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TOP STORY

Into the Hall: Carl Carbonara

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Apr 29, 2022



Ed Cope

Carl Carbonara (back row, middle) is shown as part of the Uniontown Area High School Academics, Arts & Athletics Hall of Fame inaugural class in 2013. Carbonara is part of this year's Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame Class of 2022.

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Carl Carbonara was a trailblazer in the sport of wrestling and made an impact in football as well for Uniontown High School.

Carbonara was the Red Raiders' first state wrestling champion in 1964 and was a member of Uniontown's 1962 WPIAL championship football team.

Carbonara is part of the 2022 class of inductees for the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame.

Inductees and representatives will be recognized at the Hall of Fame Golf Outing/Luncheon/Social starting at 9 a.m. on June 17 at Pleasant Valley Golf Club in Connellsville.

Carbonara, a 1964 Uniontown graduate, is the third wrestler to be inducted into the Fayette Hall of Fame.

“I think it’s a great thing. As time whistles by, I had a chance to vote for a lot of those people. Entering the Hall of Fame, it’s a sure pleasure to be nominated and inducted,” said Carbonara when he spoke of his induction on George Von Benko’s Sports Line Talk Show on WMBS Radio.

Von Benko, the Fayette Hall Of Fame executive chair/co-founder, called the period that included Carbonara’s time at Uniontown the “Golden age of athletics in Uniontown.”

Carbonara agreed.

“There’s no doubt about,” he said. “We had some great, great players that went on to play not only in college but professional. It’s hard to find an (similar) era that happened in I’d say in the whole state of Pennsylvania.

“Ron Sepic, Pope Gregory. It was a great time. I look back and it’s just hard to believe we were so talented, the whole team back then.”

Carbonara lauded his coaches, including Red Raiders football coach Bill Power.

“Coach Power was great, (Leon) Kaltenbach, (Joe) Yourchik as well,” Carbonara said.

Yourchik was also Uniontown's wrestling coach.

"Boy, you're not kidding," Carbonara said when it was pointed out the great conglomerate of coaches he participated under at Uniontown.

"They treated you like you were part of their family. It was a great time to be in sports."

Carbonara actually needed a bit of urging to join the Red Raiders' wrestling team.

"It was Coach Yourchik that pushed me into wrestling," Carbonara pointed out. "After football season I didn't really think I had the energy to go and do another sport. But, along with him and my dad, they gave me the push to stay with wrestling."

Carbonara had a combined record of 12-2 in 1962 and 1963 as he built up to his outstanding senior season.

"In my first two years I would alternate with the heavyweight guy," Carbonara explained. "In those days when you say heavyweight, they were heavy. They were big boys. I wrestled guys that weighed over 300 pounds. My sophomore year I weighed 165 pounds.

"Talk about a challenge. That was a real challenge.

"I remember I guy from Greene County, he was a stud that was tough to get by. He beat me my junior year but my senior year I got by him to get into the WPIAL."

Carbonara, competing in the 180-pound division as a senior, won the gold medal to become Uniontown's fourth WPIAL champion in wrestling. He was unscored upon his senior year until giving up one point in the WPIAL final.

"During the whole year I never even gave that a thought until they brought it to my attention," Carbonara said. "I was doing very well with my opponents with no points scored. Coach Yourchik would tell me we're on our way to states, just remember don't let him score and you'll beat him."

Carbonara reached the PIAA championship match where he faced a local hero from State College High School.

"The hometown boy Joe Yerg," Carbonara said. "If I recall I think the second period I pinned him. I'm listening to 15,000 people out there screaming and hollering."

That final victory gave Carbonara a record of 22-0 for the season.

Carbonara went on to wrestle in college at Hiram Scott and Maryland.

Carbonara also participated in track & field at Uniontown. He placed third in shot put in the qualifier held at Canon-McMillan to advance to the WPIAL championships.

In football, Carbonara played in the trenches.

“My sophomore year I played varsity, middle guard,” Carbonara said, noting linemen today are much bigger than the were in his time.

“I don’t know what these young kids eat today but whatever we ate we worked off,” Carbonara said with a chuckle. “I played with seniors who were a little bit bigger than me. But, overall, the whole team wasn’t really heavy guys.”

The 1962 football team went 10-0 in claiming the WPIAL Class AA championship.

Carbonara spoke about one key factor in the Red Raiders’ success when the team was honored during a football game at Bill Power Stadium 10 years ago. He opined their foundation was formed before the season started.

“Camp was like the Mojave desert up at Clearfield,” Carbonara recalled. “We wanted water, you know what kind of water we had to drink? It was egg water. That was the nastiest stuff. In the mornings we would put on cold uniforms from the dew, the dew was still hanging on them. It was like the pros.”

Nonetheless, Carbonara talked glowingly about Power.

“He was a good guy,” Carbonara said. “It is hard to find someone like him today, as far as I’m concerned. He promoted football, he ate football, he slept football, everyday was football. Plus he was a good teacher and he was fair.”

Carbonara, now 75, is also a member of the Uniontown Area High School Academics, Arts & Athletics Hall of Fame. He was part of its inaugural class.

“Still going strong,” Carbonara said when asked what he’s up to today.

“I live in West Virginia up on a mountaintop. I’m semi-retired. I still have an oil and gas company. I don’t have to report to any place at any particular time. I just enjoy my little piece of heaven up here. I live in the middle of 200 acres and I’ve got wild game running all over the place.”

(George Von Benko contributed to this story.)