

SCOREBOARD

A History of Athletics at Saint John's University



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at

Saint John's University

Collegeville, Minnesota

written and compiled

by

Dunstan Tucker, O.S.B.

and

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Saint John's University Press

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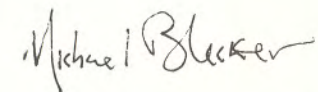
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Introduction

A reputation for athletic prowess is as difficult to gain and as easily lost as any good reputation. But St. John's bears its athletic reputation so lightly that many think it was achieved effortlessly and is sustained as easily as breathing. *Scoreboard's* story of athletics at St. John's reveals the real drama and excitement that make athletics here flourish and highlights the struggles that makes success so sweet.

Perhaps even more important than capturing the drama of the achievement won, *Scoreboard* speaks to the quality of persons and of their participation that are at the heart of St. John's athletic reputation. St. John's has pursued excellence in as many activities as possible but always recognizing that the style in which we pursue it is as important as achieving success. This book speaks about the style of playing sports which we esteem, where there is truly teamwork and sharing. *Scoreboard* is, therefore, another witness to what St. John's truly seeks to be: a community which experiences the beauty and exhilaration of living through sharing together.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Michael Blecker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Michael Blecker, O.S.B.
President
St. John's University

Foreword

Scoreboard, a history of athletics at St. John's University from 1873 to 1978, originated in a letter in 1975 from Paul Mulready, '50, suggesting that St. John's establish a Hall of Fame honoring star athletes of our past. He had just participated in the conferring of such an honor at a Wisconsin college and was impressed with the widespread goodwill which resulted from the event. He asked if the sponsorship of such an undertaking might not be an ideal project for the St. John's J-Club. The idea was discussed in the October, 1975 meeting of the J-Club Board of Directors, and although the members showed general approval of extending some sort of recognition to great athletes of the past, they chose at this time to name a committee of active J-Club members to make a further study of the proposal and report to a meeting of the entire membership for November 15, 1975.

In its report to the membership at this meeting, the members of the committee expressed the view that it is not in the tradition of St. John's to single out individuals for special recognition, but rather to emphasize the team and community aspects of athletics as well as other endeavors. The committee therefore suggested that a history of sports from the 1870's to the 1970's would emphasize the group effort these activities entailed and would include not only the stars but also lesser lights without whose aid the stars would not have shone so brilliantly.

According to the St. John's tradition, the star athlete, though always recognized and admired for his superior talents, has always been considered more as a member of the team than as an individual performer. Both players and supporters on the sidelines realize that more often than not the brilliant performance of the star was made possible by a timely block by a relatively obscure lineman which opened the way to a brilliant run. What is more, in an anti-elite atmosphere such as prevails at St. John's, the star player himself takes the same attitude—that the opportunities in any sport are innumerable for the inconspicu-

ous "average" player to win games without ever getting into the headlines. Thus most of the heroics of the anonymous athlete pass unnoticed or are forgotten, the only evidence of his existence being the inclusion of his name on the team's roster.

Anyone who has followed athletics at St. John's is aware that a healthy generous attitude towards sports has always prevailed on the campus and among the students. The glory of the team or the university, combined with the sheer enjoyment of companionship in play, have been the all-sufficient reward of athletic competition. It was in recognition of this typical campus attitude that the authors, both letter winners themselves in the distant past, have written this history commemorating the teams of St. John's athletic history.

Acknowledgements

In writing *Scoreboard* the authors made liberal use of available St. John's publications such as the St. John's University catalogs that first began appearing in 1870: the *Record*, 1888-1978; the yearbook, the *Sagatagan*, 1920-1978. Very helpful were the records of former Director of Athletics, George Durenberger, with lists of players and results of almost all intercollegiate activities of the past. Jim Smith's scrapbooks of all sports from 1971-72 to 1974-75, and the scrapbooks of football coach and current Athletic Director, John Gagliardi. Joseph Benda, Jr., graciously loaned to St. John's the scrapbooks of his father, former football coach, Joseph Benda, Sr.

Publications which were useful for background information were Fr. Alexius Hoffmann's "History of St. John's University" (1907), in the form of annals which furnished an admirable example of the value of a chronological year-by-year treatment of historical events. Also helpful for references to athletics in the past history of St. John's was Fr. Colman Barry's *Worship and Work* (1956).

It was the good fortune of the authors to have the assistance of newly appointed archivist, Fr. Vincent Tegeder, O.S.B., and his assistant, Mr. Stewart Hansen, for collections of newspaper clippings of the early 1900's, as well as their collections of photographs for illustrations of early athletics at St. John's. The authors also made extensive use of the files of clippings, seasonal previews, and photographs of the Public Information Services headed by Messrs. Lee Hanley and Thom Woodward.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Merrill Jarchow of Carleton College, the author of *Carleton, the First Century*, whose xeroxed copies from the *Carletonian* enabled us to unearth the fact of St. John's membership in the Minnesota-North Dakota-South Dakota Intercollegiate Conference from 1914 to 1920, when St. John's joined the newly founded Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC).

In expressing their thanks for interviews, the writers are grateful to former Coach and Director of Athletics, George Durenberger, Coaches John Gagliardi and Jim Smith, who gave generously of their time furnishing background materials to enliven certain periods that might otherwise have been barren of human interest. They also wish to thank Fr. Otto Weber, O.S.B., Director of the Physical Plant and Intramurals, and David Grovum, '77, all-conference center and member of the national championship team of 1976, for information on wrestling and the brilliant career of former wrestling coach Terry Haws.

Great credit is also due to the younger and part-time coaches who, in the absence of game reports in the *Record*, furnished missing information through interviews and written summaries: Greg Miller, wrestling; John Grobe, tennis; Dave Lyndgaard, cross-country; Michael Bauer, track; Pat Haws, golf and swimming; Jerry Haugen, baseball. Thanks are due also to John Forsythe for an enlightening sketch of rugby at St. John's, parts of which are quoted in the chapter on rugby. For the years 1977 and 1978 in rugby, student captains Rick Robel and Rick Battiola furnished much of the information. Thomas Haeg, '70, wrote the chapter on hockey.

Lastly, to Fr. Roger Schoenbechler, O.S.B., we owe the title of this book, suggested by the one thing all sports have in common, *Scoreboards*.

SCOREBOARD



CHAPTER I

The Early Days

It is hard for one living in the 1970's to picture for himself what kind of young men and boys were the ten, twenty or thirty students who first attended the little Benedictine school located out in the Indian Bush a few miles north of St. Cloud one hundred and thirty years ago. That they studied hard and followed the regulations of an American curriculum based on the rigorous German Gymnasium system that the Benedictines brought with them to Minnesota there is no doubt. But what they did during their recreational periods when, cramped from leaning over a desk or taking notes in class, they got outside into the fresh air of the outdoors remains a mystery until one digs it out of the sparse official documents that stand on shelves awaiting investigation. We can, of course, form some offhand opinion that they were rugged young men, ranging from fifteen to twenty years of age, sons of farmers, small store keepers, an occasional lawyer or doctor or small town banker, most of them with hands more inured to the handle of an axe or hammer or pitchfork than to a baseball bat.

Of one thing one may be sure, once arrived at St. John's it did not take them long to find some pleasant way of spending the leisure time between study and classes. Recreation, as a general thing, depends on environment, on what is possible to do in the area where one is located. For the early St. John's student it was the woods to be explored, the lake for swimming and boating, skiing in winter, and possibly a cleared space for baseball, for even then the national sport was baseball, and doubtless many of the students brought along with them from home a bat and ball.

In those early years it is certain that there was no officially regulated program for recreation. We know from an old letter written by an alumnus and quoted by Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., in his history of St. John's that there was at least the semblance of a baseball diamond at that time. Referring to the tree stumps and the roughness of the ground, he wrote:

Our baseball grounds were at the college gates. They were constructed like an angry porcupine's back. The frantic efforts of a fielder to chase down a ball in its crazy career through an array of maple stumps with which the diamond was studded would be a revelation to the present champions of St. John's University. It was appalling! (*St. John's University: A Sketch of Its History, 1857-1907*," Alexius Hoffmann, O.S.B., Record Press, Collegeville, 1907).

The document does not say when the stumps were cleared away, but it must have been sometime before 1873-74, the year Fr. Leo Winter, O.S.B., organized the Athletic Baseball Club, the first of several other clubs that followed suit.

It seems that Fr. Leo Winter was a man of great enthusiasm and interest in sports. He doubtlessly followed the major league baseball reports published in the newspapers of the time, for he modeled his Athletic Baseball Club very closely on the established patterns of professional baseball. The club was divided into two leagues under the authority of a president and a vice-president. Each league had two teams, and each team a designated captain. The players chose fanciful names for their teams: there were the Athletics, the Crusaders, the Classics, the Torn Stockings, the Invincibles, and "The Little Fellows"—the last a group that was equivalent to our present-day junior high school players. Some of these titles were retained for years in the annual St. John's Catalog, when as many as 180 students were playing in the intramural organization.

But boating did not take a second or third place to baseball for long. The year following the organization of the Baseball Athletic Club the Boating Club was organized. The club had a president and vice-president who supervised the affairs of the boatmen. The first year they had crews for two boats and later at one time for six boats. Each boat had a captain, four oarsmen, and a cockswain. Like the baseball players, they exercised their imaginations in selecting suitable titles for their boats. There were the Hiawatha, the Germania, the Fraud, and the Little Fraud, the Belle of the Lake, the Gem. A piratical tinge was given to the crew of the Jolly Six. In 1891 the boats were

spoken of as the Lake Fleet, or the Lake Flotilla, under the overall command of a Commodore instead of a President.

It will be impossible to enter into detail with descriptions of all the sports patronized. For several years there were individual tennis players who finally banded together in the Tennis Club in 1892. In 1900 four new tennis courts were constructed. It is hard to say when handball was first played, though, guessing from its popularity, it might have been a contemporary of baseball. There were several handball alleys of wood, but the most popular one of all was of brick, constructed in 1900.

For those interested in outdoor winter sports there was a large variety of activities: skiing and tobogganing on the hills, skating on the lake until the ice became covered with snow, ice fishing on the lake, ice hockey when someone could be found ambitious enough to shovel the snow from an area close to the laundry, from which it was possible to get water for flooding. Another sport was the chase, defined by one wag as "the hunt of rabbits and squirrels with a slingshot." Firearms were banned from the college.

As for indoor sports, ideal accommodations were unavailable, though St. John's did its best to provide them. In fact, there were few colleges of this era who did better than St. John's and there were others who did nothing at all. In 1886 St. John's provided "a spacious play hall (60 x 80 feet)" in the basement—now the part of the present-day refectory below the Alumni Lounge. It was provided with a bowling alley and a handball court, two pool tables, and several gymnastic items such as a punching bag and weights for weight lifting, parallel bars, etc.

According to Fr. Alexius, the play hall was never considered a permanent provision for indoor activities. In 1892 he wrote about it as follows:

Among the improvements for the new school year (1892) was the renovation of the Play Hall in the basement. A new bowling alley was fitted up, also a pool table, horizontal bar, chest weights, punching bag, Indian clubs, and dumb bells. The quarters were close (i.e., poorly ventilated) and gloomy and oil lamps lit up the place in the evening.* Still it was a step towards a gymnasium, an ideal that was realized ten years later (Hoffmann, p. 100).

* Electric lights were first installed in the buildings of St. John's in 1896.

It seems that the system of independent athletic clubs worked out successfully for at least fifteen years. If the club needed new equipment of any sort, the officers merely "passed around the hat"—an expression commonly used in the committee reports of the athletic association—and then bought it. There is no reason for doubting that the club members had a royal good time playing with friends of the same athletic interests.

Sometime during the 1880's, however, dissatisfaction arose with the club system, possibly because as the school grew in numbers there were too few small clubs, or possibly also that the early zest for athletic competition was waning and there was too much lazying around and not enough physical activity. Whatever the situation, the school magazine, *The Record*, was founded in 1888, and in its first number urged the Ajax Athletic Association to call upon the student body, and particularly the clubs, to get busy for the spring outdoor sports campaign.

The season of outdoor sports is at hand. The ball clubs have already made a move in the right direction. They are organized. What they have done excellently omens an interesting season. But what about the other sports? Baseball will become more or less stale as the season advances, and very few provisions are made for other field sports, boating, etc. The Ajax Association ought to lose no time but at once provide for other sports. We suggest a field day for the middle of May. The consent and co-operation of the faculty are assured, and there is no reason why the present season should not be an active and energetic one (*The Record*, January, 1888, Vol. 1, p. 42).

The above editorial by the pen of P. F. McDonough (later Rev. Patrick McDonough, '89), who was both president of the Ajax Athletic Association and co-editor of the *Record*, is all that is known of the Ajax Association in operation. It seems to have disappeared in thin air, and the officers of club athletics reverted to their traditional inactivity as independently of one another as before. Fr. Alexius wrote of the Ajax Athletic Association: "This club, which had for its motto 'No mouthing: all training,' did not live long enough to secure recognition in the annual catalogue" (Hoffmann, p. 87).

Stagnation continued in the intramural system, however. By 1895 the Tennis Club had dissolved, and about the same time the boats of the Boating Club disintegrated beyond repair and without complaint. In 1897 a *Record* writer railed against the apathy reigning over the campus: "There is no backbone or life! Wake up, managers and cap-

tains, make things lively! Let people know you are in it, and remember that it is only by your cooperation that you can make college days golden days" (*Record*, April, 1897, Vol. 10, pp. 119-120).

