

OLAN HIGGINBOTHAM

Olan Higginbotham became the first Belton H.S. football player to make All-State when he was named 3rd team All-State by the Waco Tribune-Herald in 1923. He later played football at Southwestern of Georgetown and St. Marys of San Antonio and lived and worked in Belton until his death in 1963.

Olan Alexander Higginbotham was born on April 23, 1905, in TN and moved to Belton in 1913 with his parents, James Marion and Mary Lucinda Fox Higginbotham, and siblings, Frank, Alda, Dora, Charles, John Benjimen and Lula Oleta. Frank and Charles operated a dairy farm on S. Pearl Street in Belton in the 1930s & 1940s.

The University Interscholastic League (UIL) listed 298 schools playing football in Texas in 1923 with the first state championship being held in 1921 when Bryan defeated Dallas Oak Cliff, 35-13, for the first state championship. The first known effort to name an All-State team was made by the Waco Tribune-Herald in 1922. The Waco newspaper selected a 1st, 2nd and 3rd All-State team the next year in 1923 naming 31 boys from large schools and 2 boys from small schools. The "small school" exceptions were Whitaker of Strawn who was named 1st team QB and Olan Higginbotham of Belton who was named 3rd team G.

George Fall, sportswriter for the Waco Tribune-Herald, who named four Waco boys to the 1st all-state team, explained his choice of Higginbotham on the all-state team by noting that he "won his place" by his "performance in the mud" in Waco's 12-0 defeat of Belton (the closest game Waco played before the state final). Waco was the defending state champion having beaten Abilene 13-10 in 1922 and was the state runner-up in 1923 losing 3-0 to Abilene after going unscored upon all year (409 points to 0). The Waco newspaper and a Waco H.S. scout both placed Higginbotham of Belton on their all-state team.

Higginbotham played guard on defense and fullback on offense during the year. The Tigers had their best year in 1923 going 7-1-1 on the year with its second ever victory over Temple (6-0) and had 5 shutouts and total points of 256 to 25. The Tiger backfield star was Capt. Byron Hallmark.

Higginbotham was average in size at 163 lbs. as the Tiger line averaged 166 lbs. and the backfield, 154 lbs. Olan was known for his "plunging" into the defensive line from his fullback position. He later played football for one year (1928) as a starting right tackle at Southwestern in Georgetown where he was on the same team as two other Belton boys (Eddie Franklin and Bob Safley) who later became long-time coaches at Belton. Olan also played football for two years (1929-1930) at St. Marys of San Antonio where he was a starting guard. The 6'4" 176 lb. Higginbotham was part of the 1929 St. Mary's team that was 8-1 (the best record in school history).

Olan left St. Mary's early (one semester before graduation) and worked in the oil fields of west Texas before returning to Bell County where he owned and operated a taxi service in Belton with his brother, Ben, for several years. He later owned a grocery store in Killeen and was "working construction" in Austin at the time of his death on April 14, 1963, at the age of 58 from complications of a fall at home. He was buried in Oakalla cemetery in Burnet County and was survived by his wife, Esta Lee Brittian Higginbotham; daughter, Mary Elizabeth Dunlap; sons,

Olan Don, Ronald Lee, and Charles Dean; by his brother, Ben; and one sister, Dora Lee Matejowsky. In 2010 Olan was survived by his sons, Olan Don Higginbotham of Belton, Ronald Lee Higginbotham of Harker Heights, and Charles Dean Higginbotham of Georgetown; one daughter, Mary Elizabeth Dunlap of Salado; and by 10 grandchildren and 5 great grand children.

Olan Higginbotham was belatedly added to the Belton H.S. Athletic Wall of Honor in 2010 when Dr. Wilbanks discovered the Dec. 23,1923 article in the Waco Tribune-Herald indicating his all-state status.