

SPORTS

A Place In The Pantheon

Humble Fairchild enshrined in Missouri Sports Hall of Fame

Retired CHS football coach among dozen state greats honored at Springfield Sunday

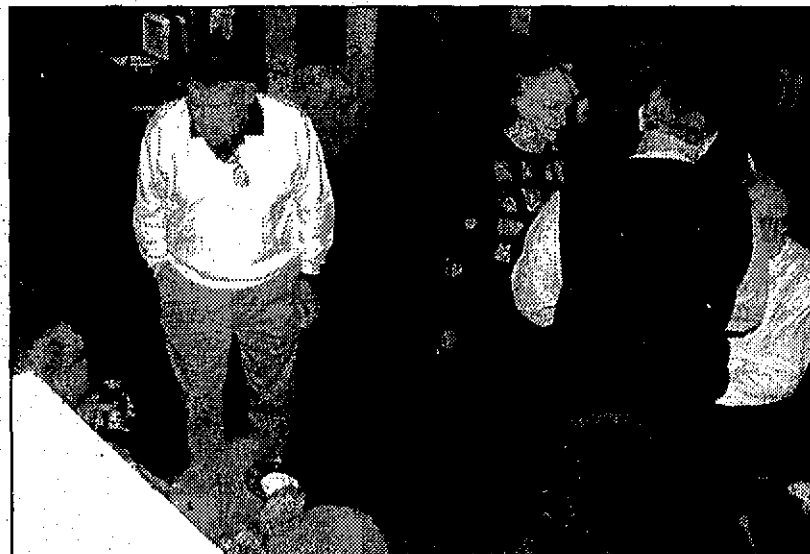
By PAUL STURM
C-T Sports Editor

SPRINGFIELD — Coach of five state-champion Chillicothe High School football teams, two state runners-up, 10 other play-off teams, and 19 conference champions in 38 seasons, second-most wins by any Missouri coach ever. Missouri high school football coach of the year five times. National Coaches Association regional coach of the year and national coach of the year runner-up in 1993. Charter member of the Missouri High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 1992. Developer of 61 All-State players, including several who later played professionally. Positive character shaper of thousands young men who played for him.

Inductee of the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame - Feb. 17, 2002.

Perhaps it's time for a name change. Call the Chillicothe native all the above honors describe Bob Fairchild.

In a thrilling moment which puts an unforgettable cap on the accomplishment-studded career which concluded in June 1998, Bob Fairchild became Chillicothe's first direct enshrinee in the Springfield-based Missouri Sports Hall of Fame in stirring ceremonies at the Holiday Inn-University Plaza Sunday evening.



Bob Fairchild (standing at left) visits with a well-wisher during an early-afternoon reception at the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame at the southeast edge of Springfield, while son Dave (back to camera) chats with Chillicotheans Joan and Fred Stephens.

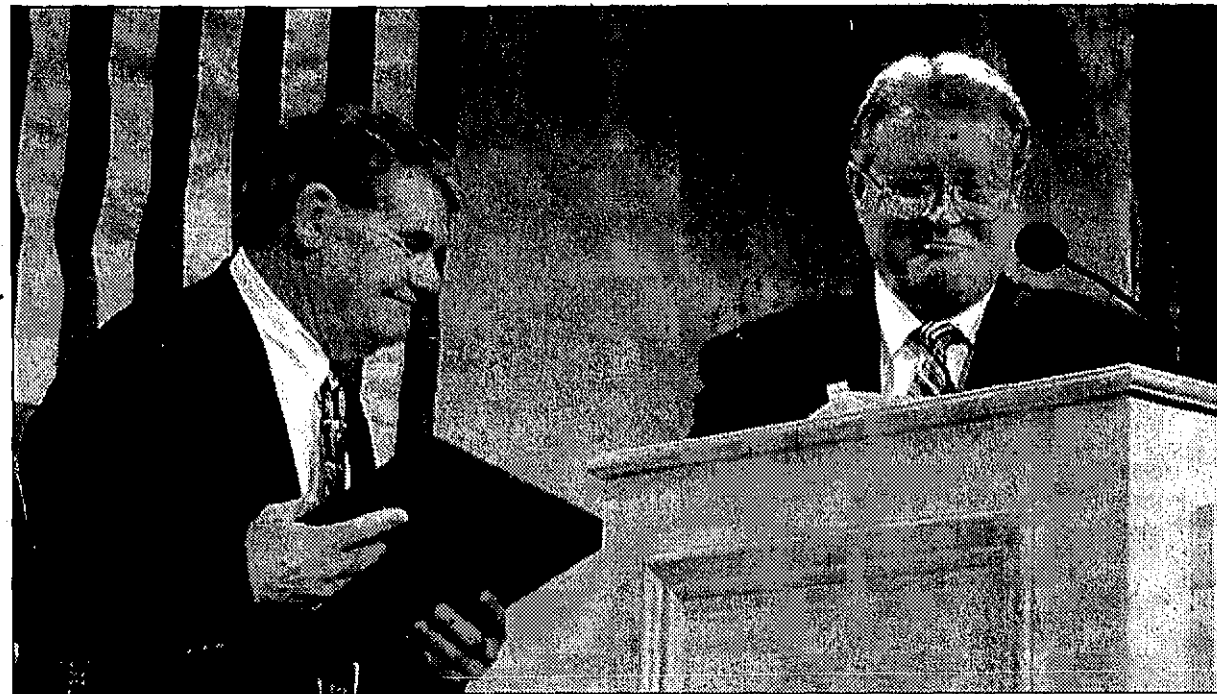
A crowd of nearly 1,700 people, including about two dozen Fairchild family members or Chillicothe well-wishers, was in attendance to honor a dozen individual sports notables, two teams, the hall's founder, and several collegiate national champions of the past year.