In 1897-98 Fr. Alexius recorded the final decision that followed the charges leveled against the negligence of athletic officials: "Repeatedly," he noted, "dissatisfaction was expressed with the system according to which sports were conducted; here and there a voice timidly queried, Why not start something like an Athletic Association?—The question was finally taken up and an organization by that name was called into being during the second term" [i.e., spring of 1898] (Hoffmann, pp. 117-118).

The athletic association referred to by Fr. Alexius in his history of St. John's as having been established in the spring of 1898, apparently failed to impress the student body as a viable, vigorous organization, for in the fall of 1900 we read the following statement: "October 8 found the allied athletes of St. John's assembled in their assembly hall for the purpose of reorganizing and electing officers. Presiding was Moderator Fr. Bruno Doerfler, O.S.B.; President J. O'Leary; Secretary and Treasurer, C. Houska." Fr. Bruno, only recently returned from Rome after four years of study and appointed Director of the college and *ex officio* moderator of athletics, was liberal-minded, and without much ado gave his approval to a request to organize an American style football team and schedule games with St. Cloud High School. Discussed in the meeting was the resolution to amend the constitution by the addition of a new association objective—"to foster athletics in all its branches" (*Record*, October, 1900, p. 314).

In February, 1901, at a second meeting of the association, the resolution to make official the new regulation adopted in October, 1900, was confirmed. The confirmation reads as follows: "The St. John's Athletic Association met for the second time with a report on the constitution. The constitution was accepted. The aim of the constitution is the furtherance of athletics. Moderator, P. Bruno, O.S.B.; President, J. O'Leary; Secretary and Treasurer, C. Houska." The editorialist for athletics commented on the new reorganization: "The permanent founding of the Athletic Association will be good news to all sports loving students. The aim of the society is the promotion of all athletics. The staff elected last fall has drawn up a constitution and a set of by-laws which were unanimously adopted at the last meeting" (*Record*, February, 1901, p. 75).

Such was the beginning in 1900-01 of the new St. John's Athletic Association, popularly known by the initials A.A., as it was generally called. The A.A. was directly responsible for the organization of a new

intramural system that for the space of seventy-eight years has continued to make it possible for any St. John's student to join some team that matches his abilities and interests. But even more, it was the chief moving force that directly introduced intercollegiate athletics on the St. John's campus and indirectly led to the construction of a new gymnasium by calling faculty attention to the need of new physical development facilities. The gymnasium was the pride of St. John's and for several years was spoken of as "the finest gymnasium in the Northwest."

All this did not happen by mere chance. By 1900 St. John's had passed its years of "beginnings" and was now a thriving college that inspired feelings of a high destiny that awaited it sometime, somewhere in the future. Remarkable as it may seem, the students had the same feeling of destiny and looked forward to the time when the college would be famous not only in academics, which they took for granted, but also in athletics. The building of the gymnasium therefore clinched the students' conviction. When, on his return to the college in the fall of 1901, the *Record's* sports columnist inspected the partially completed gymnasium, he wrote an enthusiastic prediction of St. John's future greatness in sports: "With the school year 1901-1902 a new era has dawned in the field of athletics. Although heretofore St. John's has enjoyed an enviable record, this year will bring it much higher on the ladder of fame" (*Record*, October, 1901, p. 268).

In view of St. John's smallness and isolation in the woods north of St. Cloud, the pronouncement of future fame may have sounded like sheer rhetoric to the skeptical, as it certainly did to unsympathetic ears in 1901. On the other hand, Minnesotans were accustomed to talk in big terms regarding future developments in the state, and St. John's was no exception. The A.A. went all-out for expansion of athletics. Interest in intercollegiate athletics had risen high in all the colleges of the nation around this time, and at St. John's the prospect of a victorious St. John's first team competing with other colleges in the state loomed up strongly in the imaginations of the Johnny athletes. Intramural athletics, while affording many moments of enjoyment, could offer nothing so exciting as the prospect of matching strength, skill and speed with other colleges of its own size and class—and winning! As for the faculty, the ease with which the introduction of intercollegiate sports was accomplished is proof that the comparatively young men who formed the major part of the faculty at that time were eager to make St. John's an attractive, up-to-date college that would appeal to the youth of 1900, the future business men, doctors, lawyers, teachers and priests of the church.

It is doubtful that the promoters of the intercollegiate program were fully aware of the problems they would encounter. One of the first problems was the inconvenience of team travel. At that particular time all distant travel, with the exception of that by railroad, had to be done with horse and buggy. For the Twin City colleges, St. Thomas, Hamline and Macalester, games with one another were easily arranged, whereas colleges outside the Cities had a distance to travel by train—a matter of considerable expense, for the Association was responsible for the cost of travel, the purchase of uniforms, etc.

Another problem was the difficulty in obtaining competent officials who both knew the rules of the games and administered them with authority and impartiality. Charges of partiality made officiating for years a fearsome business. In a game played on the Fargo Agricultural College floor even as late as 1909, and which St. John's won by a score of 30-18, a crowd of spectators surged out onto the floor to mob the referee. "When the whistle was blown, thus ending the game," states the *Spectrum* (the Fargo College newspaper), "everyone made a rush for the referee; . . . with difficulty he was piloted unharmed to the dressing room. The crowd was then forced out of the gym, where they awaited their victim, but when he arrived at last the crowd had nearly dispersed, and those who were left deemed it unnecessary to do him permanent injury, although they did follow him down town just to make things cheerful." It is hard to take the above account seriously, though there is no doubt that the incident bordered on a riot.

That feelings ran high during the course of the games we know from other reports published in the newspapers of the time. In 1905, on one occasion the St. Cloud Normals, behind in the score 6-0 in a football game, disputed an off-side penalty of five yards regarding which the umpire and referee differed in their interpretation. When the referee refused to change his decision to suit the umpire, the Normals withdrew from the field and forfeited the game to St. John's. On a later occasion St. John's returned the compliment to the St. Cloud High School over the completion of a forward pass. On two occasions quarrels arose when the scorekeepers differed in their final count of free-throws in basketball games.

Perhaps the most faulty of the early practices was the manner of determining championships at the end of the season. Fr. Oliver Kapsner, O.S.B., a member of the 1919 baseball team, the first baseball championship team during the period from 1900 to 1920, writes, "There was no official conference to decide championships nor official recognition, and so whoever with a good winning record hollered first and loudest could be the unofficial champion."

An unsuccessful attempt to overcome problems such as those listed above was made in 1908, mainly on the initiative of the then new St. John's football coach, Bill Brennan, along with the coach of Shattuck Academy, J. A. Foster. Foster and Brennan, both men of vision and energy, hoped, by the organization of a Minnesota College Conference that would include college preparatory schools, to do away with most of the problems intercollegiate athletics was afflicted with at that time. In a news item that appeared in the St. Paul *Daily Times*, for October 12, 1908, we read: "The most important meeting ever held between Minnesota colleges took place this afternoon when representatives of all the leading institutions of the state met for the formation of a Minnesota college conference." The article continues: "The plan is to have the schools meet annually in executive session and arrange football, baseball, and track schedules, as was done several years ago. This would eliminate friction in the arrangement of dates and would bring about a series of contests that would definitely decide the state championships in the different branches of sport."

An article in the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* for the next day, October 13, 1908, added to the above article another objective of the meeting—"to make arrangements for securing a number of well-known and impartial judges for the football games to be played among the schools this fall." The colleges, however, decided against a conference: "While a form of organization was perfected, no conference was organized, and each of the teams will continue to carry on its athletics entirely independently of each other." Something was gained, however: "each of the schools presented a list of the men thought eligible for the coming schedules and the rules of the game as they now stand" (*ibid*).



CHAPTER II

Football

The Beginnings

Although each season of the year had its special sport at St. John's, this was not true of football. In fact, football thus far had never had a "season" on the St. John's campus in all its existence. Baseball was then the king of all sports at St. John's and was played from the first warm days in April until June, and from September until freeze-up in the fall. And yet, much as baseball was appreciated in the first warm days of early autumn, it was inevitable that surfeit would set in during the fall months and interest would shift towards football, whether soccer or the American variety of "tackle football," the offspring of British rugby. The truth of the matter is that baseball could no longer hope to maintain its autumn monopoly in a period when football was beginning to occupy long columns of print in the daily newspapers. As was basketball in winter, football in autumn was almost the criterion of what was in style in college sports. It is not in the least surprising therefore to read in the 1900 September issue of the *Record* a rather plaintive plea for football. "Since the baseball season is coming to a close, what are the chances for football? There is certainly a good amount of material on hand. Why not organize a few teams and practice for a few match games?"

The wish thus publicly expressed was probably planted in the *Record* by the football enthusiasts themselves in order to arouse student sentiment and interest in a seasonal issue, or at least to call attention to a sport better adapted to autumn weather. At any rate, a month later, when on October 8th the Allied Athletes met for the purpose of reorganizing their athletic association and electing officers, the

expectation was that approval would be granted by the administration to organize a football program and possibly to play an outside team. All three of the elected officers were football players, president John O'Leary, vice-president John Thill, and treasurer Charles Houska; each one a promoter for the extension of approved sports to the new games of football and basketball. As has been stated above, they attained their goal.

The amazing thing about that October 8th meeting is that football literally sprang into being that very night—like Minerva out of the forehead of Zeus, fully grown and fully armed. We read the following account in the *Record*: "The following morning found President O'Leary on the campus with eleven selected candidates for the university team. The first work was awkward and quite discouraging, but the persistence of the president overcame all obstacles, and after ten days of hard work the eleven was in good trim." A challenge from St. Cloud High School was accepted and a game scheduled for October 20.

— 1900 —

The first game was played on October 27 and ended as a 5-0 loss for St. John's. The return game with the St. Cloud High School was a second 5-0 loss suffered by St. John's. The *Record* reporter moaned in disappointment. On the other hand, little more than defeat could have been expected of a hastily organized group of eleven inexperienced players, managed by an equally inexperienced student-coach who had only ten days of preparation before meeting a well-coached, well-trained high school team. Nevertheless, in spite of their disappointment and humiliation, the St. John's players lost none of their courage and looked optimistically to the next year.

— 1901 —

The 1901 football team was made up mainly of leftovers from the 1900 second and third teams, except for three veterans, a halfback, a guard, and the fullback. It turned out, however, to be one of the most celebrated in St. John's history, one of those rare combinations of spirit and talent that crop up occasionally in college athletics. The team succeeded beyond all expectations and drove towards victory with absolute confidence in its ability to conquer all its opponents. In a four-game schedule, St. John's defeated St. Cloud High School twice by scores of 11-6 and 11-0, St. Cloud Normal School 17-6, and in the climactic game of the entire season, defeated St. Thomas 16-0 (three touchdowns and a point after touchdown)* in a game played at

* At this time a touchdown was credited as five points, a drop-kick four points, and the after-touchdown kick one point.

ten o'clock Thanksgiving Day morning at Lexington Park, St. Paul. When the news of the victory reached St. John's, the campus went wild. It was heady news for the young partisan-minded St. John's fans. In a burst of enthusiasm the *Record* reporter called out to all and sundry to read his challenge:

"St. John's football team has surpassed all expectations. In defeating St. Cloud High School it has defeated not only all the local teams, but also one of the ringers (Duluth), and in defeating St. Thomas it holds the ball over all Minneapolis and St. Paul teams. Through four hard-fought battles it has carried the Cardinal and Blue to victory, and, still unconquered, is willing again to put on the armor to maintain her championship rights" (*Record*, December 1901, p. 359).

It was most appropriate that, of four of the stars of this never-to-be-forgotten first intercollegiate game played by St. John's, three were the three introducers of football on the St. John's campus: John O'Leary, halfback, John Thill, guard, and fullback Chuck Houska, who "hurdled" the St. Thomas line for two touchdowns, the first and third. The fourth star was a remarkable young man named Ignatius O'Shaughnessey, who, though a tackle, carried the ball for a total of 76 yards, an average of eleven yards per try. In one brilliant run, the *Record* reported, he carried the ball to the St. Thomas two-yard line, from where Kilty, an end, *was shoved over* for the second touchdown. It is evident to all that the rules and scoring systems of the game have changed radically since the year 1901.

As for Ignatius O'Shaughnessey, it is still a subject for jestful comment at St. John's the fact that the future great philanthropist, the generous endower of Catholic schools, colleges and universities, did not remain at St. John's. He transferred and graduated from the College of St. Thomas. Fr. Walter Reger, O.S.B., once jokingly remarked, "Someone goofed at St. John's."

— 1902 —

The football season of 1902 was a complete reversal from the enthusiastic spirit of the previous year, 1901. St. John's played only one game for the season, and that one game was a loss to the St. Cloud Normal School by a score of 17-0, played on November 8. It was a dismal season, to say the least. On the other hand, it is an example of what has happened so often in the entire history of athletics at St. John's that it will be profitable to consider it in detail at this point.

The *Record* ascribed the St. Cloud Normal loss to student apathy and the lack of moral support by the student body. Two of the best players on the squad had withdrawn early from the team, and student coach Brotherton resigned from his position as manager on November 12, four days after the defeat.

