

From Ephrata to WSU to Canada

Jim Forrest rode EHS success to Pullman, the Canadian Football League and now the Ephrata Athletic Hall of Fame

**BY RICHARD BYRD
of the Journal**

EPHRATA — Jim Forrest is a man who doesn't mince words. He doesn't often say things that he doesn't mean and rarely has to go back and edit a past statement. As the saying goes, he "says what he means and means what he says."

So when he describes his time as an athlete at Ephrata High School as a bridge to a better life that was chock full of opportunity, you can take that to the bank.

A 1969 EHS graduate and 2021 Ephrata Athletic Hall of Fame inductee, Forrest wants younger people — especially athletes — to recognize the great opportunities they have before them and to turn what they learn and experience into stepping stones for the rest of their lives.

Forrest was born in Oregon and first moved to the area around the second grade. At some point his family moved again, but they later returned when Forrest was in the sixth grade and ended-up planting themselves in Ephrata all the way through his graduation from EHS. A self-described "gifted athlete," Forrest says he got into playing sports as a kid because "it's what you did."

"I was very fortunate to be a gifted athlete. At 6 foot 5 inches tall I was faster than anybody else for the most part. I could run with anybody," he said.



Forrest was a big kid. At the young age of 15 he had already hit 6'5 and was an intimidating figure in whatever sport he played. He played baseball as a youngster and was even on the golf team his senior year at EHS, but his main sports have always been basketball and football.

Things were different back then though. Exercise science was in it's infancy and athletic facilities weren't anything compared to what they are today.

There were no basketball shot specialists or videos to watch on YouTube of how to run a perfect route. EHS got it's first multi-functional gym when Forrest was a junior, but before that there was no weight room or training avenues. Athletes were expected to either get into shape in the practices leading up to the season, or play their way into shape as the season progressed.

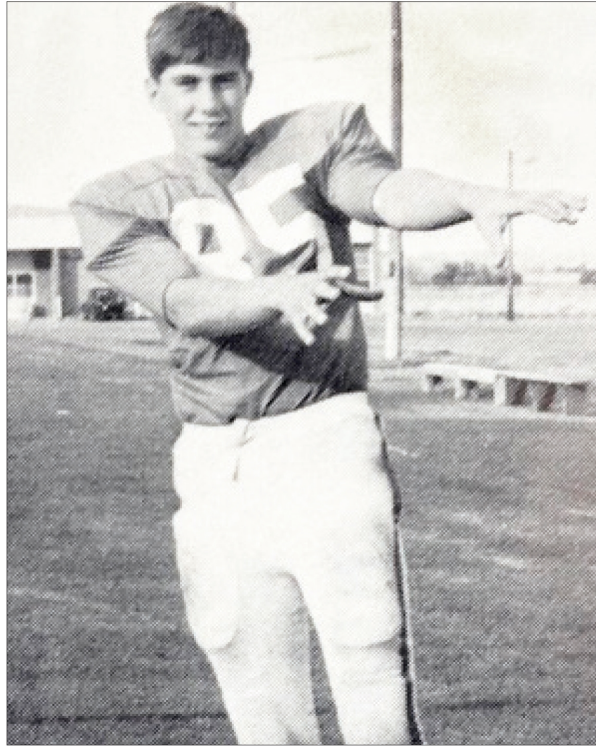
"My sophomore year I weighed 180 pounds. My junior year 200. And my senior year 210," he recalls.

On the basketball squad Forrest had a clear cut position at center.

The Tiger football team was a different story. He saw time at running back, wide receiver/tight end, defensive end, linebacker, punter, kicker, punt returner and kick returner.

"I did everything but sell hot dogs," he joked.

Forrest always loved football, but basketball was his first passion. He made the EHS varsity team as a sophomore and steadily



During his time on the football team at Ephrata High School Jim Forrest was a team captain his junior and senior years and rode his EHS success all the way to Washington State University and, eventually, the Canadian Football League. In addition to finding success on the gridiron, Forrest was a star player on the EHS basketball team. As a senior Forrest averaged over 20 points and 14 rebounds a game for the Tigers.

progressed all the way up through his senior year, averaging over 20 points and 14 rebounds a game to close out his EHS career on the hardwood.

