
Digger Stadium: There will never be another quite like it

Lyn Darrell doesn't have far to walk if he wants to watch the team he once coached – the Clear Creek Golddiggers – play. Since 1983 – the year after he started coaching in Idaho Springs – his house has sat just two blocks up and another one over from Golddigger Stadium.



Sara Hertwig

The Clear Creek Golddiggers return to the field for the second half, down 15-0 to Peyton on Sept. 20. CCHS would eventually drop the game 42-12. CCHS, which is 0-3 at Golddigger Stadium, will play its final game at the iconic field on Friday night against Jefferson High School. Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

He, literally, can see the field from his back window. And since 1958, Golddigger Stadium has resembled the epitome of what Friday Night Lights is all about in Idaho Springs.

It's the charm of the facility with the tight south sideline and vehicles whirling past on Interstate 70, honking their horns, though Darrell readily admits he didn't always hear those car horns. After all, he was busy, you know, coaching.

"It's a great place to watch a football game," said Darrell, 72, who came to Clear Creek after previously coaching in Nebraska.

One of the more iconic places to watch a high school football game because of its mountainous background, Golddigger Stadium has a charm about it that brought this small town together. If it was Friday night, there was interest in the local high school football game.

The soda pops, the hot dogs, the popcorn, it's all right there at the concession stands. The press box so minuscule that coaches can be

seen sitting on top of it, relaying play calls and dissecting the opponent's alignment to the coaches on the field. The scoreboard now rests on the southeast side of the stadium, not in the northwest corner. Oh, and the halftime locker rooms are right where they've been for some time — the home team in the bus barn and the visiting squad at the rec center.

The stands — most of the time — were filled to capacity, especially when the team was winning in the glory days of the 1980s and '90s, when Darrell coached the team to 10 of its 12 playoff appearances, including the only home playoff win, a shutout victory over Roosevelt on Oct. 31, 1997.

For Darrell, there isn't one particular moment that sticks out more than any other. Homecoming, as he recalled, was always a big deal, especially the fireworks thanks to the Clear Creek Booster Club. But, be it win or lose, there was always great support in those north sideline stands. To this day, players acknowledge the crowd — family, the student body and the band, all of whom roared their approval or disapproval but cheered anyway for their Golddiggers.

Darrell doesn't regularly attend games any longer. Retired life has taken over, with children and grandchildren occupying his time. But he returned for the Diggers' homecoming festivities a few weeks back, and it was just like old times.

The crowds have dwindled at times — though not this year at homecoming. Golddigger Stadium was overflowing with people, so much so that some stood on the outside peering in from the fence. Oh, and the bell was ringing loud and clear after every Clear Creek touchdown, just like days of yesteryear.

And no matter where he's traveling, Darrell will undoubtedly run into people who will ask him where he's from. When he replies Idaho Springs, Colo., they immediately know where he's talking about because of this iconic stadium.

"I ran into an over-the-road driver in Nova Scotia once at a campsite, and he said, 'I know where that's at. I was driving down the highway going west when all of a sudden there were fireworks going off all over the place,'" Darrell remembered.

Come Friday night, there will be no more fireworks, and the lights will shut down one final time. Darrell will miss those lights coming on, but

the memories will live a lifetime.

The bell will still ring, and the cheers will still be there. The fans likewise. But the ambiance that came with Golddigger Stadium will be different. A new field on Floyd Hill — just below where Clear Creek High School has sat since 2002 — will now be home to Friday Night Lights. It will be a new vibe — one that hopefully will bring its own charm in the years to come — but nothing will quite compare to driving westbound on I-70 and seeing those bright lights shining in Idaho Springs.

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