The very obvious reason for the poor showing against the St. Cloud Normal School team, however, is, first of all, that the four or five stars of the 1901 team had departed; and, second, the fact that boredom could have easily set in from a long series of practices, from September to November, without the relief of games and foreign competition to break the monotony. The "lack of games" we read so frequently about in the athletic reports of the first years of intercollegiate competition at St. John's is precisely the fault that Bill Brennan complained of and unsuccessfully tried to correct in 1908 by the formation of a Minnesota college conference.

Another point worth considering is the reason why, during the coming years of athletic competition at St. John's, we find these paradoxical, abrupt changes in fortune coming immediately after a sometimes even brilliant year, such as the one now under consideration. In reading this history of the early years at St. John's it must be kept in mind that, although St. John's was a four-year liberal arts college with a strong classics and philosophy curriculum, especially in the junior and senior college years, the large majority of the student body left St. John's at the end of two years. The excellent Commercial department offered a two-year course in business, after which the graduates left to take up work in the various business enterprises current at the time. Pre-medical, pre-law, and science students, after two years of college, were accepted by most, if not all, the universities of the time for admission to professional studies, and hence students transferred there at the end of the sophomore year. Even more damaging to year-by-year consistency in athletics was the practice of priesthood students entering the novitiate or the seminary in their junior-senior years, during which time they were not permitted to take part in intercollegiate competition. It should not need to be explained further why, almost up to the 1930's, coaches at St. John's only rarely were fortunate enough to field a team with more than one or two juniors and seniors in the line-ups.

— 1903 —

The 1903 season proved to be an improvement over the previous season, though the inability of St. John's to secure games was still in evidence. St. John's defeated the St. Cloud Normals by a score of 5-0

in its first game, then lost to the Normals 17-5 in the return game. Spirits were high, nevertheless, mainly because manager Frank Neary (later a prominent member of St. Martin's Abbey in Washington) was indefatigable in trying to secure more games.

The season stands out, however, because it brought the first coach to St. John's, Peter Boquel, a highly qualified Physical Culture instructor, who only reluctantly accepted "the irksome task of coaching football" (*Record*, November 1903, p. 356). The coming of Peter Boquel was an auspicious event in St. John's athletic history for the reason that he was not only a popular addition to the faculty, but was also a trained conditioner and the introducer of gymnastics, one of the important features of St. John's athletic activities clear up into the early 1920's. We read commendations of his work in the field of intercollegiate athletics such as the following review of the 1903 season: "The coaching of Professor Boquel is entirely responsible for the victory of the University eleven over the St. Cloud Normals. . . . During the first half the Normals became aware that they were up against the real thing now" (*Record*, November 1903, p. 356).

It is true that despite the success of the team, there were disquieting rumors circulating in opposition to football as a game "dangerous and productive of crippling injuries." In a defensive editorial written by a worried, indignant defender of football, the writer railed at the critics who "bring serious charges against this great national college game. Beware of these sophisticated people who try to stuff you with the dangers connected with football. . . . Football is a promoter of health, both physical and mental" (*Record*, November, 1903, p. 350).

Over against the criticism of football referred to above, the *Record* contains abundant comments approving the game of football as being far more suitable for the fall season than baseball. The new attitude is well illustrated in a comment of 1903 that contrasts baseball and football as fall sports. After writing an appreciative account of a September baseball game with the Old Reliables (the faculty team), the correspondent adds: "The greatest interest manifested at present, however, is for the autumn sport, football. When the time approached for the season to open, the greater part of students arose, as if by common consent, and demonstrated their interest in the game by paying into the treasury of the Athletic Association the small fee of \$1.50 each."

We fortunately have the minutes of this particular Association meeting at which the student body presented the A.A. with this financial windfall. It gives us an insight into the workings of the A.A. and

the spirit of fun that prevailed in meetings of the Association members. As part of the meeting, the chairman asked the treasurer to give an account of their resources in handling the fall affairs of the football season. The treasurer responded: "After deducting the amount of a bill of fifty cents at the shoemaker's, there was a measly \$5.50 remaining. Thereupon the chairman spoke further on the object and benefits accruing to the members of the society. Aided by his deep knowledge of physiology and hygiene, he made such an impression on the Society that money seemed to jump spontaneously from their pockets onto the desks and floor, a fact that made the prospects look bright." ("Signed Henry J. Sausen"—a few years later known as Fr. Alphonse Sausen, O.S.B., who became Rector of the University, 1920-1924, a dignified gentleman with his own private sense of humor).

Purely an incident as is the above report on the collection of dues for sports activities, it illustrates the role of the Athletic Association in the development of football as an intercollegiate sport at St. John's. In the first years of football, the A.A. purchased the equipment and uniforms and paid for their repair. It paid travel expenses, scheduled games, and elected from its membership the manager (now called the coach), and the captain of the team. The manager was probably the most experienced player of the team and certainly the one who knew most about the technicalities of the game. At the same time he was the best player. The captain was the man most highly respected for his playing ability and leadership qualities.

And now a word about the moderator of athletics and his influence on sports.

According to the A.A. constitution, the association worked in collaboration with the Faculty Moderator, sometimes called the Athletic Moderator. These men were always outstanding faculty members chosen for their ability to get along with young men and to understand athletic problems. Some were recognized scholars, such as Fr. Bruno Doerfler, O.S.B., later abbot of St. Peter's Abbey in Canada, and Fr. Virgil Michel, O.S.B., from 1912-1916. Frs. Pius Meinz, O.S.B., and Sylvester Harter, O.S.B., were the most athletic of the moderators. Fr. Richard Simmer, O.S.B., a fine organizer and accomplished intermediary between the A.A. and the Administration, was the one to whom the A.A. owed most. When he was sent out for parish work in Minneapolis in 1907, the A.A. recognized that it had lost a great organizer and friend. It was he who was responsible for the draining of the swamp and planning of the present football field in 1907, when it became apparent that, in the words of the *Record*, "the teams representing the various schools of the State have been loathe to come to

St. John's to play outdoor games on account of our poor campus. The top of the new field is to be black, soft soil, making it possible to raise a heavy crop of grass, an ideal gridiron" (*Record*, December, 1907, p. 510). Fr. Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B., later Abbot Alcuin, was moderator from 1909 until 1912, when serving as Rector of the University. He was an enthusiastic promoter of intramural activities only!

— 1904 —

The 1904 season was slightly more successful than that of 1903, with a record of two victories in a schedule of three games—a defeat of St. Cloud High School, 48-0, and St. Cloud Normal, 18-0. The second game with the Normals was a loss, 26-0. The *Record*, in its game report, humorously described the Normal football field as "88 yards long, with two goal posts at one end and the Mississippi at the other." The St. John's field of sun-baked clay, where now is the Mall in front of the Church, was scarcely much better! An outstanding member of this team was the well-known University of Minnesota football star Dr. John Sprafka, who later became an athletic figure in public life and a prominent Twin City physician.

— 1905 —

The 1905 season, a season in which one game made up the entire schedule, was marred by the embarrassing forfeiture of the game by the St. Cloud Normal team to St. John's by a score of 6-0. Harry Comeau, the new physical culture instructor, was spoken of as the St. John's coach for the year 1905. He was an expert in gymnastics, fencing, boxing and wrestling, but appears to have known little about football beyond the necessary work of developing physical condition. After scanning all the *Record* reports of the game, it is evident that he was of little help in settling the controversial play that led up to the forfeiture.

The game was bitterly fought, and in the second half St. John's was clearly out-playing the Normals. At this point the referee, a St. John's man, called an off-side penalty on a pass play and stepped off the five yards required according to the rules for an off-side violation. The umpire, a St. Cloud man, disputed the penalty and accused the referee of dishonesty. When the referee refused to reverse his decision, the umpire then advised the captain of the St. Cloud team "that if he accepted the penalty he himself would leave the game." After a wait of five minutes, during which time the Normal team refused to continue play, the game was declared forfeited by the referee, who then awarded it to St. John's.

In the newspaper account of the game, the St. Cloud *Times* accepted the Normals' version of the play. Even President Shoemaker of St. Cloud Normal School became involved, and in a public conference with the Normal students cast aspersions on the character of the referee. The Normals then announced through the *Times* that they would never play St. John's again unless games were officiated by outside referees.

Who was wrong? After the intervening 75 years since the dispute arose it is impossible to reach a decision. One can say offhand that St. John's was extremely unwise in having anyone associated with the school act as an official in a home game, and especially a game that would be hotly contested between two nearby rivals. The incident is an example, however, of the incompetent officiating that was one of the problems that plagued the colleges in their first "intercollegiate" days.

There is no documentary evidence to indicate what was the reaction of the St. John's administration to the dispute, though the drawing up of a revised constitution in January, a few months after the game, indicates that the authorities thought it advisable to exercise closer supervision over the Athletic Association. The pertinent statement in the new constitution that suggests this conclusion is the decision that "In the future, the president of the A.A. will be a member of the faculty appointed by the university authorities. Provision has been made whereby the president is to have charge of the A.A., and the director of athletics and physical training will have general supervision and control over all athletics." A further provision was made that "a board of three managers, with the Director of Athletics as chairman, will, among other things, constitute a committee to decide about the awarding of monograms and numerals." The writer of this passage adds: "This is a very desirable reform. At present a free graft exists at St. John's in the matter of wearing monograms which will be abolished in the future and only those who earn their letters by playing in winning games or making sub [sic] on the teams will be allowed to wear the insignia of the St. John's A.A."

— 1906 —

The 1906 season can be passed over with brief mention of two high school games, one lost to Blaine High School of Superior, Wisconsin, by a score of 17-6, the other a win over Mechanic Arts High School of St. Paul, 64-6. The attempt to secure college games was again unsuccessful. St. Cloud Normal was no longer available and St. Thomas declined to play St. John's. "We failed in our attempt to get a game

with St. Thomas. Their team issued a challenge to the football teams of any school of equal rank in the state for a game to decide the championship of Minnesota for 1906. St. John's accepted the challenge and negotiations for the game were commenced, but the managements of the two schools could come to no satisfactory agreement, and hence all prospects for the game were shattered. It is sincerely hoped that St. John's and St. Thomas may come into closer relations and that no difficulties may ever arise to destroy those relations" (*Record*, December, 1906, p. 316).

— 1907 —

After two years at the helm, Mr. Comeau resigned his position as Athletic Director at St. John's for a position in Aberdeen, Washington. He was succeeded in the fall of 1907 by Frank Cassidy, the new instructor in Physical Culture. Frank Cassidy was without doubt a fine gymnast, wrestler, and director of physical training and track, with experience as assistant director of the YMCA programs in Patterson, N.J., and New York City. He was only twenty-one years of age and, while a fine gymnast, was hardly the mature person to have charge of university athletics. It is probable that he had never played football and was ignorant of the techniques of the game.

The 1907 football season opened with a journey to St. Thomas in St. Paul. St. John's lost this opening game by a score of 21-0. Unfortunately, Ted Harter (later Fr. Sylvester, O.S.B.), the super-star of the time, was lost for the season because of a broken ankle. The following day the team played the crack North High School team of Minneapolis and lost again by a score of 23-0. The sting of this second loss in two days was mitigated somewhat by the fact that "North High" was a genuine powerhouse that went through an undefeated season, trampling over Shattuck and Hamline University on its way. It was coached by the famous Dr. Burgan who the next year moved up to Hamline, where he coached successfully in a brilliant career in football, basketball and baseball. A third game with the St. Cloud High School ended in a satisfying 26-0 victory for the home team.

The final (and unfortunate) game with the St. Cloud High School team in St. Cloud closed the season. It was an unfortunate game for the reason that it ended in forfeiture of the game by St. John's in a manner that detracted somewhat from its cherished reputation of sportsmanlike conduct on the field. The fact that the forfeiture was brought on by incompetent officiating, augmented by a partisan St. Cloud sportswriter who charged that St. John's could not take a loss gracefully, was never properly disclosed.

It was another pass play, just as in the St. Cloud forfeiture two years earlier, that set off the fireworks. St. John's was leading by a score of 5-4 when a pass, judged complete by the referee, but claimed to be incomplete by the St. John's players and the umpire, brought on a delay in the game. The players insisted that the referee was out of position and unable to follow the play as could the umpire, who also agreed that the pass was incomplete. The referee may have panicked, for after a two minutes' delay he declared the game forfeited to the high school. Bad publicity resulted from the newspaper reporter stating that this was the second time St. John's had refused to continue play. St. John's in reply reminded the newspaper that it was the Normal school that had forfeited the previous game, not St. John's.

It was this game probably that inspired a St. John's editorialist a month later to publish in the *Record* a four-page attack on inter-collegiate athletics, partly on the ground that examples could be given to show that, instead of fostering a spirit of friendliness between schools, they often beget "a spirit of enmity." After enumerating other drawbacks, he concluded: "We might go on to show that there are other drawbacks to these games, drawbacks so serious that we believe they will, if they do not put the ban on them, in the course of time they will at least greatly limit them. Sport would then cease to be for the primary purpose of victory, and would again become a means of recreation and amusement, and only as such does it have its legitimate existence" (*Record*, November, 1907, pp. 446-449).

The 1907 team was not one of the great elevens turned out by St. John's. The *Pioneer Press* reported on the North High School game that St. John's was slow and ponderous, and though made up of good material, "they sadly lacked knowledge of the game and fighting spirit, except when their goal line was endangered" (*Record*, December, 1907, p. 506). It was admitted by the *Record* that the team had been weak in pass defense throughout the season.

