

# Tennent Black-White events 'an enduring tradition'

By Gary Weckselblatt Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, March 9, 2015 5:00 pm

For students in the Centennial School District, the fascination with participating in the annual Black and White extravaganza begins well before they're of high school age.

“There are a ton of elementary school kids who watch their brothers and sisters before they even set foot at William Tennent,” said Dennis Best, principal. “They’re thinking about how they can’t wait to do it. It becomes a goal they want to attain.”

What began 50 years ago as a modest athletic event has become a three-day competition with academic challenges and gym and pool nights. On Monday, the White Gladiators defeated the Black Phantoms, giving White a 27-23 series advantage.

But Black and White, created by physical education teacher Al Rice and named in honor of the school’s colors, is far more than about wins and losses.

“There’s a frenzy of activity,” said Steve Adams, a Centennial school board member who participated in the activities and hosted many at his home for his children and their friends. “Everybody’s running around, everybody feels responsible, everybody feels involved.

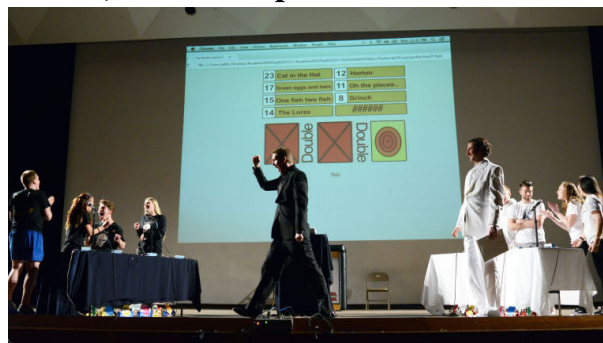
“It’s an enduring tradition.”

Black and White teams are created by dividing students alphabetically. Led by team generals, a post reserved for school leaders, students face each other in various challenges that test their minds and athleticism. The rivalry, which includes making posters and T-shirts, is tempered by healthy doses of fun and camaraderie.

This year’s generals are Kelly Burns and Nick Clark for the Phantoms and Jamie McCarney and Alex Shapiro for the Gladiators.

Shapiro said since his freshman year he aspired to be a general. “I watched what was going on and thought that would be pretty awesome,” he said. “It’s a friendly competition. You have friends on both sides so it’s all in fun.”

The event even gets time at school board meetings. Last month, as Tennent student Nick Griffin, a Phantom, was talking about Black-White, director Kati Driban said “I would personally love to see the



Black team host Brian Bassler reacts after the Black Team wins a point in "Family Feud" during the academic portion of Black White 50 Monday, March 9, 2015 at William Tennent High School in Warminster, Pennsylvania. (Photo by William Thomas Cain/Cain Images)

Black team win this year. So I'm going to put that on you, OK?"

"I'll do it just for you Ms. Driban," Griffin said.

Adams said the events, postponed because of last week's snow, are "a good break after a long winter. Kids just kind of let their hair down. ... It gives you a chance to bond with different people, compete in something that's not football. It's something we're very proud of."

State Rep. Bernie O'Neill, R-29, a former student and teacher at Tennent, said his teams lost each of his four years at Tennent but he's only missed a handful of the competitions.

"It's a long-standing tradition all run by the kids with the guidance of teachers," he said. "You have to reach out to get kids involved and you get points for that. It's a wonderful thing that so many people participate."

Dina McCaffery, the adviser for Academic Day, said the events bring "all the students together, whether you're interested in academics, music or athletics."

"A lot of high schools show a sense of school spirit, but we carry it over the course of three days," said Judy Weisensale, a Gym Night adviser. "It's really special."

Sarah Melvin, who runs Pool Night, said students are limited to participating in two events to allow for more "student diversity. And they show so much dedication to their projects."

Best said the efforts of both students and faculty "is nothing short of spectacular. The fact that we cover the pool, gym and academic pieces makes this enormous. ... Other than commencement, this is our largest event by far."