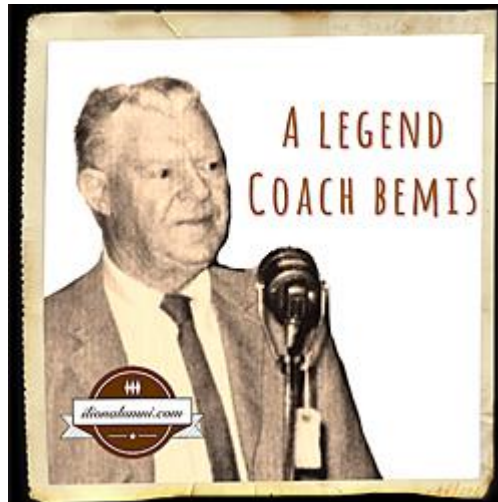


IHS Coach Ralph 'Joe' Bemis

October 2018

By Aileen Carney Sweeney

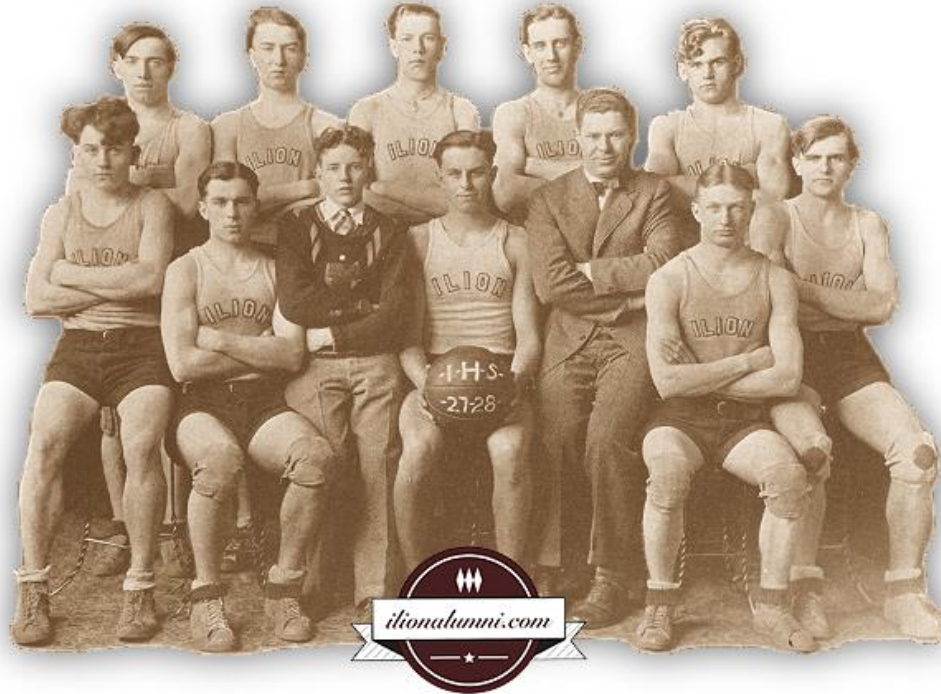


The Man Behind the Legend

The Utica Observer published an article, in March 1978 that featured the biography of Joe Bemis and why he was known as a local living legend. The article title was "A Generation of Observations Belong to Former Ilion Coach" by Steve Cimino. Below are quotes from that article. - [March 1978 - The Utica Observer](#) - Utica NY Observer 1978 - 2730.pdf

"Joe came to the Mohawk Valley by way of Ithaca College where he was graduated in the spring of 1923. That summer, he received a letter from the late Charlie Murnane, then a Herkimer resident, about a physical education opening at Mohawk Central. He took the job and remained there before moving to Ilion two years later."

"The pay at Mohawk was \$1,500 a year 'and you worked from 8 am to 7-7.50' In 1925 when Ilion offered him \$2,000 annually he accepted. 'Then I worked til 9 or 10.'"



The 1927-1928 Basketball Team

"Like so many contemporaries of his era, Joe became a member a vanishing breed — the man who coached all the sports and taught all the phys ed classes."

"Football was his game and he thrived on it. Ilion, a Class B school, played eight or nine games a year including playoff games at Murnane Field during the 20's" and 30s and Joe delighted in the competition."

"The crowning achievement in his Ilion gridship was three straight championships over Class A schools."

<i>Ilion</i>	<i>Opponents</i>	
31	Johnstown	0
12	Sherrill	6
19	Dolgeville	0
6	Endicott	0
19	Little Falls	0
14	New Hartford	0
19	Sherburne	0
25	Herkimer	12
6	Rome	0
<hr/> 151		<hr/> 18

LEAGUE STANDINGS		
	<i>Won</i>	<i>Lost</i>
Ilion	4	0
Sherrill	3	1
Little Falls	2	2
New Hartford	1	3
Dolgeville	0	4

The 1927 team's scores from the 1928 Yearbook

"We beat Oswego 6-0 in 1926; RFA 6-0 in 1927 and Fulton 8-6 in 1928 to gain permanent possession of the Central New York trophy"

"When we didn't win Herkimer and Morgan Elmer did. We controlled the league."

"During that period, his Ilion football teams were perennial powers ranking among the state's best. His games against arch rival Herkimer are legend and remain the topics of conversation every time the schools meet."