— 1908 —

But 1908 was a year of awakening from mediocrity. With the coming of Bill Brennan, the new and first real coach of football St. John's ever had before this year, the entire campus was electrified by a driving personality that no longer permitted the charge of sluggishness to be aimed against a St. John's football team. "Coach Brennan's arrival on September 2 completely changed the order of things at St. John's. Baseball was completely forgotten. . . the pigskin was the only attraction of the day" (*Record*, October, 1908, p. 384). And again: "Coach Brennan is without doubt a first-class man at his job, as his work with

the champions of Eau Claire last season clearly shows" (*ibid.*). Then, finally, contrasting the spirit of the 1907 with that of 1908, the reporter added: "If the present squad was ever in need of spirit, they certainly have it now. . . . They are learning plays and tactics never seen at St. John's before" (*ibid.*, p. 385).

The year 1908 was a banner year in St. John's athletic history. After two warm-up games, both won, St. John's defeated the St. Cloud Normals 12-4, and St. Cloud High School 33-0. This year St. John's faced Hamline University on the local field for the first time in its athletic history. It was the finest game ever played on the St. John's field, and yet, although Hamline won the contest by a 27-0 score, there were no regrets. Hamline, which in a game with the University of Minnesota held the Gophers scoreless, was the strongest college team in the state, tactically as well as physically. The St. John's team, on the other hand, was out-weighted by Hamline fifteen pounds to the man, and in addition was coached by the former University of Minnesota star Dr. Burgan, who had coached the Minneapolis North High School team that defeated St. John's the year before. St. John's was gracious in defeat and after the game the Director of the College, Fr. Albert Erkens, O.S.B., hosted the Hamline team royally. The *Oracle*, the Hamline college paper, reported that "The boys had a royal good time and wish they could have brought the armory (the new gymnasium) back to Hamline with them. The trip to St. John's was not only an athletic event, but was something of an eye-opener to those unacquainted with the equipment of the Collegeville institution and the hospitality of Father Erkens." Incidentally, Hamline reported that "The St. John's crew suffered to some extent with injuries. . . . The hardness of the field was responsible for the majority of the bruises." Fr. Oliver Kapsner, O.S.B., recalls that Fr. Sylvester once described what it felt like to land on the hard, stony field they had to play on.

The next game, won by St. John's over its arch-rival St. Thomas by a score of 9-6 (a touchdown, a drop-kick, and a point after touchdown), was the climax of the whole season. It was the first victory over St. Thomas since 1901, and spirits were high on the St. John's campus. St. Thomas—still undefeated in one of its best years—after having read the score of the Hamline game in the newspapers, came to Collegeville with high hopes of an easy victory. The game had been hailed in the newspapers of the Twin Cities and St. Cloud with extravagant hoopla as the game of the year, doubtless because of the reputation of Bill Brennan, the St. John's coach, who was well known in St. Paul to all the newspaper sportswriters.

The account of the game following the victory was typical of the meetings between the two colleges in their lifelong rivalry of some seventy and more years: "The visitors had come with the avowed intention of having an easy time with the local bunch, threatening to make a better showing than Hamline did the week before, and of giving their pony backs, substitute quarterback, and scrub ends a little experience in the second half if the regulars should make a satisfactory showing in the first half" (St. Cloud *Times*, October 26, 1908).

As for the game, St. John's made all its nine points in the first half. During that half Harter attempted a drop-kick from the 25-yard line which was blocked. St. John's recovered the ball a few plays later, and being unable to gain in two plays, Harter stepped back for the second drop-kick and scored for a 4-0 lead. A few plays later St. John's scored a touchdown on a 60-yard run. Phil Knaeble, another star, missed the extra point. St. Thomas scored in the second half by a 70-yard return of a punt.

From the account of some 70 years ago it is difficult to picture the jubilation on the St. John's campus following the game, but we do have the report of the St. Cloud *Times*: "The faces of the supporters of the Cardinal and Blue are wreathed in smiles since yesterday afternoon when Coach Brennan's proteges took the fast and thus far undefeated St. Thomas aggregation into camp to the tune of 9-6. The enthusiasm of the local rooters was so intense that each of the mud-bespattered warriors was serenaded, and Coach Brennan found himself in the agreeable position of being compelled to respond in a neat little speech."

Fr. Sylvester Harter, O.S.B.

Among the stars of the 1908 football season the stand-out player was Theodore Harter, who was given the name "Sylvester" when he entered the Benedictine Order in 1909. Fr. Sylvester Harter was the first St. John's athlete to be honored by being selected to the Minnesota all-state college football team. He was a colorful player, a rare combination of poet and star football player of great talent. He contributed a poem to practically every issue of the *Record* in the years when he was playing football. He was a stellar guard, and, like George Durenberger of more than a generation later, was pulled out of the line to do most of the punting, place-kicking and drop-kicking for the team. In his first year (1907) he had the misfortune to break his right ankle in the first game and was out for the season. He then served as team manager. He came into his own in 1908, now kicking with his left foot and doing well enough to receive special commendations for

his skill as a kicker, one of the qualifications which merited for him the all-state honor.

The announcement of his selection for all-state honors reads as follows: "We have placed Harter, the speedy St. John's guard, in the line next to Peoples, the Hamline All-State tackle. He is as fast as Schmidt, the Hamline guard. He played as nervy a game as Hodgman for Macalester, and had the better of it over Swanson of Carleton, Carr of St. Thomas and Matsche of Shattuck. His ability in placing punts, drop-kicking, and getting off fast with his plays mark him above his rivals. As an all-around player he is well adapted to the innumerable shifts and formations made possible by the style of game now in vogue. Harter is fairly entitled to the place, guard, for the superior game he has played throughout the season" (*Pioneer Press*, December 8, 1908).

In a Football Field Day competition held at the end of the season by Coach Brennan, Harter won the gold medal for a total number of points (22) in eleven events, mostly in first place; Punting for distance, 45.66 yards; Forward Pass for distance, 48 yards; Forward Pass for accuracy, 3rd place; Kicking for distance, 1st place; Kicking from 35 yards, all angles, 1st place; Charging for distance, 11 yards, 1st place.

Some of these distances may appear small to us today, accustomed as we are to the prodigious feats of professional football, but if we compare the heavy, snub-nosed, pigskin-covered footballs of those days with the light, streamlined football now in use, we bow in recognition of a fine football player.

Fr. Sylvester Harter in his ninetieth year was still straight-backed and walked with the smooth light step of the born athlete. (N.B. He died May 31, 1978.)

— 1909 —

Unfortunately we lack the abundance of newspaper clippings to cover the 1909 football season, such as we had for 1908. It was not a brilliant season, but neither did it have the stars to carry on the momentum established the previous year. There were only four holdovers to supply experience for the large number of newcomers that made up the squad. Especially missed were Harter and Nicholas Kopveiler, a bruising fullback who scored three touchdowns in 1908. The four holdovers, however, were sterling characters and players: Karl Hinz (father of Chuck Hinz '38), center and team captain; Phil Knaeble, halfback, who was the second St. John's player to win all-state recognition; and Eugene Reinhart, end, who won an end position on the all-state second team. The team played only four games, defeating

Macalester in a close game, 3-0, losing to Hamline, 27-0, to Shattuck, 16-0, and to St. Thomas, 23-6, for a season record of one victory and three losses. The lack of veteran personnel contributed to the losses, but this lack was compounded by the strength of Hamline, that placed five players on the all-state team, and of St. Thomas that was having one of its best years. The team was feared, however, despite its record, as we know from the account that appeared in the *Pioneer Press* of the St. Thomas game—namely, that St. Thomas closed its season by defeating St. John's 23-6, its oldest and most feared rival.

This was Bill Brennan's last team at St. John's. In December, 1909, the faculty decided to drop intercollegiate football, partly because it was getting to be an expensive sport—the salary of a special football coach, the increased cost of game officials, travel and hotel bills (the team was put up in a hotel overnight so as to be able to play St. Thomas on Thanksgiving morning) and, to be frank, the administration's disapproval of football as a game.

In bidding adieu to Bill Brennan, St. John's still has a vote of thanks to offer him. It was he who taught St. John's a few of the things it should have known long before. Bill Brennan was a man of action who would not tolerate forfeited games simply because two officials were incompetent. He was to an eminent degree the first man St. John's ever had on its faculty who by sheer personality and vigor brought the school to the attention of newspapermen.

The history of football at St. John's from 1900 to 1910 would be incomplete without a word of appreciation for his work. In an article that appeared in the sport section of the *St. Paul Dispatch*, December 6, 1908, the writer states that his old friend Bill Brennan, "a St. Paul boy in every sense of the word, has won success at Collegeville in the face of big obstacles. It is true that he won no championship, but out of the most unpromising situation he wrought the semblance of order and rounded out a team that made good up to the limit of its possibilities. No coach can do more than this."

Bill Brennan, who came to St. John's at the expiration of a season of umpiring in the Western League, and later advanced through the American Association to become a well-known umpire in the National League, was more than a sharp-eyed czar behind the plate. Probably the first things he noticed when he assumed the coaching position at St. John's were the complaints of incompetent officiating that had led to two forfeited games; the lack of a central office or conference for the annual arrangement of football, basketball, and baseball schedules that would assure a series of contests before the beginning of each season. It is not inconceivable that he inspired the Hamline school re-

porter to write in his school paper after the football game of 1908 that "The St. John's crew suffered to some extent from injuries, not from the game but from the field: the hardness of their field was responsible for the majority of the bruises"—which was probably true.

It was no mere coincidence that after the coming of Bill Brennan there were no more St. John's men refereeing at the outside football games. The only game officials he accepted were men who knew the game, former football stars from the Universities of Minnesota, Northwestern, Wisconsin or George Washington. They were very likely recommended in the list of "well known and impartial judges" drawn up at the 1908 October meeting with college representatives already mentioned before.

It is hard to estimate the full extent of Brennan's influence in the publicity that was showered on the St. John's teams during his stay at St. John's. In one book of clippings from the *St. Paul*, Minneapolis, and *St. Cloud* newspapers for the academic year 1908-1909, there are five photos of the entire squad, two of which are quarter-page size. There are fifteen cuts of individual members of the team, and three portraits of Brennan himself. News stories give advance notice of St. John's games to be played, then follow them up with accounts of the games in the sport section of the day following. In addition to all this, the Twin Cities colleges, Hamline and Macalester, for the first time began scheduling football games with St. John's. From all the evidence that can be gleaned from newspaper accounts and the *Record*, Brennan must have been an attractive person along with his special qualifications for success in the field of athletics. Fr. Edgar Kees, O.S.B., an octogenarian and former member of the faculty, in answer to the question whether he knew Bill Brennan, exclaimed: "I surely did! He was tremendously popular among the students. Oh my, you couldn't forget him!"

The Abolition of Football

The abolition of intercollegiate football at St. John's in 1910 should not have caused great surprise on the St. John's campus. Intercollegiate sports in general had been disapproved of in various *Record* editorials, particularly one in 1907, a four-page editorial that proposed their abolition on the grounds that they are contrary to the best interests of the college—that they do not promote loyalty to St. John's nor friendliness between contesting colleges. The editorial ended with the proposal that they be dropped and that the school revert to an exclusively intramural program. "Sports would then cease to be for the primary purpose of victory and would again become a means of recreation

and amusement—the only legitimate reason for their existence” (*Record*, November, 1907, pp. 446-449).

The first positive blow against intercollegiate athletics, and especially football, was delivered in the January issue of the *Record*, 1910, page 29. It is a brief, almost curt statement of fact: “At a meeting of the faculty on December 5 [sic], it was decided to abolish intercollegiate football, and Coach Brennan has been notified to that effect.” There was nothing to be said further, it seems, for the finality of the statement precluded any argument pro or con. Coach Brennan was notified that his services were no longer needed, and that was that!

On the other hand, there was certainly some discussion on campus, for in the editorial section of the same issue of the *Record* (page 27) the writer complained that the faculty had been the object of unjust criticism:

In abolishing intercollegiate football at St. John's, the faculty has suffered censure from many. Is this criticism just? We can best answer the question by inquiring into the true object of college athletics and comparing results. The object of college athletics is to afford an opportunity for each and every student to develop his physical powers. Intercollegiate games do not fulfill this condition. All attention is put on the representative team; everything else is sacrificed to them. Would not a big, well organized football league among the students do more good to the student body at large? Let money that is spent on the football team be spent on the student league and in strengthening our other varsity sports” (*Record*, January, 1910, p. 27).

The eventual outcome of the controversy over intercollegiate athletics ended a year later in the publication of an amendment to the 1909-1910 interdict that appeared in the 1910-1911 St. John's University Catalog, pp. 49-50. After a repeated denunciation of all intercollegiate contests, the passage concludes as follows: “Accordingly, it will permit very few athletic contests between the students of St. John's and those of other colleges, and *only in basketball and baseball*.” In other words, intercollegiate football remained prohibited according to the St. John's athletic policy.

