

The Lee County Legend

K E E P I N G T H E M E M O R I E S A L I V E

The Legends In Our Time

Who are the Lee County sports legends? The list of outstanding Lee County athletes is long. Five reached legendary status! Each reached the top rung of the ladder of success in their respective sport.

Ben Hur native, Walker (Foots) Cress (1917-1996), played major league baseball. According to reliable sources, Walker went from Pennington High School to Hiawasse College to LSU. For his major league experience, Walker, a six foot, five inch right hander, pitched for the Cincinnati Reds in 1948 and 1949.

Lee County has produced a pro basketball player, James (Jim) (Keok) Palmer, of Keokee who played in the NBA. Jim, a graduate of Keokee High, played his college ball at the University of Dayton. Drafted twelfth overall by the St. Louis Hawks, he played for the Cincinnati Royals (1958-59) and the New York Knicks (1959-1961).

Another Lee County born major league baseball player is James (Jim) Pankovits. Jim was born in Pennington Gap in 1955. He played for the Houston Astros for five seasons (1984-1988) and the 1990 Boston Red Sox. In 2011 he is manager of the Jackson Generals of the Seattle Mariners farm system.

Lee County's Barry (The Pennington Pounder) Audia is the most successful boxer from these parts. Born in Pennington Gap in 1958, Barry's amateur record is superb and he stood out even more as a professional fighter. In his pro career from 1980-1987, he was an astounding 20-0 in his first 20 pro fights. He finished his career at 28-5-0 while competing at the highest level.

Though not from Lee County, William Beattie "Big Chief" Feathers (1909-1979), does have a Lee County connection and an achievement worth noting. Beattie was a running back for the Bears, Packers, and Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1939, while playing in the NFL, he also roamed the outfield and hit .322 for the Pennington Gap Miners. He was the first player in NFL history to rush for over 1000 yards in one season (1934)

Stars in their time and legends in ours.

WALKER CRESS...From Ben Hur To Cincinnati

Today most aspiring major league baseball players will tell you that if they have not made it to the big leagues by age 23 or 24 that it appears the door is closed. Lee County's Walker Cress celebrated his 23rd and 24th birthdays in the Class B Piedmont League in Rocky Mount and Greensboro, North Carolina. It would be seven more years before he would take the mound with the Cincinnati Reds.

Born on March 6, 1917 in Ben Hur, Walker Cress played professionally for nine seasons, competing at every minor league level except Class A. He wore the uniform of eleven minor league teams from 1939 until closing out his career in 1951.

He compiled a 99-60 (3.59 ERA) minor league and an 0-1 (4.35 ERA) major league record. Similar to many ball players his career was interrupted by World War II. His immediate post war career saw him record an impressive minor league record of 34-8 in the 1946-47 seasons. After his Cincinnati Reds years he put a 33-18 record in the books in the Reds farm system in the 1949-50 seasons.



TEAMS PLAYED FOR

1939	Centreville Colts	Eastern Shore	Class D
1940	Canton Terriers	Middle Atlantic	Class C
1940	Ry Mount Rd Sox	Piedmont	Class B
1940	Danville Leafs	Bi-State	Class D
1941	Gr'nshoro Rd Sox	Piedmont	Class B
1942	Tr'to Maple Leafs	International	Class AA
1946	Lynn Red Sox	New England	Class B
1947	Lou'ville Colonels	American Assoc	Class AAA
1948	CINCINNATI	National League	MLB
1949	Tulsa Oilers	Texas League	Class AA
1949	CINCINNATI	National League	MLB
1950	Tulsa Oilers	Texas League	Class AA
1951	Memphis Chicks	Southern Assoc	Class AA
1951	Sac'mento Solons	Pacific Coast	Class AAA

MINORS PITCHING RECORD

	W	L
1939	7	10
1940	15	6
1941	8	12
1939	0	1
1946	19	3
1947	15	5
1949	15	7
1950	18	11
<u>1951</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>
	99	60

MAJORS LEAGUE PITCHING RECORD

	W	L
<u>1948</u>	0	1
<u>1949</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	0	1

Beattie Feathers...A Two-Sport Legend

It would require more than this page to even attempt to write a simple introduction of William Beattie "Big Chief" Feathers. Born in Bristol, Virginia he touched Lee County in many ways.

His career included many roles. He excelled as a baseball and football player at the high school, college, and professional level. He coached football at Appalachian State and North Carolina State. He guided the fortunes of Texas Tech and Wake Forest baseball teams. He was a 1970 finalist for election to the National Football Hall of Fame.

In 1934 he was the first player in NFL history to rush for over 1,000 yards. He held the NFL single season record for most yards per carry, averaging 8.44 yards per carry. The record stood for 72 years until broken by Michael Vick in 2006.

In his seven year NFL career he played for the Chicago Bears, Brooklyn Dodgers, and Green Bay Packers.

During his baseball career (1936-1943) he played for eight teams:

Americus, Greenville, Jackson, Kingsport, Knoxville, Palatka, PENNINGTON GAP, and Statesville.

