

THURSDAY

Section C

November 8, 2007

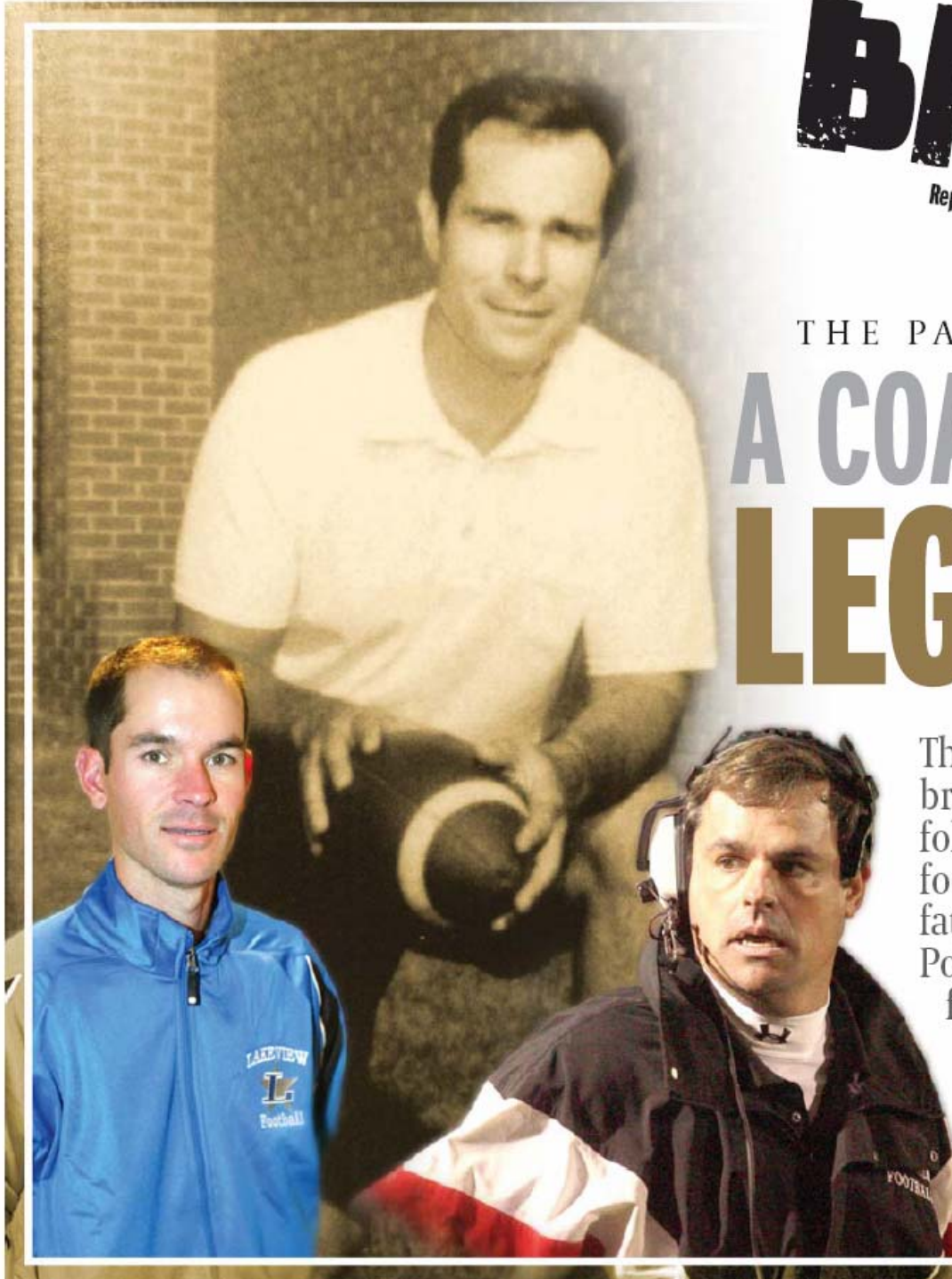
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THE PAVLANSKYS

A COACHING LEGACY

The Pavlansky brothers are following in the footsteps of their father, former Poland High football coach Dave Pavlansky, with equally successful coaching careers.