Lest it be assumed that St. John's alone had problems concerning intercollegiate football during the early 1900s, we quote from Dr. Merrill Jarchow's admirable book on Minnesota Private Colleges:

For a time early in the century football labored under a cloud of disfavor. When, for example, eighteen or nine-

teen young men died playing the game in 1905, complaints regarding the game's brutality reached clear to the White House. The introduction of the forward pass the next year reduced partially the advantage of sheer strength, such as that exemplified in the famous flying wedge, but numbers of colleges nevertheless suspended the sport for several years. At Macalester President Wallace joined in the outcry, suggesting: “The authorities of the State Fair should by all means arrange to exhibit a lot of these football giants next September in one of the barns along with the prize bulls.” Macalester then gave up competition for a time. The Augustana Synod was even more extreme, declaring in 1905 that “athletics, as it is carried on at the present time, is a real evil.” Thereupon Gustavus Adolphus, despite student rumblings, dropped intercollegiate football until 1917. Little interest in the sport was evinced at Concordia until 1915, and St. Olaf also put a stop to intercollegiate competition until the end of World War I” (*Private Liberal Arts Colleges in Minnesota*, p. 52, Merrill E. Jarchow).

There is no doubt that the power behind the abolition of intercollegiate football at St. John's was Fr. Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B., Rector of the University and Seminary, who later in 1922 was elected Abbot of St. John's and retained his abhorrence of intercollegiate athletics to the end. In justice to the memory of this truly great abbot, it must be said that his attitude towards intercollegiate athletics was based on a genuine interest in St. John's as a rapidly developing college. It sprang from an innate distaste of any activity that would detract from the primary purpose of a college, the love and pursuit of learning. He was also the enemy of all forms of physical violence and, as Dr. Jarchow admitted, the football of the time was in need of drastic changes in the rules and format of the game.

As seen in retrospect, Fr. Alcuin Deutsch can be considered as a forerunner of Robert Maynard Hutchins who as president of the University of Chicago in the early 1930's banned all intercollegiate athletics in his university and introduced an intramural system that changed the public image of the school from a football power under its famous football coach Alonzo Stagg into that of an outstanding center of learning in the United States, if not in the world. What neither Fr. Alcuin Deutsch nor President Hutchins could believe was that, under proper guidance, intercollegiate and intramural sports could exist together harmoniously for the good of the entire student body—

which happens to have been the guiding purpose of Athletic Director George Durenberger when the plans for the Warner Palaestra were being drawn up. Hopefully that objective has been realized.

— 1920 —

St. John's Enters MIAC

St. John's entered the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference in the fall of 1920. The MIAC, as it is popularly called, was a reorganization of the Minnesota-Dakota Intercollegiate Conference, founded in 1914-15, of which St. John's was a member. The MIAC differed primarily from the earlier organization in the limitation of membership to the nine private liberal arts colleges of Minnesota, and operating under a new constitution planned for the "promotion of sportsmanlike competition between Minnesota colleges." It is still one of the finest athletic conferences in the nation on the private college level.

Although St. John's was not required to reinstate football as an intercollegiate sport, it was almost a foregone conclusion that, after a year of experimentation, it intended to do so. The college would then be competing in the three major conference sports of that time: football, basketball, and baseball.

At St. John's there was no problem involved in entering the MIAC with teams in baseball and basketball. With football, however, it was a different matter. St. John's had dropped intercollegiate competition in football ten years before, and now, after ten years of exclusive intramural football, it needed time in order to field a college team capable of giving good competition to strong MIAC opponents such as Hamline, St. Olaf, Macalester, Carleton, and St. Thomas that were manned by veteran squads.

There was, however, a crucial eligibility problem that required special consideration before applying to the MIAC for the admission of St. John's in football. The Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference allowed only full-fledged freshmen with 15 high school units to play in conference games, a ruling that would exclude from the St. John's football team their top-flight prep school seniors who lacked one or two units short of the required fifteen, but who had played with the team in the Minnesota-Dakota Intercollegiate Conference. These would now be lost.

Since St. John's had always depended on the Prep School "home grown" athletes as the backbone of their teams, the athletic authorities decided that the Prep School should join a conference of the sur-

rounding towns in the area, the objective being to give their preps the experience of playing "outside football."

The experiment was overwhelmingly successful. Their first year in three high school games the Prep School team scored 96 points without having their goal crossed. They also tied Cretin High School of St. Paul, then in one of its best years, by a score of 6-6.

In the meantime, the new coach, Edward Cahill, was grooming the college squad for two non-conference games with the St. Cloud Normals. When the Preps were not playing, the coach merged the best of the Preps into the college line-up so as to give them a year's experience working with the college varsity before meeting the MIAC powers. St. John's lost both of the games to the Normals, the first by 9-0 and the second by 7-0. But in spite of the defeats of the combined team, the coaches were encouraged to apply for admission of a football team in the conference for the 1921 season.

Members of this Prep School team who were selected for conference play in 1921 were Leo Leisen (later Fr. Marcellus Leisen, O.S.B.), Donald Ryan, John Decker, Doug Ormond, and Marcellus Haines.

The official re-entry of St. John's into intercollegiate football was hailed by the *Record* with enthusiasm:

The days of Bill Brennan and his husky aggregation of Cardinal and Blue warriors back in the days of '08 and '09 were vividly recalled by the Old Timers upon the announcement that St. John's would enter a team into the Conference world again. The authorities came to the decision as a result of the splendid showing of the High School gridders of last season and because of the increased college attendance this season which makes possible a great variety of selection.

St. John's will not count her games this season as conference tilts, since at least four conference games must be played on a trial basis before the team can be considered of conference standing. Nevertheless, the contests count as conference games by the opposing college" (*Record*, October, 1921, p. 398).

— 1921 —

St. John's debut was not as glorious as had been anticipated. The MIAC was, and still is, a tough conference, and St. John's learned quickly that the climb to the top would be slow and painful—and all uphill. The 1921 team lost its first three conference games: to Hamline by 17-0, St. Mary's by 14-7, and Macalester by 14-0. Its one consola-

tion on which to build hopes for the future was its defeat of St. Cloud Normal to the tune of 28-0, a tremendous improvement over the two losses in 1920.

Alexandria High School, however, administered a resounding defeat to the Johnny team by a 20-14 score. Needless to say, the defeat came as a humiliation, but after the game Don Ryan, one of the St. John's players, was able to dismiss his embarrassment with a laugh: "They did not look like high school kids to me. Some of them had real whiskers." In retrospect, however, St. John's can still reply in 1978 that it had the honor (?) of losing to two of the most famous high school teams in Minnesota high school history, Minneapolis North in 1907 and Alexandria in 1921.

Stars in this first conference football season were Donald Ryan, captain; Ernie Koepp and Leo Leisen, tackles; McDonald and John McNally, halfbacks. It was a good season record for a team that was entering a college league mainly with freshmen. Among them was the great John McNally, who after college played professional football under the name of Johnny Blood with the Green Bay Packers. It was McNally's first season in a game he had never played in high school. Years later, in 1963, he was voted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame.

— 1922 —

The 1922 football team was the victim of the almost traditional "Sophomore Exodus" that throughout the years agonized the football coaches, but especially the new coaches, when they sized up their squads for the coming season. As so often happened in the early years of MIAC competition, men of the calibre of the 1921 stars were no longer on campus in 1922. Ryan and McDonald were in law school, Decker and Haines in the University School of Medicine, Leo Leisen in the seminary, and Keaveny in the University School of Pharmacy. Remaining on the squad was the incomparable John McNally who did most of the running, passing, and kicking but lacked the line of the Green Bay Packers to exhibit all his tremendous physical talents. There was also "Iron-Man" Tony Gornick, a modest performer from the Iron Range, who ranks with the finest all-around football players of St. John's history. The fiery Buff Mollers was playing tackle and Doug Ormond, the runner, was at halfback. The team was not strong enough to match the seasoned powers of the MIAC.

Coach for the 1922 season was Fred Sanborn, a former St. Thomas star who had replaced Coach Edward Cahill. Sanborn was inexperienced as a football coach and faced with the problem of organizing a

strong team from a squad made up of three veterans and a flock of inexperienced freshmen. He was bound to be disappointed.

The season was far from being a successful adventure into the MIAC football battles. St. John's lost all of its five scheduled conference games. After an opening 20-0 victory over the Little Falls High School team, it was defeated by the following MIAC teams: Hamline, 20-0; Macalester, 6-0; St. Thomas, 21-0; St. Olaf 20-10; and—a resounding St. Mary's thumping by the score of 55-7. The defeat by St. Mary's was accomplished by a brilliant running back named Cashman who was aided by a devastating passing attack against which St. John's was helpless. The *Record* sportswriter appended a post mortem to his account of the season: "This game was the last act of our little game of football."

The *Record* reporter, who ordinarily is not supposed to judge a season or game emotionally, in this instance exercised his rhetorical skills with what must have been a cruel piece of reading for the defeated warriors:

And so, for this season at St. John's, Old King Football is dead. 'Vive le Roi Basketball!' It is useless and unprofitable to multiply excuses for the many defeats. Without doubt there is something wrong, but who can say with justice where the fault lies. Let the curtain be mercifully drawn over the most disastrous season in the annals of any sport at St. John's, and let the balm of future victories soothe the sting of these past defeats (*Record*, November, 1922, p. 448).

— 1923 —

After the "Disaster Year" of 1922, it might have been expected that a pessimistic spirit would invade the St. John's campus on the opening of the 1923 football season. It was quite the contrary. Coach Sanborn had attended a six-weeks' summer course on the coaching of football at the University of Michigan under its famous coach Fielding Yost, and the St. John's players were eager to absorb some of the Yost mystique in the art of winning football games. Even the *Record* that had indirectly pilloried the coach the preceding year, reported that "Those who have seen him drill his men agree that he has the 'stuff'" (October, 1923, p. 341).

But there were still other reasons for optimism. The 1923 squad had been fortified by the presence of an extraordinary crop of fresh-

men to fill the large gaps left by the departure of sophomore "veterans." Among the freshmen were former Prep School stars Eddie Powers and Gus Carroll in the backfield, Ben Osendorf and Al Nordhus on the line. There was Walter "Matt" Miller in the backfield, Pierre Thomey and Tony Terrahe from St. Cloud Tech, Donald Blake from Hopkins.

Of these, Eddie Powers merits special attention. He was a gifted all-around athlete and a superb competitor in all the three major sports then being played at St. John's, whether baseball, basketball or football. As a freshman quarterback in football he was a triple-threat performer as passer, runner and kicker. He was (potentially) close to being the ideal quarterback, as exemplified in present-day professional ranks. He demonstrated his versatility in the Hamline game when, exasperated by failures to advance the ball by plunges after two downs, he drop-kicked the ball over the crossbars from the 38-yard line. Unfortunately he did not return to St. John's after his freshman year but transferred to the University of Wisconsin where he starred in basketball for three years.

Spread among the freshmen were veteran linemen Ev Schoener from St. Cloud Tech and ex-Prep Hubert "Buff" Mollers, a formidable tackle and, on occasion, an end; both these men were rugged battlers on a team that, according to the *Record*, "would never say die."

In the matter of percentages the 1923 football season was unimpressive, but as a coaching achievement it was an outstanding success. The coach faced the handicap of molding a squad of light, inexperienced recruits into a well-balanced unit. Then, after only a week of practice, the Johnnies met and lost to Macalester by a score of 25-6. In the next two games they lost a heartbreaker to Concordia 3-0, and defeated Stout Institute 12-6. The loss to Hamline was another disappointment. The Johnnies fumbled the ball in the second play following the kick-off; Hamline recovered it, and scored within the first two minutes of the contest. In the second period the Johnnies out-battled the Pipers to a scoreless standstill.

The final game of the season was the crowning point of a good coaching performance. Now an efficient team of battlers with Eddie Powers running the offense like a veteran, St. John's defeated strong Gustavus by a score of 14-12, the first St. John's victory over a conference foe.

Freshmen Eddie Powers and guard Al Nordhus were selected for berths on the second string team of the conference.

From George Durenberger to John Gagliardi 1924 - 1977

If there is any one person who has left the stamp of his personality upon the athletic program and physical education at St. John's University, it is George Durenberger. As football and basketball player in college, as assistant coach and athletic director, from time to time, track and baseball coach and phy-ed instructor, George was identified with the sports program of St. John's University and Prep School from his freshman year in college (1924) until he retired in December, 1972. And during his leisure moments, he and his efficient wife Isabelle gave invaluable assistance to Fr. Walter Reger, O.S.B., in alumni work.

George was born in Le Sueur on November 21, 1906, attended St. Anne's parochial schools and graduated from high school in 1924. He had had no experience in football because St. Anne's High School dropped that sport in his freshman year, but he played four years of what he called mediocre basketball.

But his ambition was to play football. Why did he pick a small college behind the pine curtain? The reason was that St. John's did not rate very high in intercollegiate sports at that time, and he thought that this would give him the opportunity to get into the action. During his senior year in high school, he attended a basketball tournament at St. Thomas College and two St. Thomas athletes tried to recruit him for that school. But he had heard of the rugged Tommy football teams of those years and looked around for a school where he would have a chance to make the team.

St. John's filled the bill in that respect. He wrote for information and received a bale of literature on "the school in the heart of a landscape paradise." He liked what he saw, applied for admission, and was accepted. St. John's almost lost him, however, on the first day of his arrival. The literature on this paradisiac school had given the impression that the Greyhound buses run conveniently near the school, so George debarked from the bus at the intersection of the old road and Highway 52, a mile and a half from the buildings. It had rained the entire day and was still drizzling when he set out with two heavy suitcases to cover what he thought would be just a stroll around the next bend in the road. The road had been gravelled, but the good earth had oozed up through the gravel and the going was extremely sticky. He arrived at the buildings in a state of near exhaustion an hour later.

