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SHS vs. BC football games make the book

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For Maurice "Mutt" Sheppard and other old timers who are young at heart, Thanksgiving is synonymous with the Savannah High School versus Benedictine Military School football games.

Back in the day - from 1920 to 1959 - the SHS Blue Jackets took the field on Thanksgiving Day to play the BC Cadets in front of thousands of fans. For many of those years, the much-anticipated game was a huge event at Grayson Stadium.

After eating turkey and dressing, throngs of Savannahians put on their finery and headed over to Daffin Park to cheer for the teams. Most of the girls in the crowd wore mum corsages decorated with flowing ribbon streamers in either maroon and white for BC or blue and white for SHS or as many people called it, high school.

Parades were held and a coffin-burning ceremony usually was staged on Broughton Street in front of masses of folks.

Mutt heard all about the games during his growing up years on East Henry Street and couldn't wait until he was old enough to put on a uniform.

"All I ever wanted to do when I grew up was play football for BC," recalled Mutt, who now lives in Midway. His dream came true in the 1950s when he became a tackle on the BC team.

And what was his most memorable moment? It was the time he made a tackle and knocked out his two front teeth. Because the BC squad was rather few in number, Coach Vic Mell asked the snaggletoothed teen if he wanted to return to the game.

Mutt graduated from BC in 1959, which was the last year the SHS vs. BC game was played in Grayson Stadium, he said. The next year the teams met on the field at Memorial Stadium.

Mutt furthered his education at the Georgia Institute of Technology and became a helluva engineer (as the Georgia

Tech song goes). But he never forgot about the stories of those Thanksgiving football games in Savannah.

As a result, Mutt decided to write a book.

"I've been thinking for a while that with everybody getting older, this (the Thanksgiving Day rivalry) needed to be saved," he explained.

After hours spent poring over microfilm at the public library and numerous visits to Savannah High and BC, Mutt has come up with a book that he has self-published on the games, players, coaches and pageantry.

Called "Savannah's Thanksgiving Day Football Classic," the book is chock-full of stories and photos of the game that was first played in 1903. The book is set to go to the printer this week and will be available by Christmas, Mutt said.

"This is not a book just about football," he said. "Mostly, this is a story about the people of Savannah and how they celebrated Thanksgiving during this golden era."

In addition to scores of pictures of teams and cheerleaders, the book also includes fascinating bits of trivia. For example: The teams didn't play at all between 1912 and 1917 because they couldn't agree on the rules, Mutt said.

The first game between the two schools was played at the Bolton Street Athletic Park in front of 800 spectators. The teams began playing on Thanksgiving in 1920.

The book will sell for \$19.95 and should be available at local bookstores.

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