Hall of Fame enshrinees receive a large, inscribed plaque they keep.

Fairchild's induction produced a more-emotional response than the normally stoic gridiron coaching legend, who took over a moribund Chillicothe program in 1963 and left it after the 1997 season as one of the state's premier football operations, expected, he told the C-T late Sunday afternoon as he awaited the actual enshrinement ceremonies.

"At the beginning, it wasn't a particularly emotional thing for me," he said of his reaction three months earlier to notification of his selection by the Hall's 50-member-plus board of directors. "But after I got here (Saturday), the way they treat you in such a first-class way, I became a little more excited about it."

Calling his selection "a com-



Retired Chillicothe Hornets football coaching legend Bob Fairchild accepts his Missouri Sports Hall of Fame plaque from Jerry Andrews, president and executive director of the hall, during Sunday night's 2002 enshrinement ceremonies at Springfield.

plete surprise," even though he knew the Missouri High School Football Coaches Association has nominated some people to the all-sports state hall over the years, Fairchild's voice betrayed an emotional peak when he gave his brief acceptance speech Sunday night.

His voice quivering a bit as he fought to control his emotions, he told the crowd a story related to him by Carrollton native Bruce Finlayson, a long-time National Football League official several decades back.

"Bruce told about how he was working a Green Bay game one day and (legendary Packers coach) Vince Lombardi called him over after Bruce had made a call against the Packers," Fairchild recalled.

"Finlayson, Bruce said Lombardi told him, 'you're the second-best official in this league.'



C-T PHOTO / PAUL STURM

Then, just as Bruce was starting to feel pretty good, he said Lombardi added, 'All the others are tied for first.'

"That's the way I feel up here tonight," Fairchild continued, referring to his place on the dais with the other Missouri sports greats being inducted. "I'm the second-most-deserving one up here. Everyone else is tied for first."

Later expressing his thanks to the football coaches' association for nominating him and his family for its support throughout his career, the retired CHS coach said the victories, championships, records and individual honors are wonderful and memorable.

His greatest satisfaction, however, has nothing to do with his or his teams' on-field exploits and accomplishments.

"Along the way," Fairchild told the hall of fame ceremony audience, "I hope I've made a difference in the lives of some of the players I coached. My greatest reward is a 'hi, coach' when I meet one of my former players."

In his informal visit with the C-T before Sunday's dinner and induction ceremony, Fair-

child had noted the same thing.

"There are two things you always are hoping for as a coach," he reflected. "You like to win the games - that's why you go out there - but the other thing is having a positive relationship with the players you coached. The number of people you affected in a good way is what makes you feel the best."

Although he was on cloud nine, noting how good it was to have an opportunity to see a lot of his old coaching associates he hadn't seen for a few years, Fairchild also acknowledged there was one damper on his joy.

"Without question," he quickly replied when asked whether his induction would have been even more satisfying had his late brothers Kenneth and Richard been able to share it with him.

Fairchild lost both his brothers, younger brother Rich having been an extremely successful basketball coach at CHS much of the time Bob coached the football team, to cancer within about a year in 1997 and early 1998.

The emotional double-impact of those losses prompted the CHS football legend to lose his desire for coaching and announce his retirement in June 1998. He had passed the 300-win mark for his career the previous fall, just before brother Rich's cancer was diagnosed, and at the time there seemed no reason to go on coaching, he told the C-T Sunday.

