

"MAN IN THE MIDDLE"

by Fred Ambrose

"The Eyes Have It:"

In 1956, when I started to play organized football for St. Bernard's grade school, I asked my Dad, "How do I know the best guys?" His answer was easy: "The eyes. Always watch their eyes." It wasn't until the fall of '85 that I would truly know what he meant. It was when the voice of my 11 year old son called my name from the empty lot next door. "Dad, I'm King, I'm King of the Mountain!" His hands high over his head, dirt mixed with sweat on his face, his orange Morgan State Division 11 Championship shirt ripped under his left arm, hair totally dishelved. But that was not what caught my eye. It was his eyes - the look deep in his eyes - for he had just defeated all comers: Bryan, Dougan, and the toughest of them all, his older sister, Alys Lee. But, there he was, the King of the Mountain, with that look my father had told me about 29 years ago. I know this look, this energy, this feeling of accomplishment. I see it every March when I'm among the privileged ones to witness it first hand, when I raise the hand of the champion. Vini, vidi, vici. I came, I saw, I conquered. It's the quiet battle cry of every champion. I can hear them saying it without them ever moving their lips. You can feel their heart pounding right through their wrists as I hold their hand high over their sweat covered heads in victory. It's the same look I saw in the eyes of a young boy who became King of his Mountain so long ago. I know their names: Reyes, St. John, Brands, Demaray, Gutches just to name a few of the ones I have crowned. Their names are etched forever in the book of champions and in the hearts of their friends and families, knowing that they are the crème de la crème, and gave it their all. It's a thrill to be the one who raises their hands high above their heads, seeing the cameras going off at all four corners of the coliseum, and be the one who shows the world the new King of the Mountain for his year. And, when the King climbs that mountain of wood to the summit to receive his gold medal of victory, all others who came can only look up with hopes that some day...So, the next time you see a group of kids playing "King of the Mountain" look deep into their eyes because you, too, may find a champion, a real winner, like I did.