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Remember When: Myles Witchey, Teacher, Coach and Race Car Driver

In the 1950's most race car drivers were affiliated with different aspects of the auto industry. It was unheard of for a college professor like Myles Witchey to be involved in auto racing.

The California University men's basketball program has been one the most successful in the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference and one individual who continued and enhanced the Vulcan's' rich history is Myles Witchey. Not only was Witchey one of the school's most successful basketball coaches, he was also a longtime distinguished faculty member. He began teaching at Cal U as an assistant professor of physical education in the fall of 1962 and retired as the department head in January of 1988.

Originally from Belmont , Ohio , this graduate of Belmont High School competed in basketball and softball. Witchey earned his degree in education from West Liberty College , a master's degree from West Virginia University , and served in the U.S. Army for two years. He has two grown children, Brian and Myles.

Witchey attended his first race as a fan at Debo Park in Ohio . He raced at Debo Park and Grabits Speedway driving cars for Stanley Grabits and Bucky Reline. He drove under the assumed name of Bobby Barnes from Little Rock , Arkansas . The name was given to him by Sam Reppard the announcer at Debo Park to prevent his parents from knowing that he was racing.

While racing at Debo and Grabits Speedways he attended West Liberty State College. Some of his competitors included drivers Mike Bice, Dean Mast, Baldy Baker, and Jack Stefan. Myles said, "they did not let me win a feature race". Myles first saw Heidelberg Raceway when he drove for the Z-1 for Bob Burris in his absence. Witchey used his own name while racing in the Pittsburgh Racing Association. He

had a ride in the Campbell #101 Firedome at Heidelberg for the season ending race on the half mile. Unfortunately, the event was rained out that Sunday and Myles entered the military (Army) the next day.

After two years in the Army he returned to racing and replaced Ed Fiola in Borandi's GMC powered Chevy Coupe. Fiola had vacated this ride to drive for his brother Jim.

Myles was teaching and coaching in St. Clairsville, OH while racing PRA at Heidelberg and South Park. During the summers he attended graduate school.

After Borandi got out of racing, Witchey drove for Don Fenney. Fenney had purchased East Liverpool, Ohio driver, Jack Stefan's Pontiac powered Ford coupe. Fenney and Witchey competed at Heidelberg and Claridge Speedways against drivers like Herb Scott, Buddy O'Conner, Joe Mihalic, Joe Viglione, and Gus Linder. "Herb was the best as defined by his ten PRA Championships". "Those drivers did let me win a few feature races", said Witchey.

He eventually teamed up with Mike Kemple in the Palmer Pontiac coupe at Jennerstown competing against drivers Joe Viglione, Blackie Watt, Rollie Smith, and Smokey Stover. Kemple got involved in racing helping Eddie Graham and driver, Rollie Smith. Some of Kemple's racecars during his eight years in the sport included cars 104, 99, 49, 16, 35 and 25. Kemple built some beautiful racecars in his career including two for Witchey. The sharp looking #25 Ford Coupe driven by Witchey was a constant front runner at the Jennerstown Speedway. Kemple and his last driver Witchey remain friends today.

Myles drove Viglione's coupe a few times and rolled it over at the Indiana Fairgrounds. He also raced it at Bedford in a 100 mile NASCAR sanctioned race. When the late models replaced the coupes Kemple built a 1957 Pontiac race car that they ran twice at Langhorne and Heidelberg. Mike sold the car to me and moved out of state and Myles drove the car at South Park. Witchey was squeezed up against the outside wall at South Park and crashed against the pit exit on the back straight and destroyed the car. This was the last race of his career.

Myles and I became friends while I was one of his students at Cal State and he decided to use my name to protect his identity. He had been fired from a previous position from a school in Ohio when they discovered that he was a racecar driver. We decided that since I was attending California State and racing on a limited basis that he would race using the alias Don Gamble. Everything was fine until one

Saturday night in 1962 Don Gamble (Witchey) won the modified feature at Jennerstown Speedway and the other Don Gamble (me) won the feature at South Park Raceway. The race results were listed in the trade papers in the same issue and it was necessary for Myles to become Lee Palmer, another alias, to avoid any other confusion or termination of employment. I am pleased to say that I have remained friends with Kemple and Witchey and cherish the memories.

Rappin' on Racin' is starting the twenty fourth year on the air. The show can be heard live Mondays at 6:00 on WEDO 810 on the AM dial. Rappin' on Racin' is available over the Internet by way of our website www.speedwayproductions.biz. We have a lot of special guests lined up for the coming months plus a few surprises. Listeners won't have to miss any show since each show's content will be archived.

Mike Lysakowski will alternate weeks as the co-host along with guest hosts Deana Barbara, Jim Dinsmore, Dave Dragovich, Jack Crowell, Dick Curry, Dave Kohler, Bill Korch, Keith Koval, Mike Milliron, Don Rottman, Ed Schaefer, Jason Shank and Jim Zufall to bring the listeners the latest breaking motorsports news. The two-hour show features special guests, local track reports, driver interviews and open phone lines. Weekly reports include NHRA, Indy Car, World of Outlaws, DIRT, All Stars, MACS and NASCAR.

In addition to Monday night's Rappin' on Racin' Speedway Productions produces Trackside from Lernerville Speedway on Friday evenings at 6:00 PM . The show features reports on race night activities and driver interviews. Make plans to join us every week.