

TOWER NEWS



Withrow Alumni • Box 8186 • Cincinnati, OH 45208 • 513-363-9085

Spring 2022

Withrow—the first fifty years

Football—Angus King and the early coaches

by Bob Linnenberg '63

Anyone visiting Withrow these days will see **Angus King Stadium** in big white letters on the green artificial turf sideline of the playing field. Most of these visitors would be unaware that honoree Angus King was the football coach from 1931 to 1945 and the foremost winning coach in the first 50 years of Withrow's existence. With a record of 98 wins, 30 losses and 5 ties, the Withrow "King's Men" had an undefeated season of 9 wins in 1934 and a winning season of 8 wins and one tie in 1941. The teams of 1932 and 1939 had 8 wins and suffered only one defeat each. In all, Withrow garnered 10 city football championships during Mr. King's 14 years of coaching. In the 1934 season alone, Withrow's opponents scored only a total of 18 points while coach King's Tigers scored 206.

Angus King was a 1922 graduate of Ohio University in Athens, where he lettered in basketball and baseball. For a short time after college, he played pro baseball in the minor leagues before beginning his high school coaching career in Mt. Vernon, Ohio. Upon arriving at Withrow in the fall of 1931, Coach King found that his first team had only two returning

lettermen and over 70 inexperienced recruits. Nevertheless, he shaped up his squad and finished the season second in the league.

In addition to the coach's prowess on the gridiron, Mr. King was also the baseball coach during his tenure at Withrow. His 1934 baseball team won the state championship, the first Cincinnati area team to claim that title. The record of 34 runs for Withrow versus 5 runs for their opponents in the finals evinces the strength of the team. In all, the Withrow baseball teams won one district champion-

ship, two state titles, and seven league championships under coach King.

In 1945 Mr. King left Withrow and coaching to become assistant director of physical education for Cincinnati Public Schools. He was promoted to supervisor of athletics in 1948, a position he held until his retirement in 1966 after 45 years advancing high school sports. As director, he developed programs in the public schools that promoted all sports for young men, not just football and basketball. Stressing physical fitness

continued on page 6



Coach King and the 1945 Tigers, aka "The King's Men".

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President's Messages

by Dave Blocksom '68

Team success

Stellar season for football: team wins first playoff game; Tiger player to continue career at Navy

For those of you who are unable to follow our football team, I am pleased to inform you that our Tigers went 9-1 last fall, and their only season loss was to Taft 13-7. Unfortunately, our first and second team quarterbacks were unavailable for that game. We advanced to the Ohio High School playoffs and won our first playoff game. *This is the first time Withrow has won a playoff game since the Ohio High School playoffs were established in 1972.* We lost in the second round to #1 seed Piqua, 17-13. Coach Jones has 11 seniors who are going on to play college football. Player Kushi Abraham is going to play football at the Naval Academy. We're trying to find out if any other Withrow grads have gone on to the Naval Academy. If you know of anyone, please let us know.

More successful competitors

On the subject of sports, Coach Nathan Myers has 14 of his former rugby players playing rugby in college. Coach Sasha Young's Lady Tigers basketball team won the CMAC conference (old PHSL) with a 12-0 conference record and 18-5 record overall. I also want to give a shout out to our robotics team who are participating in the University of Cincinnati robotics competition.

Withrow Athletic HOF

Due to the cancellation of the January 21 boys basketball game because of Covid infections, we held our Withrow Athletic Hall of Fame induction ceremony without a game day crowd for the first time. We inducted both the 2021 and 2022 HOF classes that evening since the 2021 ceremony had

to be cancelled due to Covid protocols. We still had an amazing turn out of over 150 guests to honor our 10 inductees.

Farewell to a legend

I'm sad to inform you of the passing of Dr. John C. Bryant '54. John was an influential voice on diversity, equity, inclusion, and education. In 1963 he was one of four African American teachers hired to integrate Withrow's faculty; and when he became Withrow's basketball coach, he was the first African American basketball coach hired in the Cincinnati Public Schools. John went on to become the first African American hired on the UC basketball coaching staff. After John received his doctorate in education from UC in 1971, Wilmington College hired him as a teacher of education and head basketball coach. He then became chair of their Education Department. In 1990 John left Wilmington to become the Executive Director of the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative. After that he served on several boards and commissions. A Celebration of Life will be held for John on June 25th at the Ault Park Pavilion.

And finally ...

Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't mention how important your donations are to help support all our volunteer efforts to maintain our beautiful campus and support our students and staff. If you are taking taxable IRA distributions, don't forget about using tax-free qualified charitable distributions instead. It also looks like Congress might extend the up-to-\$600 (married filing jointly) tax deduction for charitable contributions again this year (even if you itemize). We sincerely appreciate any financial help that you can give us.

