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## Winning life built on passion for sports

by **Sandy Wells**  
Staff writer

*CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- In valley sports circles, his name rings a very loud bell.*

*A coal miner's son from Rand, Keith Pritt was a gritty football player at DuPont and Glenville State College. At Glenville, he met a senior player named Frank Vincent. They went on to coach together at Charleston High School where their team won three straight state championships.*

*He also made a name for himself as a high school and college track coach. Later, he coached the Charleston Rockets with Perry Moss.*

*As county athletics director, he spearheaded the formation of the Mountain State Athletic Conference.*

*As principal at Roosevelt Junior High, he tackled lagging student reading skills with the same intensity he brought to coaching.*

*He tells anecdotes galore, all peppered with familiar names in West Virginia sports.*

*At 78, he attributes his fruitful life to an abiding love for athletics and the influence of his mother and some attentive teachers.*

"I'm from a large family. I have five brothers and two sisters. We grew up in Rand. Dad was a coal miner and finished at Libbey-Owens-Ford.

"My mother was the toughest woman I've ever known. She knew more football than I did. She wasn't afraid of any man walking. Her nickname was Dutch. I would come in from a football game busted up and complaining and she would say, 'Football is tough. If you can't take it, don't play it.'

"Now, if a parent spansks a child in a grocery store, you'd get arrested. My mother would be in the pen. She would take us to Knuckle City in a minute.

"Football, my mother and some outstanding teachers paved the way for me.

"My third-grade teacher instilled in me a desire to read. She would ask us who took vacations. I never went on a vacation. She said, 'You can go anywhere in the world by reading a good book.' That year, I read 48 books and got a certificate.

"I could have made A's in school, but if you were good in classes, you were not very popular. So I just did enough to get by. That's where my mother set the line. I could spell. We would get the Reader's Digest, and they had a thing to increase your vocabulary. My mother would sit me down and give me those words. They had a spelling bee at Thomas Jefferson Junior High. I'll never forget the word that cost me the championship -- Chautauqua.

"I played ball at DuPont Junior High. In fifth grade, I would go up to the field on Sundays when the older guys would play sandlot football. They would beat the daylights out of me, but I wouldn't quit.

"At DuPont High School, Bob Hardman said his fraternity at Glenville was having a dance. He asked me to go with him. He said it was a mock fraternity called the Holy Roller Court. All the athletes belonged. I later found out why. They got kicked off campus.

"That was my introduction to Glenville. The following week, I tried out for the football team. My mother thought that would be the greatest thing in the world, because it wasn't Times Square.

"They had a great teachers college. I majored in biology and science and health and physical education.

"In football camp, I met Frank Vincent from Pennsylvania, a senior. On one of the plays, I hit the quarterback a pretty good lick. I didn't know you weren't supposed to hit the quarterback. Frank kicked me. He said, 'You trying to be a college hot dog?' We mixed it up until they separated us. After practice, he said, 'Why don't you room with me?' So we were roommates for one year.

"Coach Douglas at DuPont helped me get a job teaching at DuPont Junior High with a guy named Tom Bossie. We had some good teams. Coach Leon McCoy at Charleston High decided to go to Florida. Frank asked if I was interested in going there with him.

"I hesitated because I thought I'd like to be head coach at DuPont. But they had just gotten a new head coach, and he was a good coach -- Corky Griffith.

"Destiny has a way of working things out. I went to Charleston High with Frank in '62 as assistant football coach and wrestling and track and field coach.

"We wanted to set some standards. We had gold helmets and we made them wax them with Johnson's car wax. If they didn't polish their shoes, we wouldn't let them dress for the game.

"We had 2,100 students, but our squads weren't large. We were like family, a brotherhood. We knew we had special guys. We would ask them to come into the classroom at noon when they wanted to walk the halls and flirt. They'd bring their lunch trays. We'd show films and go over game plans. We met every night but Thursday and played Fridays and Saturdays. Those guys bought into it.

"We ran a wing-T offense, and it worked for us. College coaches would come watch us practice. We won three championships in a row. In a five-year period, we won 58 games, lost two and tied three. One year, we won the state championship and lost the KVC because no one would play us.

"I was at CHS 14 years. We had an outstanding basketball and track and field team. It was a great era. I went to the Olympic trials in Eugene Ore., with a kid named Mike Tyson, a great athlete. He ran against the best in the world, but he pulled a hamstring muscle in the semi-finals.

"I became director of athletics for the county in 1974. When I was at CHS, the superintendent had called and said he'd had complaints because nobody wanted to play Stonewall or Charleston. He said he needed someone to head up athletic programs and physical education and health and safety.

"I met with the coaches and athletic directors. I told them we were going to look at developing a new conference where, if you were a Triple-A high school in the county, we were going to play each other. That was the start of the Mountain State Athletic Conference, now one of the most powerful conferences in the state.

"In 1993, they had an opening for principal at Roosevelt Junior High. I had a master's from WVU in secondary school administration and a master's from Marshall. I'd been in coaching and athletic administration. In 1976, I was athletic director of the year. So I applied.

"Dr. Jorea Marple, the superintendent, wanted Roosevelt to be more active academically. We looked at incoming seventh grade test scores, and the reading level was fourth or fifth grade. Reading is the key. In an era of computer and technology, you still have to be able to read.

"We initiated a program where we read an hour a day. That bell would ring in the morning, and for half an hour, they read. And again in the afternoon. We didn't care what they read as long as they read. They thought it was sissy to read.

"They kept a log of the books they read and had to tell about them. We put their pictures up in the cafeteria. And we had this assembly and would give them a little gift. We started second from the bottom academically. In three years, we were fourth or fifth.

"I wanted to go to physical therapy school. WVU and Marshall didn't have a physical therapy school, and I didn't have a car to go somewhere else. But when I look back, I just feel so blessed that I had an opportunity to coach at DuPont and Charleston.

"When I went to Charleston High, people said, 'Why do you want to go there? It's a blackboard jungle and kids are tough.' But that was the most respected student body I've ever been involved with. We had blacks, whites, Jewish kids, Indians. We didn't have racial problems. Our campus was Washington Street.

"But we turned out doctors and lawyers. I wouldn't trade that for anything, because you are dealing with humanity as a whole.

"Another exciting thing that happened to me was that I was able to coach with Perry Moss with the Charleston Rockets. I don't think Perry Moss lost a game. We played the Chicago Fire in the American Football championships at Laidley Field. We won, and there were 21,000 people there, standing room only.

"I closed my career as administrative assistant to Ed Hamrick, director of the Department of Natural Resources.

"I've met so many outstanding coaches. I met President Ford. And governors. And some of the greatest track athletes in the world. I loved my students. I've coached and taught thousands of kids. If I need anything now, they will be there for me.

"Gary Markham is like my son. At DuPont Junior High, he was a straight-A student and a good athlete. I had weights in my garage. He would come over and work out. I told him I would make a quarterback out of him.

"We ended up at Charleston High together. He played basketball and football.

"Gary fell off his roof about five years ago. He almost died. His wife asked if I would work with him. I'm certified as a fitness trainer through the International Sports Science Association. I work with Gary three days a week in concert with his neurologist. Now he goes out and plays golf.

"I'm fortunate, but I worked at it. When I played football, I played full speed. I wasn't big, but I did make the all-conference team. I was proud of that. My mom was, too.

"The only other thing I'd like to do before I die is teach anatomy and kinesiology."

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