

JOEL WILSON

His coach, Lou Nocida, said three-year starter Joel Wilson was good enough just on defense to be a first-team all-stater.

Nocida, however, had a pretty good idea when Wilson came out for football as a sophomore after sitting out his freshman season with an injury.

He put the 5-foot-11, 225-pound Wilson at running back, fed him the football and told everyone else to get out of the way. A lot of times, it was the players on the other team's defense who did.

"He's a high school John Riggins," Fayetteville coach Frank Spangler said after Wilson ran for 169 yards and two touchdowns in Sistersville's 42-11 Class A state championship game victory in 1984.

During his senior year, Wilson had a pretty good season — just in the playoffs. In three playoff games, he gained 590 yards and nine touchdowns. In a state semifinal game at Gilbert, he often toted two defenders on his back while gaining 222 yards and four touchdowns.

"I've never had anyone play the way Joel does," Nocida said. "He absolutely refuses to let one person tackle him."

It was that way for three seasons, too. Wilson gained 4,556 yards in his career, including 2,048 yards and 28 touchdowns as a senior. As a junior, he had 1,614 yards and 24 touchdowns. As a sophomore, he gained 894 yards and scored 18 touchdowns.

During that time, he played in only three losing games, two in state championship games and the other to St. Marys in 1984,

a loss that ended Sistersville's record 42-game regular season winning streak.

For all of the exceptional players Sistersville had during Nocida's 10 seasons as coach, Wilson was the first to win the Kennedy Award as West Virginia's outstanding high school player. He also was the first Class A player to win since All-Pro Curt Warner of Pineville in 1978.

Previously, Sistersville had two Kennedy runnersup, running back C.R. Howdysell in 1978 and wide receiver Brian Swisher in 1981.

But for all of his success, there was something Joel Wilson accomplished as a senior that excited him even more than winning the Kennedy Award as a small school player.

It was winning a state championship.

Sistersville won back-to-back titles in 1980 and 1981 but, once Willson started playing, the Tigers were beaten in the finals by Duval in 1982 and Tyler County in 1984. He wasn't about to let that happen in his senior season, when he made all-state for a second consecutive season and was the offensive captain.

Wilson was complemented perfectly that season by sophomore running back Jeff Swisher, who ran for 156 yards and three touchdowns himself against Fayetteville while totaling 1,238 yards for the season.

And it was a season the Tigers needed to run.

Sistersville could throw the ball downfield with Tommy Archer then Rick Glover then Matt Archer at quarterback from 1979-83, but had almost no passing game in 1984. So having Swisher enjoy his breakthrough season was a major plus to

Wilson because it meant defenses couldn't pack the middle to stop him, not when Swisher presented the threat of going outside.

"Wilson was durable, and everybody was after him because we had no passing game," Nocida said.

They certainly did have a running game.

Passenger trains stopped running through Sistersville in the mid 1960s, but try telling that to any teams that visited Core Field from 1982 through 1984.

Kennedy Award Goes To Sistersville's Wilson

By ALAN ROBINSON
CHARLESTON — Joel Wilson, the bruising, defense-busting fullback from Sistersville's Class-A championship team, is the winner of the 38th annual Harry H. Kennedy Award, presented annually to the athlete voted as West Virginia's top high school football player.

The 17-year-old 5-foot-11, 225-pound Wilson, is a two-time all-stater whose career rushing total reached 4,561 yards this season as the 12-1 Tigers made a record fifth consecutive state title game appearance.

"It would have been absolutely unfair if anybody else had won this award," said Sistersville Coach Lou Nocida. "People don't realize how hard it is to rush for 2,000 yards with nine people coming at you on every play. Joel is the best running back I've ever coached, and I've coached some good ones. He plays with complete intensity on every play."

Wilson, who gained over 1000 yards rushing in each of his three high school seasons and 2,053 this year, is the first Kennedy Award winner from a Class-A school since Curt Warner, now with the Seattle Seahawks, won for Pineville High School in 1978.