Fine Arts continue to flourish

by Christy McTigue Backley '66

“Once a Tiger, Always a Tiger” is a catchphrase dear to the hearts of Withrow alumni. We all feel it, that warm nostalgia triggered by a name, a song, a photo of our beautiful campus, but few of us act on it. A notable exception is Zach Riggins, class of '72. He came away from his 40-year reunion with an inkling of an idea — an idea that percolated over the years and finally grew into a full-fledged plan to return Withrow to its glory days (and rightful position, many would say) as Cincinnati Public Schools’ leader in fine arts.

Since his high school trumpet-playing days, Zach has been a performer, director, producer, and technician. Lighting is a specialty, and in addition to managing his own enterprise, he taught courses in cinema lighting at the University of Cincinnati’s College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). Step one in his plan was to bring back the once-annual musical tradition that showcased Withrow’s

talented students from 1930-1984, first as the *Withrow Minstrels* and then as *The Sounds of Withrow*. His production, *Withrow Sounds Again*, was planned initially to be a band fundraiser and a kickoff to the school’s centennial celebration.

In the fall of 2016, Zach began soliciting his industry contacts, and within two years he was receiving donations of money and equipment from community organizations, alumni, and businesses. His conversations with CPS intrigued Dr. Isidore Rudnik, Fine Arts Superintendent, and resulted in \$50,000 from CPS. The renaissance had begun. *Withrow Sounds Again* debuted on May 9, 2019.

By 2016, music classes had all but disappeared from the curriculum. There were few instruments, and those that remained required extensive reconditioning. There was no choral music program. But things began to look up. By 2019, 70 students were enrolled in three periods of beginning

band. Despite shutdowns caused by Covid, there are now 85 students participating in beginning and intermediate band classes. Laura Omaitis and John Beasley are full-time instrumental music teachers.

Through the Carlson-Bierne scholarship, students from CCM provide additional, targeted instruction to strings players, who are showing tremendous progress. Other paid instructors are teaching students to play different instruments from the percussion, brass, and woodwind families, including oboe, bassoon, and baritone sax.

“We have some outstanding players,” says Zach, “including a sax player and several other instrumental students who likely will major in music and then go professional. In addition to improving their skill, these young players are all developing a competitive spirit. They all want to be the best. They come into the room and

continued on page 4



Tuba trio of Robert Emery, Yahmir Rone, and A'Pavion Jordan White will play music by Saint-Saëns at the band spring concert. (Date TBD).



A percussion instructor from CCM plays a set of timpani.



It doesn't matter if readers don't know much about this recently-donated equipment—Zach does, and students in the media production class are learning to use it.

A student in the media production class checks the lighting before he takes his shot.

can't wait to get their horns out and start playing.”

It's not only instrumental music that's staging a comeback – so is the choir. From full-time choir instructor Haley Walls students learn music theory as well as how to sing in a group.

Maybe one of the most exciting innovations is the media production class. Since 2019, students of English teacher Diane Roland have been learning to write scripts and perform dramatic readings and plays, including *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. They have also learned about costuming, makeup, and sound effects. It was her idea to move the program forward by combining the dramatic and technical aspects—lighting, sound, and video—to develop a class that augments reading, writing, and organizational skills. Zach has created a curriculum that gives students practical knowledge in an in-demand field by focusing on cinematic principle and video production. A re-discovered set of 14 cameras allows students to take their own videos and download them to a computer to edit. CPS provided funding for a 4K camera, tripod, and light kit—to be used for the “big stuff.” Re-



cently, a friend and former colleague who teaches at Cincinnati State saw Zach's post asking for donations and provided cameras, sound equipment, and a handcam. Now, three teams of students can work on separate programs simultaneously.

The combined drama/media class of 25 wrote, performed, and filmed Christmas and Black History programs, and is currently working on a production of *Much Ado about Nothing* for a Cincinnati Shakespeare Company high school competition. “I love having a project,” says Ms. Roland, “and we're especially having fun with Shakespeare.”

These successes bode well for the future of fine arts program at Withrow, but the program needs help to thrive and grow. “The quality of musicality is still here,” says Zach. “Now it needs nurturing and support.”

The Wish List

- tubas
- baritone horns
- French horns
- trombones and bass trombones
- baritone saxophones
- alto saxophones
- tenor saxophones
- piccolos
- flutes
- clarinets
- bass clarinets
- bassoons.
- grip equipment.



Tyler Crawford (rear, Benedick) takes the bait as his friends Sean Cornett-Hubbard (left, Don Pedro) and Kushi Abraham (right, Leonato) claim that Beatrice loves him.



