

## Torchy's Legacy at Xavier High School in Appleton, WI



Gene "Torchy" Clark circa 1963

Xavier opened its doors for the first time in the fall of 1959, and a young man named Gene "Torchy" Clark 'moved' from St. Mary's Grade School in Appleton to become the first head coach for the football and basketball teams at the city's first Catholic high school. He also coached the boys tennis teams and was the athletic director at XHS.

His legacy at Xavier almost seems made up, as he quickly established a very successful and strong tradition... one that still makes the school widely respected in athletic circles.

He coached 10 seasons at Xavier (the 1959 football season was against JV teams as the school opened with only freshmen and sophomores, and, XHS joined a conference in '61). Torchy's teams won almost 90% of the time, and, they earned plenty of "hardware" to fill the school's trophy cases: XHS won 7 conference championships in 8 years in football, and, they captured 8 conference titles in 8 seasons in basketball.

His B-ball teams went to the State Tournament in Milwaukee 6 times in 9 years, and the Hawks returned to Appleton with a trophy each time: Xavier won the State Title in 1963, was 2nd in '64, was 4th once, and claimed 3 Consolation honors.

A then-single-game-record-crowd of 7,095 witnessed the '63 state finals, eager to see Xavier top Marquette High, 71-66, in a raucous, "mostly-blue" Milwaukee Arena.

His basketball teams won 49 straight, but their shot at the '64 state title and 50-in-a-row came up short against Marinette Central & Coach Marty Crowe, 43-37.

Torchy's teams also had a 62-game regular season win streak – before Chicago St. Pat's put an end to that string, 66-54, before an as-always packed-in-crowd in the noisy & hot XHS gym.

The post-season Football Playoffs in Wisconsin did not start until 1969 – *after* Clark left Xavier for a college coaching position in Florida.



Each gold ball in the trophy case is from a conference championship won by Xavier in the early years of league play for XHS; many were earned by Coach Clark's teams.

A huge "gold ball" was the league's trophy / reward for conference championships, and those were the first of many such awards in the school's illustrious and proud athletic history that was started by Coach Clark and his teams. The outstanding fan support by the Xavier Community and the Valley for XHS athletic events, that also started in the Torchy Clark era, continues to this day.

His football teams posted a record of 69-9-2 overall, as 3 times XHS was 9-0 and 3 times was 8-1. Xavier shut out its opponents in nearly 50% of their games, as the Hawks averaged 27 points per game and

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allowed just 6 points a game... over 9 football seasons. The '62 team was rated # 1 in the state by the Associated Press.

His basketball teams were 208-26, and, after his first two years never had more than 3 losses in any of 8 straight seasons. XHS was undefeated in 6 seasons at home, and in two other seasons had just one loss at home – as his home-court advantage was 95-7 over 10 seasons. The Hawks outscored opponents in those 10 years by an average of 70.7 points to 50.7 points per game.

Torchy's record for football and basketball at Xavier was 277-35-2 -- a phenomenal 88% over 10 years.

He was inducted into the Hall of Fame for the Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association in 1981, and Torchy was the first Xavier coach to be so honored.

Torchy gained his nickname from his grade school athletic days... but it could have easily come from his red hair and fiery sideline personality, as he always demanded a top effort from all of his players. He left Xavier after the 1968-69 school year to coach basketball at Florida Tech University, which later became the University of Central Florida (UCF). Torchy continued his winning ways as a collegiate coach before retiring. He passed away on April 22, 2009 at the age of 80 years.

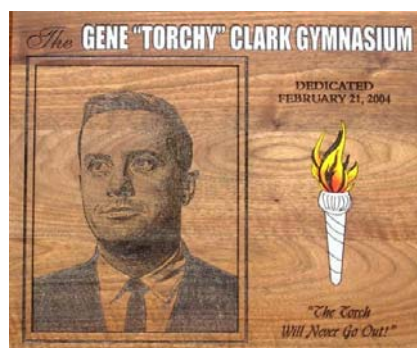
Torchy – and his wife, Claire – plus the many dedicated coaches and the hard-working, gifted student athletes who first walked the hallways at Xavier very instrumental in establishing the Hawks' athletic tradition.

### **TORCHY GYM DEDICATED – Feb. 21, 2004**

The gym at Xavier was dedicated in honor of Torchy Clark on Saturday, Feb. 21, 2004. Many alumni came back for the special night, including Rocky Bleier, who introduced Coach Clark. The MC for the event was Peter Bates, Xavier Class of 1979 and the Voice of the Hawks for XHS athletic events for 30 years. Peter introduced Rocky... who was welcomed back to Xavier to a warm, standing ovation by the sell-out crowd in the gym on hand for the dedication, a non-conference basketball game against Whitefish Bay Dominican, and social.

Lee Rabas, then coach of the Xavier Varsity Boys Basketball team, presented Torchy with a plaque, commemorating the event.

Thanks to so many people for their donations, input and assistance in making this special occasion a reality.



*Plaque in the gym lobby at Xavier*

A special thank-you goes to the Planning Committee for their hard work in organizing the "Torchy" Clark Gym Dedication event: Kathy Bates '71, Kelly Kornely '63, Kip Whitlinger '63, Brad Garvey '77, Rocky Bleier '64, Chris Richter, Rick Vander Wyst, Becky Weiske, Jim Weiland, Lee Rabas, Matt Reynebeau, Sena Gray, Sister Patrice Hughes, and Tom Simon. < more >

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Coach Clark and members of his family, plus many other coaches and members of the Xavier Community as well as the Fox Valley area were on hand – as the gym at Xavier was formally dedicated the “Torchy” Clark Gym. A reception was held in the Xavier Commons prior to the dedication, and a post-game celebration was held at Tornado’s Restaurant-Lounge located near Fox Cities Stadium in Appleton.

*Rocky, introducing Coach Clark →*



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### Photos of Torchy

## 1963 State Champs!!

