

Shelbyville has had a football team since 1938. From 1938 to 1961 is often called the early years of the football team. During that time the Dragons had great coaches, struggled through the war, and learned how to play the game of football. The early years are not often remembered -- so let's travel back in time to take a look.



First Eleven-Man Football Team-1939

From 1938 to 1961 the Shelbyville Dragons had a total of six different coaches. Earl Biggers was the first coach and as Mr. S. W. Carter remembers it, "It was quite a funny site getting all the players together and teaching them to play."¹ Mr. Biggers had a hard time teaching the boys to line up and play their positions. In 1941, Doogie Carter took over the team for half a year -- World War II cut that season short. Shelbyville did not have a team from 1942 to 1945. Then in the 1945-'46 season, J. B. Taylor became the coach. He only coached for two years and in 1947 Clinton Crisp took over the team.² In 1953, Coach Crisp took the team to the regional game where they won. Mr. Crisp coached from 1947 to 1956. In the 1956-'57 season, Bill Denman took over and in his first year as coach he won district. Coach Denman coached until 1960. Then Jackie Cannon took over, and in his first year of coaching, he won bi-district. He is also the most successful coach that Shelbyville has ever had, he has a lifetime average of .694 winning average.³ In the early years of the football program the Dragons had many successful coaches.

Shelbyville High School had a football team four years before World War II started removing boys to go fight in the war. The six-man team started in 1938, and was coached by Earl Biggers.⁴ He had a hard time with the boys because they were just a bunch of country boys who had never been anywhere or done anything. They had never seen a real football game and they certainly did not know what to do. Coach Biggers overcame these obstacles and took the Dragons to a district championship. In the first season the Dragons played the Indians from the reservation in Livingston.⁵ The first time, November 4, they played here and the Dragons won 39-0. Their next meeting with the Indians was November 8, but it was at the reservation. The field was extraordinarily wet so both of the teams took off their shoes and played football, and the Dragons won 26-6. The Indians preferred playing basketball so after the game the Dragons stayed and played a good game of basketball. The next year he coached an eleven-man team that was undefeated. The team however would have lost to Tenaha 0-14, but they were unhappy about the game and asked for a rematch where they won 8-6.⁶ Coach Biggers continued to coach until 1941 when Doogie Carter took over the team halfway into the season. That season was cut short by World War II, they tried to play it out but about four games into the season not enough boys were left to play.⁷ During the time before the war the rules were very relaxed. For example, before the game a boy who had already graduated would come up to the school and want to play, and they would suit him up and let him play. Before the war the game was played more for fun than competition. After the boys came back the football program was as prosperous as ever. The Dragons started playing football again in 1945, and J. B. Taylor was their coach. He coached the 1945-'46 season and the 1946-'47 season, then he left and Clinton Crisp took over.⁸ He coached from 1947 to 1956, however in the 1953-'54 season he had a very special team.



This team is the most successful team that Shelbyville has ever had. During that year the Dragon won ten games, lost one game, and had one game tied up. What makes this team so special is that they went all of the way to regionals. Now back then, regionals was as far as a class B team could go.

Football Program

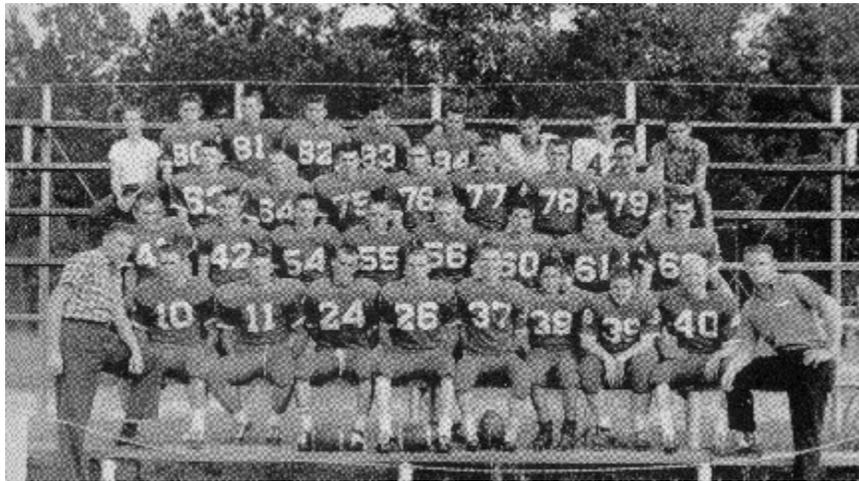
Shelbyville Dragons

CHAMPIONS OF DISTRICT 20-B

VS.

Sabine Cardinals

The Dragons, champions of district 20-B, played the Sabine Cardinals, the champions of district 19-B, for the title of bi-district champion.⁹ The game was played on Wednesday, November 25, 1953 at Martin Stadium in Carthage Texas. The Dragons next game was for the regional championship. This game was played against the Royse City Bulldogs on Friday, December 4, 1953.¹⁰ The Dragons won and then got in a fight after the game. Coach Crisp continued to coach until the 1956 he then left and Bill Denman took over. In his first year as a coach at Shelbyville his team won five games, lost five games, and tied one game. Despite the team's five loses they still won the district. Coach Denman's most successful year came in the 1958-'59 season when his team won nine games and only lost one game.¹¹ Coach Denman departed in 1960 and left the team in very good hands.



The new coach was Jackie Cannon and he is the most prevailing coach that Shelbyville has ever had. In his first year of coaching the Dragons he won 10 games, lost one game, and tied one game. The Dragons were the bi-district champions but went on to lose to Whiteoak 0-22 in the regional game.¹² The Dragons had many successful seasons after the war.

In the early years of the Shelbyville Dragon football team the team was very successful. The times before the war was for learning more about the game and the when the boys returned the game became more discipline because of stricter rules. In the early years the spirit of the game never left nor the spirit of winning. During that time the Dragons had many great players and many great coaches. The proud tradition of Dragon football still lives in the school today.