

Elizabethtown College 125th Anniversary  
National Historic Preservation Trust This Place Matters Campaign & Campus Historic Building Survey  
Based on the National Parks Service Historic American Building Survey  
2024 Summer Creative Arts and Research Program SCARP  
Ava Barton Class of 2027 and Shawn Gipe Class of 2027  
Jean-Paul Benowitz, Director of Prestigious Scholarships and Fellowships and Public Heritage Studies



## **Ira Herr (1894-1986)**

## **Kathryn Harper Nissley Herr (1904-2007)**

Ira Herr was known as the “Grand Old Man” of Elizabethtown College’s athletics and first came to the College at age 34 when President Schlosser requested him as a coach.<sup>1</sup> Herr had attended the academy at Elizabethtown College and graduated from Franklin & Marshall in 1916. Ira Herr had been involved with coaching at teaching at several high schools, one being Elizabethtown, and ran two W.A.W. Shoe Stores in Elizabethtown during 1928. Since he was young, Ira Herr had partaken in almost all kinds of athletics, which made him a great choice to coach for Elizabethtown College. On December 8, 1928, the Elizabethtown basketball team played its first intercollegiate game, winning 27-22 against Millersville State Teachers College under Coach Herr’s direction. This win started a streak, with the team going onto win 35-24 against Thompson Business College on December 13 and then 31-24 over Williamson Trade of Philadelphia two days later.<sup>2</sup>

Ira Herr’s arrival as a full time Coach of Athletics in 1932, overseeing the men and women’s basketball team, would prove to be Elizabethtown College’s most successful sport.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Eberly et al. “The Father of Elizabethtown Athletics: Ira Herr” (Landmarks and Legends Essay, Elizabethtown College, 2017) 1.; Ira Herr File. Faculty Vertical Files. Hess Archives, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA.

<sup>2</sup> Chet Williamson, *Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College* (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College Press, 2001), 112-113.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Benowitz, Peter J. DePuydt, “Elizabethtown College” (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 112, 120.



Unfortunately, Coach Herr's team had to face skillful opposition such as Saint Josephs, Haverford, Bucknell, Millersville, and Dickinson. In the face of this opposition, both Herr and his team remained optimistic. An *Our College Times* article was published on November 16, 1931, with a headline stating that the "Basketball Team Looks Promising."<sup>4</sup> The writer of the article stated, "Let's all be around for the first game and see what the team can offer under the direction of the new coach, Ira Herr." Though the team suffered many defeats, another article was published with a headline claiming, "Coach Herr Optimistic Despite Dearth of Material." Ira Herr was honest in stating, "Hope for a good boy's team lies in the type of players that can be produced from the new students. After all, the success if the team will depend upon the spirit and enthusiasm of the girls and fellows who play." In the coming months, *Our College Times* would run articles with headlines like "Common Sense Defeats Blind Optimism As Athletic Situation Shows No Sign of Improvement," and subheads such as "A Coach

Is No Magician" and "First Class Material Is Seen as Crying Need." Another article was ran with the headline "Little Hope Remaining/School Spirit Does Not Score Many Field Goals." The story continues, "For a period of four years the local college club has failed to annex a major engagement and the last successful season we had was in 1928 when our present coach Ira Herr had such stars as Clyde Wenger, "Red" Angstadt, and Harry Bower around whom to build a team...Most of the players from Elizabethtown College are recruited from B and C class high schools while the majority of colleges today have men available that have been stars on first class high school and prep teams." Another article read: "Not alone basketball, but tennis and baseball have fallen into a category where not even the best friends of the men on the teams can wish them luck without a half smile." More discouraging headlines read: "Millersville Club Slaughters Boys," "Doctors Nose out Varsity," "Maryland Trips Varsity." Additionally, a report of the game against Gallaudet College in Washington D.C. said, "Deaf Mutes Handle Boys Rough to Get 36-16 Win."<sup>5</sup>

However, due to Ira Herr's continual positivity and coaching, the baseball team had its best average ever in May of 1962, winning seven out of eight stars and ending the season with a 9-2 record. Regardless, Herr's team would face more losses than



<sup>4</sup> Williamson, 139.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 140.



wins due to the hard opposition. In one baseball game Herr's team was met with "subsidized" student athletes who were performing excellently in their practice. A spectator said to Herr how it must be a blessing to have such talented players to work with on the first day of practice, however, Herr stated, "Probably so, but the supreme thrill to me is seeing a diamond in the rough report as a freshman and develop into a first stringer." It would be Herr's mission to transmute beginners into golden athletes in the years to come. In 1937, the first game of soccer was held on campus, and Coach Herr's first thought about the sport was that it would be good exercise for his basketball team. An intercollegiate team was also formed in 1938, but to little success.<sup>6</sup>

