

Tonight we bid farewell to a familiar face around Stillwater High's Pioneer football program for 60 seasons.

Hamilton Field, home to the Pioneers since 1948, is officially retired tonight. Next year, the Pioneers will move to a new multi-purpose stadium, which is currently under construction on the SHS campus.

Prior to the construction of Hamilton Field, the Pioneers played games at Washington High School's field and at Oklahoma State's Lewis Field. The new field was named for former Pioneer football coach Ralph Hamilton, who coached SHS from 1919-21 and again from 1927-1949.

During its tenure, Hamilton Field has seen numerous improvements, thanks to the cooperation of the school system and City of Stillwater. Notable improvements included additional seating, lighting, press box, entrance facility, sound system and irrigation system.

Besides Pioneer football, Hamilton Field has hosted Pioneer soccer, little league football, an Oklahoma State spring football game, an SHS graduation ceremony and several small school playoff games.

Hamilton Field has been home to a special football program.

It's a program that produced players and coaches who embraced the importance of being a Pioneer. Pioneer Pride is a real, visible emotion started many years ago, enhanced down through the years and a tradition that exists today.

Pioneer Pride is evidenced by the many former players and coaches who return to watch the current Pioneers play. Former players like Tom Dearing, Max Talley, Kenney Field, Mike Field, Dr. Gilbert Emde, Anthony Curtis, Kevin Fowler and Dr. Todd Green to name a few.

Also often in attendance are former head coaches Jim Harris and Dr. Bill Defee. Mr. Harris coached the Pioneers only state championship team in 1967 and Dr. Defee, who coached the Pioneers from 1983-2001, is the winningest coach in Pioneer football history with a record of 152-67.

Two former Pioneers have served as head coaches – Rod Warner in 1979 and current head coach Rusty Atkins, who is in his third season.

Some outstanding players have displayed their talents on this turf.

Former Pioneers who played professional football were Earl Lunsford, Sonny Keys, Chip Myers, Jackie Shipp and Artie Smith. Numerous former Pioneers have played on the collegiate level.

Current Colorado Rockies outfielder Matt Holliday and Chicago White Sox infielder Josh Fields each played quarterback for the Pioneers. Arizona State assistant baseball coach Josh Holliday also quarterbacked the Pioneers in the mid-1990s.

Some high-profile opponents also visited Hamilton Field. Former Miami Hurricane head coach Larry Coker brought his Claremore team here for a playoff in the mid-1970s. John Blake, the current associate head football coach at North Carolina, played here for Sand Springs, also in a playoff game in the late 1970s.

And, Oklahoma State head coach Mike Gundy and his brother Cale quarterbacked Midwest City in games here against the Pioneers.

There have been many outstanding, memorable games played on this turf. One of the most memorable came on Nov. 14, 1997 when the Pioneers trailed Tulsa Union by 22 points in the fourth quarter. Led by Matt Holliday, Stillwater rallied to stun the Redskins, 43-42, in a Class 6A state playoff game.

The Daily Oklahoman selected that game as the 71<sup>st</sup> greatest moment in Oklahoma sports history during its centennial celebration edition featuring the Top 100 moments in state history. It was one of 12 moments in state history involving high school athletics.

In the 1989 season, SHS successfully converted two onside kicks in the fourth quarter and, led by a back-up quarterback, knocked off Muskogee to continue in the state playoffs.

In 1988, the Pioneers trailed long-time rival Enid, 14-0, at intermission but turned in a dominating performance in the second half to topple the Plainsmen, 26-14.

Those games are typical of the Pioneers' effort and focus exhibited at Hamilton Field.

There have been additional emotional evenings here. In the early 1990s SHS honored the late Drew Williams. Williams, who graduated in 1991 and tragically died in 1992, was a sensational linebacker for SHS. He finished his career with 400-plus tackles.

On this particular evening, Williams No. 30 was retired in his memory.

The Pioneer Pride concept has benefited from the efforts of players who never played at the next level to make this program special.

It's those players who take great pride in being a Pioneer and great pride in being a part of this football program who have contributed significantly to the successful tradition`

A former successful head football coach once remarked that Stillwater had the most intelligent and most courageous players he had ever coached.

That intelligence, courage, determination and effort were visible at Hamilton Field most nights in the past 60 years.