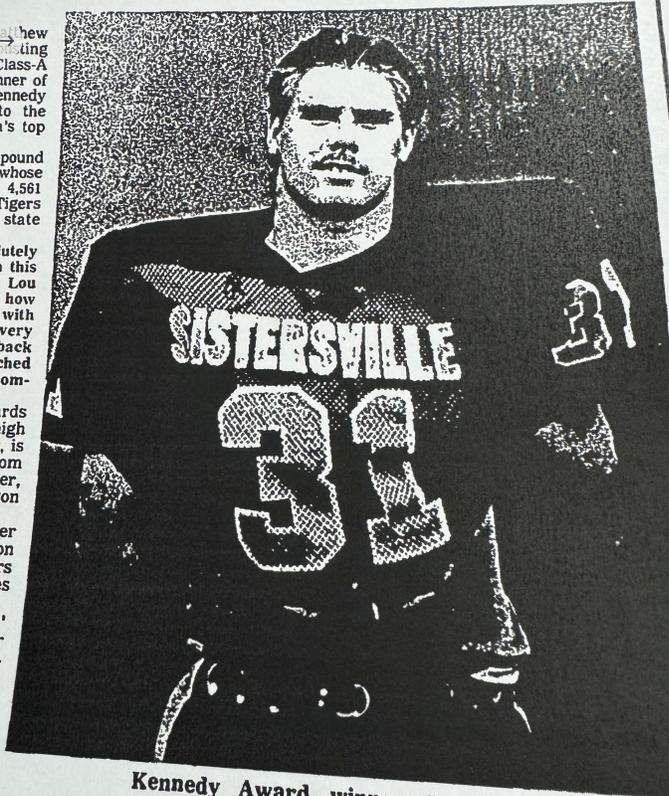
"Joel would have been an all-stater even if he had played exclusively on defense," said Nocida, whose Tigers have won a state-record 61 games over the last five seasons.

"He's a high-school John Riggins," said Yvetteville Coach Frank Spangler after the physical Wilson punched the Pirates for 169 rushing yards and two touchdowns in Sistersville's 42-11 state championship game.

In his three 1984 state playoff games, Wilson ran for 590 yards — a 197 yards per game average — and scored two touchdowns as Sister'sville defeated Clay-Battelle and a pair of unbeaten teams, Gilbertsville and Sistersville, in a 47-0 final victory at Gilbertsville.

Wilson's performance constantly dragged several other players for an extra five or six yards. He ran for 222 yards and scored two touchdowns in the week honors game.

"No one else had anyone play the way Joel does," Nocida said.



Kennedy Award winner Joel Wilson

St. Francis, for the 1984 Kennedy Award. Finishing third was Pocahontas High School tackle Mike Dunlap, followed by Barboursville end-line-backer Terry Smith and Gilbertville running back Jeff Mounts, who tied for fourth place.

Wilson will be presented with the Kennedy Award at the West Virginia Sports Writers Association's annual Victory Awards Dinner in Morgantown.

Philip Morris, Wayne; 1969 — Kerry N. Monaghan; 1970 — Rickie Eugene Hurt; 1971 — Richard Neil Petty, William Daniel Walter Williams, Dupont; 1972 — Daniel Walter Williams, Dupont; 1973 — Robert A. Lyons, Herbert Hoover; 1974 — Robert A. South Charleston; 1975 — Robert A. South Charleston; 1976 — Robert A. Washington; 1977 — Mike Este; 1978 — Tim Stephens, Parkersburg; 1979 — David Bayer, George Washington; 1980 — Koonz, Petersburg; 1981 — Bradley H. North Marion; 1982 — Bradley H. Morgantown; 1983 — Anthony Duon.

There was a runaway train in town named Joel Wilson, and he was as durable and dependable as a locomotive. And he'd hit you like one, too.

Wilson initially enrolled at Ball State, but ended up finishing his career under Nocida at Glenville State.



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S **WHAT A SIGHT** — A terrifying sight to Fayetteville tacklers was number 31, Joel Wilson of Sistersville, rambling through a big hole for some of the 166 yards the 220 pounder picked up Saturday as the Tigers thumped Fayetteville 42-11 for the West Virginia Class A state football championship at Charleston's Laidley Field.

(Photo by Drew Moody)

...High School. Baric, who coached at
Penns Grove High School in New Jersey for 19

...nearly 500 attended the Victory Awards Dinner.
(News-Register Photo--Jim Cochran)

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Joel Wilson, Sistersville High's great full-back who led the Tigers to the their third West Virginia state Class A football championship in five years and who established all-time valley scoring and rushing records, was honored at the Victory Awards dinner in Morgantown Sunday. The 6 ft., 225-pound running back and linebacker

outstanding high school player of 1984. Presentation was made by Alan Robinson, at left, Sistersville native who is now Associated Press sports writer in Pittsburgh. At right is a proud Lou Nocida, Wilson's coach. Wilson has signed with Ball State University, a Mid-American Conference school at Muncie, Ind.
(News-Register Photo--Jim Cochran)

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Joel Wilson received the first Kennedy Award ever given to a Sistersville High School player at the Victory Awards Dinner in Morgantown in May 1985

