

"My recollection of becoming a Panther": by Steve Hochhauser

As I recall it, I was minding my own business one day after school, and checking out the candy-store on Newkirk Avenue across from PS 217, I saw Marty Schub and Lennie Axelrod crossing Newkirk Avenue and I asked them where they were going. They said they were on the way to Ronnie's back yard, and asked me if I wanted come with them to throw around a football. Of course I agreed. When we got there Lennie threw a pass to me which I caught, and before I knew it I was being called "Don Hutson Hochhauser," and was asked to put up money to buy a Panther jersey.

I recall that on most afternoons during football season the Panthers assembled in Ronnie's back yard to practice, which consisted of Ronnie and Lennie knocking me over again and again. Many years later when I was playing High School football and was about 6 ft and weighed about 185 pounds, I used to wonder whether I was big enough or strong enough to tackle them.

I also remember walking to the Parade Grounds very early on Saturday mornings to wait on line for a permit that reserved a field we used for games against other teams. Where those teams came from, or how the games were arranged was never explained to me.

The Panthers also played other sports. Softball and stickball as well as basketball were played in the PS 217 school yard which had several basketball courts and two softball fields, both with very short right fields. Chinese handball was played in the yard on the side of 1212 Newkirk Avenue, where Lennie, Marty and I lived. I remember that Howie was my primary opponent.

I also have a vivid recollection of trying to hit curve balls pitched by Jerry Hanfling with a "spaldine," and that I sometimes was successful.

Basketball was not my cup of tea, to mix a metaphor, but I could hold my own in softball. Come to think of it that was about the same time that all of the Panthers started to hold their own, and when Steve Feinman tried to explain to me how babies were born I was convinced that he was just trying to make me laugh because I could not imagine that my parents would possibly do anything that disgusting.

My folks moved to Westchester after I finished the 8th grade, which is when all of you other than Teddy were already in High School. I did not resume contact with the Panthers until Lenny called me to say he had run out of money and needed a lawyer. I did what I could for him including getting him a first rate attorney who got him and Nelson acquitted in their Federal Stock Fraud case (I represented Nelson). The lawyer I got for Lennie insisted on a retainer which Lennie came up with - I later learned that he borrowed the money from Ronnie.

Many years later I was at the Hartsdale train station waiting to go into the City when Dave Shaiman came up to me and asked me if I knew him. His voice and face gave him away and I even remembered his name. He told me the Panthers were getting together in the City and suggested that my wife and I should join in the party. We have been delighted to join you ever since, and I hope the get-togethers continue so long as there are any Panthers left. It is a great tradition.

If any of you has a different version from mine, keep it to yourself - I'm sticking to my story!