

Freshmen Baseball Coach Tells of Days Past

Don Kepler Remembers Williams and Ruth

By DAN DONOVAN Assistant Sports Editor

It is not hard to write a story about Don Kepler. All you have to do is just list some of the sports thrills this 61-year-old physical education instructor has experienced and you have to capture any reader's interest.

A talk with this engaging man would send Al Capp away with his mouth hanging open. It's hard to believe that one person could cram so many experiences into his life, yet Kepler tells tale after tale to anyone who will listen.

He talks of Walter Johnson, Ted Williams and Ty Cobb. Anyone who has had sports lecture has heard Kepler talk of survival training and his experiences on hunting and fishing trips could fill about three books.

Kepler has managed the best players in baseball, been a bounty hunter to make ends meet during the depression and taught the Peace Corps how to survive in the woods.

Kepler started his career near Penn State as he was born nearby on a small farm. He started hunting when he was only five, but can't recall killing a bear until he was much older than

Daniel Boone's three years. He was interested in baseball at an early age and looked up to Walter Johnson and Ty Cobb. He came to Penn State as a shortstop in 1930, but was soon cured of it by Lion coach Hugo Bezdec.

Bezdec was athletic director, football coach, baseball coach and water boy back then, but he soon saw pitching potential in the strong right-hander. He started Kepler on what became a long pitching career.

Kepler played for the White Sox in 1931 and in 1932 he performed for his hero Walter Johnson and in the Washington Senators. When he played for the White Sox farm team at Indianapolis he was able to get his name in the record books for the first time.

Indianapolis was one of the first baseball teams in the country to have lights. The Cincinnati Reds, wishing to buy lights themselves, came to Indianapolis to play and to experience night games. Kepler had the honor of pitching in the first game a major league team played at night.

He bummed around the minors, pitching in several leagues, until the Second World War. He

entered the Navy and became an instructor on the Naval Aviation Pre-Flight Training Team.

Here he got his chance to become a manager. Eighteen major league stars were assigned to the same base as Kepler, and they organized a team. Prominent among the players were Ted Williams, Johnny Pesky, Harry Kraft and Johnny Sain.

Kepler became great friends with Williams. "When he first came, I had heard that he was hard to handle, but we seemed to hit it off from the start," Kepler recalls. "He liked the outdoors and we talked a lot about hunting and fishing. After a while, he became a real nut on fishing."

Williams became such a nut on fishing that he received a \$100,000 a year job with Sears and Roebuck testing fishing equipment. He owes part of that to Don Kepler.

The Navy team, stocked with major league players, was named the outstanding service team and was asked to play the New York Yankees. Babe Ruth was retiring and the Yankees wanted to give him a chance to manage the team just once.

Kepler and Ruth shared the same locker in Yankee Stadium as opposing managers and the

pictures of the two skippers at home plate appeared on the front page of nearly every newspaper in the country.

"The Babe enjoyed hunting," Kepler said, "and we made plans for him to come to my place after the war to do a little hunting. Unfortunately, he was struck with cancer and we never got a chance to do it."

Kepler's team pounded the Yankees, 15-2, to ruin the Babe's last appearance in jersey No. 3. "We had all the players," Kepler said.

Kepler helped to write the Naval survival manual during the war, and then was named one of heads of a Naval survival school for pilots, the first such school in the world. He returned to his farm after the war, but came to Penn State to give lectures on survival.

When Penn State trained the first Peace Corps in 1962, Kepler took the students into the woods for survival training. They lived off the land for several days.

State hired him as an instructor and freshman baseball coach in 1960 and his current band of frosh just finished an undefeated season.

Kepler likes to compare ballplayers. "Ted Williams was the greatest hitter I ever saw," he said, "but it was not just because he had great eyes or a great swing, it was the work he put in."

Williams had just hit .406 the year before he came under Kepler's tutelage, but he did not rest on his laurels. "Every night we were supposed to practice for an hour and a half and then eat dinner, but Williams and Pesky would ask me to stay out through dinner just to practice," Kepler said.

"Williams would have me throw inside curve balls until he had blisters on his hands from swinging, and then I would hit grounders at Pesky until my hands were blistered. That's why they were two of the greatest players ever."

At age 61, Kepler has no visions of retiring. "I really haven't thought about it," he said. "Hunting has kept me fit. I can out walk a man half my age, and my eyes are as good as ever."

Maybe it is that Kepler has led just such a full, active life that he can't imagine going into retirement. After all, back in 1932...

Laughter, Heartaches; State Lacrosse, 1969

By WARREN PATON Collegian Sports Writer

Even the most fanatical Penn State lacrosse fan could hardly have called this season a successful one, at least in view of the outcome of competition. The Lions managed but four wins in ten matches, often being able to put 14 to 15 healthy players in action while the three or four remaining wounded observed the action from prone positions on Centre County Hospital stretchers. Injuries racked them to the point that they were often outmanned, outgunned, out shot, out hit and, consequently, out cold.

Then of course, there were those games where a bad bounce, a bad shot or an interfering swamp frog monkey wrenched an otherwise fine effort into one of those Monday morning mudfielder games, full of second guessing. It was just a season of bad breaks that only a sympathetic masochist could have enjoyed. William Bell must have had visions of this in mind when he lyricized "If it wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all."

