

**Warriors went to the wire for title 40 years ago
Vaxmonsky's Wyoming Area squad copped WVC championship in '71
(written in conjunction with 2011 Ring of Pride Cocktail Party)**

The 1971 Wyoming Area football team will be honored on the 40th anniversary of its Wyoming Valley Conference championship at halftime of the Wyoming Area-Pittston Area football game Friday night. Returning players from that team will be introduced at halftime and there's a cocktail party after the game at St. Anthony's Center.

Those '71 Wyoming Area Warriors were 11-1 overall and won a second consecutive Wyoming Valley Conference championship. But unlike 1970 when they were upset by Pittston Area on Thanksgiving and backed into the title when Valley West beat Coughlin, in 1971 they had to beat Pittston Area and then beat Coughlin in a playoff game to clinch the WVC title.

With three quality running backs in Mickey Calabrese and Dave Amico, who were in the 160-lb. range, and Paul Tamalenus, a 6-1 and 190 wing or slot back, and a quarterback, Don McDermott, who ran like a fourth tailback, the Warriors pounded the ball on the ground behind fullback Andy Supey, a big athletic offensive line with the likes of Gino Chiavacci, a 6-3 230-pound all-scholastic; Lou Lucarella, 6-0, 220; Bob Black, 6-4, 230; Vince Randazzo, Phil Falvo, John Chiampi and tight end John Fumanti.

The defense gave up more than one touchdown in only five of the 12 games and pitched three shutouts.

Tom Vaxmonsky was the head coach in his second season.

WA 34 GAR 14 – Friday, Sept. 10 at Wilkes-Barre – The season didn't start like a winner. GAR's Dave Carter ran the opening kickoff back for a 6-0 lead. But Calabrese ran for 217 yards and scored four touchdowns after that, one on a 36-yard run after an interception by linebacker Fumanti.

• **WA 34 Central Catholic 7** – Saturday, September 18 at Valley West – It was close, 13-7, after three, but the Warriors scored 21 in the fourth. McDermott returned an interception 40 yards to set up his Td pass to Russ Ramage. He also tossed short Td passes to Fumanti and Staley. Calabrese went for 85 on 16 carries. Three Td passes was an aberration for an offense that would throw double figure passes in only two games.

• **WA 13 Coughlin 0** – Friday, September 24, home – An estimated 9,000 fans saw the Warriors win on 1-yard Td runs by Calabrese and fullback Andy Supey in the first half. McDermott caught as many passes as he threw. He was 1-for-2 passing and had two interceptions.

• **WA 21 Plains 0** – Saturday, October 2, home – Plains High School was in its last season. It merged with Coughlin the next year. It was 6-0 late in the third quarter when McDermott tossed a screen pass to Amico and Chiavacci made a block to convert a

3rd-and-20 to the Plains 4. Amico took it in from there with :02 left in the third. Tamalenus scored the first Td on a 10-yard run in the first quarter.

- **WA 31 Scranton Prep 6** – Friday, October 8, home – With Calabrese out with an injury Tamalenus rushed for 92 yards on just seven carries and scored 22 points on three Tds and two 2-point runs. Stan Waleski, yes that Stan Waleski, scored the Prep Td.

- **WA 27 Valley West 12** – Friday, October 15, home – More Tamalenus as he went for over 100 yards including three runs of 20 plus. Amico scored on a 70-yard punt return and McDermott scored three Tds, one on a 25-yard pick-six. The crowd was estimated at 8,000.

- **WA 23 Lake Lehman 8** – Saturday, October 23, at Lake Lehman - Calabrese got back on the field and breezed to 125 yards and a Td on 19 carries. McDermott ran for two Tds.

- **WA 12 Nanticoke 10** – Friday, October 29, home – Calabrese came all the way back getting 37 carries and 197 yards. He scored the first Td to cap a 97-yard drive that included a 35-yard pick up on a McDermott pass to Fumanti. Trailing 10-6 with 3:18 left the Warriors drove 57 yards for the winning Td--most of it on two runs, 24 by Calabrese and 22 by McDermott for the Td.

- **WA 39 Old Forge 21** – Friday November 5, at Old Forge – Up 26-0 at the half, Vaxmonsky gave Calabrese the second half off after he went for 96 on 13 carries in the first half. Amico scored three Tds and McDermott was 6-for-12 passing for 129 and two Tds, the most he'd thrown all season.

- **WA 8 Meyers 27** – Friday, November 12, home – Coulda clinched the WVC. What happened? The biggest upset of the season according to the Wilkes-Barre papers. Eight turnovers will do that. Forced to throw after falling behind McDermott was 10-19 for 167 yards, but Meyers picked off five. The Warriors also lost three fumbles and had a punt blocked. Meyers played with a short field all night, starting possessions at the WA 10 and 22 for two of their scores.

- **WA 32 PA 23** – Saturday, November 27, home – Having lost to Meyers the Warriors couldn't afford to lose to PA again and they didn't, but they had to wait. A Thanksgiving eve snowstorm postponed the game until Saturday, Nov. 27. Chiavacci and company paved way for 195 yards rushing and three TDs for Calabrese on a WA-PA series record 40 carries. Some kid named Jimmy Cefalo, a sophomore, had 84 yards and a TD for PA. Having done their part, the Warriors had to wait, and wait, to see what Coughlin, who also had one loss, would do in their Thanksgiving Day rivalry game with Valley West. That game was put off until Tuesday. Coughlin won 34-20 setting up a playoff game. With Coughlin facing a short week it was agreed to play on Saturday afternoon December 4 at Valley West.

• **WA 8 Coughlin 7** – Saturday, December 4 at Valley West – In front of a reported “paid” attendance of over 5,200, McDermott found another way to win – punting. He punted seven times for a 43 yard average. The last of his punts, in the fourth quarter, pinned Coughlin back at their own 1 with two minutes remaining. The score was 8-7, with all the points having been scored in the first half.

Coughlin scored first on a 66-yard catch-and-run pass play from Jeff Zych to Pesotski. The Warriors scored on a 5-yard run by Calabrese with 1:07 left in the half. Tamalenus caught a 29-yard pass from McDermott in the drive and caught the 2-point conversion pass which wound up as the winning points.

McDermott said they practiced that play for the 2-points during the week and it was the only time all season, as he recalls it now, that they practiced a specific play for a specific purpose. “Vax said if the situation comes up where it’s a close game we were going to go for two. He must have thought there wasn’t going to be a lot of scoring. It was a roll out on my part and Paul did a little curl. It worked as it was drawn up.” Back to that final Coughlin possession.

Throwing from his own end zone after the McDermott punt was downed at the 1, Coughlin quarterback Zych connected with Howe all the way out to the Wyoming Area 37. Three plays, later facing a 4th-and-7 from the WA 33 with 1:39 left, Zych threw a screen pass to Lionel Crawford. Gary Wendorf smelled it and dropped Crawford for a five-yard loss to clinch the championship. McDermott said as the quarterback he got a lot of props for the team success as did Calabrese and Amico, deservedly so. But McDermott said Tamalenus was something of an unsung hero as was Supey, the 180-pound fullback. “Andy just punished people. He was a crushing blocker. Vax used to line him up pointing right where we were going to go and they still couldn’t stop him.”