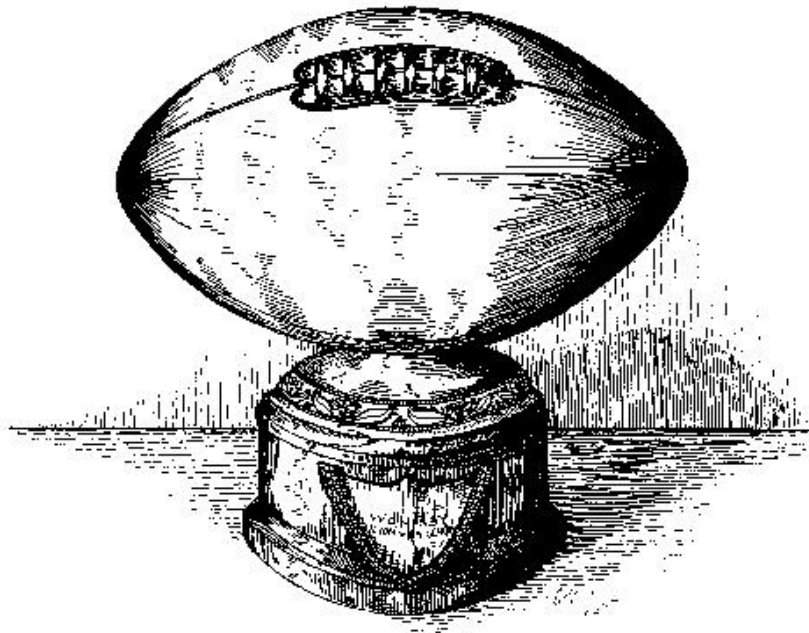
"The proximity of schools in the valley made for an intense rivalry. Herkimer was always the final game of the regular campaign and Bemis and his Golden Bombers had the entire season to prepare for the Magicians."

"People came from all over for that game. There was a lot of emphasis on football. Maybe too much."

"God, it was great. A good life."

The Michigan Trophy

The Michigan trophy was awarded yearly by the University of Michigan Alumni Club of Utica. It was awarded on the basis of votes which were cast by each school in Herkimer, Oneida, Madison, Jefferson and Chenango counties and by the Utica and Rome daily papers. A December 7, 1925 article in The Evening Telegram reported that the school which could win the trophy in three consecutive years would retain permanent possession of the trophy.

