
WHS Homecoming Then and Now

The History of Homecoming

By Sheri Blare

As the student council prepared for the 2002 homecoming activities, I began to wonder how it all started. I graduated for Winner High School many years ago, but as far as I knew homecoming had always been around. I decided to do some research to clear up this mystery. I began by talking to some of the older alumnus that I knew.

My first call was to the first Princess of WHS, Rosemary (Donatino) Roosa. I figured if she was the First Princess maybe she would know. Rosemary is also a former class, the class of 1948, decided to put this together. It was shortly after World War II and the boys were coming home from the service. Many of these boys were students in high school when they were called to service. If you were eighteen years old, you were drafted.

Rosemary and another classmate, Betty Littau, gave me much information about that first ceremony. The class got together and planned the whole coronation ceremony and parade. They also decided to include the graduates of WHS from when the high school began in 1917 up until 1947 because they had never had a homecoming. That first ceremony was held October 31, 1947. It began in the morning with the coronation in the high school gym. Rosemary Donatino and Don Herbison were crowned Princess and Warrior. The ceremony was followed by a parade down Main Street at the time. The Winner Warriors were taking on Platte. The game ended in a tie score 20 to 20. Following the football game a wiener roast was held, and a dance then followed at the Legion Hall. At the homecoming dance former graduates were introduced thus beginning the roll call tradition.

A tradition called the "Snake Dance" has been lost. The "Snake Dance" started with students joining hands at Leahy Bowl, once known as Warrior Tank Hill, then the leader of the pack would run down Main Street and all the others would follow. The leader would weave in and out of business and all around the streets of main. This was then banned due to injuries.

The more I found out about that first homecoming the more I began to feel tremendous pride at being a graduate of this school. With all the controversy surrounding our mascot changes, it seemed like a good time to bring out the history of this important and unique event. Maybe it does not really matter what our Warrior mascot looks like on the outside, whether it is a Native American warrior or a Roman soldier. I think it is a feeling of pride deep within us that nothing can take away. Where else in America do graduates of a high school take time out of the busy schedules and arrange vacation time to go spend three days helping their former high school celebrate homecoming? Each year former students come from all over this country to a very small community in rural South Dakota to relive memories of a grand time in their lives. High school is a very brief time in our lives, but nothing can compare to the many friends we make and the special times we have for four short years.

As you students graduate and go on to college or out into the business world, you may not think of WHS for a few years. When it comes time to come back for a class reunion I can

guarantee that you will be sitting in the audience at coronation and roll call feeling tremendous pride and anxious to go down with your class and say you were a graduate of Winner High School.

Homecoming-since 2001

By WHS Student Council

In the fall of 2001, the administration and school board of Winner High School decided to change the Native American warrior mascot. The school mascot was selected from designs submitted and voted upon by the student body. The new mascot is a purple and gold shield with two intersecting swords behind it, and the banner Warriors across the top. A large W is on the face.

It was decided that the whole homecoming ceremony needed to be changed as well. In the ceremony, Native American symbols were being used. The student council met to decide what it could be changed to that would not offend any particular group of individuals. After much discussion, it was decided to choose the Olympics as a theme. It was decided that the Olympic Games are a coming together of all nations and ethnic groups in harmony to compete and interact with each other.

It began with that thought, and to ease in the transition, as much of the original dialogue and format were kept. Only the symbols were changed. For example, the traditional moccasin ceremony was changed to the torch ceremony. The wording that was used since the first homecoming in the fall of 1947 was kept with minimum changes. Five groups of candidates represent the senior class. They were previously called tribes, with tribal names. It was decided to use the colors of the Olympic rings to represent these groups with the exception to change the black ring color to white. Also, group names were chosen using words that describe the Olympic spirit. Strength, Bravery, Honor, Peace & Unity.

It was also decided that the council wanted to make the ceremony more elegant with these changes. Previously, blankets were worn by the candidates, and they sat on hay bales wearing jeans. It was changed to black dresses for the girls with sashes in the color they represented and the word they represented. For example, red sash with strength embroidered on it. The boys have black dress pants, tuxedo shirts and carry a flag in the color they represent. The symbols in the gift ceremony were changed from a tomahawk, bow & arrow, headband and beaded necklace to sword, shield, flower garland headband and medallion necklace. The leather costumes were changed to velvet capes and a white roman style dress for the princess.

The alumni portion of the program was not changed. It was the goal to improve the ceremony and expand it without taking away the original content and tradition. Other changes implemented at this time included more activities for the student body during homecoming week.

Olympic game contests are held with each class being represented. They include such activities as a balloon toss, tug of war, races, cheer contests, etc. Student classes earn gold, silver or bronze medals during the week, and the overall gold medalist class wins a prize at the conclusion of homecoming week. In the past, the homecoming traditions seemed to center around the alumni and community as well as the students. These new activities were events that the students could have exclusively. It was a difficult change to make because of a deep tradition in our high school and community. So far, it has been a very positive experience for all.