Student director Christopher Perez-Yera (left) looks on as (l to r) Aminata Thiam, Lisbeth Aguilar, Kushi Abraham, Chanya Bell, Tyler Crawford, Sean Cornett-Hubbard, Kaleem Arnold, and Savion Cornett-Hubbard rehearse.

Much Ado about Nothing

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continued from page 1

in all forms, Coach King was quoted as saying, “Not everyone is going to become a big star, but that’s not the point of high school athletics, anyway.”

One of his final acts as athletics chief was to see that lights were installed in the Withrow stadium. Up until that time, the only public high school football night games had to be held at Trechter Stadium at Central Vocational High School (named for Howard Trechter, a 1928 Withrow graduate).

Mr. King served as president of the Southwestern Ohio High Athletic Board of Control for many years. He was named an All-Ohio Coach by Scripps-Howard newspapers in 1938 and posthumously inducted into the Buddy LaRosa Sports Hall of Fame in 1984. Mr. King was a scout for the Cincinnati Reds from 1947 to 1965. He died in July of 1969.

William Gilliland

Below: Mr. Wirth, Mr. Reuter, Mr. King, Mr. Nimmo, from the 1941 Withrow Annual.

Right: Mr. Walke, 1925



Upon coach King’s departure in the fall of 1945, returning WWII veteran William Gilliland was selected to head up Withrow’s football program. Coach Gilliland had been a star athlete at Western Hills High School and played football under coach Dana King, Angus King’s brother, at the University of Cincinnati. President of the senior class of 1933, Mr. Gilliland was “Honorary Captain” of the UC football team and an all-Ohio fullback. After graduation, he coached at Crescent Springs High School for several seasons, assisted as a line coach at UC and was football coach at Wilmington College. Prior to serving in the war, he was football coach and athletic director at Walnut Hills High School.

Coach Gilliland ran the Withrow football program from 1946 through 1953 and sustained a record of 49 wins, 20 losses and 3 ties. The 1952 season of 8 wins and one loss was his most successful one; his teams copped the Public High crown in 1951 and shared the top with Hughes in 1953.

In 1954 coach Gilliland

stepped down from coaching but remained as head of football as the athletic director at Withrow. He retired in 1972 after 27 years at Withrow. He passed away in January of 1973.

Nelson Walke

Prior to Angus King’s arrival at Withrow, the football coach was former United States Marine veteran Nelson Walke. Coach Walke, a Hughes High School graduate, was at East High/Withrow High from 1922 to 1931. His 1928 team, with 8 wins and one tie, scored 325 points to the opponents’ 51. When Mr. Walke took over from coach Arthur Reisner, he established the practice of early pre-season games with strong teams from central and southern Ohio. Coach Walke felt that this competition would give his boys experience and toughness for when they met city teams in league play. In his first year as coach East High won the city championship. Mr. Walke’s teams continued to have winning seasons, garnering the city championship again in 1929. A multi-talented indi-



vidual, coach Walke assisted the new band director, George G. Smith, in organizing a student variety show which they called the *Withrow Minstrels* in 1930. Coach Walke's name appears on the program above Smittie's.

Coach Walke left Withrow in 1931 to further his education. He coached and taught at the Pennsylvania State University and Columbia University and obtained his doctorate from Columbia in 1937. The author of a college textbook on health and physical education, Dr. Walke retired as Professor and Chair, Department of Health and Physical Education, at Brooklyn College, New York. He died in 1974, and he and his wife, who was also a Physical Education teacher at Withrow, are buried here in Cincinnati.

Early coaches of other sports: Wirth, Nimmo, Sherman, Reuter, Huheey

No article on Withrow's early coaches would be complete without following Angus King's dictum that ALL sports are important, not just football. Ray Wirth, who taught at Withrow from 1931 to 1972, coached the swimming team from 1932 to 1954, cross country from 1948 to 1950 and volleyball 1935-1937. Popular Phys-Ed teacher Lomond Nimmo coached basketball 1939-1941, track 1943-1956, cross-county 1951-1956, and assisted coaches King and Gilliland with football 1939-1948. Another polymath, he also entertained generations of Withrowites with his bagpipe playing. Social studies teacher Harold Sherman coached the tennis team on

and off from 1941 to 1960. Legendary coach Fred "Doc" Reuter, one of the original phys-ed faculty members, ran the track program from 1923 to 1942 and served as cross-county coach until 1947. Many fine coaches served at Withrow in the first fifty years. One man in particular, basketball and baseball coach John Huheey, will be the subject of a future article.



*Left: front row: Mr. Wirth, Mr. Gilliland
rear: Mr. Huheey, Mr. Nimmo, 1950*

Above: Mr. Sherman, 1941

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