

Harold Holcomb

1943 -2024

Growing up in Fremont, Harold Holcomb played football, basketball, and pole vaulted on the track team before going on to Central Michigan University. His roommate turned out to be Bob Quinn who would become a life-long friend.

The two journeyed together to Prudenville in July 1977 to attend our association's first board meeting. Bob would become our second president; Hoke the third. Quite a duo. Quite an impact.

The two were high school football players who were supposed to compete against each other but Hoke was sick that night. Both eventually became football coaches. In Harold's case, it involved a move from hometown Fremont to Essexville-Hampton, a small semi-rural school district with a student count then of approximately 7700 kids, 550 of whom would attend the high school.

But why would a football coach turn to tennis? "Neither one of us had played tennis on a team," says Bob. "Just recreational. Both of our districts simply said, 'You have to take it.'"

For his part, Hoke became a textbook case of what a difference a single dedicated coach can make. At the time, football was the school's most popular sport with basketball, track, and baseball being the strong second choices of its male students. The high school had four tennis courts and not an organized program other than the varsity squad. The Dukes had never won a regional championship nor qualified for state competition.

Over the next two decades,

- Hoke lobbied the community, the administration, and the school board to increase the number of tennis courts. Four additional courts were established and all eight have been maintained in excellent playing condition.
- He got more boys to go out for tennis than any other sport other than football. Full varsity and junior varsity schedules were established and there was great competition for spots on the teams. Assistant coaches had to be hired and despite eight courts, split practice schedules had to be organized to accommodate so many participants. A major addition for both Garber and the MHSTeCA was Jeff Newingham who has been a long-standing and helpful board member.
- His boys teams qualified for the state finals 17 out of the last 18 years before he was inducted into the Hall of Fame

Class of 1992. His boys won four regional championships and finished in the top ten of the state 9 times, the highest being fourth in 1980 during that time period

- More girls participated in varsity and junior varsity tennis than in any other sport offered to female students at Garber High School and their success was as prolific as that of the boys. Garber girls team qualified for state competition 6 out of those previous 7 years, compiled a 101-45 record, captured three regional championships, and finished in the top ten of the state three times with seventh being its highest finish in 1987.
- He initiated a tennis clinic which held classes for students five days a week, four hours a day all summer. It involved over 100 kids and employed a number of student assistants

in a program that became the most successful ever offered through the district's Community Schools Program.

- He ran two Saturday invitational tournaments during both the boys and girls seasons and hosted a Class B Regional Tournament in the both the boys and girls seasons for four years. Coaches participating in regional tournaments against Garber elected him MHSTeCA Regional Coach of the Year four times in the spring and three times at the end of the girls season. He was chosen Boys Coach of the Year in 1983 and Girls Coach of the Year in 1987.

- Hoke served on the MHSAA's State Seeding committee from the very beginning.

He taught middle school for many years and then taught computers to elementary school teachers. His expertise enabled him to establish our very first website in the mid 90s.

In 1992, sixty of his former players from all over the country attended a reunion in his honor. **Years later, the community bestowed the ultimate honor: they named the high school courts after him.**

Hoke stepped down after suffering a stroke but he left a strong program in the capable hands of Nancy Brissette and Jeff. Despite his malady, he would occasionally attend a Hall of Fame Selection Committee meeting and attended Bob Wood's memorial service in May 2019.

A caring, compassionate, sensitive man, Hoke was universally liked by his colleagues. Moreover, he and Bob served as not only pioneers but ambassadors with the regard to the establishment of the MHSTeCA. Thanks to them, our leadership got off to a very good beginning.



He was one of the Founding Fathers, having attended the first board meeting in July 1977

He was our third president.

He served on the first State Seeding Committee

The community named the high school tennis courts after him.