Now that four years have passed, were there any regrets about that decision, he was asked. The answer was surprising.

"Yes," he responded. "If I had it to do over, I'd ask for a year's sabbatical. I was going through a tough emotional time (with his brothers' deaths) then, but after a year I wished I was still coaching."

"I really do miss those 'Friday Night lights,'" he said, referring to the euphemism once used as the title for a book about Texas high school football.

Fairchild added that his wish that he was still coaching the Hornets is no reflection of dissatisfaction with the way successor Phil Willard has coached. Willard is an unabashed Fairchild coaching disciple, having played and starred for his late 1960s teams.

"Absolutely not," he declared. "Phil has done a great job."

As best as C-T observations and inquiries Sunday night could determine, those from Chillicothe or with local ties who attended the enshrinement ceremony or other Hall of Fame activities Sunday in Springfield included:

Family - Wife Karen; sons David of Hamilton and Perry of Kansas City; daughter Jacinda (Cindy), daughter Shandolyn and her husband, Kyle Roberts, and daughter Courtney and her husband, Rick Harris, all of Ok-

lahoma City; sister Phyllis Lutz of suburban Chicago; sister Ellen and her husband, Jerry Berlin, of Sweet Springs, Tex.; nephew Tony Fairchild and his wife, Paula, of Meadville; and cousins Dale Fairchild of Springfield and Steve Fairchild of Mount Vernon, Mo.

Friends - C.P. Hutchinson, David Macoubrie, Jerry and Geraldine Goede, Fred and Joan Stephens, Chuck Haney, Eva Danner (widow of long-time Fairchild assistant coach Daryl Danner), Charles Meek, Ron O'Dell, Jim Graham, and former players Willard, Butch Davis, Reid Stephens, Jason Graves, Drew Danner, Hamilton Trinidad, and Levi Yardley. Davis was accompanied by his wife and Danner by his fiancée, Krista Kloopp.

Besides Fairchild, the 11 other 2002 inductees were: fellow high school coaches Dick Birmingham (Springfield Hillcrest baseball) and Bud Lathrop (Raytown South basketball); former major league pitching standouts Bob Forsch of the St. Louis Cardinals and Paul Splittorff of the Kansas City Royals; former Kansas City Chiefs safety Deron Cherry; former St. Louis Blues center Bernie Federko; ex-Southwestern Missouri State women's basketball record-setter Jackie Stiles; former pro wrestler Lou Thesz; former boxer Johnny Copeland of Joplin; St. Louis businessman Jerry Clinton; former St. Louis soccer player Bob Kehoe, who played and coached on the U.S. national team.

Two teams were inducted - the 1968 William Jewell College NAIA baseball national champions and the 1978-79 Drury NAIA basketball national champs.

Springfield developer and sports supporter John Q. Hammons, already in the Hall of Fame, was named the eighth "Missouri Sports Legend." A bronze bust of Hammons was unveiled, and soon will join those of the likes of Stan Musial, Len Dawson, Norm Stewart, Jack Buck and others on Legends Walkway at the Hall of Fame.



The individual 2002 inductees into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame are joined by the hall's founder and 2002 Missouri Sports Legend honoree John Q. Hammons (front, center) of Springfield and hall president and executive director Jerry Andrews (back, left) for an official photograph Sunday. From left they are: Front - Bernie Federko, Jerry Clinton, Jackie Stiles, Hammons, Deron Cherry, Paul Splittorff, Bob Forsch; Back - Andrews, Johnny Copeland, Dick Birmingham, Bob Kehoe, Bud Lathrop, Chillicothe's Bob Fairchild, and Lou Thesz.

Odessa gains shot at Chillicothe boys in 3A district semi

EXCELSIOR SPRINGS — The top-seeded Chillicothe Hornets will take on the fifth-seeded Odessa Bulldogs Thursday evening in the semifinals of the Class 3A District 15 tournament, thanks to a 64-57 Odessa victory over Richmond last (Tuesday) night.

Joining the Hornets, who had an opening-round bye, and the Bulldogs in tomorrow's semifinals are second-seeded Grain Valley and third-seeded Kearney. Grain Valley's Eagles (21-5) took command early and beat Oak Grove 61-40 last night after Kearney (15-12) had disposed of Excelsior Springs 66-48.

Chillicothe has not played Odessa (15-11) this season, but did have a fairly-convincing victory over Richmond about a month ago. Odessa had beaten Richmond in overtime about 10 days earlier.

(B) Odessa 64, Richmond 57

Early on, it looked the Bulldogs would cruise in the rematch, as they jumped to a 16-5 lead after one quarter. But the Spartans wouldn't go away.

