

# Interview with Coach Dick Carter (Class of 1965)

By Jason Shum

Coach Dick Carter’s devotion to Piedmont football began in 1961 when he first suited up for the Highlanders as a freshman. A graduate of the Class of 1965, he returned to the program as a coach, starting with Piedmont Middle School flag football in 2004 and 2005 before becoming Freshman and JV Football Coach at Piedmont High School in 2006. It is a role he continues today. A lifelong Piedmonter, he passed on his love for the game to his twin sons boys who also played for Piedmont.

Coach Carter’s impact reaches far beyond the sidelines. He has served as Chair of the Piedmont Recreation Commission, co-founded the popular Walking on Wednesdays program that brings neighbors together for weekly exercise and community connection, and continues to support seniors through local recreation programs. Known as a steady and thoughtful leader, he has strengthened community ties across generations and helped make recreation and athletics a central part of Piedmont life.

Outside of his civic and coaching roles, Coach Carter built a distinguished career in marketing and business leadership. He earned a BA in History and an MBA in Marketing from the University of California, Berkeley, where he also served as the Varsity Boxing Coach while completing his graduate studies. His career spans leadership roles at Procter & Gamble, Ralston Purina, and No Nonsense Fashions, as well as executive positions in marketing agencies.

As an entrepreneur, he owned and operated four Wendy’s restaurants before launching Carter Marketing Group. He later served as Chief Marketing Officer of the California Alumni Association, where he revitalized membership, expanded partnerships, and generated significant new revenue. Coach Carter has also served as a member of University Senior Living Partners LLC, developing senior living communities connected to colleges and universities.

Today, Coach Carter remains a cornerstone of both Piedmont athletics and community life, embodying the tradition, continuity, and civic spirit that make Piedmont special.

*Q: How has Piedmont Football changed over the years?*

**Coach Carter:** I look at Piedmont High football from two different time perspectives. First, I think back over 60 years ago when I was a student at PHS and played football, and second from 20 years ago when I first started coaching the freshman team in the fall of 2006.

From both perspectives there has been a dramatic increase in commitment required to play high school football. This is especially the case compared to playing Piedmont football in the early 1960s. Back then, we showed up in August for “double days” and started the season. There were no off-season weight training and conditioning.

Twenty years ago, there was an understanding that this work was needed, but the follow-through by the coaches and boys was inconsistent. The “arms war” of high school football has escalated very significantly over the recent years and what is required to play football is much greater today for players and coaches.

With the increased commitment and effort required to play high school football, players have gotten bigger, stronger, faster, and more athletic. A “big player” in the 1960s was 200+ pounds. The idea of a high school player being 300 pounds or more was almost unimaginable. You certainly see this sized player today.

High school football coaching and the level of playbook sophistication today is much greater today. It is probably greater than that of many college football teams in the 1960s. I can only remember the PHS head varsity, JV, and freshmen coaches when I played. I’m not sure if there were assistants. In the 1960s the coaches were usually PE or other PHS teachers. This was less common 20 years ago and today.

That brings up another important difference between now and both 60 and 20 years ago. We had three levels, varsity, JV, and freshman at both of these times. The varsity had over 30 players and the JV and freshmen teams each had between 30 and 40. So, there were almost 100 boys playing football each year. It was almost a right-of-passage for a 9th grade boy to play freshman football. Unfortunately, the much smaller number of boys participating required the merging of the freshman and JV teams about ten years ago.

A positive recent change has been the importance given to coaching safe techniques. When I played, you were taught to tackle with your “head across the bow” (i.e., in front of the direction of the ballcarrier). It wasn’t until the last five or so years that it has become recognized that rugby tackling with your head out of the tackle can be just as effective and can reduce concussions and neck injuries.

Equipment is better today too. I was small in high school and it seemed my helmet and shoulder and other pads weighed almost as much as I did. Pads are lighter today and this along with higher levels of conditioning make the game faster.

Witter Field got converted from grass to turf around 1999. (Turf could make the game faster too.) The grass in the middle of the field was destroyed during the season, which made for a hard surface, but it was fun playing in mud when it rained. Boys don’t



Dick Carter, PHS Class of 1965, has been a part of the Piedmont High football program since 2006.

get to play on grass very often today. That’s a change too.