Despite his early discouragement, he got through the next day and began to meet friendly prefects (i.e., faculty residents), especially kindly Fr. Clarus Graves, O.S.B., and easy-going Fr. Theodore Krebs-

bach, O.S.B., both now deceased. He also began to experience what the literature had described as the "home" atmosphere of the school.

The next day he reported to Coach Gene Aldrich, who had replaced Coach Fred Sanborn that fall to serve as head coach of football and basketball. Coach Ed Flynn had returned to act as athletic director and moderator of the highly developed intramural program. A friendly high school coach had told George that if he didn't know much about playing football, the easiest position to learn to play is guard. So when Aldrich asked George what position he played, he said: "Guard!"

— 1924 —

He played guard in the 1924 season, which resulted in one tie (Macalester), one victory (Eveleth Junior College), and four defeats. However, he recalls the last game with Gustavus at St. Peter as the turning point in his athletic career. When Coach Aldrich was naming the starters, he put George at guard, Al Mahowald at center, Ben Osendorf and Al Nordhus at tackles, Carl Schumacher at halfback (to name only the future Benedictines). But Al "Fritz" Mahowald said he didn't think he could play because of a badly sprained ankle. Aldrich said: "OK, Durenberger, center."

George admits with modest pride that he was the Johnnie star of that game. Although the score was lopsided, George was spectacular on defense. He said that with scores of relatives and in-laws from four or five neighboring towns looking on, he just had to put out. Carleton, which was a member of the MIAC in those years, won the MIAC title.

Bill Houle, now deceased, became head coach in 1925, but there was never any doubt as to who was to be the starting center for the next three years.

— 1925 —

Bill Houle, assistant coach at the College of St. Thomas, was hired as head football, basketball, and baseball coach in the spring of 1925. He had starred at quarterback for St. Thomas from 1921 to 1923, and twice made all-conference in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) which had been founded in 1919-1920. He also led his team to the conference title in 1923. In 1925 he coached the St. Thomas baseball team, which lost only one game during the season (although St. Olaf won the title). Houle had also been a star in hockey, so there was no question of his versatility as an athlete.

However, the change of coaches did not do much to change St. John's standing in the conference. In 1925, the Johnnies lost all six

games, four of them by one touchdown. The title went to Macalester that year. Memorable names on that team, in addition to that of Durenberger, are Norb Schoenecker, who was the Jays' leading threat in basketball; Lawrence Hall, now deceased, who became prominent in politics as one of the young men who, with Stassen as governor, ran the state in the 1930's; Al Nordhus, now deceased, who became a Benedictine under the name of Fr. Lanfranc; Ben Osendorf, now Fr. Cornelius, O.S.B., who is working in the St. John's missions in the Bahama Islands; John ("Herc") O'Fallon, father of William, '56, John, '59, and David, '65; Heinie Zimmermann, now Fr. Odo, O.S.B., a member of St. John's daughter house in Mexico City; Carl Schumacher, now Fr. Blase, O.S.B., a member of St. Gregory's Abbey, Oklahoma, and former successful basketball coach at St. Gregory's junior college; Bill Froembgren and Gordon Tierney, who was also a basketball star.

George was named all-conference center, the first St. John's player to be so honored—although Ed Powers and Al Nordhus had made the second team in 1923. This contrasts with the number of all-conference berths won by the national champions of 1976—eight spots on the 22-player all-conference team.

— 1926 —

Fifty men answered Coach Houle's call for candidates in the fall of 1926. By this time most of the stalwart candidates for the Benedictine Order who had played the preceding two years had entered the novitiate, but veterans George Durenberger, Lawrence Hall, and Norb Schoenecker showed up for practice. There were also some promising freshmen—Mahlon Gann, Hub Latterell, Fred Baker (former Prep and brother of Fr. Damian Baker, O.S.B.), Hermie Linnemann, who commuted from St. Joe and operated a vital taxi service for the isolated Johnnies, Roman Niedzielski, now deceased former Prep, Al Siebenand, Frank Weier, Matt Miller, Adolph Pohl, *e.a.* The season's results were somewhat better than those of 1925, with two victories and one tie (Augsburg). Gustavus took its first title that year by defeating St. John's 20-0. George Durenberger was named all-conference center for the second time.

— 1927 —

Fifty men again reported for practice in the fall of 1927, but despite the return of Durenberger and guards Gann and Latterell, and the addition of three future Benedictines—Tony Lawrence (now Fr. Em-eric, O.S.B.), Linus Tekippe (now Fr. Owen, O.S.B.), and Ed Schirber

(now Fr. Martin, O.S.B.), along with Al Bauman, Ken Raymond, Ray Heisler (first string pitcher on the baseball team), Robert Lowe, Paul Lansing (now Fr. Lansing, of the St. Cloud Diocese), *e.a.*, the Johnnies won games only over the small non-conference schools of Park Region and Phalen Luther and lost the final conference game to league-leading Gustavus 0-38. George again was the only Johnnie to receive all-conference recognition.

Durenberger gives much of the credit for his selection as all-conference center in 1926 and 1927 to the two rugged guards who could plug the center of the line, and allow him to rove and make a large number of tackles. Those guards were Mahlon Gann, '33, and Hub Latterell, '29. (Gann stayed out of school for two years and returned in 1931 to team up with Al Ethen, all-time stellar guard for St. John's, both in Prep School and college, and lend priceless aid to Joe Benda in reversing St. John's fortunes on the gridiron.)

However, George's performance on the field was not only skill in diagnosing opposing plays and nabbing the ball carrier. He showed a great deal of versatility. When Houle needed a player who could plunge with authority, he would shift George to the backfield for a few plays. He also became known for his booming punts at a time when St. John's punters were not known for getting distance. One of George's kicks sailed over the safety's head and went for 82 yards, with Niedzielski hovering over it and waiting to touch it down the moment it ceased rolling. He was also called upon to kick field goals and points after touchdown.

Before graduation in May of 1928, George had been told that the administration was thinking of hiring him as assistant to Bill Houle. However, by the end of the school year, Abbot Alcuin, who was never enthusiastic about intercollegiate athletics, informed him that budget limitations would make it impossible to add him to the athletic staff (translation: "I should like to de-emphasize intercollegiate athletics."). George accordingly began looking for a job in the summer of 1928. He was about to accept an offer from Green Giant Company of his home town of Le Sueur (then called Minnesota Valley Canning Co.), when he received a letter from Fr. Cuthbert Goeb, O.S.B., secretary to Abbot Alcuin (later abbot of Assumption Abbey, Richardton, N.D., now deceased), informing him that if he would divide his time between the Liturgical Press which was then expanding rapidly, and the Athletic Department, it would be possible to piece together a salary for him. The upshot was that Green Giant lost a prospective executive and St. John's gained a coach and athletic director who shaped St. John's athletic programs and policies for over forty years.

— 1928 —

In George's first year as assistant coach, the fall of 1928, he and Coach Houle were met with the smallest turn-out of candidates in years. The three candidates for the Order had been mercifully absorbed into the novitiate, Gann had temporarily left school, and Baker and Linnemann and a few others had discontinued. A few new names appeared along with those of veterans like Latterell, Bauman, Niedzielski, and Lansing. These were: George Tegeder (now Fr. Vincent, O.S.B.), Ray Hite, Johnny Zaic (former Prep), Myron Wiest, now deceased, and Ralph Koll, who was prevented by injuries from displaying his slithering ball-carrying as much as had been hoped. Again the scores were close, but St. John's won only one conference game (against Macalester) and tied another (Concordia) to rank below .500. St. Mary's and Augsburg tied for the championship.

— 1929 —

The year 1929 was a re-run of 1928 except that St. John's lost all of its games, including a non-conference encounter with St. Paul (Phalen) Luther, which was one of the two teams which St. John's defeated in 1928. St. Thomas won the title.

It was clearly time for a change, and Fr. Mark Braun, O.S.B., now deceased, dean of the college (later abbot of St. Gregory's Abbey, Oklahoma), began a search for a new head coach. A promising young Notre Dame star had just returned to coach at his alma mater, Cathedral High School in Duluth, and had had a successful season in football in the fall of 1929. Fr. Mark offered him a position as head football and basketball coach in March, 1930, and hired him soon afterward.

Benda Becomes Head Coach

The new coach was Joseph Benda, who attended Duluth Cathedral 1918-23 and played football and basketball during most of those years as a member of the Cathedral state championship football team in 1922. He was prominent enough in prep football to be noticed by Notre Dame scouts, and applied for admission to Notre Dame in 1923. He played under Knute Rockne in 1926, but injured his knee in the Army game and was sidelined much of the time that season. But he was again first string end in the fall of 1927, and also played end in 1928, until his trick knee gave out again. He also played basketball for two years under Coach George Keogan. He was graduated in the spring of 1928 and was named head football coach at his alma mater, Duluth Cathedral, in the fall of 1929. He guided his team to a tie for the Head of the Lakes championship with a 7-1 record in that year.

— 1930 —

Joe introduced the Notre Dame system to St. John's in the fall of 1930, but it worked no miracles the first year. The 1930 season was no more successful than the dreary string of seasons which had preceded it, and was distinguished primarily by the belligerent cry of Al Hermanutz as he went into the St. Olaf game in the waning minutes, with the score 0-82: "Come on, guys, let's show these farmers how to play football!"

— 1931 —

The most striking feature of the 1931 season was the complete turn-around from Benda's first year, signalized by the convincing 13-0 victory over the team which had clobbered the Johnnies 82-0 the year before. It is recorded that the score was so incredible that the Northfield newspaper called St. John's four times, asking each time that the score be repeated. The 1931 team had a sprinkling of former Prep stars coached by George: Lee Hartmann, Gus Luckemeyer, now deceased, Walter Thuente (later Fr. Adelard, O.S.B., now deceased), John Zaic, Ambrose Osendorf (now Fr. Cassian, O.S.B.), to mention only those who had not graduated in the spring of 1930. To these were added Red Fairbanks, halfback, Al Ethen, guard, and Roy Donaldson, end. Several promising grads from public high schools also added their power to the team and helped provide beef for the championship team of 1932—George Klasen, fullback and punter, who was recruited from the intramural leagues; Si Ryan, halfback, and all-round backfield resource man; Al Schoeneberger, end; Al Schaefer, Bucky Hennen, and Ralph Koll, halfbacks. Mahlon Gann, veteran guard, returned from a two-year leave of absence, teamed up with Ethen, also a guard, to make the center of the line impregnable on defense and devastating on offense. Benda was evidently becoming a drawing card for football talent.

St. John's won its first five games and allowed its goal line to be crossed only once. However, they lost to Concordia on a muddy field in Moorhead, and another heartbreaker to Macalester in the season finale. After trailing most of the game, Macalester began to fill the air with desperation passes in the final minutes of the game and connected with a touchdown pass just before the gun sounded. Mac made both points after touchdowns and the final score was St. John's 13, Macalester 14.

It was in the St. Olaf game and in the preceding game against Augsburg that the Gann-Ethen combination showed its power, taking Luckemeyer for yards through center at every crunch, and stopping everything that tried to come through the middle of the line. If it had

not been for the frenzied passing of Macalester and the spotty pass defense of the Johnnies in the last few minutes of the game, St. John's would have ended up in a first place tie with Concordia. As it was, their final standing was fourth place.

St. John's was clearly no longer a push-over. Benda once remarked that up to this time he had always been one of the most sought-out persons at annual meetings at which coaches and athletic directors worked out football schedules (that was before George worked out the round-robin schedule which became effective in 1938 and requires every school to play each conference member school every year). After 1931, Benda's popularity as a choice of opponent waned.

— 1932 —

The avoidance of Benda at the coaches' meetings became all the more pronounced after St. John's won its first football championship in 1932, in a season in which the St. John's goal was never crossed. The Johnnies were stopped by Concordia on the one-yard line on a muddy field and had to settle for a 0-0 tie, but all other teams had experienced at least one loss, so the Johnnies were undisputed Number One. The Gann-Ethen combination had been broken up because Gann had used up all of his eligibility, but he made his contribution by serving as line coach. He was adequately replaced in the line by Lawrence "Zook" Iten, who was later shifted to end, where he regularly made all-conference. Other names to be remembered in this championship year, along with the Luckemeyers, Ethens, Klasens, Ryans, and Hartmanns are Ken Bloms (now Fr. Romuald, O.S.B.), quarterback; Elmer "Bull" Madsen, now deceased, fullback; Walter Johnson and Bill Arth, halfbacks; Lane Scofield, now deceased, guard; Jim Scofield, now deceased, quarterback; Roy Donaldson, Al Schoeneberger, and Jim Coyne, ends; Jim McCormack, tackle. Al Ethen, Lee Hartmann, and Gus Luckemeyer made all-conference.

The freshman rule was in effect for the first time, and was retained until dropped temporarily, first during the war years, and later in 1951, for good.

— 1933 —

In 1933 the Benda-men were on the move but lacked the scoring punch to put the ball across after getting to the five-yard line. They tied in two conference games and lost two by one touchdown. After dropping a game to St. Cloud State, they came to life with a bang to beat St. Thomas 7-6 and to throw the championship to Gustavus. St. John's finished in fifth place. Al Ethen was chosen all-conference guard

for the second time; "Zook" Iten, now converted to end, was all-conference selection for that position.

