

Winger: Donations needed to help publish book about SVL standouts

Published: Tuesday, March 3, 2009 12:13 PM EST

In 1904, five high schools formed the Saginaw Valley League: Bay City Eastern (now Bay City Central), Bay City Handy (now Bay City Western), Saginaw High, Saginaw Arthur Hill, and Flint (the only high school in Flint at the time).

Since that time, the league has evolved to 11 schools. Pontiac Central is no longer a member, but Flint has three members in Central, Southwestern Academy and Northern. Midland High joined in 1959 and Dow High after it opened in the late 1960s. Saginaw Heritage and Mount Pleasant are the latest additions.

During that time, thousands of athletes have left their marks. Yet no one has chronicled what they did.

If Rick Sigsby has his way, that will soon change.

A former Midland High track and field star in the 1960s, he established a long jump record of 22 feet, 9 inches, that has since been shattered. He is now retired from his job as a Midland County park ranger and lives in Coleman, where he is publisher of Dreambuilder Publications.

He is a freelance writer for horse racing magazines and also has a weekly column, "Rick Off the Record," that is published in the Gladwin County Record and the Beaverton Clarion.

As a former Saginaw Valley Conference athlete, Sigsby got to wondering one day why nobody had ever written a book highlighting some of the many athletes who went on to make a name for themselves.

In doing his research, Sigsby utilized yearbooks and newspaper articles to gain his information. He estimates that he will put in at least 700 hours into researching for his book.

He learned about Bill Hewitt of Bay City Central, who went on to play end at the University of Michigan in the 1930s and played in the National Football League with the Chicago Bears and the Philadelphia Eagles.

"I discovered that Hewitt was the last player grandfathered into the NFL not to wear a helmet," Sigsby said.

Another Bay City Central player was Art Beckley, a halfback who played for Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State) in 1901. He then went on to play professionally for the Dayton (Ohio) Triangles.

Others whom Sigsby has highlighted are Hayes Jones, a track star, and Micki King, an Olympic diver, both from Pontiac Central. Also featured is Jim Abbott, the one-handed athlete who starred in baseball and football for Flint Central and later pitched a no-hitter for the New York Yankees in the American League.

"Then of course, we can't forget Midland's Howard Mudd," Sigsby said. Mudd was a star lineman for Midland High and went on to earn all-pro honors in the NFL. He now is the offensive line coach for the Indianapolis Colts.

Among some of the other Midland athletes who have made a name for themselves in the SVL and beyond are Terry Collins, Jim Kern, Roy Burks, Jalen Parmele and Tom Drake to name only a few.

Sigsby's efforts have been endorsed by the Saginaw Valley League, which is formally known as the Saginaw Valley High School Association.

The estimated cost of producing the book and an accompanying DVD is \$10,000. Donors are being sought.

"We have applied to the Michigan Baseball Foundation for funds," said Pete Ryan, executive director of the SVHSA. "We're also seeking individual donors."

Those who donate \$100, \$250, and \$500 or more will be acknowledged in the book, receive an autographed copy and also be invited to a private book signing to celebrate its release to the public.

The target date for publication is August of this year.

"To be honest, we haven't received any donations yet," Ryan said. "It's a combination of things, including the economy."

Anyone interested in contributing can contact either Sigsby at (989) 465-1583 or Ryan at (989) 399-8053.

Ryan noted that the SVHSA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Don Winger is the retired executive sports editor of the Daily News. Email him at dwinger103@aol.com or telephone him at 631-0347.