*Q: What do you think your sons gained from playing football at Piedmont?*

**Coach Carter:** My twin sons played football all four years while they were at Piedmont and I think it was helpful in establishing the importance of doing something hard in its entirety and not quitting. Things in life are hard at times, but you have to have the mental strength and discipline to stick with challenges and work through them. I think football helped my boys understand this. It also provided some confidence that they could handle difficult things in their lives. Additionally, I think the need for every player on the field to perform his job correctly for a play to be successful reinforced the importance of teamwork for my sons.

*Q: What traditions or rituals have stayed consistent over the years?*

**Coach Carter:** Friday night lights at Witter are an important one. I remember being in elementary school at Havens and coming to the high school football games. We sat in the stands at the south end of the field. It was fun and exciting. (We tried to get the players to give us their chin straps at the end of the games.)

The players doing Piedmont victory jacks in front of the stands after a win is a great tradition. It’s a rightful celebration for everyone. We’ve been doing it for a while now.

*Q: Who are some standout players or teams from the past that you think deserve to be remembered?*

**Coach Carter:** I didn’t coach them, but Mike Humphries’ frosh teams went undefeated for something like three seasons in a row in the early 2000s. Coach Kliszewski coached these teams too and can provide more information. It is an impressive accomplishment.

Our 2018 JV team went 10 and 0 and is memorable one for me. It was team that was made up primarily of a large, strong sophomore class. As freshmen they took their lumps and gained experience, but as sophomores they excelled. Two years later I believe these same boys went undefeated, 5 and 0, as seniors in a shortened 2020 season.

There have been many excellent Piedmont players over the years. Drew Olsen was an outstanding quarterback who played at UCLA and in the NFL. He started on the PHS Varsity as a freshman, but I didn’t have any coaching experience with him.

I did coach Gabe Watson and he stands out in my memory as the best Piedmont running back that I ever experienced. Sadly, Gabe tore his ACL in a playoff game at the end of his senior season. He worked hard to rehab and had some excellent college football accomplishments. He finished his career at the University of Texas. Gabe was an outstanding athlete and a fine young man. He was the best player on all his PHS teams and he was also the hardest worker. There was a correlation.

*Q: What do you think sets Piedmont’s football program apart from others in the area?*

**Coach Carter:** Piedmont doesn’t have the biggest or most athletic players in the area and often in its games. I think our boys realize that in order to win they have to be in excellent physical condition and play with better technique and skill than their opponents. This means Piedmont players have to work very hard before and during the season, and they do. Other schools’ players work hard too, but we are almost always competitive because of our hard work and the pride and confidence that comes with it.

*Q: What inspired you to become a football coach, and*

*what keeps you motivated each season?*

**Coach Carter:** Since I had two sons playing middle school flag football with practices at 6:30 a.m. I felt I should be down on Witter with them in the morning dark. It turned out to be the best decision I’ve ever made. Helping boys develop into better football players and young men during their time in the PHS football program has been a joy for me. I particularly enjoy working with freshmen and watching them develop over their four years. They become “our boys.” It especially gratifying to see them after they graduate and come back as grown men for visits.

*Q: How has support from the school or local community changed over the years?*

**Coach Carter:** Unfortunately, the cost of conducting the football program has increased dramatically over the recent years and not all of it can be borne by the school. This has necessitated parents and the community stepping up and providing more financial support for the program. JV Coach Greg Dietrick, who is also the father of Piedmont boys and future PHS players, has done a wonderful job of organizing some of this support.

I would also note that players’ mothers have provided needed team support in recent years as “team parents.” This was not part of the program when I was in school and it is very beneficial today.

I believe the Piedmont Boosters have been active in the supporting the team since at least the 1990s. Their contributions have also been consistent and very important.

*Q: What are some of the toughest moments the team has faced, and how did they overcome them?*

**Coach Carter:** I think the toughest moments were when the numbers of players dropped to levels that did not allow for fielding full teams. About 10 years ago, we had to combine the freshmen and JV teams. This means less opportunity for younger boys to play and develop. It also means that sometimes our freshmen are playing against juniors on the other teams, but our players have

