

# MacArthur's '66 team was special

They are in their late 50s now and many are grandfathers, the passage of time and winds of change scattering them throughout the country.

Still, the memories of MacArthur's first playoff run on the football field in 1966 endure for the men who played on the team that fell in the Class 4A state semifinals.

Some of them will be at the Alamodome on Saturday, cheering on the Brahmas in another state semifinal 40 years later.

"I really enjoy hearing that fight song," said David Ylitalo, a San Antonio attorney who was a junior defensive back on the 1966 team. "It still stirs something in me."

Houston Spring Branch beat MacArthur 14-6 on Dec. 10, 1966, at Memorial Stadium in Austin, handing the Brahmas their only loss in 13 games that year.

Ylitalo and some of his former teammates still can rattle off the names of some of the best players on the Spring Branch roster, which included quarterback Donnie Wigginton, who went on to play at Texas.

"It's kind of a neat deal, thinking back on that kind of stuff," said Rocky Self, the Brahmas' starting quarterback in 1966. "I still remember a lot of the scores and the plays



DAVID FLORES

from that season. I guess stuff like that sticks in your head."

Self, who lives in San Antonio, can't remember the last time he went to a MacArthur game but plans to

watch the Brahmas' clash with Cypress Falls in the 5A Division II playoffs.

MacArthur has advanced to this round one other time, falling 14-6 to Katy in 1998.

But the 1966 team, coached by Joe Bill Fox, always will be remembered for setting the program's benchmarks.

Self, a senior that season, was the catalyst of an offense that scored 389 points and was fairly balanced for that era. He passed for 13 touchdowns and nearly 1,000 yards.

Fullback Dutch Riefler, now deceased, was the Brahmas' leading rusher. Halfbacks Mike McLeod and Al Hook Jr. also carried some of the offensive load.

Hook, who also played linebacker, was at Bobcat Stadium in San Marcos last week when

MacArthur beat San Marcos 50-43 in an overtime thriller.

"I hate to steal (Odessa) Permian's thing, but this team has got some mojo going for it right now," Hook said. "I hope these young players are enjoying what they're doing because they're going to remember it for a long, long time."

Hook played a key role on a defense that allowed only 94 points.

"Our defense was outstanding," Fox said.

Fox lives in Keller, near Fort Worth, and has kept up with the 2006 Brahmas through phone calls from former assistant coach Ezra Corley.

"I'm proud of them," Fox said. "Ezra told me they had a strong team at the beginning of the season, and it looks like they've gotten better."

Fox, 74, could have been describing the 1966 Brahmas. After recording two one-point victories in their first seven games, MacArthur closed out the regular season by beating Roosevelt, Sam Houston and rival Lee decisively.

The Brahmas trounced Harlandale 48-7 in bidistrict and defeated Alice 21-12 in the state quarterfinals before 18,046 fans at Alamo Stadium.

"We had a great nucleus back that year," said Fox, who coached the Brahmas for seven seasons before becoming

athletic director of the North East Independent School District in 1967. "Those kids had a wonderful attitude."

MacArthur scored first in the semifinal game, Hook hitting end Rock Oberlies with a 20-yard option pass for the TD. The Brahmas missed the extra point, but their 6-0 lead stood until the Bears scored in the third quarter and converted the extra-point kick.

The Brahmas appeared ready to take the lead when they drove from their 33 to the Spring Branch 11 midway through the fourth quarter. But after Hook ripped off 9 yards to move MacArthur just inside the 2, the Bears stiffened and held Riefler twice and Hook once for no gain.

"I thought we scored or at least made the first down," Self said.

Said Hook: "A lot has been said about that over the years."

Spring Branch took over with 5:30 left and Wigginton ran 35 yards for the Bears' second TD with 58 seconds remaining.

"I thought we should have won it all that year," Self said.

For the record, San Angelo, coached by Emory Bellard, beat Spring Branch 21-14 for the state championship.

[dflores@express-news.net](mailto:dflores@express-news.net)