Tom and Mike Pavlansky both have their teams, Lakeview and Canfield, alive in the state playoffs.

By **JOE SCALZO**
VINDICATOR SPORTS STAFF

The four Pavlansky brothers would get up at sunrise in August, piling into their dad's station wagon at 6:30 in the morning to make the morning practice, then returning after 4, exhausted and exhilarated.

"Those were some of the best days I ever had," said Lakeview High football coach Tom Pavlansky, the youngest of the four. "We've all been on the practice field since kindergarten or second grade, going to triple sessions in August.

"Football teaches you so much about life. Life isn't going to give you everything you think you deserve. It's all about how you handle it. In football, you get knocked down and you learn to get up."

On Nov. 22, 1978, the Pavlansky family got knocked down.

Dave Pavlansky, 41, died after a 26-

month bout with cancer. The Poland High football coach left four sons, two daughters and his high school sweetheart since his days at Struthers High, Bernice.

"Losing him was obviously a challenge; it's a challenge even here today," said Tom Pavlansky. "But losing him allowed me to see how much good there is in people. I lost my dad, but I gained four or five other dads.

"If my dad didn't pass away, I don't know if I'd have the life I have today."

Tom Pavlansky, who has been the head football coach at Lakeview since 1999 and is also a successful track coach, won his first playoff game last weekend. His older brother, Mike, led Canfield to its sixth playoff victory in his seven years with the Cardinals.

All four brothers are successful coaches in the Mahoning Valley — Dave, the oldest, is the track and cross country coach

at Boardman, while Pat coaches girls tennis and girls basketball at Canfield — and their lives were shaped by those hot summer days on the practice field. It's where they learned to love sports — and coaching.

"We were fortunate enough to meet [Ohio State coach] Woody Hayes in the mid-70s and one thing he told us that stuck with me is that you don't get to choose your parents," said Mike. "Everything that happens after that is a choice, but not your parents."

"We were blessed to have two loving parents that were tremendous role models for us. It was tough to go wrong in that environment."

The elder Pavlansky was diagnosed with a brain tumor in fall of 1976. He had surgery a week later and, for awhile, he seemed to have made a full recovery. In 1978, the tumor returned and Pavlansky

made it through the football season, going 9-1 with a lone loss to eventual state champion Brookfield.

After his passing, Bernice went back to college and dedicated her life to making sure her kids succeeded. She still lives in the same house where the Pavlanskys grew up and still attends her sons' events.

"Watching her certainly made it more difficult for us to make a bad choice," said Mike. "We were not going to let our mom down and we certainly weren't going to tolerate anything less than the best from our brothers and sisters."

The family rallied around each other. Still does. As he was driving home on the turnpike following last Friday's win over Aurora, Tom called Mike so they could share the moment with his brother.

"It was a special conversation," said

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Tom. "We were really happy for each other and really proud of each other. Most of all, we understood it was a team thing. We were proud of our coaches and, especially, we were proud of the kids."

Both Pavlanskys enter Friday's playoff games as underdogs. Canfield plays the state's top-ranked team in Division II, Columbus DeSales. Lakeview plays Div. III power Walsh Jesuit.

"We're certainly happy for Tom and his staff and his kids and we're obviously in constant contact," said Mike. "We talk three or four times a week, bouncing ideas off each other."

"That's a neat thing to have.

We're all still heavily involved. Pat and Dave give us ideas, our spouses throw out ideas. It's exciting for us."

Through it all, they haven't lost sight of what's important. Sports are a huge part of their lives, but not the main part.

"I was only 9 when my dad passed away, so my memories aren't as strong as my brothers'," said Tom. "But the one thing more than anything else that I got from my dad, and it also came from my mom and the coaches and teachers that worked with my dad at Poland, is that each day is a new day. You can make an impact each day, whether positive or negative. If you do what's right, you'll continue to make a positive impact."

"I miss my dad incredibly. Football allows me to feel closer to him."

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