Yet, competition aside, it was not a depressing season for the players. Unlike what one would expect, the players did not re-enter the locker room slashing wrists and fooling around with plastic bags. This was not that kind of lacrosse team. Sure they were dedicated to the sport and to their coach, but they were also a team of individuals who accepted defeat and then lived to kill another day. They weren't stereotyped into the old head-hanging, sackcloth modesty but, rather, were unspoiled human beings who displayed their individualism, whether it ranged from Don Stone's goatee to Dave Schock's shock of hair, or Galen Godbey's cowboy style bandana to coach Dick Pencek's wild bells.



DICK PENCEK... popular coach

This was also a very close team, one that did things together, both on and off the field. It was a team that stuck together as a group, whether it was weathering an attack of Syracuse men-mountain's or the misguided blasts of some fledgling reporter. Ask a player about his stickhandling and he'll tell you that reserve goalie Al Dreeland could start for 75% of this team's opponents. Ask another about his scoring and he'll tell you that the biggest crime in America would be for defenseman Gerry Curtin not to make the All-America squad.

"We were a very close team, a very mature team," Penn State's monstrous midfielder Galen Godbey said. "You get a lot of satisfaction playing for a team like this, even if it doesn't always show up in the wins and losses."

"We didn't have a great year but that doesn't always matter," Curtin said. "The team was a great bunch of guys and everybody put out."

"They were an exceptionally close group," Pencek echoed. "If we ever had any problems, we settled them within the group, though we rarely had to do that. If any

problems ever developed on the field, I'd consult the kids before making any major decisions."

This closeness had to be a plus factor for the too-often injury riddled Lions. Any other team might have thrown down their gloves and sticks and taken up less dangerous activities, like javelin catching. No matter how few were able to suit up, they never lost the spirit to do their thing.

Guys Kept Them Playing

"It took guts to keep going," Godbey said, "especially when you had only 15 bodies out there (a lacrosse team fields 10). Oftentimes we had to borrow five or six guys from the freshmen just so we could have a full scrimmage. When you see teams from small schools like Lebanon Valley with 55 traveling players, you have to be close."

"Closeness definitely made coaching more enjoyable," Pencek said. "The kids had the enthusiasm that helped make it that way. They kept this even one day when we had only 11 healthy players and the coaches had to suit up just to have a decent workout."

If Pencek enjoyed coaching the team, having Pencek coach them made lacrosse a hundredfold more enjoyable for the players. To them, he wasn't a coach with an overbearing holier-than-thou attitude, but an adviser, teacher and human being as well.

"He's just a tremendous guy," Curtin said. "He's gone out of his way to help somebody on this team at one time or another."

"He's a teacher in the broadest sense of the word," Godbey said. He helps you with your schoolwork if necessary, besides being a great coach. You always want to put out for a man like Pencek."

Retires A Jersey

Probably no better example of Pencek's feelings for his team can be drawn than his retiring the number of goalie Jim McGuone, setting a precedent for lacrosse players. It was McGuone's outstanding network that kept the Lions in many of the games this year, but it was typical of Pencek to recognize it in this way.

"I didn't know that he was going to do that," McGuone said. It really surprised me. He's a fabulous guy, kind of the antithesis of the typical phys. ed. teacher."

On bus trips, an outside observer might notice a cluster of players in one section of the vehicle. No, it's not the world champion collegiate floating crap game, it's just the players sitting and gabbing the ride away around their coach, who is probably throwing some interesting side-lights into the problem of the increasing rabbit population of Australia, or something like that. Quoting him is more interesting than watching the Philadelphia Eagles play football. It's often as funny, also.

The past season had to be one of the great disappointments for Pencek.

The loss of All-American attackmen Ken Edwards in pre-season play squashed the chances of this being the greatest lacrosse team in Penn State's history. Bad breaks and other injuries to his depths talent forced his men to the wall, from which they never were really able to advance. The fact that Pencek couldn't move them, however, means that probably no other man alive could have accomplished the task.

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Major League STANDINGS

Table with columns for American League and National League, including teams like Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, New York, Wash'n, Cleveland, Minnesota, Oakland, Kansas City, Seattle, Chicago, California, Atlanta, L. Angeles, San Fran., Cincinnati, Houston, San Diego, and their respective records.

British Champ Henry Cooper Forfeits Title

LONDON (AP) — Henry Cooper, British heavyweight boxing champion for 10 years, resigned his title yesterday because British authorities would not recognize his proposed fight with Jimmy Ellis of Louisville, Ky., as a world title bout.

The 35-year-old Cooper still retains his British Empire title.

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Williams Plans To Rest Relievers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The score is 15-0 in the early innings but still no one is throwing in the Washington Senators' bullpen.

Sounds incredible, but says rookie manager Ted Williams it might have happened the way the Senators' fortunes were going during the past week.

"I was tempted to start somebody and get a complete game," Williams was saying after his Senators defeated Minnesota 5-1 Tuesday night. "And I didn't care if the score was 22-7."

Barry Moore went nine innings to win the game for Washington, only the third time this season that starting Senators' pitcher was around for the finish.

"I've thought about it during the past week," Williams said. "Why not let the starter go and see what happens. Our relief pitchers needed a rest. "And what's wrong with the idea of deciding before hand that the starter is going to stay in no matter what. Either that or decide that the game will be divided between two guys." The Senators have won only five of their last 20 and during that period have had two six-game losing streaks, one of which ended Tuesday night.

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