As a team captain and star on the football and basketball teams, he gained significant interest from colleges.

Forrest denies the notion that an athlete needs to go to a big name high school to get interest from marquee college programs.

"They will find you if you are good enough," he said. "I had offers to the University of Washington, Oregon State University and Washington State University — three out of the eight teams in the Pac-8."

Being a country kid and having friends who went there, Forrest made his commitment to play for the Cougars in Pullman.

When he first arrived at WSU, freshman were not allowed to play football with upperclassmen. Freshmen had a team of their own and competed against freshmen teams from other programs.

"I am dating myself, but that was how it was," he explained. "That freshman year we went undefeated and averaged 34-36 points a game."

He was on the varsity team his next three years and got hurt twice his sophomore year and once as a senior and missed a few games, but overall he was a valued member of the team at tight end.

During his sophomore year the team went a measly 1-10 and a disappointing 4-7 the next year. The team rebounded in Forrest's senior year — 1972 — and went 7-4 and even appeared in the national top 20 rankings. Forrest's timeline of playing football at WSU was fairly linear and played out the way he intended. His basketball career at the school was a little more complicated.

After his freshman year of football he joined the basketball team as a walk-on. Legendary coach Marv Harshman was at the head of the program in those days, while Jud Heathcote — who went on to coach at the University of Montana and won a national championship at Michigan State University in 1979 — was the coach of the freshman team.

"I went out and played and the long story short was that my grades were down and I didn't get along with Jud Heathcote," he explained.

After only eight games Forrest was leading the team in rebounds and was second in scoring. Even with his success, Forrest eventually made the tough decision to quit the team. Harshman tried to get him to reconsider and Heathcote later even tried to convince him to play at Montana, but Forrest never went back on the hardwood.

"As sports go, there is a lot of respect there and what matters is how it is handled and how the

players take it. I wasn't one of those players that needed to be chewed-out all the time. All you had to do was tell me what to do and then tell me if it was good or bad. So that is why I ended up quitting. It just became too much," he said.

"I also thought that my future was in football at that point in time."

Forrest drew some interest from NFL scouts and even got a letter of interest from the Dallas Cowboys, but at that time there happened to be a plethora of tight end talent in the league and he couldn't find a niche on an NFL team as a result of, in his opinion, not "being fast enough." It was then that the Canadian Football League (CFL) came calling — the Saskatchewan Roughriders in particular.

"They offered some money down and paid my way up there and I went and played for the pre-season," he explained.

Forrest doesn't regret his CFL days. He still speaks fondly about the experience and talks glowingly about the people he met and his teammates. But fresh out of college and wanting to make a career for himself, the money just wasn't enticing enough to convince Forrest to continue playing in Canada.

"I will tell every kid playing sports that when it stops being fun, don't play," he said. "Walk away from it. Because you won't be happy. You just won't be."

In the proceeding decades Forrest came back to Ephrata for a bit, went down to San Francisco for a stint, worked up in Alaska on the pipeline, returned to Ephrata for a few years to serve the city as the recreation and recycling director and then finally dabbled in real estate.

From success on the field as an athlete, to success in his professional life and having two sons, Wyatt and Reid — who was an accomplished punter at WSU and played in three preseason games for the Buffalo Bills — with his wife Kaye, Forrest has seen and achieved a lot over the course of his life. His journey has led him in several directions, but in Forrest's estimation the success that he has enjoyed as an adult flows directly from the things he learned and experiences he had as an athlete at EHS and WSU.

"It means a lot (being inducted into the EHS Athletic Hall of Fame). If people ask me 'what did high school mean to you?' I tell them this, 'it was a stepping stone to a great life of opportunity because of sports,'" he said.

The 2021 EHS Athletic Hall of Fame induction ceremony is scheduled for Sept. 11 and will be held at St. Rose of Lima. Tickets can be purchased at Goin' Postal, 159 Basin St. SW, or by visiting www.ephratatigers.com.