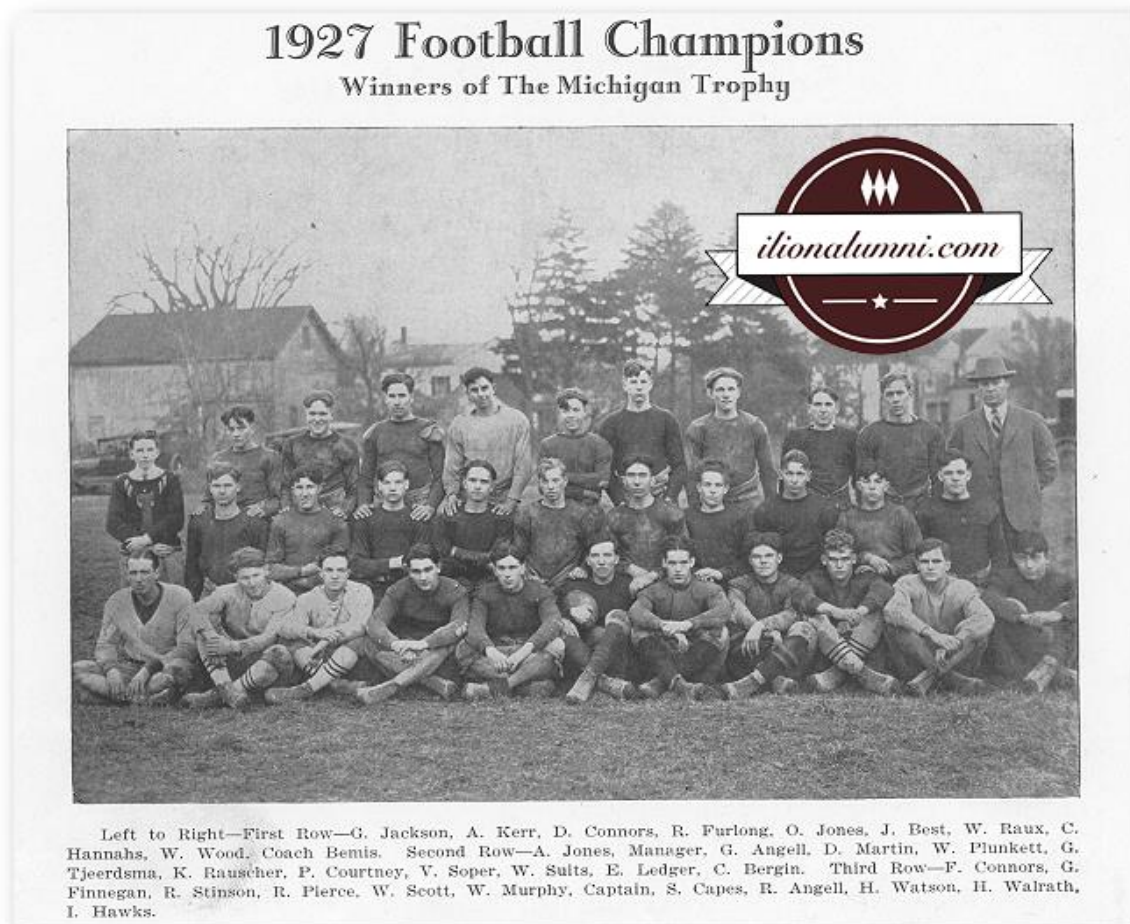


Dedication

To Coach Bemis and the championship football team of 1927, in recognition and appreciation of their splendid achievements as winners of the Michigan Trophy for the honor of Ilion High School, we, the Senior class of '28, respectfully dedicate this annual.



In 1925, Herkimer had been awarded the trophy for two consecutive years. That streak was ended. The Michigan Trophy sat in the Trophy Case of Ilion High School.



The Early Years

The nickname 'Joe' was given Ralph Bemis by a friend and is not part of his birth name. Ralph W. Bemis was born on August 31, 1899. The Ilion Sentinel published an article, on December 26, 1935, that featured the biography of Ralph 'Joe' Bemis. The article provided more details on his background. The title was "Ilion's Coach is Alert to the Newest in Physical Education". Below are quotes and information from that article. - [December 26, 1935 - Ilion Sentinel](#) - Ilion Sentinel - 411.pdf

He received his early education at Framingham, Mass., where he attended the high school. In his senior year of high school, in the midst of World War I, he quit school to join 33rd Harbor Coast Artillery at old Boston Harbor. He became a member of the band playing the trombone. At the conclusion of the war, he returned to Framingham and completed his high school education. He went to Fort Warren, transferred to Fort Storey, then to Camp Abraham Fustus where he was ready to ship overseas. "The Armistice was signed while I was at Camp Abraham Eustus and I was sent to Fort Devins for discharge."

Coach Bemis entered Al Sharper School of Education, now known as Ithaca College, after he graduated from high school. At Ithaca College, he was a star end on the football team. He was also rated as one of the best pitchers that was ever trained by the Ithaca baseball coach. He was a left-hander twirler and was a constant threat to opposing college teams. During the summer months, he played summer baseball throughout the New England states. He was offered a contract to play professional baseball in the old New England League.

"Upon graduation from college, Bemis received his first contract for coaching duty when he came to Mohawk High School in 1923. He remained there two years and developed one championship football team and one championship baseball club. While at Mohawk, he developed such basketball and football players as Don Finch and Fran Ahern, who later entered Centenary College, Shreveport, LA. where they won further fame."

"In 1924, Coach Bemis took over the coaching reins of Ilion High School, which he made famous throughout the state for its fine in athletic teams. After experimenting with the various material with which he was confronted during his first two years here, he blossomed out with a first class football team in 1926, and won his section of the high school football league. In the play-offs with the winner of the other section, which was Herkimer High School, he was defeated for the championship of Central New York. Bill Fenner, who has charge of the coaching duties at Mohawk now was the thorn in Ilion's side that year."

"The next three years were glorious years for Coach Bemis, as far as football was concerned. In 1927, his team ran rough shod over all opponents, defeating Herkimer and then in the play-offs defeated Rome Free Academy

to the tune of 6 to 0 to win the championship of Central New York. They repeated again in 1928 and 1929 and maintained their championship rating for Central NY. In 1928, they were forced to play a 6-8 tie with Oswego High and in 1929 they defeated Fulton in a hard fought game, the final score 8-6."

R.F.A.

Central New York
Scholastic Football
Championship Game

All Rome Wishes You Victory Saturday In
Your Championship Football Game With

Rome Daily Sentinel

ILION

Rome F. A. vs. Ilion H. S.
Saturday, November 19
U. F. A. Athletic Field

ROME-ILION FOOTBALL SECTION
ROME, N. Y., THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 17, 1927.
ROME-ILION FOOTBALL SECTION

End Positions on R.F.A Eleven Still in Doubt With Game 2 Days Away

'BRING ON ROME' IS CRY OF ILION FOOTBALL ELEVEN

Valley Team Anxious to Keep "Iron Six" Immaculate

FOES EVENLY MATCHED IS BELIEF OF COACH

Cold and Brown's Speedy Backfield Hope Of Its Followers

By Leo B. Becker, Sports Editor
The University Post

Ilion, Nov. 17, (Special to the Sentinel)—From end of the night of the cold and brown, football team of Ilion High School, to the cry of "Bring on Rome," the Ilion football eleven is ready to meet the Rome team at the U. F. A. Athletic Field, Saturday, November 19.

The Ilion team, coached by Coach Brown, is made up of the following players: Captain Greene, center; C. Cooke, left half back; R. Cooke, right half back; D. Greene, full back; and the line consisting of five players.

Five Sturdy Barriers to Ilion High's Line Offensive



C. Cooke D. Greene R. Cooke

Keating Concentrating on Work Of Wingmen in Anticipation of Sweeping Flank Attack Saturday

Three Regulars Suffer Minor Bruises in Practice Yesterday; Captain Greene Expected to Play Part of Time.

