

Wildcats reminisce about title win 50 years ago

By **STEVE KEENAN**
STAFF WRITER

PAX — Coach Kenneth "Horse" Legg reunited with several of his former basketball players over the weekend at the Pax Reunion.

You can bet that the smell of Hershey's chocolate probably seeped into the players' sub-conscious as the Pax Reunion welcomed home a good portion of the team that walked away with the WV Class B basketball champi-

onship trophy in 1954.

While addressing a crowd in the very gym in which the Wildcats played their home games during a 21-6 season five decades ago, the 80-year-old Legg — who went on to a successful career as executive secretary of the WV School Service Personnel Association — recalled how he got his players to shoot foul shots.

"We really worked at it in practice; the players shot 25 foul shots every day," said

Legg. "If they made 20, I'd give them a Hershey bar."

"They'd shoot their hearts out to get that Hershey bar." That came in especially handy in the 1954 semifinals against Huntington Vinson.

Vinson outgated Pax 24-14, but the 'Cats made 30-of-37 charity tosses. The two most critical freebies occurred with the clock running down and Pax trailing 57-56.

"There was a jump ball and Larry Tyree got fouled



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Charlie Hall gives high-fives to teammates who joined him this past weekend to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Pax Wildcats' Class B state basketball championship team.



Coach Kenneth Legg, left, is shown with players Larry Tyree, Bill Tyree, Eddie Harless, Lowell Payne, Jimmy Craddock, Marvin J. McBride and Charlie Hall.

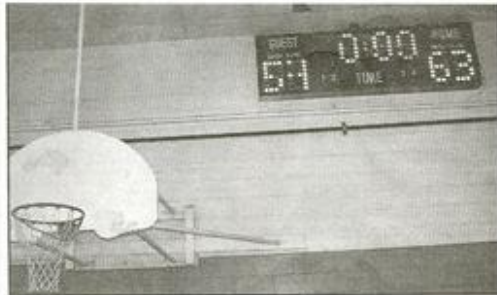
and was awarded two shots," Legg said. "He looked over at me to ask if I wanted a time-out. I told him I didn't need a time-out and for him to get on down there and make those two free throws. I had every confidence in the world that he would hit the bottom of the net on both of them, and that's exactly what he did."

After slipping by Vinson, Pax disposed of Piedmont 63-54 to win the state title. During that contest, the Wildcats sank 31 free throws.

As noted on a big sign still hanging in the gym, team members included: players Larry Tyree, the late Don Stover, Paul Humphrey, Jerry Phillips, Bill Tyree, Bobby Phillips, Clinton Stover, Lowell Payne, Pat Humphrey, Marvin J. McBride, Charlie Hall, Jimmy Craddock, the late Arnold Thompson, the late Kenneth Thompson, the late Jack Thompson and Eddie Harless; managers Edgar Bowyers and Vernon Maynor; and cheerleaders Patricia Lively, the late Carrol Gilliam, Faye Humphrey and the late Faye Billups.

"We didn't have any real stars," Legg said. "They were just ordinary guys that did things beyond the normal call."

"This is a really special day," said Bill Tyree, a guard on the '54 squad. He remembered the "pretty exciting" days in Morgantown when Pax had to come from behind to beat Huntington Vinson before handling Piedmont, an Elkins area team, in the final game.



The scoreboard in the Pax Regional Community Center was lit up to indicate the score of the championship game win over Piedmont.

Legg recalled attempting to instill a sense of decorum in his players.

"As you lads recall," he said while addressing the players, "we talked about what we were going to do after basketball. Education prepared us for our life's work. We always stressed the common courtesies, and we put on our Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. And, whether sitting on the bench on or the floor playing, we urged players not to be critical of those arbitrating the game. That's the kind of image we tried to create for Pax High School.

"The lesson we learned is that you can still go to the top and behave yourself," Legg said, adding that he was particularly proud that the team and its cheerleaders were both honored for their sportsmanship following the tournament.

"All of them have turned out to be good citizens and have made their mark on society and that's very impor-

tant."

And the efforts at raising solid young men — who also happened to have a talent for the game — were apparently appreciated, Legg said.

"The support we got from the community was (tremendous). The bleachers were always full. The miners working the midnight shift would come dressed in their work clothes to watch us play."

In addition to the gathering of the basketball champs, last weekend's reunion included a variety of other activities.

The event, most of all, served as a means for former residents to catch up with each other.

"I'm just a home person, still a hillbilly," said Bishop Bertha Smith, who lived in Pax for 69 years before relocating to Charlotte, N.C., following the death of her husband a few years ago. "This is home. I love coming back."

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