

Kennedy shooting affected ILH title

By Bill Kwon

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I was playing the second hole at the Barbers Point golf course with fellow reporter Lyle Nelson when we heard that President John F. Kennedy was shot in a motorcade in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

En route back to the office, we heard on the car radio that Kennedy had died, victim of an assassination.

It was a tragedy that left the nation in grief, not unlike our feelings as we watch the casualties continue to mount following the attack on America by terrorists Tuesday in New York City and Washington, D.C.

In the days following Kennedy's assassination we watched replay after replay until it was vividly etched in our minds.

But those memories cannot compare with the images of jetliners being deliberately crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

To me, as tragic as the Kennedy assassination was, it pales in comparison with the recent catastrophes, which left wounds that will never heal for the families of the thousands of innocent victims.

Rightly so, all major sporting events were canceled in order to allow the nation to mourn and reflect over this latest and bloodiest tragedy in America since the Civil War.

It was not the case in 1963.

It was November, six days before one of the saddest Thanksgivings ever observed, so the major league baseball season was long over.

The National Football League, though, played a full schedule that Sunday — a controversial decision that late commissioner, Pete Rozelle, later said he truly regretted. Also, many major college football games were still played that weekend.

Unlike the rival NFL, the eight-team American Football League canceled its games. So did the Pacific Coast Conference, then an eight-team league. There was no football that weekend on the West Coast for the first time since World War II.

I was scheduled to work that Friday night, covering the **University of Hawaii's homecoming football game against Cal Western**. That game, too, was postponed until the following Wednesday night.

The biggest football game that weekend, though, didn't involve UH.

Rainbow football took a backseat to the Interscholastic League of Honolulu back then.

The whole town was talking about the Interscholastic League of Honolulu championship game between Kamehameha and Farrington, scheduled for the following night. The game had been sold out for weeks,

and more than 25,000 were expected to be at the Honolulu Stadium. It was also scheduled to be shown live on television by KHVH-TV, one of only four stations then.

Farrington was led by prep back of the year Bob Apisa, who went on to star for Michigan State. He along with two other high school stars from Hawai'i — Iolani kicker Dick Kenney and Punahou's Charlie Wedemeyer — were on the 1966 Spartans team, ranked No. 2, that played No. 1 Notre Dame in the first sporting event televised live in Hawai'i.

The Governors were favored to beat the Warriors for their first football championship since 1944. But the championship game was postponed until Thanksgiving Day.

For the first time since its inception, the ILH's traditional Thanksgiving Day doubleheader involving the top four teams was canceled, leaving the spotlight only on Farrington and Kamehameha.

The Warriors, who had given up only three touchdowns during the regular season, won, 10-8. It was Kamehameha's fourth ILH championship in six years, and winning coach Cal Chai called the 1963 team the best of the four.

Until he died, Farrington coach Tom Kiyosaki believed that the postponement cost his team the championship. At practice the Monday after Kennedy's death, Kiyosaki said that his team had been mentally ready for the game that Saturday night.

"I just hope we can stay up for Thursday," he said.

As it turned out, they didn't. But they had a lot of company across the country during the grim Thanksgiving week following the tragic event that happened on Nov. 22, 1963.

Bill Kwon has written about sports in Hawai'i since 1959.