



The Pride of Price Hill

Cincinnati's West Side and the Elder Mystique

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IN THE DAWN OF QUEEN CITY athletic time, what would become known all over Ohio as 'The Pit' was exactly that—a dusty cow pasture on Cincinnati's West Side adorned with a manhole on the 50-yard line. It was the only known playing field in Ohio where a manhole was the home field advantage, and its sewer-lid icon became a kind of trademark for the school's rough-and-ready working-class play.

FROM THAT INAUSPICIOUS beginning nearly eighty years ago was born one of the Midwest's most storied prep traditions: Elder High School athletics. In its steady procession of stellar teams and athletes, Elder became a West Side phenomena.

IT BEGAN WITH COACHES LIKE Babe Bartlett and the custom of player-priest-athletic directors such as Father Bertke, known for telling his charges, "Quit yappin or I'll ride herd on ya," and salty Father Rudy whose green socks became another part of Elder lore. There were the Thanksgiving Day shootouts

with archrival West High; Bob Hoernschemeyer, class of '43, in the *Guinness Book of Records* for once scoring 27 points in six minutes; Steve Grote, an All-Big Ten basketballer after whom Michigan named its Hustle Award; and an astounding list of All-Staters and All-Americans.

ALONG THE WAY, THIS ALL-BOYS parochial school, nestled in a residential corner of blue-collar Price Hill, acquired a following of loyalists found in no other school in Cincinnati, maybe in no other school anywhere.

A CURIOSITY TO OUTSIDERS, THE lifelong object of affection and fealty to insiders, this is the mystique that created back-to-back basketball state titles, a cross country dynasty, an unprecedented eleven baseball championships, and a football team with a national ranking. Its football field was named by *USA Today* as one of the best places in America to watch high school football, and its graduates have populated programs from Division I all the way to the professional ranks.

WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THIS transcendent athletic experience in Price Hill?

BILL KOCH, A LONGTIME Cincinnati sportswriter, brings his own unusual perspective to the answer, the premise for *The Pride of Price Hill*.

"FOR THE PAST THIRTY YEARS or so," he begins, "I have observed Elder with varying levels of fascination, loathing, and respect." Here is a LaSalle grad who grew up with his Elder cousins exalting their wins over LaSalle, and, in time, he acquired two brothers-in-law who attended Elder. In turn, he was presented with two nephews, both of whom were Elder team captains.

EQUAL PARTS CHAMPIONSHIP seasons, feats of athletic derring-do, improvisational moments, anecdotes, good talk, and purpose, *The Pride of Price Hill* is, finally, a story about an old-fashioned neighborhood—a neighborhood most of us wish we inhabited.

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