BY MARTIN R. MARSHALL

Ilion's line and backfield are expected to meet the Rome team at the U. F. A. Athletic Field, Saturday, November 19. The Ilion team is made up of the following players: Captain Greene, center; C. Cooke, left half back; R. Cooke, right half back; D. Greene, full back; and the line consisting of five players.

"In other sports competition Bemis again came out in front when he developed nine championship baseball teams in his eleven years as mentor. In basketball, his teams were just fair, with 1929 being his best year. His team finished in third place in the Central New York High School Basketball League."

"During his regime at Ilion, he developed many fine athletes who migrated to colleges and made good. His most successful student was Rem Furlong, who upon graduating from high school, entered St. Lawrence University where he played three years of baseball and football. He is now principal of Coeymans High School. Frank Connors, tackle and Bill Murphy, end, both entered Notre Dame, with Connors making the varsity under the late Knute Rockne, while Bill Murphy played some football but was forced from active competition due to injuries. Murphy redeemed himself in the spring when he made the frosh baseball team. Many of his understudies entered Cortland Normal, where all of them made good. George Finnegan, Bob Pierce, Bob Stinson and Irv. Hawks, played football on the varsity while Sam Jones made a name for

himself, being first string catcher on the baseball team for three years. William Scott and Roy Whiter, both football stars, also entered St. Lawrence University, where they were, varsity mainstays. Roy Whiter is now assistant football coach at Coeymans High School and George Finnegan has landed a position at Constableville High School."

"The large measure of success which he has achieved not made this popular Iliion coach rest on his laurels. He has kept pace with the latest developments in coaching with summer courses at the University of Illinois, Boston University, Northeastern University and three summers at NYU. "

"Coach Bemis has been in Iliion eleven years and in that time he has proven his ability and made a place for himself and to student body and townspeople he is an 'all right guy'."

The Golden Bombers

What's in a Name? You Should Never Have Asked

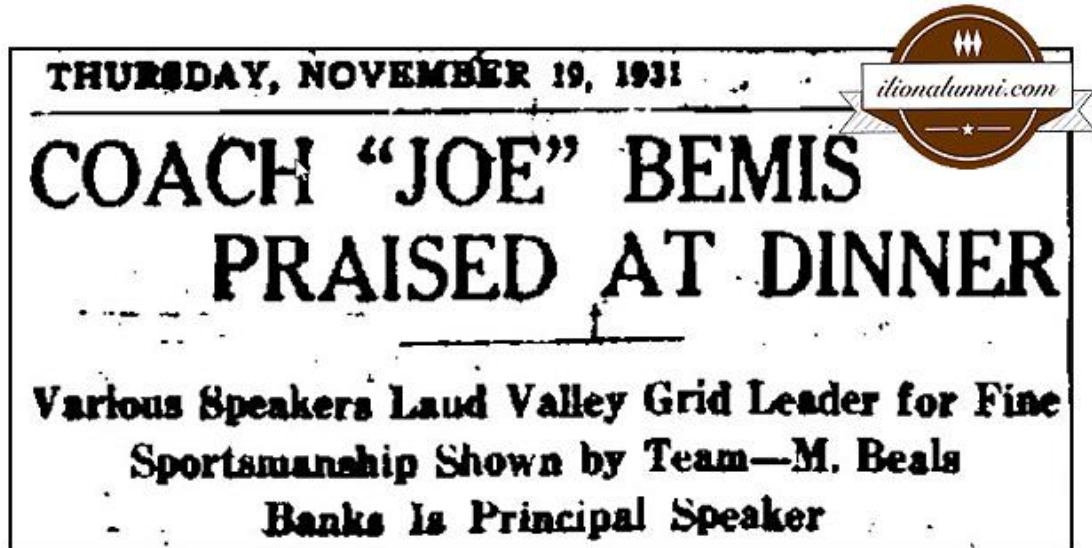
Joe Bemis provided this bit of Iliion history to Iliion's Principal in 1977 and it was reported in the Utica Observer Dispatch. - [October 27, 1977 - The Utica Observer](#) - The Utica Observer - 4790.pdf

"Iliion's Golden Bombers supposedly adopted their nickname due to an Observer Dispatch reporter who covered them when Iliion was a the champion of the entire central New York area around 1925. 'One of the sports reporters said in a story that Iliion had 'bombed' its opponents during the season.' says Iliion principal Henry J Bartosik."

"It got to the point where everyone would say before a game. 'My gosh', we will bomb them.' and the name came into common use. The color "Golden" was added because our school colors are gold and brown" Bartosik said. **Ralph Bemis** who was a coach back then is responsible for the information."

1930s - What A Difference a Decade Makes

Dinner in Honor of Coach Bemis - 1931



In 1931, the village came together to hold a dinner in honor of Coach Bemis and his football team. The event was held at the Annunciation Hall. The 1931 team was not as victorious as previous years but the testimonial dinner for the team demonstrated the fans were still supportive. Coach Ralph Joe Bemis was given a great ovation when he rose to speak. He said the dinner showed a splendid spirit and showed that the fans are with the team, even if the season was not successful.

