

Remembering 1964: The Year Duke Ellington Crowned the Homecoming

By Pat Spanjer

Who could forget Duke Ellington's performance at the 1964 Homecoming coronation ceremony? It seems to be the one thing many Eastern Washington State College alumni remember about that Homecoming. The bandleader's poetic lyrics and his band's trumpet wah-wah and growling saxophone blended uniquely for a timeless jazz-swing-classical sound that still lingers in the deepest recesses of their minds.

"The crowning ceremony was really pretty special," remembers Homecoming Queen **Betty Jo (Tesch) Nebb** ('66 BA education). In grand style, Ellington placed the crown on her head while the band's performance of *Satin Doll* filled the fieldhouse.

Nominated by the Greeks, Betty was chosen as a finalist for the crown along with Pearce Hall nominee **Bobbi (Stowell) Brown** ('65 BA education), and off-campus nominee **Marcene (Flikke) Hendrickson** ('64 BA education). While royalty campaigning could be as competitive as the football game itself, it was all in good fun for the three girlfriends.

Betty and Bobbi were roommates in Louise Anderson Hall's Primrose Lane. Betty and Marcene went way back as Longfellow Elementary School-mates who lived on the same block in a Spokane neighborhood where they played kick the can, dolls, house and hide and seek. They wiled away many hours performing backyard plays. Blankets hanging from clotheslines were their stage curtains.

On coronation night, the three women – wearing beautiful formal gowns, long white gloves and white pumps – graced the fieldhouse stage, holding their collective breath as they awaited the selection



Jazz legend Duke Ellington crowns 1964 Homecoming Queen Betty Jo Tesch.



1964 Homecoming royalty (from left) Bobbi Stowell, Marcene Flikke and Betty Jo Tesch.

announcement. Actually, Bobbi remembers holding her breath because the gown she borrowed for the event “was too small for me, but I got it zipped up!”

As part of the royalty campaign, **Chris Brown** ('65 BA journalism), shot publicity photos of the candidates. After taking Bobbi's photo, Chris asked her out for coffee and then dinner and a movie (*Goldfinger*), and they eventually married.

In the days between the coronation and the Homecoming game, students kept the campus and Cheney hopping with mixers, campus decorating, float construction, bed races, two parades and a bonfire.

The week culminated with the semiformal postgame dance at Spokane's Ridpath Hotel. Bobbi didn't go to the dance with Chris, but she wore the same dress she squeezed into for the coronation. Marcene went to the dance with classmate and future husband, Paul Hendrickson. Betty's date was her future husband, **Peter Nebb** ('65 BA health and physical education).

Dick Zornes ('72 MA physical education), starting safety and backup fullback for EWSC in '64, didn't attend the dance. “It wasn't for me,” he acknowledged,

“but **Heidi Aldinger** ('66 BA education and his future wife), the cheerleader I was going with, made me go to the Homecoming dance in '66.”

Dick's recollections of that Oct. 24 Homecoming game are sketchy, but he recalls, “Coach (Dave) Holmes really turned the program around that year. It was a lot of fun.” Unfortunately, on that day, EWSC suffered a disappointing 20-7 loss to Pacific Lutheran in the midst of the team's first winning season in several years.

“Up till that game, we were feeling pretty good about our ability to beat Pacific Lutheran,” recalls starting quarterback **Bob Clark** ('65 BA biology).

His wife, **Maureen** ('65 BA elementary education), was less concerned about the game than learning the Twist, the latest dance craze, before the big night at the Ridpath.

“The girls and I practiced the Twist in our apartments at the edge of campus,” Maureen said. “We used a towel to learn how to do the moves. It wasn't the way we moved our bodies back then, but we decided we needed to get with it.”

As fate would have it, Maureen and Bob had to wait for another occasion to do the Twist.

Bob remembers things going pretty well in the first half of the game, but then, “Some time in the second quarter, I went out for the sprint-out pass – now it's called the roll-out pass. A linebacker, quicker than I, got to me. It was helmet-to-helmet contact. At 155 pounds, I was gone. Small and slow is not a great formula. I was unconscious.”

Maureen accompanied Bob in the ambulance to Sacred Heart Medical Center, where they spent Homecoming night, just blocks away from the Ridpath.

Bob's injury gave freshman backup quarterback **George Cross** ('68 BA and '70 MA mathematics), the opportunity to step in and finish the game.

“Forty-one years ... that was a long time ago,” George said with a chuckle. “It doesn't stand out for me anymore than to remember it was my first Homecoming game at Eastern. Yeah, Pacific Lutheran handled us a little that game. But when we started beating them the following years, it was fun.”

Homecoming '64 a little fuzzy in your memory banks? It's time to renew acquaintances and make new memories at this year's Homecoming Reunion for the classes of 1964, 1965 and 1966. In addition to the pregame activities for alumni, the game is 2:05 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 22, at Woodward Field. Visit <http://www.ewualumni.org/> for details.