In 1939 his travels, while still in the NFL, took him to play 66 games with the Pennington Gap Miners in the Appalachian League. The Miners played in the league for four seasons (1936-39).



Beattie Feathers scampers for a big gain for the Chicago Bears in the NFL

Professional Football Success

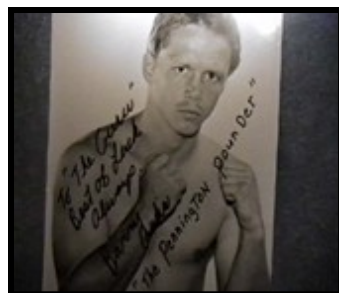
1934	1st Team All-NFL	Chicago Daily
1934	1st Team All-NFL	Colliers Mag
1934	1st Team All-NFL	GB Press Gaz
1934	1st Team All-NFL	NFL
1934	1st Team All-NFL	UPI
1936	2nd Team All-NFL	Colliers Mag
1936	2nd Team All-NFL	UPI

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Barry Audia . . . The Pennington Pounder



Barry Audia—"Now and Then "

Barry Audia's story should inspire a whole new set of Lee County athletes. Professional baseball once had a great foothold in Lee County but was gone by the 60's. No athletes raised in Lee were making the pros anymore.

Boxers generally came from places like the Bronx and Pittsburgh, not Woodway.

Barry caught a vision along the way then transformed himself into a fighter. Coaches shaped him into the boxer we know of today.

A late beginner in boxing, Barry had a very successful amateur career with a great shot at the 1980 Olympics. An American boycott cut that dream short for Barry. He turned pro and won 20 in a row before losing. He finished his career with a very respectable 28-5.

Athletes here in our county now can take a lesson from Barry. You can succeed if you will find something you love to do, then work, work and work to get to the top.

Barry is an asset to our county. He put us on the map when he made it to the top in boxing. He made it to the New York Times. He boxed on ESPN. He is known around the world.

CAREER RECORD

12/26/80	Pedro Guerrero	W	PTS	6
2/15/81	Lester Groves	W	KO	2
8/09/81	Ed Harris	W	KO	3
10/24/81	Ed Harris	W	KO	6
11/27/81	Nate Beach	W	KO	3
1/30/82	Fred Darden	W	PTS	6
4/7/82	Tommy Rogers	W	KO	6
7/8/82	Ricky Davis	W	PTS	8
8/27/82	John Williams	W	KO	2
10/16/82	Ivan Cowan	W	PTS	6
1/8/83	Toby Smith	W	PTS	10
2/4/83	Ken Heflin	W	KO	6
3/12/83	Ricky Davis	W	KO	2
4/10/83	Ricardo Bryant	W	KO	6
4/30/83	Tommy Rogers	W	KO	7
5/12/83	David Plowden	W	KO	3
6/25/83	Robert Jackson	W	PTS	10
4/7/84	Fred Brown	W	PTS	10
5/5/84	Bobby Franklin	W	KO	3
5/24/84	Thomas Smith	W	UD	10
7/5/84	Giovanni Bovenzi	L	UD	10
8/30/84	Wayne McClanan	W	TKO	4
10/13/84	Toby Smith	W	KO	8
11/24/84	Fred Jordan	W	PTS	10
2/12/85	Ron Lee Warrior	W	UD	8
4/16/85	Luis Rivera	L	UD	10
9/18/85	Errol Christie	L	TKO	2
2/24/86	J. T. Thomas	L	UD	10
5/6/86	Paul Whitaker	L	UD	10
11/22/86	Ronnie Swink	W	TKO	2
5/9/87	Lopez McGee	W	PTS	10
7/11/87	Gerald Moore	W	KO	2
9/19/87	Gary Thomas	W	MD	10

(Officially resigned as a professional boxer)

The New York Times

5/24/1984

Barry Audia vs. Tommy Smith, middleweights, 10 rounds, and Pascual Aranda vs. Aaron Lopez, featherweights, 10 rounds, at Houston. (Television - **ESPN**, 8:30 P.M.)

Jim Palmer . . . From Keokee to Cincinnati

(Eula Clarkston, long time columnist for the Keokee community, published the following column in 1958. It serves well as an introduction to the career of Jim Palmer.)

Palmer signs with Royals

By Eula Clarkson

Do you remember the small fair-haired lad who trod through the paths of our Keokee hamlet delivering newspapers? Ah, yes, he was a familiar figure here a few years ago as he waved a cheery hello and called out "paper!" If you have known Jimmy Palmer you couldn't forget him.

When I opened my mail box a few days ago there was a letter from Peoria, Illinois. Enclosed were news clippings about Jimmy, or, should I say, Big Jim, as he is now 24 years old and six feet seven inches tall.

Jim left Keokee and went to Dayton, Ohio about six years ago this summer, after graduating from Keokee High School. He got his first break when he found a job at Delco. Basketball coach Jim Gift spotted him and recruited him for the plant basketball team.