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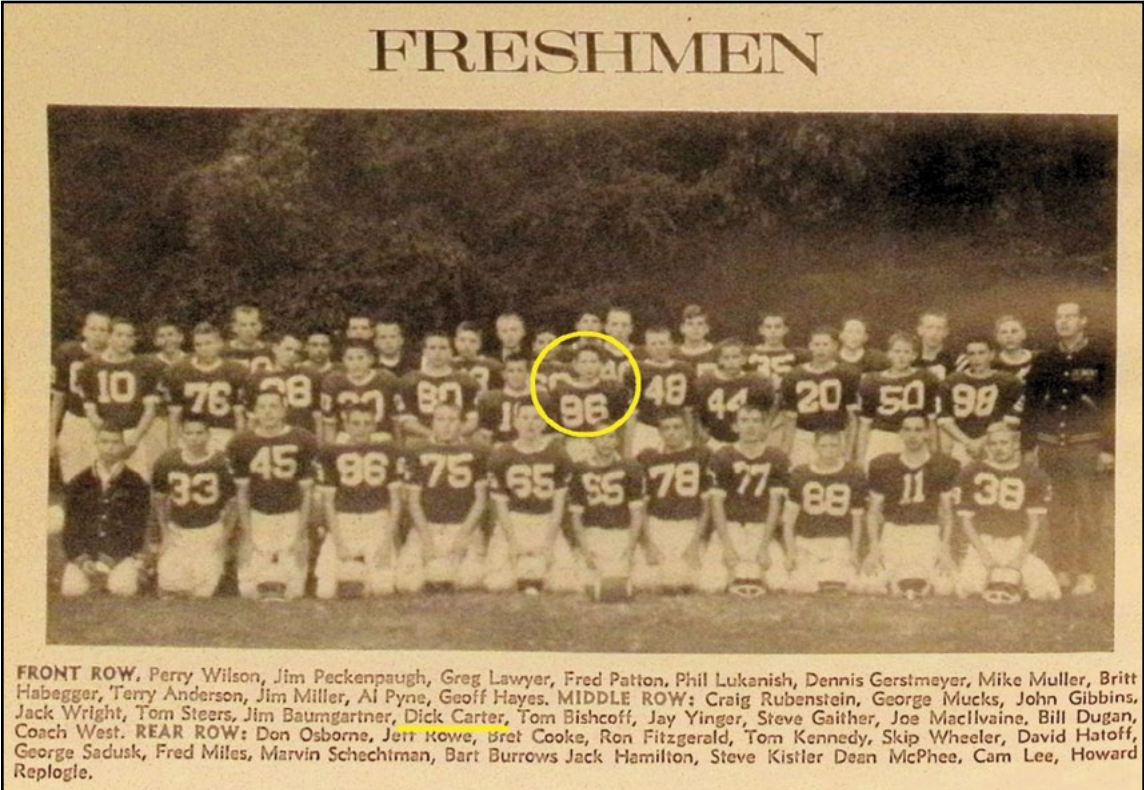
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Coach Carter as a member of the Piedmont Freshman Football Team in 1961



Ex Machina

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posed with a startling self-awareness and empathy?

*Ex Machina* opens with Caleb (Domhall Gleeson), an employee of a Google-like company, flying in a helicopter to the remote, mountain retreat of the company's owner, Nathan (Oscar Isaac). He will spend a week involved in what is called a "Turing test."

Upon his arrival – the home is constructed of steel, concrete and glass, beautiful yet stark – he is briefed by Nathan regarding the purpose of his mission. Caleb will be conducting a series of interviews with a robot named Ava (Alicia Vikander). She has a human form, her body, in some places transparent thus revealing her inner circuitry. She possesses a gorgeous face and a soft, seductive voice. Caleb is tasked with determining whether Ava can cross that boundary that differentiates man from machine. Is she conscious of the difference between Caleb and herself?

He sits in a glass-walled room, Ava on one side of a glass divide and Caleb on the other. Nathan

is watching and recording the interactions. It is a fascinating series of conversations in which it soon becomes clear that Caleb is drawn to Ava. Her humanity, so to speak, attracts him. Her preternatural responses are enigmatic, varied, demonstrating a curiosity about him that he finds appealing and surprising.

The above doesn't begin to describe how strangely creative this film is, how remarkably different. The characters, to include Ava, are remote, bright, inaccessible, yet maddeningly flawed and revealing. Nathan delivers a fraternal, let's be bros patter with an embedded menace that makes Caleb feel relaxed, at least initially, and then increasingly uneasy as each day passes.

The setting is simultaneously austere and yet welcoming, the trees seeming to be part of the house's modern and sparse interior. There is a sense of bonhomie and beauty layered with a chilling detachment (*Ex Machina* was filmed in a mountainous region of Norway).

There is also a question woven into the narrative: how do we define our own humanity? What makes us unique, as distinguished from other life forms on the planet? We know there are those among us who seem to have flat lined, as if they had been in retreat all of their lives. And yet there are those who, in the alternative, burn with a life force and possess a certain spark. Many glow with a humanity that can astonish when they engage. They possess qualities that can seem indefinable. Whatever it is, we know it when we encounter it.