Richmond, which finishes the year 16-10, cut its deficit to seven points at halftime and was closer than that at times in the second half, but couldn't make the key run that would put it back on even terms.

Odessa's Bulldogs got a big offensive night from Oliver Baker, who hit nine of 13 shots from the field and four of five free throws for 22 points. He missed his only 3-point attempt, handed out four assists and made seven steals, according to tourney statisticians, but also was listed with nine turnovers.

Having scouted the game, Chillicothe coach Chad Snyder told the C-T, "Being behind, Richmond tried to pressure the ball and make steals. When they didn't, (Baker) would look to penetrate and if nobody came to him, he'd pull up and hit the 10- or 12-foot in the lane. If they did come to him, he'd dish off."

"We're going to have to keep him out of the paint."

Led by Baker's hot hand, the Bulldogs made nearly half of their shots from the field, but take away his total and the rest of the Odessa club was 13-of-32 (41 percent).

Joining Baker in double figures was reserve Kyle McCarthy, whose 6-of-6 shooting at the foul line boosted him to 11 points. Norman Bass added eight points and three other Bulldogs tallied six.

"They're a lot like us," Snyder said of the Bulldogs. "They don't have any one specific player you have to concentrate on, but they have several who can hurt you."

Richmond was led by Willy Rogers' 13 points. Reserve Travis Miller added 11.

Richmond hurt itself a lot with 22 turnovers, six more than Odessa had, but the Spartans really worked the Bulldogs over on the backboards, holding a 35-24 rebounding edge.

"We'll have to control the boards to win," CHS' Snyder emphasized. "They really go hard to the offensive glass, so we'll have to make sure and put a body on them and block out."

(B) Grain Valley 61, Oak Grove 40

The Eagles put up 20-point quarters in each of the first two

periods to lead 40-18 at intermission, then coasted.

Danny Pagel's 20 points - on 8-of-12 shooting from the floor - led the Eagles to victory. Pagel also collected a team-high eight rebounds, according to tourney stats, and made three steals, although he committed five turnovers.

Joining him in scoring in twin figures were fellow starters Bobby Barrow, with 13, and Tyler Stricklin, with 10. Stricklin was credited with six assists and Barrow with three blocked shots.

Oak Grove, which concludes play for 2001-02 with a 3-21 mark, was paced by Michael Baker's 12 points and Brandon Thompson's 10. Grain Valley limited the Panthers to 33 percent shooting success and outboarded Oak Grove 40-28.

(B) Kearney 66, Excel. Springs 48

The favored Bulldogs outscored the host Tigers by 3-6 points in each quarter in a less-than-dominant, yet workmanlike win.

Kearney, beaten by Chillicothe in the semifinals of KHS' "Bulldog Classic" in early January, shot only 44 percent from the floor, but made 25 of 34 free throws, outscoring Excelsior Springs by 19 points from the stripe.

Guard Tommy Saunders, generally ineffective in the earlier loss to Chillicothe, popped in a game-high 17 points and teammate Matt Toomey had 16, but both hit less than half of their shots, much as they did against the Hornets.

Joining that duo in double digits were guard Brian Hastings, who tallied 14 points on 3-of-4 field goal accuracy and 6-of-6 free throw shooting, and Grant Kohlstaedt, who netted 12.

Trent Johnson and Spencer Wilkins posted 12 points apiece for Excelsior Springs, which finishes 3-24. The Tigers shot only 34 percent on their home rims.

Kohlstaedt and Toomey were noted for five steals each by tournament stat keepers, while the athletic 6-3 Toomey blocked three shots and pulled down a game-high nine boards.

3A DISTRICT 16 ROUNDUP

(B) SJ Lafayette 80, Savannah 38

The second-seeded Fighting Irish (19-5) looked mighty impressive in routing the Savages.

Darryl Hughes joined All-State guard Charlie McDonald in scoring 20 points apiece to lead Lafayette, which had eight 3-pointers total from six different players.

(B) Maryville 53, Platte Co. 51

Maryville, the third-seeded defending district champ, will take on Lafayette in the semifinals, thanks to a reprieve provided by Ross Hullinger, who hit the game-winner just ahead of the final buzzer.

That thwarted a Platte County comeback from a double-digit deficit in the second half.

Dylan Hurst led the Spoofhounds with 17 points, with Hullinger getting 13. Zo Riley of Platte County had 19.

(B) SJ Benton 61, Smithville 45

The Cardinals will be the semifinal foe for No. 1 seed Cameron after big men Martin Rucker (21) and Jared Boone (16) combined for 36 points in the win over Smithville.