If Ira Herr had said any prayers for a great player, these were answered in the form of a young man from a little town in Cornwall, Freshman Frank Keath. In his first year, he scored 371 points in 20 games with an average of 18.6 points per game, placing him as the second highest scorer per game in the state. Being the third shortest member at 5'10, Keath depended on skill compared to relying on height. In his sophomore year, Ket scored 433 points in 21 games with an average of 20.6 points per game, the highest in Pennsylvania. In his junior year he established a state record with 564 points in 23 games and a 24.5 point average per game. He also went on to set a record for the most points scored in a single game, scoring 43 points against Bridgewater.<sup>7</sup> He ended his career with 504 points in 1949, collecting 1872 points and an average of 21.2 points per game, making him the fourth among all-time point scorers in collegiate basketball. *The Etownian* said this about Keath: "It must be taken into consideration that he was a marked player and opposing coaches continually assigned two men the task of trying to hold the scoring wizard down."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 170.

The 50s were a good decade for Ira Herr and he celebrated his twenty-fifth year of coaching baseball in 1956, at the time being recognized by the American Association of Collegiate Baseball. Additionally, he received the Sports Headliner of the Year Award from the association of Lancaster Sportswriters and Broadcasters “for contributions to the local sports during his lifetime.” During this decade, after nine years of being absent, Ira Herr once again took up coaching men’s soccer.



His 1959-60 team was undefeated in fifteen games and won the Middle Atlantic Conference Championship by defeating Washington College 6-1. The team then went to Slippery Rock, hoping to achieve the NAIA title. The team started by beating Howard University 5-2, but they then lost to Pratt university during the second overtime of the game.<sup>9</sup> Around 1961 when Roy McAuley took up presidency of Elizabethtown College, the previous May found sixty-two-year-old Ira Herr announcing his retirement for the end of the summer. He had been at the College since 1928 for a total of thirty-three years.

Herr’s wife, Kathryn, would stay at the College as a popular French teacher for many more years. Despite his retirement at Elizabethtown College, Herr decided to coach baseball and basketball at the Patton Trade School in Elizabethtown. He also taught physical education and social studies, then retiring for a second time in 1972 at the age of seventy-seven. Despite retiring even for second time, Herr continued to be an active old man. Additionally, Herr was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame in 1975, and received awards from the Church of the Brethren, the Elizabethtown Rotary Club, the American Association of Collegiate Baseball, and several other organizations. Ira Herr passed away at the old age of 92 in 1986.<sup>10</sup> Edward E. Brunner ’52 said Coach Herr “took an interest in each kid and really cared. The impact he had on people was incredible. He had rules and values, and expected you to follow them. I just loved the way he led, quietly, by example... He was a legend.” Don Smith, former head basketball coach, agreed with the sentiment and said “Coach Herr is to Elizabethtown College what Coach [Amos Alonzo] Stagg is to Susquehanna. He was the institution.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 212.; Eberly et al., 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 212-213.

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The greatest athletic addition to the College during the 1950s was the Elizabethtown College Athletic Hall of Fame Dedicated to Coach Ira Herr, and ten charter members were inducted on Homecoming Weekend in the fall of 1975. The honorees were:

- \* Warren Angstadt '30, who played on the first basketball team and was an outstanding tennis player.
- \* Guy R. Buch '45, who participated in three sports, and was an outstanding basketball player who, in his senior year, led the nation's small college scorers,
- \* Joel D. Chase '67, a premier Blue Jay soccer team goalie.
- \* Warner Cheeks '61, baseball player and All-American soccer goalie who led the Jays to a four-year record of 32-7.
- \* Ray R. Diener '65, star soccer goalie, a center/forward in basketball, and a baseball pitcher with a three-year record of 14-5, who later signed a pro contract.
- \* William E. Foster '54, who tallied 1148 points in his college basketball career, and who became Duke University's basketball coach.
- \* Alvin E. Hershey '64, an All-American in soccer with 61 goals in four years, and a baseball player who batted over 300 in three of his four years.
- \* Linda Eshelman Hershey '63, an All-American field hockey star, who led the undefeated 1961 team and made 64 goals in four years. She also helped establish women's tennis at the College and was the first woman to serve as executive director of the Middle Atlantic Conference.
- \* Frank W. Keath '49, who played baseball, soccer, and basket-ball, in which he became the all-time Blue Jay scoring leader with 1872 points in four years, set the state small college scoring mark with 564 points in his junior year, and was twice selected All-State.
- \* Sal L. Paone '57, a sharpshooting basketball guard who scored 1408 points in four seasons, ranking fifth among college scoring leaders.<sup>12</sup>