Beals Banks, a former Ilionite and one-time SU quarterback was the guest speaker. Beals Banks was in charge of the new Owen D. Young dormitory at St. Lawrence University and was formerly coach of Ohio State University, University of Tennessee and Center College. "He complimented the team, for after being defeated in the one sided game with Herkimer to come right back and win its next game. Furlong and Scott who are on the St. Lawrence team, he stated reflected great credit on Coach Bemis. He referred to amateur football as the greatest sport attraction in the country and complimented the semi-pro team, the Best Garage, for its prowess, because of the former high school players on it. He further stated that if football is worth anything to parents, they should be proud of what it does to develop manhood as it teaches cooperation, team play, self-control, poise, chivalry and sportsmanship."


"The closing speaker was Superintendent of Schools Earl P. Watkin, who thanked the committee in charge of the affair. He said that the splendid attendance showed that Ilionites were backing the school in backing the team and not backing the team out of sentiment but in the sense of educational training which these boys get outside on the football field. In Bemis' job, he stated that Coach Bemis' job was not to develop a winning football team but to develop men." - [November 19, 1931 - The Utica Daily Press](#) - Utica NY Daily Press 1931 - 5503.pdf - [November 10, 1931 - The Utica Daily Press](#) - Utica NY Daily Press 1931 - 4188.pdf



1935 Team - Village Wall of Fame 2000

The village of Ilion's 'Wall of Fame' induction ceremony and plaque unveiling, honoring the Ilion High School Varsity Football team of 1935, was held November 24, 2000 in the Ilion Municipal Building Auditorium. The 1935 Golden Bombers finished the season with a 9-0 record and outscored opponents 202-20. Team members included: Arthur Barnum, Kenneth Bleau, James Bowers, Sam Bubb, Frank Campbell, Jack Caswell, Richard Daily, James Foreman, Ted Leonard, Robert Long, John Mackin, Joseph Manion, John Morris and Konstantine 'Gus' Panarites. The team was coached by Ralph 'Joe' Bemis.

1935 - The Herkimer - Ilion Game



Ilion, N. Y. Thursday November 7, 1935

Probable Starting Line-Ups For Herkimer--Ilion Game

HERKIMER		ILION
Babrowicz	L. E.	Barnum
Santillo	L. T.	Mackin
Zeleski	L. G.	Foreman
Reese	C.	Campbell
Vielhauer	R. G.	Bubb
D'Ambrosio	R. T.	Bowers
Beauchamp	R. E.	Bleau
Collis	Q. B.	Morris
Welton	L. H. B.	Long
Paestella	R. H. B.	Caswell
Piacente	F. B.	Manion

The Ilion-Herkimer game was the big game of the season in 1935. At that time, Herkimer in the previous fourteen years of the rivalry, had won 10 games, lost three and tied two. Herkimer was coached by Elmer Morgan.

"Morgan's teams won in 1920, 1922, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1933, and 1934. Coach Bemis was the first coach to tack a defeat upon Herkimer in seven years when his teams won three straight in 1927, 1928 and 1929. There have been two tie games played over which was 14 to 14 and the other the period of 14 years;

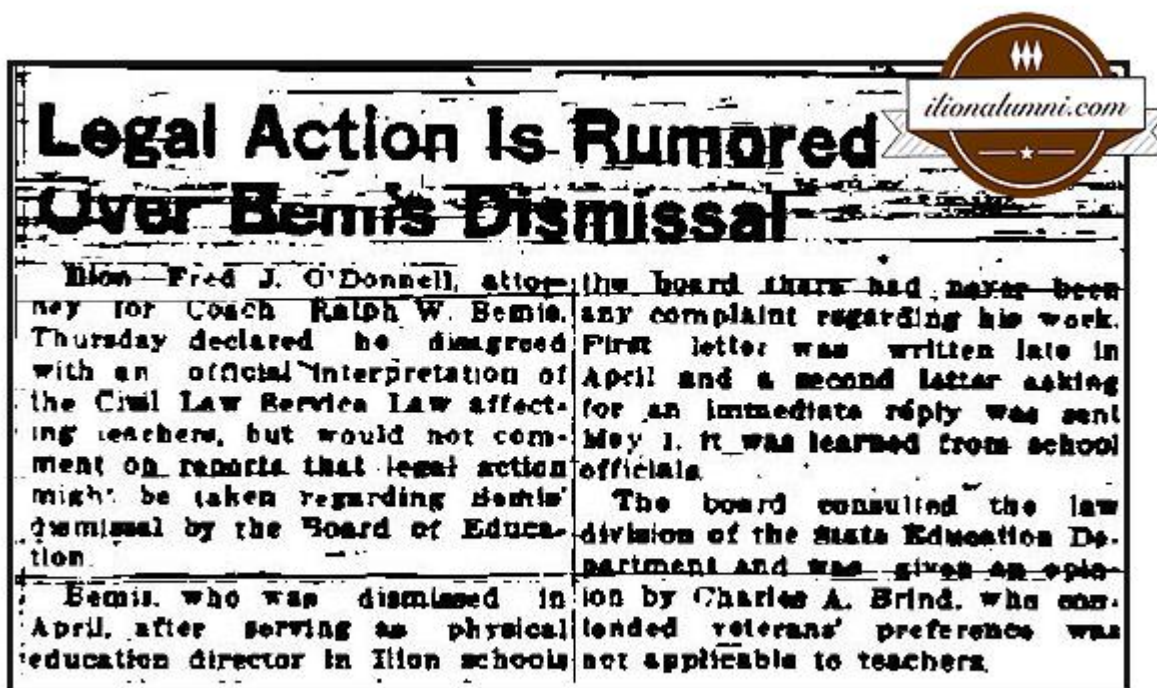
one in 1921 in 1923 which was 0 to 0. Morgan's teams have scored a total of 257 points to Ilion's 71 over this period." Read this Ilion Sentinel newspaper article, titled "Ilion Primed To Break Herkimer Jinx - Annual Game At Russell Park", for more details about the team members and the history of the rivalry. - [November 7, 1935 - The Ilion Sentinel](#) - Illion NY Sentinel 1935-1937 - 0346.pdf

