



# Alle-Kiski Sports History: a Century of Sports in Western Pennsylvania

*George Guido*

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How did forty-seven , mostly gritty, blue-collar towns on the edges of four counties outside of Pittsburgh, produce such an unparalleled wealth of sports accomplishments? Sports journalist George Guido attempts to answer that question in his meticulous 300-plus-page compilation of stories, stats, and incredible photos that made the A-K Region world famous. How many people know that New Kensington sent the first black quarterback to the NFL, that Vandergrift once had a professional baseball team, or Bell Township, a female high school football coach. How about the Pittsburgh industrialist who designed only one golf course in his life the world-renowned Oakmont, or the fact that one Aspinwall High School football team went the entire season without giving up a point. Nothing ever came easy. There were obstacles to overcome, writes Guido, but overcome, they did. Take New Kensington's legendary football coach Don Fletcher who led the Red Raiders to such success in the late 40s that the Ken-Hi team was invited to Florida to play in Miami's Orange Bowl stadium. But when Ken-Hi was told it was welcome only if it left its two black players behind, the team voted to decline and the great Fletcher told the promoters what they could with their invitation. Then there was the Highlands High School basketball team that lost 41 games in a row during the early 1990s. Change came, however, when the district hired Saint Joseph High School coach Rich Falter and by 1995 the underdog Golden Rams shocked the WPIAL basketball world with a victory over the Blackhawks at Duquesne University. In everything you do be a giant. These are the words of the football wonder that was Willie Thrower, whose story Guido writes with reverence and eloquence. And there are others in the book like Burrell graduate John Brown, whose touchdown on a 33-yard pass from Dan Marino gave Pitt a victory in the Sugar Bowl in 1982, making it one of the most memorable plays in all of college football history. Guido, working in his tight, clean sportswriter's style, takes readers back to a hundred heart-stopping moments provided by thrilling teams like the 1989 championship Springdale Dynamos lead by Chuck DeVenzio. Watching DeVenzio coach was sometimes the highlight of a game for fans and the media, writes Guido. On and on they go victory after victory in every sport from Kittanning to Aspinwall to Leechburg, Freeport, Kiski Area, West Deer, West Leechburg and all the little towns in between. From the smallest high school to the most prestigious university and on to the pros, few regions of the country can rival the Alle-Kiski Valley for its contribution to sports. George Guido has written the definitive book on the determination, hard work, loyalty and sheer guts that defines a century of sports in the AK Valley.

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