Elizabethtown College entered intercollegiate basketball on December 8, 1923, when Ira Herr, who previously coached the Elizabethtown Highschool team, faced off against Millersville Normal School and won.<sup>13</sup> Ira R. Herr was elected to the Faculty of Elizabethtown College on September, 1932, as the Coach of Athletics. He coached both men and women's basketball and held his position for over thirty years. Herr was then honored by Elizabethtown College, being named Professor Emeritus of Physical education at the dedication of the Alumni Physical Education Center. On January 25, 1970, the *Lancaster Sunday News* commented on Coach Herr receiving this honor: "Ira R. Herr for years and years and years was athletics at Elizabeth-town College, and but for his singular sagaciousness and drive there might never have been a major sports program at Elizabethtown College, let alone a \$1.3 million dollar sports building standing in the midst of the halls of learning on the Elizabethtown campus." Ira Herr first took up his

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899 - 1970*. (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Company, 1971), 149.

position as the Coach of Athletics and took over the direction of the entire intercollegiate program, the first few years were discouraging due to opposition being comprised of subsidized athletes. During a game where Elizabethtown College was faced with difficult opposition of subsidized athletes, a spectator commented on their batting practice to Ira Herr during the warmup. The spectator said: "Every coach dreams of receiving his players in full bloom from high school and doing nothing but molding a game." Coach Herr responded: "Probably so, but the supreme thrill to me is seeing a diamond in the rough report as a freshman and develop into a first stringer."<sup>14</sup> Coach Herr was looked up to as a "father to players" and was exceptional at molding new players into winners. In one season with his baseball team, nine games were won in a row with only one loss. Herr had also had strong morals, caring about fair game more than anything. His motto is stated by a poet: "When that great soccer scorer comes To write against your name It matters not if you lost or won But how you played the game."<sup>15</sup>



On May 18, 1946, the Elizabethtown College's Alumni Council decided that the Student Alumni Gymnasium Auditorium, which was dedicated on May 25, 1929, should be remodeled to honor student veterans of WWII. Ira Herr suggested that the President of the College, a representative of the Memorial Committee, and a representative of the Board of Trustees should be brought together to discuss changes for the gymnasium. An architect was brought on to draw plans for the remodeling, but the changes were unsatisfactory.<sup>16</sup>

*This Field is Named for  
Ira R. Herr  
First Director of Athletics  
at  
Elizabethtown College*

At the dedication of the Baseball field in honor of Coach Herr, President Roy E McAuley had this to say about him: "Ira R. Herr, more than any other person in the history of Elizabethtown College, personifies the intercollegiate athletic program on this campus. It was Ira R. Herr who initiated the intercollegiate program for the College in 1928 and who nurtured the program through its formative years, serving as Director of Athletics until his retirement in 1961. It was Ira R. Herr who was literally a one-man force for athletics on this

<sup>14</sup> Schlosser, 150.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 203.



campus, administering the physical education pro-coaching virtually all the sports during his tenure. For thirty years coaching Cotl xxall the sports during his tennne. on years the coach of the men's basketball team. In addition he coached soccer, women's basketball, tennis and cross country.”<sup>17</sup> In Lancaster County, Ira Herr was known as the “Dean of Coaches,” as he had served over 30 years at Elizabethtown College as Coach of baseball and basketball most notably. During his time at the College, Herr organized the Inter-County Tennis League and was the president of it for many years. In 1956 Ira Herr was presented with a plaque of honor from the American Association of College Baseball Coaches of the National Intercollegiate Athletic Association.<sup>18</sup>

*Presented to  
Ira R. Herr  
for a  
Quarter of a Century  
of  
Leadership and Devotion  
to  
Collegiate Baseball*

At The Lancaster Sportswriters and Broadcaster’s annual banquet within Hotel Brunswick on January 1959, Ira Herr was named “Sportsheadliner of the Year” for his contributions to local sports during his life. Ira Herr was honored for “his outstanding sportsmanship, his Christian bearing, and the lasting influence he has exerted upon coaches and players who are all the better for their contact with him.” When accepting his award, Herr showed humility in his response, one of his notable



characteristics: “Little did I expect this. Words fail to express my feelings. I shall certainly endeavor to be worthy of this honor and to use my talents to further sports as long as I can.” After a vote, the Board of Trustees decided to name the new athletic field in honor of Coach Herr. On May 7, 1966, a large boulder with bronze tablet was placed on the edge of the field to commemorate his service to Elizabethtown College.