The Bombers defeated Herkimer at the November, Saturday afternoon game held at Russell Park. The Ilion Golden Bombers won 12-0. The game drew 3,300 fans to the game.

"Pre-game ceremonies kept the fans in good humor until the starting whistle. The Ilion cheerleaders somehow got Herkimer's goat and led the synthetic animal in front of the Herkimer stands but the goat appeared not to know his master's voice."

"Both bands put on a snappy drill and offered some nice music. Arline Adams and Agatha Hoeschle made attractive drum majors for Ilion and led the 45 band members to intricate letter formations. The band contingent was under the direct of Prf. F. F. Swift and Herb Barnum in a gold and brown clown suit helped the standees forget their barking dogs. The contest between the cheering sections ended in a tie. Honors to both for fine rooting and good sportsmanship." - See full game results here - [November 14, 1935 - The Ilion Sentinel](#) - Illion NY Sentinel 1935-1937 - 0354.pdf

April 1939 - Bemis Dismissed by Board of Education



In April 1939, the Ilion Board of Education dismissed Coach Bemis who had served as physical education director in the Ilion schools for more than 13 years. At the time of his dismissal, Coach Bemis believed the Board had not provided him with reasons for his firing. In a letter to the Board of Education, sent in late April, he stated that there had never been any complaint regarding his work. Another letter was sent on May 1 asking for an immediate reply from the Board of Education. Coach Bemis hired Fred J. O'Donnell, as his attorney, in the matter. Bemis and his attorney contended that because he was an honorably discharged World War veteran, he could not be removed from his position except for incompetency or misconduct. Bemis filed legal action with the Supreme Court demanding reinstatement as physical education director. - ["Legal Action Is Rumored Over Bemis Dismissal" - June 7, 1939 - Utica Daily Press](#) - Utica NY Daily Press 1939 - 1793.pdf



Left to Right: William Momberger, Dr. Robert A. Luke, Mrs. Everett V. Mack, Dennis McLaughlin (Board President), Superintendent Earl P. Watkin, Grover Radley

June 1939 - Bemis Continues Fight for Job

In June 1939, Fred J. O'Donnell attorney for Ralph W. Bemis announced a new show cause order would be served on Ilion Board of Education demanding the trustees give reasons why Bemis should not be continued as physical education director and coach.

"Bemis term expires this year and he was recently notified by the board he would not be retained. After the notice was served, Bemis through his attorney, served the board with a show cause order which became ineffective because of a technicality. The court ruled the board had not been given the necessary 30 days in which to reply."

"Board members assert Bemis was given an opportunity to resign before they gave him the notice. One of the causes revealed was the athletic program was not in line with state requirements.

"Bemis is basing his fight for reinstatement on the fact that he is an honorably discharged war veteran and cannot be discharged without a hearing except for incompetency or misconduct. Board of Education

members feel Bemis was on a probationary appointment and because of this could be discharged at any time during the temporary appointment." - [June 20, 1939 - Utica Observer](#) - Utica NY Observer 1939 - 4215.pdf

August 1939 - Arthur Coons Replaced Coach Bemis



The Board of Education, on Tuesday August 8, 1939, appointed Arthur E. Coons, 24, a graduate of Springfield College, Springfield, Mass., to replace Ralph Bemis as physical education director of Ilion Schools. The Board announced that Coons would be supervisor and teacher of physical education and have charge of the sports program, including football. Bemis was still seeking reinstatement and his case was argued on Monday August 7, 1939, at a special session of Supreme Court at Syracuse. Fred J. O'Donnell, attorney for Bemis, said that the motion was argued before Judge Cregg. Chester Winslow, attorney for the board, was given a week in which to file additional briefs for more information in the case. As explained by one Board of Education member, "Bemis was dismissed in April and so far as this board is concerned he hasn't been here since." - [August 1939 - Utica Daily Press](#) - Utica NY Daily Press 1939 - 3573.pdf

August 1939 - Ralph W. Bemis Reinstated - Salary Cut

Supreme Court Judge Frank Cregg, Syracuse, upheld Bemis' motion that contested his dismissal on the grounds that he was an honorably discharged veteran and was entitled to a hearing. As a result, the Board of Education, on Tuesday August 29, 1939 passed a resolution to reinstate Bemis. At the same time the resolution was passed, the board announced that Coons, who left Copenhagen Central School to

come to Ilion, would be head football coach that fall and Spencer Fearon, hired as an English teacher, would be assistant coach. Bemis was placed in charge of the grade school physical education program.

