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Kistels continue legacy

Family a big part of Bishop Verot's history

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When Carl J. Kistel sprinted from cover during a World War II firefight, he endangered not only his own life, but the athletic legacy he would leave at Bishop Verot High School.

Losing his legs from the knees down after being slammed by a German shell, Kistel recovered and became a pioneer of the Vikings football program.

Kistel's work allowed his four sons to play for the school in the 1960s and 70s. It continues this season with Jake Kistel, Carl's grandson. The junior will start at quarterback tonight when Bishop Verot plays host to East Lee County in a preseason game.

"It gives me a sense of pride that my dad played here and that my grandfather did a lot here," said Jake, who was 1 at the time of his grandfather's death at age 69 in 1993. "It gives me a sense of obligation."

A sense of duty cost 21-year-old Carl Kistel his legs, but saved dozens of American lives.

A private first class in Company A of the United States Army's 343rd Infantry Regiment, Kistel's outfit was caught in an artillery barrage. Cut off from the rest of the battalion that served under General George Patton, Kistel ran for a radio in the middle of a shell-swept street in Dossein, Germany on April 26, 1945.

After being wounded, Kistel crawled to cover and called for air support.

The U.S. Army awarded him a Distinguished Service Cross, a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

His wounds led Kistel to his wife, Maggie, a member of the nurse corps who treated him stateside. The couple moved to Fort Myers in the mid-1960s. Soon, Carl Kistel attached himself to Bishop Verot, a fledgling Catholic school.

"Basically, he wanted to give back to the community and really got involved with Verot just starting," said Dave Kistel, who was born 14 years to the day of his father's heroics. "He helped with raising money. He was a pioneer, if you will, of the early sports program."

Kistel's oldest sons, Dan and John, played on Bishop Verot's first football team alongside Mike Gill in 1966. Kistel's younger sons, Tim and Dave, played in the 70s.

"We had nothing," said Gill, now a wood shop teacher at the school. "We had no football field. We had no footballs. He wanted to see Bishop Verot football start a football program.

"He basically begged and borrowed football equipment. Everything the other schools had no use for ended up over here. It was a rag-tag, ragamuffin start."

While installing the team's practice field, players and coaches realized it had been infested with rattlesnakes. They enlisted Kistel to help eradicate them — thanks to his wooden prosthetic legs.

Dave Kistel, now 50, carried on his father's passion for football, first as a ballboy, then as a quarterback and now as a parent.

"I just loved going out to practice," said Dave Kistel, whose wife Mary teaches at the school. "I would put on helmets, and they would bobble on my head. I was involved at a very early age."

Dave Kistel emerged as the team's starting quarterback in 1974 under coach Fred Thierer. The team compiled a 10-0 record, the best in school history.

The Vikings were ineligible for postseason play because of moving from Class A to 2A during the middle of the season.

Dave Kistel said he never recaptured his sophomore season's magic as a junior or senior, suffering through injuries both years.

But Dave Kistel can follow his father's path by rooting for his son.

Jake Kistel started eight games at quarterback last season as a sophomore, completing 90 of 186 passes for 1,220 yards and nine touchdowns.

"Jake is not just a kid who's playing," Bishop Verot coach Phil Dorn said. "He's pretty good. He's got a great work ethic about him. He's developing into a good leader."

And when he leads the Vikings onto the field tonight he'll pass a sign at the entrance to Viking Stadium remembering Carl Kistel.

The sign ends with a quote from Saint Francis de Sales: "The measure of love is to love without measure."