Ritter Collett, writer for the Journal of Sports, puts it his way: "It's a pretty fair piece from Keokee, Va., to the Cincinnati Royals and even longer when you go by way of Dayton, Peoria and Moscow as Jim Palmer has just done."

I know that you will be interested to read that our Jim Palmer is in the news headlines: "JIM PALMER TURNS PRO; JOINS ROYALS. Jim Palmer, Caterpillar basketball star, signed a two-year contract with the Cincinnati Royals Saturday. The contract called for an estimated \$18,000 salary.

...Palmer's draft rights in the National Basketball Association had been held by the St. Louis Hawks, but he was traded to the Royals along with Wayne Embry (Miami, Ohio), and Darrell Floyd (Furman) for the Royals' No. 2 draft choice of next year.

...Palmer graduated from the University of Dayton in the spring of 1957 and played with Caterpillar during the 1957-58 season. While playing with the Cats he led the team in rebounding on the AAU All-American team and went with Coach Womble and that team on the Russian tour.

...Palmer said he was very pleased with the contract and the opportunity to play with the Cincinnati team. Jim plans to come to Keokee to visit before the season starts and will probably be here sometime in September. Yes, we are very proud of Jim Palmer, the boy from our village who has worked his way up.

The POST, Aug. 28, 1958

NBA HIGHLIGHTS

1958-59	Cincinnati	690 Points
1959-60	Cincinnati	181 Points
	New York	430 Points
1960-61	<u>New York</u>	<u>294 Points</u>
	<u>Total</u>	<u>1595 Points</u>

Thank You!!!

The Lee County Legend would like to say "thanks" to Terry Pope for all he has done to make this publication a success. He has given us countless rounds of encouragement to go forward with plans to write the history of sports for Lee County.

In addition, Terry's unending willingness to give us leads, information and lunch is certainly an asset that is very valuable to us.

Most of all, thank you, Terry, for being our friend.

Dave Audia and Lowell Lawson—The Legend Staff

Jim Pankovits . . . From Lee General Hospital to a Life in Baseball

Pennington Gap took great pride in watching Frank and Meda Smalley's grandson, Jim Pankovits (born at Lee General Hospital), progress from the high school ball fields of Virginia to a successful professional career. Jim followed in his Dad, Vince's footsteps. Vince was the player/coach for the Pennington Miners in the early 50's.

A versatile utility player, Jim, saw service at catcher, second base, shortstop, third base, and in left field . In 1986 he and his Astro team mates played the New York Mets in the National League Championship Series.

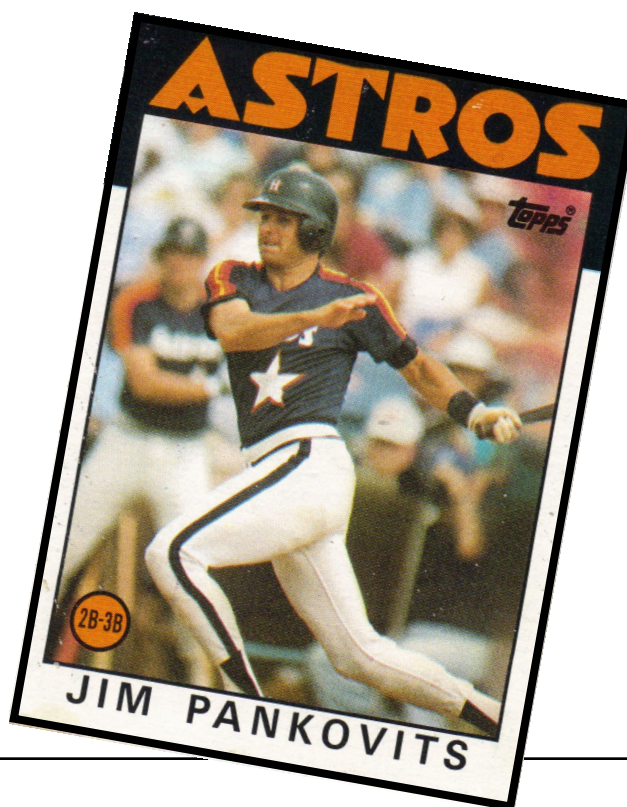
Following his active major league playing days he moved into managerial and instructor roles. He managed the Tri-City Valley Cats of the New York-Penn League through the 2010 season. In 2011 he took over the managerial reins for the Jackson Generals, Class AA Southern League affiliate of the Seattle Mariners.

MINOR LEAGUE SUMMARY

1976	COVINGTON	.247
1977	COCOA	.227
1978	COLUMBUS	.240
1978	CHARLESTON	.143
1979	COLUMBUS	.263
1979	CHARLESTON	.169
1980	TUCSON	.249
1981	TUCSON	.282
1982	HAWAII	.267
1983	TUCSON	.282
1984	TUCSON	.332

MAJOR LEAGUE SUMMARY

1984	HOUSTON	.284
1985	HOUSTON	.244
1986	HOUSTON	.283
1987	HOUSTON	.230
1988	HOUSTON	.221



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TO:

KEEPING THE MEMORIES ALIVE