"Resolved, that Ralph W. Bemis be reinstated in the same position as held by him prior to April 4, 1939, to wit: Supervisor and teacher of physical education, pursuant to the provisions of an order of Hon. Frank. J. Cregg, dated, Aug, 9, 1939, and that his salary be fixed at the amount stated in the schedules filed for such position with the department pursuant to the provisions of Section 888 and 889 of the Education Law to wit, \$1,800 and be it further Resolved, that this resolution in no way changes the status of said Ralph W. Bemis as in his appointment with the provisions of Section 212-A of said Education Law." - [August 1939 - Utica Daily Press](#) - Utica NY Daily Press 1939 - 3573.pdf

September 1939 - Ilion Board Appeals Reinstatement

In September 1939, the Board of Education members filed notice of appeal to have the decision of Supreme Court Justice Frank Cregg reviewed by five Judges in the Appellate division. Chester Winslow, board attorney, formerly filed the appeal for the board. - [September 14, 1939 - Ilion Sentinel](#) - Ilion Sentinel 1939 - 554.pdf

"Since the Cregg order stated Bemis salary should remain the same, the outcome of the appeal which, it is believed, will be reviewed the latter part of this month will be watched with interest.

Another issue which will be watched carefully will be the Appellate court's consideration in regard to the clause in the Cregg decision relating to positions held by World War veterans.

Justice Cregg declared that Bemis' position in the school came under the rules of the civil service code and, being a veteran, he could not be dismissed unless charges were preferred and sustained against him at a public hearing.

September 1939 - Education Board Appealed Cregg's Order

The Ilion Board of Education carried the case to the Appellate Division for a final ruling. - [September 14, 1939 - Ilion Sentinel](#) - Ilion Sentinel 1939 - 554.pdf



January 1940 - Education Board Appeal Sustained

Bemis Dismissed Again

The board carried the case to the Appellate Division for a final ruling. There the board's position in the matter was sustained. - ["Board Removes Resumes Bemis; One Member Dissents" -January 4, 1940 - Ilion Sentinel](#) - Illion NY Sentinel 1938-1940 - 0678.pdf

"Ralph W. Bemis, former physical education supervisor for Ilion schools and high school coach, was officially 'dismissed and discharged' Tuesday night by the Board of Education which was passed by a 4 to 1 vote, a resolution canceling the reinstatement ordered by Justice Frank J. Cregg of the Supreme Court Syracuse."

"The dismissal resolution followed receipt by the board's attorney, Chester Winslow, of the official decision of the Appellate Division of the state Court of Appeals which reversed the decision of Justice Cregg. The reversal decision was unanimous."

"Fred O'Donnell, attorney for Bemis, refused to comment on the dismissal

resolution when asked for a statement yesterday. Time only and final legal resort open to Bemis now, it was pointed out, is to carry the case to the Court of Appeals, the highest court in New York State. There seven justices would weigh the facts of the case."

"A memorandum handed down by Appellate court stated that Bemis came under the 'unclassified' list of civil service and could therefore be dismissed before his probationary period was finished. Those on the 'classified' list, it was said, could not be."

"The resolution of dismissal, drawn up by Attorney Winslow, concluded a statement reviewing the case up to the reversal of Cregg's decision by the Appellate Division and was stated to rescind the order of reinstatement and 'that said Ralph W. Bemis be forthwith dismissed and discharged as supervisor and teacher of physical education in this school district.'"

"In the vote which followed Mrs. Everett Mack, the only woman on the board and the member having the most years of service to her credit, opposed the resolution on the grounds that Bemis should be given until June and be retained until then as grade school physical director."

"Those members who voted in favor of the resolution were William Momberger, president; Dennis J. McLaughlin, Grover Radley and Dr. Robert Luke."

Post 1939, World War II and Finally Retirement

The Utica Observer March 1978 article, titled "A Generation of Observations Belong to Former Iliion Coach", contained these other quotes about Coach Bemis. - ["A Generation of Observations Belong to Former Iliion Coach" - March 1978 - The Utica Observer](#) - Utica NY Observer 1978 - 2730.pdf

"In 1939, Joe and the superintendent had a difference of opinion and at the zenith of his career, he left Iliion for Newberryport, Mass in what he thought would be a similar post"

"They wanted me to coach football basketball, baseball and track, too. When I asked them how I could coach baseball and track at the same time

they told me to work it out."

"Joe never coached high school again. Instead, he took a job as a landscape salesman until World War II broke out."

"At 42, he joined the Air Force and became a director of physical education. He spent time in Atlantic City, New England Aircraft School 'near the old homestead', Westerly RI. and at Langley Field, Va until the Japanese surrendered. He was discharged a sergeant on April 16, 1945."

After World War II, Joe returned to Ilion. He was a liquor salesman for seven years and spent the last four years of his work life as a beer salesman. He retired in the 1960s.

Only an old-timer or a descendant of the 1939 School Board members might be able to provide what may be the real <"*difference of opinion*" that let to Dr. Watkins and the Ilion Board of Education dismissing Coach Bemis. For now, we can only assume that it had something to do with "the athletic program was not in line with state requirements."