Some new names began to appear in the line-up along with Elmer "Bull" Madsen, Jim Coyne, Jim McCormack, Si Ryan, Jim and Lane Scofield, both of whom were now listed as quarterbacks along with Ken Bloms. Other new names were the following: Joe Marx (now Fr. Michael, O.S.B., professor of theology and editor of *Worship*), halfback; Duke Campbell, who recently retired as commander of the Alameda Naval Air Station in California, an iron man who played 60 minutes of every game except those in which reserves were inserted in order to keep the score down; John Van Buren, fullback, consistent punter; Jim (now Dr., M.D.) O'Keefe and the Uberecken brothers, centers; scrappy Bill McCauley, guard; and George Toman, now deceased, tackle.

— 1934 —

The coaching staff in 1934 was strengthened by the addition of Jim Dincolo who had captained the Boston University football team as an undergraduate. He gave Joe invaluable assistance as line coach when he was not busy teaching accounting. Gus Luckemeyer was also retained for the season as backfield coach. St. John's lost only one game this season, the last game of the season to St. Thomas 12-0, and tied St. Mary's on a muddy field to end up in fourth place, with two victories, one loss and one tie. The overall record looked better than that, however, since the Johnnies won three non-conference games to end up with an overall standing of 6-1-1. Something unusual for the period was a 35-yard drop-kick by Al Ethen against Superior State College.

Despite the disappointing season, St. John's had impressed the coaches sufficiently to place four men on the all-conference team: Al Ethen, guard; Lawrence Iten, end; George Toman, tackle; and Si Ryan, halfback.

George recalls that the only genuine athletic scholarship ever awarded by SJU was in favor of Si Ryan in his freshman year. Si's father had said that he would send Si to St. John's if he got some sort of scholarship in recognition of his athletic ability. While quick of wit and able to think faster on his feet than the majority of mankind, Si was not the type of student to merit a scholarship on the basis of his high school record, and St. John's had a policy of not awarding athletic scholarships (unless the student gave signs of a vocation to the priesthood). Si did not qualify on either basis. But to make sure that Si would not be lured away from us by a "ride" and soon be met playing

against us, Joe and George asked the business office to deduct \$25 from their salaries for two months and apply it to Si's account. Result: Si attended St. John's and starred in football, hockey, and baseball. Several years later when George and Joe were in need of cash, they each received a \$100 check in the mail. George calls this the best investment he ever made. It really should not have been called an athletic scholarship, he says. It was rather a student loan at a very high rate of interest.

— 1935 —

The Benda-men had to settle for a three-way tie for first place with St. Olaf and Gustavus in 1935. St. Cloud State was the only team to cross the Johnnie goal line that year, although St. John's won that game 21-7. Vern McGree, John Van Buren and Ed Callanan, halfbacks; "Bull" Madsen, fullback; and Lane Scofield, quarterback, running through holes opened by Maurice "Tiger" Hynes, Frank and Jim O'Keefe, Tony Schultheis, Clarence La Selle, Norb Vos, Duke Campbell, George Toman, and former Preps, scrappy Fran Johnston and brothers Ray and Heinie Uberecken, piled up a total of 118 points to 7 for the opposition. Vern McGree crossed the opposing goal line with monotonous regularity, often after sprints of 40 to 60 yards and dragging anywhere from three to five would-be tacklers with him. In the Hamline game he made 307 yards and five touchdowns, one of them after a 56-yard gallop. Despite this brilliant display of ball-carrying, he was not chosen all-conference this year.

The final game of the season was a punting duel between Van Buren of St. John's and De Marce of St. Thomas. Neither team took chances, and the game ended in a scoreless tie. All-conference selections were Lane Scofield, quarterback, and George Toman, tackle.

— 1936 —

In 1936 the Benda-men won their third championship in a period of five years, this year sharing it with Gustavus. The Johnnies lost their first game to Duluth (which was not yet a member of the MIAC) by a field goal late in the game, but snapped back to dump St. Mary's and St. Olaf by convincing scores. They lost to Superior 6-9, but held all remaining conference opponents scoreless. The Armistice Day game with St. Cloud State was canceled because of bad weather. McGree, Callanan, Van Buren, backed up by Vedic Himsl, Lane Scofield, and Clarence La Selle, piled up a total of 110 points against 18 for opponents. Linemen who opened the way for this performance were Fritz Schneider, Phil Rath (former Prep), Guido Sartori, Maurice "Tiger"

Hynes, Chuck Trudelle, Fran Johnston, and John Murphy. Tiger Hynes and Lane Scofield were chosen all-conference.

With a record like that of the past six years, it was inevitable that Joe Benda would be invited to use his talents at a bigger school. In 1937 his alma mater invited him to return as end coach under Elmer Layden, to replace Johnny O'Brien who had been killed in an auto accident. George Durenberger reluctantly took over as head football and basketball coach, but still retaining most of his duties as athletic director. On top of this load he also began to work on his master's degree at the University of Minnesota.

— 1937 —

Three additional shocks hit the Johnnies in the fall of 1937. First, Jim Dincolo, who had been of invaluable assistance as line coach, resigned to join the accounting staff of Notre Dame University; the second was the tragic auto accident which befell the team on the way home from the Gustavus game, the second game of the season, and which took the life of Bud Carlin and injured Vern McGree and Vedio Himsl. Finally, all-conference "Tiger" Hynes did not return to school. Something seems to have gone out of the team. They lost to River Falls by one touchdown but came alive with the return of McGree to the line-up and made a clean sweep of Moorhead State, Macalester, Concordia, and St. Cloud State. Only traditional rival St. Thomas survived this resurgence, with a score of 14-7. St. John's was able to end up in third place, behind Gustavus (5-0) and Concordia (3-1).

All-conference selections went to halfback-fullback Ed Callanan and halfback Vern McGree.

— 1938 —

With a wealth of home-grown material which he had coached when serving as Prep coach, and with a good assortment of graduates from other high schools such as Al Brenny, George Grace, Bernie Lorenz, Omer Sieben, Harlan Hurd, Norb Vos, and others, George went on to take the MIAC title in 1938, his second year as head coach in college. He gives a lot of credit to assistant coach Vern McGree, Johnnie star halfback and dedicated competitor of the previous three years. Vern coached the backfield that fall.

In the 1938 season, St. John's lost the first game to Jordan College and the second to St. Norbert's but took all conference games by comfortable margins. They climaxed the season with a 37-0 victory over St. Cloud State. St. John's piled up 158 points to 74 for the opposition for the year. Ed Callanan, "Phantom Halfback" Jim Roche, and

end Fritz Schneider made all-conference. Edward Callanan was chosen Little All-American.

— 1939 —

With the former Prep touchdown twins Jim Roche and Jim Boyd sparking the backfield and backed up by Omer Sieben, who had starred in high school at Melrose, along with Ben Lorenz, Norb Vos, Benno Marx (now Fr. Paul, O.S.B., Executive Director of the Human Life Center at St. John's), and a beefy line powered by Phil Raths and Nick Stoffel (former Preps), Al Brenny, Konnie Prem, Clancy Grell, George Grace, Ade Born, and Ed Schnettler, the 1939 team seemed all set to repeat its 1938 performance. However, Phil Raths was lost through injuries, and after winning games over St. Cloud, St. Norbert's, St. Mary's, and Concordia, the Johnnies were clobbered by Gustavus and lost a squeaker to Macalester, to end up with five wins and two losses overall and three wins and two losses in the conference for fourth place. St. Thomas took the title with a 4-0-1 record.

Jim Roche and Ben Lorenz tied for high scoring honors in the conference with 42 points each. Roche was selected all-conference halfback and ended his career with the greatest number of touchdowns, 24, in the years 1937-39.

— 1940 —

The 1940 season was unspectacular and marked by narrow losses to St. Thomas and Hamline and a tie with Macalester. The end result was a record of two wins against three losses, one tie in the MIAC, and fifth place. The Johnnies, however, defeated Duluth and St. Cloud State, and so their overall record was 4-1-3. Gustavus won the title with a 5-0 record.

One-half of the Roche-Boyd combination, Jimmy Boyd, was still in operation, but the replacements in the backfield—Eraine Patrias, Tom Paul, and Bob Turek—failed to produce a break-away runner of Roche's calibre. Nevertheless, Jim Boyd was the main ground-gainer, accumulating 200 yards in the St. Cloud State game alone.

Jim Boyd and Al Brenny, halfback and center respectively, made all-conference.

— 1941 —

Joe Benda returned from Notre Dame in 1941 on the eve of the U.S. entry into World War II, and resumed where he had left off in 1937. George also resumed his former positions as line coach, Prep basketball coach, and athletic director. Most of the stars of the 1930's had graduated and the coaches were faced with a serious rebuilding

job. The Johnnies lost all but one conference game (Augsburg) but won two non-conference games (River Falls and Duluth). They lost to St. Cloud State by the close score of 0-6, the first victory of St. Cloud over the Johnnies since 1933.

Some of the new candidates showed real promise as the season progressed—Alex Winkler, end; Ted Seep, guard; Jack O'Connell, center; Heinz Arnold, former Prep, center; and Val Marchildon, half-back-quarterback. Eraine Patrias, a leading ground-gainer from 1940, continued to improve, but Tommy Paul, a triple-threat player from Faribault, was obliged to drop out because of a broken leg. The passing of Austin Shanahan was a strong point in the Johnnies' offense but it could not offset the loss of Tom Paul's running and punting.

Ted Seep, guard, and Alex Winkler, end, made all-conference. St. Thomas won the title.

— 1942 —

The war did not eliminate football all at once, and the suspension of the freshman rule and the enrollment of a promising crop of freshmen in 1942—especially Bill Osborne, Red Maenhout, and Barney Gervais, who came in one bundle from Marshall, Minn.—gave promise of a revival of former St. John's power on the gridiron. The Johnnies started out strong, taking Augsburg 31-7, Macalester 20-0, and St. Mary's 28-13, but they lost to the two powerhouses of that year—St. Thomas (0-18) and Gustavus (13-24), and tied Concordia 14-14. The result was a third place finish. The team played no non-conference games this year.

The passing of John Heimann, pass snatching by Maenhout and Chuck Gregory, and the kicking of Al Rowe were features of the season. Toward the end of the season, backs Osborne and Jack Schmidt had acquired experience of college football and began to show power as ball carriers.

Three players were named to the all-conference team: Clarence "Clancy" Grell, tackle, Al Rowe, halfback, and Chuck Gregory, end. St. Thomas and Concordia tied for the championship.

— 1943 —

In 1943 the student body had shrunk to less than 150, and most of these were IV-F's (physically deferred), priesthood students, and students under 18, so it was impossible to field a football team. Joe and George devoted their energies to supervising a strong intramural and the physical training program of the Air Force cadets who were sent to St. John's for short periods of basic education before going on

to Air Force bases for intensive flight and military training. As the war dragged on, Benda decided to accept an offer as assistant coach of the Cleveland Rams in the summer of 1944 and served in that capacity for the entire 1944 season.

However, to keep the program from folding entirely, Henry "Bruts" Welsch, a member of the Johnnie baseball team, coached a small squad which played two games with the non-program school of Macalester, winning the first and tying the second.

— 1945 —

By 1945 military men were being discharged from the service and it was easier for the 18-year-olds to get deferments if they were doing satisfactory work in college. Benda returned from Cleveland, and, anxious to try out the new T-formation, was ready to field a football team that fall. The season was unsuccessful largely because several of the other colleges had Navy training programs (V-12) which permitted trainees to participate in intercollegiate sports. It is not surprising, therefore, that St. John's won only one game with a non-program school (Macalester) and another by default, when Augsburg's all-civilian team folded. The T-formation could not compensate for the sparseness of material.

Memorable features of the season were a 90-yard touchdown run by guard Bill Prickril on a pass interception, and the elusive running of Doug Gits (now a priest of the Winona Diocese). The team received an injection of new strength with the return from service of John Heimann, Ken Schoener, and Tom Donlin of the 1942 team. Schoener, a newly discharged Navy ensign, was chosen all-conference end.

— 1946 —

The 1946 season appeared promising (they all do!) with Coach Benda again at the helm, assisted by Chet Grant, former Notre Dame player and assistant coach at that school. He was a valuable addition to the St. John's traditionally undermanned coaching team, and particularly so because he had built a highly diversified attack around the T-formation. The effects of demobilization were apparent in the 88 candidates who turned out for practice—75 of whom were war veterans. But despite the power brought to the team by such performers as Jack Blommer, Bill Osborne, Barney Gervais, Jack Schmidt, Konnie Prem (now M.D. on the University of Minnesota medical staff), Chuck Miller, Pete Neumann, Don Gray, and Ev Trebtoske (now Fr. Trebtoske of the Austin, Texas, Diocese), Sam Weber and Skip Linnemann,

former Preps, and Art (Dick) Schmitz, father of Tim Schmitz, who starred as top ball carrier for the Johnnies from 1974-77, St. John's found its three principal rivals, St. Thomas, Gustavus, and Concordia a bit more powerful and ended the season in fifth place in the MIAC with two wins and three losses. Overall the Johnnies looked better with three resounding victories over Bemidji, Loras, and St. Cloud for a 5-3 overall record. Gustavus took the title.

