley of Eureka. Jack Retzloff was a sophomore reserve halfback.

In the 1940s, Humboldt County had no television. The only radio station was KIEM, which carried the 1947 Arcata-Eureka championship game at Redwood Bowl. Football fans throughout Humboldt County listened to the game with enthusiasm, rooting for their favorite team. Arcata had bruising

fullback Louie Simas. In the fourth quarter, Arcata was ahead 12-7. Many radio fans were overjoyed to hear the radio commentator report that Eureka's fleet halfback, Les Ivancich, had broken loose and was speeding down the sidelines for a 70-yard touchdown run to win the game for Eureka. The joy was short lived, however. Soon, the radio commentator announced that referee Sid Bartlett, a local optometrist, had ruled that Ivancich had stepped out of bounds. Coach Willard did not contest the referee's call, and the touchdown was called back.

Later, Bartlett stated in the *Humboldt Times* that Willard was always cordial with referees and never contested a referee's call. Arcata won the championship game 12-7. Three years later in 1950, former halfback Les Ivancich was a rifleman with the United States Army in North Korea. His rifle squad and platoon were pinned down by Chinese regulars attacking the American position. When they suddenly ran short of ammunition, Ivancich volunteered to run through enemy fire to get more. He ran to the rear, obtained the ammunition, and returned. As he was passing out the ammunition to his comrades, he was mortally wounded by enemy fire. Les Ivancich received a Silver Star for his heroism.

In 1952, Jay's team again went undefeated and untied. Jack Hilfiker was the captain and later went on to play at the University of Oregon. Ralph Mayo was a junior and in 1953 was named All-American high school fullback.

The season of 1954 was Jay's last season as head football coach. The '54 team was undefeated and untied. The '54 team produced at least nine players who went on to small or major college careers. Linemen Bill Nichols, Bob Renwick, Rich Ames, and Zeke Van Deventer played at Humboldt State College. Bob Snyder played at Oregon. Jerry Winters was an end at Stanford. Fullback Errol Scott was a starting guard at Stanford. The '54 team produced two college All-American quarterbacks, Fred Whitmire was a starting quarterback on the great Humboldt State teams of '58, '59, and '60, and was voted Little All-American as he led the '60 Lumberjack team to the national championship game in Florida. Rich Mayo was a three-year starting quarterback at the U.S. Air Force Academy and led the Falcons to an undefeated season and a 21-tie with TCU in the Cotton Bowl. Mayo was named All-American and later went to medical school and became a physician. Fred Whitmire later was head coach at College of the Redwoods for fourteen years and has been HSU head coach for the past five years. Coach Whitmire recalls:

Jay Willard was a great motivator and had the ability to make athletes believe and have confidence in themselves. I ran track and played football for Jay. I try to use some of the characteristics I learned from Coach Jay Willard and Coach Phil Sarboe in my everyday relationship with athletes.

In the spring of 1954, Jay retired as football, basketball, and track coach. He continued to teach physical education at Eureka High School until 1963. He was the first Eureka

High golf coach in 1960 to 1963.

Basketball was perhaps Jay's favorite sport. Jay enjoyed teaching the boys the fundamentals of basketball and team play. One of Jay's favorite players was Darrell Brown, who started EHS in 1937 as a lightweight forward. He entered Humboldt State in 1941, played his freshman year, then went overseas with the U.S. Navy. After the war, Brown returned to

Humboldt State and in the '46-'47 season was the fifth leading scorer in the nation. Brown held all Humboldt State scoring records with a then-unheard of 42 points against Chico State.

Ernie Cunningham was an all-county point guard on the two undefeated basketball teams '37 and '38. After graduation, Ernie went to work at a lumber mill and continued to play for the town teams. In the spring of 1940, Jay asked Ernie if he would like to play for Oregon State. Ernie said that he couldn't afford to go to college. Jay replied, "We can take care of that." Jay had contacted Slats Gill, Oregon State mentor, and Ernie was given a basketball scholarship.

On the '40-'41 EHS team was Dorman Willard, son of Jay and Thelma. Dorman had been an outstanding athlete playing basketball, football, track, and tennis for Jay. Dorman also received an Oregon State basketball scholarship. In the fall of 1941, Dorman Willard and Ernie Cunningham reported to Slats Gill for Beaver basketball practice. After several months of practice, both Eureka players made the team. Before the first game was played in 1941, the events of Pearl Harbor altered both athletic careers. Dorman Willard entered the service of the United States Merchant Marines in World War II.



Jay Willard's last football season was 1954. Assistant Coach George Lee is at right.

Ernie Cunningham became a naval pilot and upon his discharge from the service played basketball at Humboldt State College. Cunningham became the first head football and basketball coach at St. Bernard High School in 1954. In 1961, Ernie went to Arcata High School where he had a successful career as head football coach and head basketball coach. Ernie's teams at St. Bernard and Arcata were consistent champions. In 1970, Ernie became an administrator with the Eureka City Schools and retired after several years as a junior high principal. Today, Ernie Cunningham reminisces concerning his days at EHS:

Jay Willard was the adult male role model for all of the boys in Eureka. He was respectful, cordial, and never expressed anger towards any boy. He encouraged boys to do their best. He seemed to have the ability to evaluate and encourage a boy's strengths. He was a role model that I attempted to emulate later as a coach and school administrator.

