

Martin & Company On Duty

When Jamestown Red Raiders Entertain Orchard Park On Friday Night, Four-Man Chain Gang Will Be There As Always

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By Jim Riggs

When you talk about perfect attendance, Ken Martin would be the poster child.

Article Photos



From the left are Mark Swanson, Greg Anderson, Ken Martin and Bob Winterburn. Together, the men have 90 years of experience working the chains at Jamestown High School football games, including 50 by Martin alone.

P-J photo by

Mark L. Anderson

In 40 years of working as a tool-and-die maker, he missed only three days of work. He has retired from that job, but he has another avocation with even a better attendance record.

This is Martin's 50th year of patrolling the sidelines on the chain crew at Jamestown High School football home games, and in that time, he hasn't missed a game.

However, he had one incomplete game in that streak seven years ago.

"My 50th anniversary I had to go at halftime," he said. "Mamma wanted me to be on time, so I had to leave at halftime."

Many might call Martin a slacker, but I think he'll get a pass on missing the second half of one game.

So when the Red Raiders play host to Orchard Park on Friday night, Martin will be on the sidelines in

approximately his 225th straight game.

It all started in 1964.

"Dewey Westerburg asked me if I wanted to do it and I said, 'Yeah, I'd be glad to,'" Martin recalled about a former member of the JHS chain crew. "He (Westerberg) went to reffing and I just stayed on and I've been there 50 years."

He added, "When Dewey asked me, I always wanted to do it. I enjoy it, I have a good time. I've got a ringside seat and all I have to do is get out of the way when they come heading toward me."

Martin has been on the job at plenty of places. When he started, the Red Raiders played at College Stadium with stops at Washington Middle School, Falconer Central School, Southwestern Central School and the grass field at Jefferson Middle School before it became Strider Field.

"I'll tell you, I've seen a lot of good coaches on that side," Martin said about his position on the visitors' side of the field at every Jamestown home game. "They get hot every now and then like any coach does. They were good coaches."

He also worked under some very good Jamestown coaches on the other sideline, including his first, Terry Ransbury, who had an undefeated 8-0 team in Martin's first season of 1964. Martin enjoyed another perfect season of 7-0 in 1966 under Tony Nunes. And there were four under Wally Huckno - 9-0 in 1986 and 13-0 in 1994, 1995 and 2000 with all three resulting in state championships.

The move to Strider Field was a big plus for the chain crew because of the artificial turf. Martin described it as "Tremendous."

That's because it meant no longer trying to find the yard lines on a muddy or snowy field.

"I remember a Warren game, which we got beat 6-0, and it (the field at College Stadium) was covered with snow," Martin said.

Worse than trying to find the yard lines is standing out in rain and/or snow and cold when Martin could be in his warm house, but that doesn't concern him.

"Once you're there and you're dressed for it, it doesn't bother me," Martin said.

When asked about a memorable game, Martin pointed out the 1996 loss to Lake Shore, 20-14, thanks to a trick play called "water bucket."

"They had a play where the guys were over by us (near the sideline)," Martin said. "They weren't off the field, but nobody knew they were there. They threw a pass and there was no one there to defend against them."

That game ended the Red Raiders' 28-game winning streak after winning back-to-back state titles.

It was a victory over Orchard Park in 2012 that stands out for another veteran of the chain crew, Bob Winterburn. He joined in 1986 and he's just like Martin.

"I haven't missed any games," Winterburn said.

That includes a 42-41 victory over Orchard Park in 2012 that was memorable.

"That was a heck of a game, best I've ever seen," he said. "It was a terrific game that went back and forth."

Winterburn ended up on the chain crew much like Martin.

"I used to go to the games all the time and I was a friend of Kenny," he said. "He said they needed someone and I said I'd love to do it and I've been doing it ever since."

He noted the crew has also worked JHS scrimmages and even some Section 6 Class C and D Bowls held at Strider Field.

When asked how long he plans to continue, Winterburn said, "As long as I can. I enjoy it."

Two rookies on the crew are Greg Anderson and Mark Swanson who began about six years ago, so they have a while to go to catch up to either Martin's 50 years or Winterburn's 28 years.

So when Jamestown plays host to Orchard Park on Friday, the teams will benefit from a chain crew with 90 years of experience.

That's different from some Class AA teams I've visited and they were scrambling to put together a chain crew 30 minutes before kickoff. And often people come out of the stands to help out.

That doesn't happen for the Red Raiders.