



Retired Eastern York High School football coach Ellsworth Kissinger reflects while holding the game ball from the Golden Knights first varsity win during the playing of the National Anthem at Friday night's game against York Suburban. Eastern honored the program's first coach before the home opener of the Knight's 35th season. Mrs. Kissinger is standing to Ellsworth's right. (DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS -- NOEL KLINE)

Eastern York honors the legend of their first football coach

STEVE NAVAROLI

Outside the gates of the Eastern York football stadium on Friday evening, Ellsworth Kissinger looked nearly the same as he always has.

The pleasant smile and friendly nod many of us remember was on full display as dozens of people stopped by to say hi and shake the coach's hand.

It was Ells' night and those that gathered around the hospitality tent were there to honor and remember the first coach in Golden Knight football history prior to the home opener of Eastern's 35th football season.

Sue Kissinger couldn't help but beam nearby.

Knowing that her husband of 53 years, who suffers from Alzheimer's, seemed able to identify some of the admirers made the evening all the more special.

"He seems to be doing well tonight," Sue said. "He is recognizing some people."

The pregame event turned into a reunion, much to the delight of son Joe Kissinger.

"It's a big honor. We are happy for him," Joe said. "It's nice to have all of these people come back to recognize him."

From there, the group made its way into the stadium where a pregame ceremony took place.

The Dallastown High School Jr. ROTC presented the colors before the game. The squad was led by Dallastown senior Kyle Richards, who is the Kissinger's grandson.

Former Eastern principal John Manley, who hired Ells as Eastern's first football coach, spoke to the crowd.

"It was an easy decision to find this young man and ask him to be the first coach of the program," Manley said. "Thanks Ells."

Lee DeRemer, the quarterback of that first Golden Knight squad, also addressed the crowd, thanking Ells for taking "A bunch of rag-tag kids" and making them into something.

"We are here to honor you and Eastern York football as we celebrate 35 years," he said. "The journey needed a spark. The journey needed a vision. You had that spark and gave us vision ... We are better off knowing you."

Eastern athletic director Karl Oswald presented Ells with a coaching picture and a varsity letter and junior high coach Steve Kline gave Ells the game ball from the program's very first varsity win.

"No one deserves this more than you," Kline told Ells as he handed him the encased ball that until Friday had been in the school's trophy case.

It was easy to honor the man that starred at William Penn and went on to play at Southern Cal, the start of his many travels.

Ells returned home to help coach at Gettysburg College and became an integral part of the EYC football organization.

After coaching for several seasons at Eastern, Ells moved on to be the offensive coordinator at Central. He returned to Eastern late in his career to help the football team.

Ells Kissinger is quite a man, who has lived quite a life and fittingly on the night he was honored, the Knights played inspired football and earned a resounding victory over rival York Suburban.

More fittingly, Ells spent the first half of the game right where he belonged -- on the Eastern sideline.

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