Memories, Reunions and A Commemorative Dinner

Despite the negative way in which Coach Bemis' career ended at Ilion, he didn't appear to be bitter about it. He led the Ilion Varsity Club when they paid their respects at the funeral of Principal Guy Prindle in January 1951. He attended and helped organize reunions with his former athletes. He continued to accept invitations to address pep rallies in the 1970s.

The Class of 1936 included in the Class History memories of the man that gave a hint at his teaching style. "Twice that year Prof. Bemis called some of the more fortunate actually by their first names. What a compliment that was, and what a distinction! "

1949 Blinger Reunion for Coach Bemis

As early as June 1949, athletes were planning events to honor Coach Bemis. A

reunion Blinger was planned in honor of former Coach Ralph "Joe" Bemis in honor of former Coach Ralph for the South Columbia Inn on Saturday night, June 18, 1949. The event was planned by Fred Davis, Bill Murphy and several other former high school athletes. - [June 2, 1949 - Ilion Sentinel](#) - Illion NY Sentinel 1949-1950 - 0242.pdf

1973 Athlete Reunion Fish and Game Club

A June 9, 1973 Athletic reunion was held at the Ilion Fish and Game Club. The event was open to all former athletes from Frankfort, Ilion, Mohawk, Herkimer, Little Falls, Dolgeville and St. Johnsville. Members of the committee included Ed Holleran Herkimer 1935-36; Glenn Collis Herkimer 1933-34; Ralph Thomas Mohawk 1925-28; Fred Meyers Herkimer 1928-31; Arley Cole Ilion 1935-37, and Coach Bemis. Over 500 former athletes were expected to attend the informal reunion. - [April 6, 1973 - Utica Daily Press](#) - Utica NY Daily Press 1973 - 2865.pdf

1974 Trading Memories - Monk Manion and Coach Bemis

A November 7, 1974 Utica Observer newspaper story, by Hal Hefner Jr., featured memories of the Herkimer-Ilion football rivalry as recalled by Coach Bemis with Monk Manion. Martin 'Monk' Manion, Ilion History teacher was, at that time, an assistant coach at Ilion for 17 years. He also had been a star football player for Herkimer in 1945-1945. - [June 2, 1949 - Utica Daily Press](#) - Utica NY Observer 1974 a - 5028.pdf

"Manion, who starred on the 1944 and 1945 Herkimer teams, played when the Magicians had a 27-game winning streak (begin in 1942) snapped. "I am afraid I'll leave out some of the best ones but Herkimer had Dell Collis, Tony Bonvino, Walt Carswell, Jim Vendetti and Dizz Swietlikowski around when I played."

"A former Ithaca College star, Bemis said his most pleasant coaching memories were at Mohawk in 1923 and 1924."I really enjoyed it there. Had some great ones - Jim Graves, Lawrence Paul, Jack and Bill Cook. Those were the days."

1978 Dinner Honoring Coach Bemis

More than 200 former Ilion High School athletes paid tribute to Ralph W "Joe" Bemis at a testimonial dinner held at the General Herkimer Hotel on April 7, 1978. Ernest Sitls of Mohawk, also a Bemis athlete, opened the program and introduced the master of ceremonies. Richard "Dick" DeForest of Pearl River, an outstanding quarterback and baseball catcher under Bemis, was the master of ceremonies.

The organizers presented plaques and gifts from his former players. The also presented him with certificates of commendation from village officials. Letters were read from former athletes who were unable to attend the dinner. Coach Bemis was given three standing ovations during the presentations.

Others who attended the dinner were: E E Swarthout, retired dramatics and speech teacher at Ilion, Joseph Derby, an executive at NBC in New York City, and Joseph Sorge, former Ilion Director of Athletics.

A permanent trophy to be awarded annually to an outstanding football player at Ilion was presented to the high school in honor of Bemis by his former athletes. The current Ilion athletic director, Nick Pannes, made the trophy presentation.

Coach Bemis Memorial Trophy Award

The trophy, which was first introduced in 1978 at the dinner cited above, is still being awarded to outstanding football players, including students at the merged Ilion-Mohawk school District high school - Central Valley Academy.

Coach Joe Bemis Memorial Outstanding Football Award Recipients

Former IHS Athletic Director and friend of Coach Bemis, Robert Turley, provided the names of the recipients of this trophy - [The Coach Joe Bemis Memorial Outstanding Football Award](#).

The Passing of the Legend

"Seated at the edge of his favorite chair snug by the fireplace, this time machine looks out his front window and ponders aloud 'We are here in this country by the grace of God We may slip at times, but it's a great country.' - The Utica Observer March 1978

"In the little world of Ilion athletics Joe Bemis still stands tall." - The Utica Observer March 1978

Coach Bemis and his wife, Rubye, never had children of their own. They continued to live in the house at 31 S. Fourth Avenue for the rest of their lives. [Rubye Bemis](#), died, at the age of 91 on July 5, 1991. Ralph W. 'Joe' Bemis passed away, one year later, on August 31, 1992. He was 93 years old.

"God it was great. A good life" - Coach Bemis

[BACK](#)

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