And it is that experience with Ava that gives Caleb pause while he marvels at what Nathan has achieved. Clearly her intelligence exceeds his. And yet, he also feels surrounded by a sense of corruption, that much of what he is told is a distortion and that he is being manipulated. The question is, by whom?

*Ex Machina. Written and directed by Alex Garland. Starring Domhall Gleeson, Oscar Isaac and Alicia Vikander. 1 hr., 47 min. Rated R. Streaming on Prime/Apple/Fandango/YouTube.*

Coach Carter

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always taken on the challenge.

However, one of the really tough moments was not long ago when there weren't enough varsity players to field a team that could play safely. We were down to about 15 players with some guys being on the field almost the entire game. There weren't enough seniors on the team and the decision was made midseason to fold the varsity into the JV team. Some Piedmont football careers were over because seniors are not eligible to play JVs.

At the time, people were asking if Piedmont football was going to die. Was the risk of football concussions too great for Piedmont boys? Were parents going to let their sons play? This was not the case. The problem was that the Piedmont Recreation Department, which runs Piedmont Middle School sports, didn't have a flag football program when these seniors were in middle school. This may have been because of construction work and limited field access at the time. The boys weren't exposed to football in middle school and as one player told me, "It just wasn't a thing."

Thankfully, Billy Goldstein introduced his "Skyhawk" flag middle school program to Piedmont, and the number boys playing football increased significantly and also successfully. Billy's first-year players went on to win league championships at PHS.

*Q: What role does Friday night football play in Piedmont's identity?*

**Coach Carter:** It's an important aspect of the program. These games are the only PHS athletic events, or any PHS event for that matter, that students and the Piedmont community turn out for in large numbers. As I said earlier, elementary school students are there and they get excited about football. The PHS student body attends Friday night football games like no other event. You can feel the difference that Friday night play makes when you go to away day games. The boys play just as

hard, but the energy of the people in the stands is not the same.

*Q: How has your coaching philosophy evolved since you started?*

**Coach Carter:** I didn't have a coaching philosophy when I started except that I felt being there and supporting my sons and the other boys was important. However, over the years, I have come to understand the responsibility for coaching football in as safe a way as possible. Football is hard both physically and mentally. That's one of its best aspects. It's a tough contact sport and injuries do happen, but it can be played in a way that reduces injuries. It starts with getting the boys physically strong and flexible so that they can absorb the hitting and twisting, but coaching safe tackling with the head out the tackle is extremely important too.

In 2018 our JV team was playing Castro Valley. We were undefeated and the team that won this game would be the unofficial "JV League Champions." We had the ball. It was 3rd and short and we ran a drive up the middle. Their middle linebacker flew head-first to make the stop and lay on the field motionless for the next 45 minutes until an ambulance arrived to take him to the hospital. Thankfully, his neck was only badly jammed and not broken. But the experience reinforced for me how important it is for players to play and especially tackle with safe techniques.

My "philosophy" now is that supporting the physical and mental development of your players and keeping them safe through hard conditioning and proper techniques are the most important things that a coach can do.

*This interview is part of Jason Shum's Eagle Scout Project with Troop 15, documenting the history of Piedmont High School football for the Piedmont Football Archive at PiedmontGridiron.club. Featured coaches include Jordan Seiden, Beth Black, Pouyan Assadi, Dick Carter, and Mark Kliszewski.*

READ IT IN THE POST

Where in the World Are We?



The Piedmont Avenue Members Association (PAMA) held its fall meeting at J. Miller Flowers, bringing together PAMA members and new readers of the *Piedmont Post*. Thanks to Pizzeria Violetta, Ebiko Sushi and Holly's Mandarin for some delicious food for the evening meeting.

Send your photos of the Post in the far corners of the world, or of other communities named Piedmont, to: WITWAW, 1139 Oakland Avenue, Piedmont, CA 94611.

2025 Calendar of Events

October 1 - October 8

Wednesday, October 1

5:30 p.m. .... Park Commission Meeting..... City Hall

Sunday, October 5

11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. .... PUSD Rainbow Connections..... Piedmont Park

Monday, October 6

6:00 p.m. .... City Council Meeting..... City Hall

Meetings may be viewed on KCOM (Channel 27) and on the City's website: [piedmont.ca.gov](http://piedmont.ca.gov).

FLIP by Phil Witte

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WAWK

WAWK

DONT  
WOK

WOK

N.Y.C. vs. Boston