

Oct. 26 - Nov. 2, 1969

By Tom Bodle

Ghosts and goblins filled the autumn air during the last week of October, 1969 as northeast Ohio prepared for a Friday Halloween. "Scary" events made national news as the "Cold War" became a bit more heated. Simultaneously, the Soviet Union and the United States flexed their nuclear muscles with well publicized nuclear tests. Racial tensions made headlines in Jacksonville, Florida, when riots broke out on Halloween.



Some "treats" of national interest also occurred. The Supreme Court ruled that all segregation in schools must stop. Ralph Nader created his "Nader's Raiders" to advocate for consumers. In baseball, Tom Seaver won the "Cy Young" pitching award for the National League.



As students rode to school this week, radio fare, including Halloween classics such as "The Monster Mash" and "Spooky," blended in with the new number one single "Suspicious Minds." Yes the "King", Elvis Presley, was back. With two major sports events for St. Joe this week, a football game at Youngstown Ursuline and the Cross Country State Championships in Columbus, the Student Council wanted to add some spirited fun with a Halloween costume party and dance to top off the holiday weekend.



Several booster buses of students traveled the distance from Cleveland to Youngstown in hopes of trick or treating to a victory over an undefeated but twice tied Ursuline team. Heavy traffic caused the buses to arrive late and fans found a trick had already been delivered with the Irish scoring a touchdown before they could get into their seats. A second trick soon occurred with another Irish TD from a 65 yard return. It was "spooky" as our gridgers, so use to being in control of games found themselves down 12-0. The offense appeared to have been the object of a witch's curse. An offense that scored twenty-four unanswered points the week before, including TD passes to Mike Zontini, Ward Hill and Tom Holmes, had trouble completing a pass or getting the ground game going.



The spirited Viking fans were not disheartened by what was occurring on the field. Rich Uszko wrote “I started to scream louder than the guys next to me and they started to scream louder...We became one with the team.” The team did respond. An Ursuline turnover led to a Bill Centa touchdown and a 12-6 deficit at half time. Then, coming off the bench, after nursing injuries, Bob Bobrowski and Kevin Flynt gave a spark to the offense. Flynt rambled for a thirty yard score and with Centa’s two-point conversion, the Vikes took a 14-12 lead early in the third quarter. The remainder of the game became a classic punch and counter punch by two teams determining to remain undefeated. The St. Joe defense again proved clutch in preserving the victory. The team gave their fans the perfect Halloween treat and remained perfect at 8-0.



On Saturday, another booster bus was bound early in the morning for Columbus to witness the state cross country championships. Many of the faithful had only a few hours earlier returned from the Youngstown football victory. What had been described as the “scenic” Ohio State golf course, the venue for the cross country meet, was an area that could hardly be seen. The morning was damp, with a persistent and misty rain amidst patches of fog. The runners started off into a slippery and muddy terrain. The Viking harriers were seeking their second straight state title and fourth in five years. There was a strong field which sought otherwise. But Coach John Gasperak called this group a special group, “They are not like regular kids,” he said. “Some things just mean more to them.” The “thing” that day was to preserve the St. Joseph supremacy in cross country. They also remembered their roots. Joe Andry, class of 1967 and a member of the 1965 and 1966 championship teams, had been injured in Vietnam. Andry lost a leg and an eye as a result of the injury. The team dedicated their performance to this wounded warrior. As the student fans waited at the finish lines with parents and other supporters, they witnessed Jim Stanley cross the finish line at 5th. John Schmidt (9th), Mike Malovasic (21), Bill Deckman (23) and Ken Udovic (52) followed to be part of the scoring. Seniors Dan Howard and John Klima also finished. With anxious anticipation the fans wondered if the point total was enough. Whispering grew into confirmation. The air was filled with “We’re number one!” and “We are St. Joe!” The Viking harriers or more appropriately “heroes” achieved their objective and sketched their names into history as the 1969 State Champions in Cross Country.



What a prideful weekend and a celebration was well deserved. The Student Council had conceived the idea of a Halloween party to cap off what was hoped to be a “big” weekend for St. Joe. Evan Zupancic, Special Activities Chairman, was asked to come up with something different from just another mixer. Being Halloween weekend, a party with costumes, a dance and treats was an obvious choice. But some other type of entertainment would make it special. And what could be more special other than “Big Time Wrestling”. Professional wrestling was a staple of Saturday television and the match ups and antics



of the wrestlers were legendary. Names such as Bobo Brazil, “the Sheikh”, Moose Cholak, Haystacks Calhoun and Clevelander Johnny Powers were marquee for professional events throughout the Midwest. To entertain Halloween parties, seniors such as Mike Campolietti, John Beran and Ed Acton donned costumes representing some of their favorite professional wrestlers, mimicking one-on-one and tag team contests complete with the antics of the performers. After the wrestling fun, costumed guests danced and enjoyed refreshments. It was a “spooktacular” climax to a very memorable weekend in Viking history.



St. Joseph High's state champion cross country runners, shown with coach John Gasperak, are, left to right: Jim Stanley, John Schmidt, Bill Deckman and Ken Udovic. Absent is teammate Mike Malovasic, who also scored in last week's state finals in Columbus.