Gridiron Glory

Club Football in the 1970s

In the fall Observer we asked readers to tell us about the above photo from our archives of a Hartford football team. Here’s what we learned.

From Martin Olesen ’66:
“There was, as I recall, a football club, in either ’64 or ’65 . . . do not see it listed in my ’66 Primus. The coach was Ralph Worth, retired varsity football coach of HPHS [Hartford Public High School]. As to who was the opposing team featured, not a clue.”

From Melissa Wooldridge Breton ’05 (daughter of Thomas H. Wooldridge ’71):
“’Big Poppie,’ also known as ‘Big Bad Tom,’ Woolridge reminisces about his football days at UofH as left defensive/right offensive tackle #74. The Hawks, lead by Coach Ralph Ward [sic], had a four-year record of 32-0-4.” [Editor’s note: We think that’s Wooldridge at far left in the photo.]

From Doug Dix, professor in ENHP health sciences:
“[Former Hartford] Professor Ted Maguder of the biology department was faculty advisor and coach to a club football team in the 1970s. [Last I knew] he was chair of science at a community college in Florida, although he may have retired by now.”

From Hall-of-Famer Tony Harrington ’77:
“I played in the fall of ’74, ’75, and ’76. I believe the coaches were first Murphy and Fitzsimmons, then only Murphy. I played running back and my last two years, defensive end. The field we played on was Al Marzook, but practice was on an open field on the east side of campus.”

From Jim Keener, associate athletics director at the University:
“Club football was very popular. In fact, there are six individuals in our Athletics Hall of Fame that played football here. Mark Greenberg, Tony Harrington, Joe Morley, Bill Thurston, Bob Guyon, and Bob Feld were all inducted between 2004 and 2009.”

From Mark Zamary ’86:
“I was on the club football team during the 1982-1983 season. I believe coach Cote was involved at that time, but I can’t remember the other coach’s name. In the picture it looks like we could have been scrimmaging the Central Connecticut team.” [Editor’s note: The fall 1983 season was the last for Hartford club football.]

David Weinberg ’74 had information and memorabilia from his club football days at Hartford:
“I believe this picture was taken before the 1970 season on campus. The H decal was replaced by ’71–’72. The Hawk uniform is before ’70. New jerseys were issued in ’71.

“I was a member of the University of Hartford 1972 League Championship team and a unanimous First Team offensive center in 1973.

“’I played in every game from 1970 to 1973 and received a gold watch, which I still have, from the University for playing four years. Tom Wooldridge was a member of the team and a big contributor to its success. Ralph Worth was the head coach when I arrived, and he retired from the position in 1972, the year the team beat Providence College 7-6 in Providence for the league championship.

“Club football was a national association of teams, divided into leagues around the country. In 1970 we had the 10th ranked defense in the country and were #12 in offense. The year the team won its only league championship, 1972, we were members of the Eastern Collegiate Club Football Conference (ECCFC). Each team member received a University of Hartford letter jacket for winning the title. That same year we played in the Schaffer Bowl against Marist College [Hawks lost 36-6].

“We were the University of Hartford football team. We were Hawks. We were as dedicated, practiced as long, and played as well as any Division III team of the day.”

Thanks to all those who wrote in. The prize of a University of Hartford mouse pad goes to Marty Olesen, who was the first to respond.

David Weinberg ’74 wears the letter jacket he and his teammates received for winning the ECCFC title in 1972. Today, he is a public school teacher in Leonia, N.J. After graduation, he coached high school football for 15 years, followed by several seasons as a color commentator for high school football on Cablevision and the MSG channels. He begins his 19th season as a girls’ softball coach in the spring.