

# When Pinevale Stood in the Gap

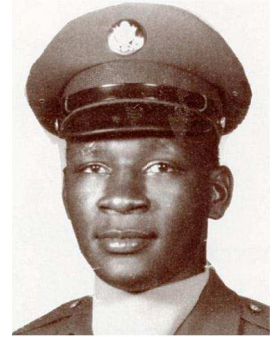
*By Donald Davis:* This September the 1963 Pinevale Tigers football team held a 50th year reunion recognizing their winning the Class A-4A State Championship. This particular game was played December 6, 1963 on Cleveland Field at the then Valdosta High campus. Other home games that year were played at Pinevale Stadium. The Pinevale Tigers defeated Lemon Street High Hornets of Marietta 27-13.

Regretfully, I was unaware that this recent reunion was taking place but do have personal memories of the game, I attended. I was 12 years old and a seventh grade student at Valdosta Junior High School. This was during the era of racially segregated schools. I felt compelled to attend and told my father I wanted to go to the Pinevale championship game and he took me.

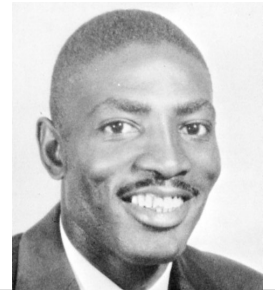
By circumstance, a few days ago, I learned of another VJHS seventh grade classmate that attended the game. Robert Bohler, of the Texas Christian University journalism faculty in Fort Worth called the museum on totally different topics. After discussing Robert's topics I mentioned the Pinevale reunion and he said that he had read about it in the online version of the *Valdosta Daily Times*.

Robert told that in his case his father was going and asked him if he wanted to go. He also remembered that 1963 was Bazemore's only losing season 2-7-1 after three perfect seasons and state championships in 1960, '61 and '62. Pinevale playing for the championship was tonic for all football fans after the Wildcats dismal season. Pinevale truly did "Stand in the Gap" and "Carry the Banner" for the community. The GHSA Historians website shows that the Pinevale Tigers went 8-0-2 during the regular season. The tie games were Johnson High of Savannah 0-0, and Center of Waycross 7-7. Regular season victories were over Liberty Co.(old) of McIntosh, Hutto of Bainbridge, Ralph Bunche of Woodbine, Monitor of Fitzgerald, Washington Street of Quitman, Douglass of Thomasville, Carver of Douglas and Wilson of Tifton. Playoff wins were over Center, 2-0; Douglass, 32-0; R.L. Norris of Thomson, 35-0; and then Lemon Street.

Pinevale predecessor Dasher High Golden Tigers won a 1953 state championship over Hunt High of Ft. Valley. Dasher played all home games at Cleveland Field.



**Above:** Horace Hampton was remembered, as well as others deceased, at the reunion. This photo is part of the Vietnam War exhibit at the museum. He died in service to his country, March 27, 1966. **Below:** Coach Edward Jones



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Vernon Walker, a painter, admits to being a devout Wildcat fan. Two of his sons played on championship teams. Jimmy Walker made all-state in 1953.

"I've got another boy, Dave, in the ninth grade," said Mr. Walker, "and I hope he can help Bazemore in the next few years. He's six feet but only weighs 135 pounds. I'm sure Bazemore will fatten him up."

Valdosta's city manager, Harold Farmer has only been here a few weeks. But he still hasn't gotten over the football-crazy town.

"Kissimmee, Fla., was never like this," said Farmer. "Folks tell me this is natural but it is unnatural for me. To me it means that people have a keen interest in their youth."

The towns keen interest in football didn't begin in the era of Coach Bazemore. The first coach of a Valdosta High team, Turner Rockwell, who now is editor of the *Valdosta Daily Times*, remembers the following his first team had back in 1913.

"We had only 15 boys on the squad," said Rockwell, "and we had to scrimmage one side of the line against the other. But for our games we had as many as 300 standing on the sidelines. We didn't have any stands for them."

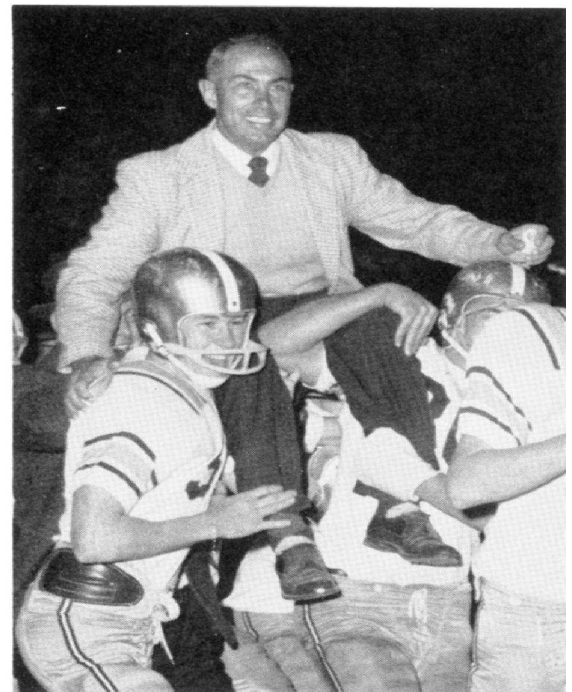
Ellis Clary, a former big league player who can claim to being the only Valdostan to make it big in a sport aside from football, looks at Bazemore's accomplishments in another vein.

"What kind of guy is he? I'll tell you. Anybody who take a team with a backfield that averages 154 pounds and a line that weighs only 177 and stay unbeaten is a great coach. But heck, he has proved through the years he's great. Nobody can argue that point.

"Sure there are people who do not praise him," explained Clary, "and you will find them in Thomasville and Moultrie but not in this town."

At a meeting of the school board earlier this year talk had gotten around to procuring a guidance councilor for the school. After much discussion one board member proved his point to all when he said: "Heaven help us if we ever lose Wright Bazemore."

The University of Valdosta would never be the same. *Atlanta Journal*



**Above:** Coach Bazemore carried off the field after the VHS Wildcats defeated R. E. Lee High School of Thomaston 34-13 in the 1961 AAA state championship game. Identified hoisting Bazemore is number 31 Rusty Griffin who played tight end. After a successful business career Rusty Griffin is now a member of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. Note the era of "gold" helmets.