

Townsend, Homer

Red Well Remembered

July 17, 1972

They called him Red; they called him Townie, and City Limits, and Carrot Top.

And in the personally-stamped heyday he brought to local high school sports they called him other things, besides.

Colorful reaction was a natural sequel to the presence of Homer Townsend and his squads on fields and playing court — something they all relished, and part of the game.

But Red Townsend he emerges at the end of it all.

Personal contact with the Townsend era ends this month when he retired from Belleville Collegiate — the high school where his career as physical education instruc-

tor imparted a flair and dash to collegiate sports still recalled with nostalgia.

Last night, the recollections came back with a rush as compelling as any his rugby or basketball squads ever mustered.

Fielding the memories were scores of his old students who joined colleagues and friends at the Canadian Legion's Holland Room to pay tribute to the man and the events he organized — and his personality evoked.

For personality was the key to the Townsend times in local sports — even if it did tend to blur his serious contributions to local and school sports.

For helping set patterns of organization in high school sports, Ontario "owes him much" last night's testimonial was told. The tribute came from Pete Beach, spokesman on behalf of secondary schools' Ontario Athletic Association.

And the individual guidance his influence exerted on numerous young personalities in contact with the Townsend touch also was repeatedly emphasized.

For Red — the nickname inspired by his once-burning hair crop — that contact began seriously in the early 1940s when he took over as instructor at BCI.

What became known as the Red Machine — the football team he reorganized — began its career, along with Townsend basketball squads.

The personal attitude and vigor he invested in the squads drew ready loyalty from his students.

In the real sense Red says he "never was a coach". He never exercised selectivity simply because of talent — although it probably cost championship.

"My idea was that every kid on the basketball floor or rugby field should have a chance to play should have a crack at competition, good competition. I just can't see a kid sitting out game after game on the bench after coming out to practice and then not playing."

Born near Holloway on the family farmstead, Red went to Belleville High School — BCI's predecessor. He graduated from the then Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph and then the Ontario College of Education in 1931. After two years teaching physical education and science in Ottawa he returned to Belleville operating a sports store on Campbell St. In 1943 he returned to teaching at BCI, then the city's only high school, to exert his influence on a generation of students and sports squads.

Offhand, he can't immediately recall just what championships his techniques produced. But he easily recollects his proudest moment. It came when his basketball team downed top-notch opponents from Niagara Falls to win COSSA championship.

"They had a better team than we did," admits Red. "And after it was all over the

coach . . . came over and said: 'I never thought a bunch of damn farmers could beat a team like I've got!'"

In sports endeavors were interrupted in the early 1960s after a fall from a step-ladder while helping organize a campus show, that caused a broken leg. The old injury reasserted itself years later. Now, Red has been teaching science in recent terms.

School games will still bring him out in retirement — as a spectator. The one-time hockey player and boxer who still relentlessly plays bridge as one of his "favorite sports" is still more enthusiastic about games on the high school level.

Yet there have been changes in the lifestyles of generations he's taught — among the most marked being less family influence on young people, Red observes.

He doesn't believe this a good development. But, he qualifies, the "whole of society is changing. We haven't seen what these kids can do yet."



Scene of Many Memories

The Intelligencer
June 17, 1972