

Yesterday Is Today

By Pete Clark

I am looking at a photograph, an old photograph, taken sixty years ago, in the fall of 1956. The subject of the photograph is the Shoshoni, Wyoming High School Football Team, their coaches, student team manager, water boy and equipment handler. They are sitting, kneeling and standing, the top row of uniformed players flanked on each side by the coaches and their assistants. The players are dressed in their new jerseys of navy blue with gold numbers on the fronts and backs and UCLA Stripes on the shoulders, made up of a white stripe between stripes of gold.

The setting is an expanse of bare ground that was used for both football practice and football games. On game day, the sidelines, end zones and yard markers were defined in powdered lime, forming a transitory gridiron, whose lines would be trampled, fallen on, rolled through, slid through, mangled almost beyond recognition, but it served its purpose and was ultimately dissolved and borne away by the relentless Wyoming Wind.

I played First String: Right Guard on defense and Left Tackle on offense and though I was part of the photograph, I had much to learn about playing the game. I remember the taste of sweat mixed with dirt, the feeling of hair drenched in sweat beneath my helmet, the crack of pads and helmets when opposing players would meet at full speed, the whistles of the referees signaling penalties, times out and the end of plays. In huddles I rested as the Quarterback called plays.

The locker room was a special place, even though it may have had the stench of sweaty bodies and dirty sweat socks, we gathered there to suit up and go to the playing field. At Half-Time, we went back to the locker room to listen to a lecture or a rant, depending on how things were going and then went back to the field for the Second Half and at the end of the game, win or lose, we went back to the locker room, showered, dressed, had minor injuries tended and went on our separate ways.

Most of the teams we played that year were north of Wind River Canyon, in the Big Horn Basin, but we also played the football team at Morton, Wyoming, west of Riverton, which was composed of Shoshone youths from the Wind River Reservation. Undoubtedly, High School Football is for kids: but after every game I played I, could feel the beating I took, but I always knew that I gave back as much or more than I received. We played a rougher brand of football than the other Class B conferences in Wyoming.

I have studied the wars with the Arapahoe, Cheyenne and Lakota, becoming aware of their cultures. If I spoke with a Cheyenne, who adheres to the ancient Cheyenne Tribal wisdom and beliefs, he would say the photograph was taken today as everything happens in the present and is with us always.