Every year the Christian Education Commission of the Church of the Brethren would grant Distinguished service awards to staff and faculty of Elizabethtown College who were part of the Church of the Brethren. On June 18, 1959, the General Brotherhood Board, through the Christian Education Commission, gave Ira Herr the Distinguished Service Award at the General Conference held at Ocean Grove, New Jersey, for serving over twenty-five years in the field of physical education.<sup>19</sup> Ira R. Herr organized the Intercounty Tennis League in 1925. Tennis clubs from Elizabethtown, Penbrook, Manheim, Lilitz, Ephrata, Marietta, and Columbia participated in the second season of the league. To be eligible for the league it was required that you be “a resident of town in which the club is located,” “a bona fide member of the club residing in or near the club headquarters or

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 210.

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whose business interests or profession closely connect him with the town,” or ”a college man home on his vacation, if he lives in the town.” Herr continued his presidency in the league during 1935 and it was comprised of Columbia, Elizabethtown, Hershey, Manheim, Middle-town, Palmyra, the Harrisburg Tennis Club, and the Reservoir Tennis Club of Harrisburg in 1935.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1957 the Elizabethtown Rotary Club discussed dealing with the library’s lack of space. Ira Herr, who was chairman of the community service committee, suggested that Rotary members should take on the challenge of finding or building a better building for the public library. In 1958 Ira Herr was elected as chairmen to the library committee by President Dr. J. Hoffman.<sup>21</sup>

The following information on Ira Herr is found on Find a grave:

*“Ira R. Herr, 92, of 315 E. Orange St. died Tuesday in the Leader Nursing Home.*

*He was retired from Elizabethtown College, where he opened intercollegiate athletics and was athletic director for 42 years; was retired from Patton Masonic School for Boys, where he was a coach, physical education and social studies teacher; was a baseball, basketball, soccer, cross-country and tennis coach in the high school, college and community for many years; served in World War I; served two terms on the Republican Committee;*



*was founder of Elizabethtown Little League; proposed and organized the committee to incorporate Elizabethtown Public Library; was co-founder and president of the Inter-County Tennis League; and organized the Keystone Scholastic Athletic Conference. He established the Ira R. Herr Athletic Hall of Fame; was a board member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and Executive Committee member of the Middle Atlantic Conference and National Soccer Coaches Association; was a member of St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Rotary International; was a life member of Friendship Fire Company, American Legion, Traveler's Protective Association, and Lodge 682, F&AM. He was a graduate of Elizabethtown College and Franklin & Marshall College, and attended Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Temple University. Surviving are his wife, Kathryn Harper Nisley Herr, and a daughter, Lois Kathryn Herr of Somers, N.Y. Services will be held at 10: 30 a.m. Friday in his church, with the Rev. Frank A. Nickel Jr. officiating. Burial will be in Mount Tunnel Cemetery, where military services will be conducted by Conewago American Legion Post 329.*

<sup>20</sup> Richard Kerwin MacMaster, *Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries* (Morgantown, PA: Mastof Press, 1999), 225.

<sup>21</sup> MacMaster, 250.



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*Friends may call from 7 to 9 p.m. today at Miller Funeral Home, where Masonic services will be conducted at 9 p.m. by Abraham C. Treichler Lodge 682.”<sup>22</sup>*



Regarding information on Ira Herr’s wife, Kathryn Harper Nisley Herr was born on January 26, 1904, in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, USA. Her parents were J Harper Nisley (1874-1903) and Gertrude Hassler Nisley (1878-1955) She died at an old age of 103 on June 27, 2007. She was then buried at the Mount Tunnel Cemetery in Elizabethtown, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, USA.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Ira R Herr,” Find a Grave, accessed June 24, 2024. [https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/196552496/ira\\_r-herr](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/196552496/ira_r-herr)

<sup>23</sup> “Kathryn Harper Nisley Herr,” Find a Grave, accessed June 24, 2024. [https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/204027522/kathryn\\_harper-herr](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/204027522/kathryn_harper-herr)

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