

Oil City coach Hud Wells must have been smarting after Warren's Lefty Check tossed five touchdown passes in a 33-6 rout of the Oilers in 1937.

The next season, Wells – erstwhile basketball mind with more than 300 victories – turned the tables on Check and the Dragons with a 6-0 decision at Mitchell Avenue Field.

I met Hud when I first started out at The Derrick, and if I had known then what I just learned, I would have asked him about those games. As it was he was gushing over Paul Mitcham and his play against (winless) Franklin that year.

But getting back to Oil City-Warren in 1937/38. It was one of three big turn-arounds – that I can think of – in Oil City football lore, the others being beatings of Sharon two years after the infamous 108-0 thumping in 1928 and the 30-7 defeat of Franklin in 1975 after the 62-0 shellacking the Knights handed the Oilers the year before.

But this piece is not about Wells or Oil City. It is about Check – given name Warren – and known to his friends as Lefty or “Warnie.”

Five touchdown passes in a game was pretty much unheard of in 1937, and it caught my eye a few days ago as I was looking over a few things. Actually, it might have been four TD passes. The Derrick had him for five, but another publication said four and I couldn't verify through the Warren paper because that issue is not on microfilm.

Five would be a personal record. Four would match a career best; he also had four as a sophomore against Kane in 1936 and as a senior against Jamestown, N.Y., in 1938. Either way, that's a lot for that era.

But when I saw that five, I thought: Who is this guy? Has anybody ever heard of him? In Warren even?

So, I started snooping around the Warren Times Mirror and other papers in northwestern Pennsylvania to find out more. I also put it on Twitter, but not that many people seemed interested. A few did, but not many,

Anyhow, as it turns out, Check, a left-hander, obviously, apparently wasn't big in stature, but big on talent. He was one of those guys who pass, run and kick.

And he had, and I am missing one game, but get this: 43 touchdown passes from 1936-38!!! That's a lot for that time.

That four-touchdown game against Jamestown in 1938? He also had an interception, at least 155 yards passing (scribes pretty much shunned individual stats in those days) and returned three punts for 16, 43 and 19 yards.

The Warren paper described it as the “most brilliant game of his career. Not only did he throw passes with deadly precision, but he ran back punts and twisted through the opposing line for many good gains.” (See, they were more interested in description, rather than getting to the point with numbers.)

Other sportswriters of the day were more than impressed, including whoever covered that five-TD performance for The Derrick.

Not only was that scribe wowed by Check, but by the offense of coach Jake Leidig, a Warren legend.

“The winners’ offense, one of the fastest moving ever seen, featured double and triple laterals, which dazzled the Oilers and thrilled the crowd (at Warren),” the man from The Derrick wrote.

(It’s kind of ironic, but fast-forward to the 1960s when Warren semi-ruled under coach Toby Shea. The Dragons’ offense was like Oil City’s today, I-formation with the tailback doing most of the work. Warren’s big pass play then was a little look-in to the tight end. Hardly thrilling.)

Check – and I’m assuming he did all the passing – completed 15 of 25 for 195 yards, three of the TDs going to Joe Bonavita (now that’s a Warren name) against Oil City in the 1937 game. The Oilers also got into the act, what with 49 passes attempted in the contest.

A week later, it was more the same with Franklin. There were 62 passes “flung” in that game at Miller-Sibley, with Check going 12 for 24 for 197 and three more TDs. The Nursery was 11 of 38 for 138 yards, putting the ball up 21 times alone in the fourth quarter.

And the ball was up for grabs; each team picked off three passes.

Earlier in the season in a 36-7 rout of Titusville, the Herald’s writer was just as moved by Check/Warren’s offense. “Uncorking a razzle-dazzle attack which made them look like the proverbial million dollars, the Warren bla, bla, bla...” The Dragons (Check) were 10 of 16 for 121 yards that game.

Warren was a good, but not a great team during Check’s time, but the Dragons did post two “signature” victories against Meadville in 1937 and 1938. The Bulldogs had big plans spoiled by Warren, 14-0, in 1937 and then 13-0 in 1938 when Check tossed two more TD passes.

Meadville and Warren were not big rivals back then; in fact, Warren was a member of District 9. But the back-to-back victories might have gotten a rivalry rolling. The Check-engineered upset in 1938 spoiled Meadville’s chance of an unbeaten season and the mythical District 10 title.

Check would go on to play football at Alfred University. Then, as so many pre-World War II stars before him – would enter the Forest of the Forgotten.

Meanwhile, here's a photo of the 1937 Oilers. No. 51 in the front row is Mitcham, who scored three touchdowns against the Nursery, two on runs of 62, 11 and 68 yards – all around right end.

Mitcham scored 10 touchdowns that season, others on runs of 42, 62 and 64 yards when the Oiler backfield outweighed the Oiler line, 158.5-157.5. (Wells was a math teacher and he probably kept careful calculations.) Mitcham also averaged 37 yards on nine punts.