In the 1950s Jay Willard's most prominent national basketball player was Dick Soares. Soares had played for Jay in '46-'48, and played major college basketball at Santa Clara.

In 1952, the Santa Clara Broncos went to the national NCAA final four with Dick Soares as a starting guard.

Lou Bonomini (EHS 1935) played four years of baseball for EHS. His brother, Joe Bonomini was the class of 1934. Lou recalls Jay coaching baseball two years and as a P.E. teacher. Lou Bonomini later coached the Humboldt Crabs semipro baseball team from 1945 until 1986. Bob Bonomini, son of Lou Bonomini, coached baseball and basketball at St. Bernard High School and EHS.

In reviewing the thirty-seven years of the Willard era, there are several brother teams that excelled in sports. At least two families contributed three brothers to Jay's teams. In the 1930s, brothers Joe Daly '32, Bill Daly '34 (retired Major General, Air Force) and Jerry Daly '35 all played for Jay. All broke the county record in the one-half mile race in track. Joe Daly taught at the Eureka Junior High in the late 30s. Joe Daly was interim baseball coach for one year at Eureka High and was Jay's first assistant track coach. Bill Daly was a five-sport letterman and took a track scholarship at USF.

The three Kinser brothers—Dennis, Lloyd and Jack—all played quarterback for Jay. Dennis Kinser later started at quarterback at Humboldt State. Lloyd Kinser was the quarterback on the 1951 team. Jack Kinser was the quarterback on the undefeated 1952 team.

On December 18, 1954, the *Humboldt Standard* published an editorial announcing that Jay Willard would no longer be the athletic coach but would remain at Eureka High as a teacher. The newspaper article reviewed the achievements of Jay's teams over the years which included the following statement:

Jay Willard is known as a man to whom the game of football, for itself, is more important than the touchdowns; to whom the development of the young man, through healthful sport, is vastly more significant than whether he is a star player. And those principles have been evident both on the gridiron, in practice or in play, and in the subsequent lives of the young men who have enjoyed his guidance and leadership. A great many boys from Eureka High School have gone on to distinguish themselves in sports in their college careers, including many who have continued their schooling at Humboldt State here in our own Humboldt county. But they have distinguished themselves, as well, in their studies and, beyond that, they are numbered among the successful men in the communities where they have chosen to pursue their adult careers. Each bears the stamp of Jay Willard. And it is that record that stands as the finest of the tributes to a fine coach and a fine gentleman.

Jay continued to teach at Eureka High and was the first golf coach from 1960 to 1963. In the spring of 1963, Jay announced that he was retiring as a teacher. After retirement, Jay and Thelma built a home in Arcata where they played golf and Jay enjoyed his woodworking shop. In March 1969, Jay Willard was named to the California Coaches' Association Hall of Fame. Jay travelled to San Francisco to receive the honor.

At his retirement dinner on May 25, 1963, at Redwood Acres, a crowd of 500 persons attended to honor "Coach Jay Willard — Molder of Champions, Builder of Men." The *Humboldt Times* edition of May 26, 1963, reports:

Present at the testimonial dinner included then-coaches from the Humboldt area Arcata High's Ernie Cunningham, Fortuna High's Dennis Kinser, Humboldt State's Hank Cooper, Eureka High's Mark Melendy, Len Longholm, and Keith Weidkamp.

On January 12, 1973, at age 74, Jay Willard died. Don Terbush of the *Times-Standard* reported on January 14, 1973, the following:

"Builder of strength and molder of men." That was the motto around which the retirement dinner for the late Jay Willard revolved. Now it could well serve as his epitaph. Few men in Humboldt County history have been held in such lofty esteem. He is revered as both teacher and coach. People were proud to be known as his friend. Many of his former players regarded him more as a father than as a coach.

Other men had further comments: Phil Sarboe, athletic director:

I thought he was the peer of all of the local coaches when I got here. Not only that he was such a fine individual . . . so gracious and understanding, especially to his players and friends. His players were always his friends. We had a lot of fine discussions about his players. He was very considerate, thoughtful and very loyal to his guys. I know all of his former players are going to miss him just like you and I will.

Laurence Beal, former sports editor: *I think he did more for kids than anyone in the history of Eureka High.*

Robert Madsen, former player: *He was certainly respected by all and kept his interest in his players all of his life. He was interested in their life after high school. Everyone was always glad to see Jay.*

Thelma resided in Arcata and Eureka until her death in January 1988.

Jay and Thelma's son and daughter, Dorman Willard and Harriet Willard, are retired and continue to reside in Eureka. Jay and Thelma's granddaughter is Melinda Sheridan who recently became the grandmother of a boy named "Jay."

About the Author: *Jeremiah R. Scott, Jr., a local attorney, played football for Jay Willard from 1951-1953. After Jay's retirement from teaching, Jay would often reminisce with the author concerning his years at EHS. Jay was most proud of the contribution his former players made to the community and society. The author appreciates the influence and affirmative role model that Jay gave to all his students and athletes.*

The lessons taught by Jay Willard at EHS gave countless men the foundation to achieve higher levels of success in all fields.

HH

Copyright of Humboldt Historian is the property of Humboldt County Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.