Konnie Prem and Jack Blommer made the second and third all-conference teams. Bill Osborne, Chuck Miller, and Bob Mayer were standouts in the backfield.

— 1947 —

In 1947 St. John's was rated as a top contender for the title, but "Big Red" Murnane Maenhout was sidelined with a knee injury most of the season. Halfback Bill Osborne was nursing an ankle broken during spring baseball, and saw only limited action. St. John's squeaked by Augsburg 7-6 and St. Mary's 20-13, but lost to Gustavus and St. Olaf to end up with a 3-2 record and a tie with St. Olaf for third place. Macalester and St. Thomas tied for the championship. The Johnnies played no non-conference games this season, partly because the last game of the season with St. Cloud State was snowed out.

In addition to the names that stood out during the 1946 season were newcomers like Ed Hasbrouck, Bob Fitzgerald, Don Gray, Louis Senta (later coach and currently teacher at St. John's Prep School), Mick McNeely, Chuck Kranz, Ev Trebtsoske, and Pete Neumann (now the FBI agent who spent five years on the Piper Kidnap Case of 1972, and succeeded in securing indictments of suspects just before the statute of limitations expired in July, 1977).

— 1948 —

In 1948, with an experienced line and a strong backfield inherited from 1947, with Red Maenhout healthy again, and team additions like Bill Weyandt, Al McGinnis, Frank Fischer, George Marsnik, and Joe Cascalenda, there were strong hopes that St. John's would go all the way. They started out strong and demonstrated the real strength of the MIAC by comfortable wins over St. Cloud State (14-0) and North Dakota U. (14-0), but losing heart-breakers to Hamline (6-14) and Gustavus (13-20), to end up in fourth place with a 3-2 record in the conference and 6-2 overall. St. Thomas won the title.

Vern Fahrenkrug gave a preview of the pass-grabbing he was to perform in 1949, and Chuck Miller and Pete Neumann took turns making touchdowns, while captain Don Gray, Sammy Weber, former

Prep and vicious tackler, Jack Blommer, immovable guard, Ed Hasbrouck, Ken Zirbes, and Ev Trebtsoske were all reasons for the closeness of the scores. Jim Schumacher helped along with his toe, establishing a record up to that time of 16 points—four points after touchdowns and twelve field goals. Maenhout was the only member of the team to make all-conference.

— 1949 —

In the fall of 1949 Coach Benda was greeted by a star-studded squad. In addition to the veterans who came within a single touchdown of an undefeated season the year before, two promising sophomores reported for practice—Terry O'Hara, star quarterback from Glencoe High School, and Joe Cascalenda, halfback, who had set rushing records at Monroe High School in St. Paul. They teamed up with veterans Chuck Miller, Chuck Kranz, Pete Neumann, Bob Evans (later coach at St. John's Prep School and now assistant headmaster) to present a formidable and versatile backfield. The line was strengthened by the addition of Jim Kavanaugh and Bill Schwob, tackles; Judd Pribyl and John Lalonde, guards; and Dick Juba, center. In addition to these there was George Marsnik, who made history as one of St. John's greatest linebackers. He became known for his ability to diagnose an opposing play before it got started and then strongly interfering with its execution.

Despite the brilliant play of both the line and the backfield and the piling up of more yardage than the winners in the two games, the Johnnies lost to Gustavus (14-19) and St. Thomas (27-28). The Johnnies ended up with a 4-2 record and in third place. Those who saw the final game with St. Thomas are still talking about it. It was undoubtedly the most thrilling encounter ever enacted in the local bowl. St. Thomas came from behind three times, the last time to stay, just before the gun sounded. St. John's was leading with only three minutes to go, and St. Thomas in desperation began filling the air with passes. Finally, Jim "Popcorn" Brandt, speed merchant of the Tommies, caught a long pass on the far sideline, bobbled it a couple of times, powered past the St. John's safety man, and kept going another 30 yards to a touchdown. St. Thomas made the point after touchdown and the final score was St. Thomas 28, St. John's 27.

That one point prevented a three-way tie between St. Thomas, Gustavus, and St. John's. As it was, St. John's ended up in third place behind St. Thomas, 6-0, and Gustavus, 5-1.

In his column in the St. Cloud *Daily Times*, sportswriter Frank Farrington described Benda's acceptance of that defeat: "Joe stayed

there on the field after all the thousands of people had gone. . . . He knew it was probably the last game he would see. . . . He just wanted to be by himself on the turf that he loved so well—the gridiron of St. John's University. . . . He stayed a long time and then walked slowly away" (St. Cloud *Daily Times*, June 21, 1950).

The game was marked by the brilliant passing of O'Hara to Vern Fahrenkrug, and by the hard rushing of the new set of TD twins, Miller and Cascalenda, who between them racked up ten touchdowns for the season. Also notable was the strong defensive play of George Marsnik and Judd Pribyl. Vern Fahrenkrug and George Marsnik made all-conference.

Benda had resigned as basketball coach in 1948, ostensibly to devote more time and energy to football and the physical education program in general, but there was a deeper reason. He was suffering from Hodgkins disease and becoming progressively weaker. By the end of the 1949 season he became so weak that he was unable to stand for any length of time and finally had to drive his car to the practice field and coach from the front seat. At the end of the season, he took a year's leave of absence and by the end of November he had to enter the St. Cloud Hospital, which he did repeatedly for the next few months. A news story widely circulated by the International News Service described how his players showed their loyalty and affection. When they learned that he needed many blood transfusions, the entire Monogram Club of 66 athletes, representing all sports at St. John's, piled into a bus and went to the St. Cloud Hospital where they contributed several gallons of blood to the St. Cloud blood bank. Gustavus lettermen also sent flowers to Joe in the hospital and offered to donate blood if it was needed.

Joe died at his home in Flynntown on June 20, 1950, at the age of 45, and was buried in the Collegeville Parish Cemetery overlooking Lake Sagatagan. His funeral was attended by his fellow coaches from around the state and many of his former players and a host of friends. His wife Gertrude, a graduate of St. Catherine's College, St. Paul, and sister of the Brownes (Bill, '40, Don, '43, and Jack, '48), is buried beside him.

Editorials and statements by those who had known and worked with Joe Benda mentioned again and again the high ideals he brought to the conduct of the athletic program and inspired his players with a will to win, but always within the rules of complete sportsmanlike conduct. His success as a coach is evidenced by his 58-32-8 record in the MIAC, and the winning of the first MIAC football title by St. John's (1932), which was followed by two more in 1935 and 1936.

He also turned out 19 all-conference players, some of whom were two- and three-time winners of that distinction.

St. John's was fortunate in having an able replacement for Benda right at hand—the colorful John (Blood) McNally, who had attended St. John's from 1920 to 1923 and starred in all sports from football to track. He had had no experience in sports in high school, and to compensate for this deficiency, undertook a rigorous program of self-training and the study of fundamentals. This self-discipline paid off. He starred in four sports and became St. John's first four-letter winner.

McNally transferred to Notre Dame in the fall of 1924, but dropped out of school after one semester to enter the ranks of pro ball. He was a star halfback with the Green Bay Packers from 1929 to 1936, but left the Packers to become playing coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers from 1937 to 1939. He then took a similar position with the Kenosha Cardinals, leaving them to enlist in the Army. In World War II he served as a cryptographer in the China-Burma-India theatre, and returned to St. John's in 1949—after a lapse of twenty-five years—to complete his work for a major in philosophy. He was graduated in June, 1949, at the age of 46. Since he had done a good deal of studying of economics in the preceding 26 years, and took courses in this subject after returning to St. John's, he was engaged to teach a course in the principles of economics and to coach the freshman football team in the fall of 1949. He piloted the freshmen through an undefeated season and was the natural successor to Benda as head coach in the fall of 1950.

— 1950 —

Prospects for the 1950 season were good. Not only had McNally shown his coaching ability in the pro leagues and at St. John's, but he had an experienced assistant in Big George and additional help from John (Buster) Hiller, head basketball coach, and Vernon McGree. The strong 1949 team, like the 1975 team sixteen years later, had been heavily sprinkled with sophomores, and these players were now seasoned veterans. Only Chuck Miller, Pete Neumann, Jack Smith, and Chuck Kranz were lost through graduation, and Terry O'Hara through withdrawal from school. Most of the gaps were filled with sophs from the championship freshman team of 1949 or by the conversion of lettermen of the previous year to new positions.

Dick Kelly and Curly Gasperlin replaced Terry O'Hara at quarterback; Ted Joyce was converted from quarterback to fullback, and alternated with Dan Coborn, Judd Pribyl, converted guard, and Tom Reichert, converted end. Jerry Hovey, Augie Donovan, Don Chisholm,

Bob Brendan, Dick Juba (father of Michael, '78 and Gregory '80), and Joe Denzer added beef to the line, while all-conference end, Vern Fahrenkrug, was still on hand to continue his performance in snatching passes. The other 1949 all-conference selection, George Marsnik, was converted to end on offense and to safety on defense, where he could use his speed to good effect. Unfortunately, Marsnik was sidelined with injuries a good part of the season, although he had an able replacement in the person of Bill Christopherson, who had been a stand-out on the freshman team the year before. Another promising prospect from the freshman team was Don Rubertus, who added speed to the backfield.

However, this remodelling of the 1949 machine didn't pay off. St. John's won three and lost three in the conference, all but the Gustavus game being by one or two points, for a fifth place standing. Overall, the record was four wins and three losses. Gustavus won the title with a 6-0 record. No members of the 1950 team made all-conference.

— 1951 —

The abolition of the freshman rule in 1951 resulted in a large turn-out in September of this year. Only a few regulars had been lost by graduation or withdrawal from school to enter the service, and these holes were plugged by new men from among the promising crop of freshmen and sophomores. New prospects were Tom "Whizzer" White, halfback, John Vachuska, end, Clem Schoenbauer, fullback, Dick Coy and Jim Sexton, tackles, Bob Aufenthie, guard, Don Dvorak, center, Casey Vilandre (former Prep star) and Don Westbrook, halfbacks, and Bob Forster, linebacker. However, the new men were inexperienced and needed more seasoning, and several of the regulars were lost through injuries. Result: a 4-1 record and fourth place in the conference, 4-3 overall. Gustavus (6-0) won the title.

A heartening feature of the 1951 season was the potential revealed by the new recruits. Some of these names were to resound throughout the conference during the next two years. However, during this year of rebuilding, no member of the team made all-conference.

— 1952 —

Fifteen lettermen reported for practice in August, 1952, led by co-captains Bill Christopherson and Maurice Chevalier. The Jays took St. Cloud 19-7, but lost to Hamline 19-21, largely because of a spotty pass defense. Then they rolled over Duluth, St. Olaf, and Augsburg by good margins, but, though losing to Concordia (6-32) and Gustavus (0-19), they instituted the tradition of beating St. Thomas which has

persisted to this day. St. John's played heads-up ball in that game, as Mike O'Brien raced 57 yards with a pass interception and Tom "Whizzer" White broke away for another 78 yards for a touchdown. Result: St. John's 13, St. Thomas 7.

But despite the pass-snatching of Jeb Vachuska, the chugging ground-gaining of Casey Vilandre, and the consistent gains through the line by Clem Schoenbauer, St. John's again ended up with a monotonous 3-3 record in the conference and fourth place (5-3 overall). Most depressing was the 19-0 beating administered by Gustavus in the final game in which the Gusties rang up 500 yards to 100 for the Johnnies. This also entitled Gustavus to a tie with Concordia for the title with a 6-0 record.

Despite the disappointing season, three players, Bill Christopherson, Maurice Chevalier, center, and Dick Coy, tackle, made all-conference. However, the feeling around St. John's could best be expressed in the French expression: "*Il faut que ca change.*" Something should be done to get out of that 3-3 and fourth place rut. And get out they did!

The 1953 football season witnessed a revolution in St. John's football fortunes comparable to that wrought by Joe Benda in the early 1930's. This change was executed by a smallish man, like Benda of Italian descent, from Trinidad, Colorado, and more recently from Carroll College, Montana. His name was John Gagliardi.

Coach John Gagliardi

John was born in Trinidad, Colorado, November 1, 1926, of first generation immigrant parents, whose accent betrays their origin. He attended the Catholic grade and high schools in Trinidad and was graduated in 1944. He played halfback during his high school years, but when his coach was drafted in his senior year, John, although only 16 years of age, was called upon to coach football and other sports that year. Holy Trinity High School won its first championship that year, and John was retained for three more years, making the runner-up spot once, and winning the championship in two other years. He ended his four years there with a 28-8 record.

During these years, John attended the junior college in Trinidad and played on the junior college basketball team. News of his success got around, and the priest-director of St. Mary's High School, Colorado Springs, arranged to have him attend Colorado College in Colorado Springs, while coaching all sports at St. Mary's. He lived up to his advance billing by pulling St. Mary's up to second place in his first year, and winning the championship of his league in his second.

By the time he graduated from college in 1949, his reputation as a winning coach was solidly established, and he received an offer to be head coach of all sports and athletic director at Carroll College, a diocesan college in Helena, Montana. He lived up to his reputation at Carroll, and was only half a game out of first place in his first year, and then went on to win three consecutive championships in 1950-52. During these years he never lost a conference game, and compiled a record of 25 wins in 31 games overall. His teams were noted for their tight defensive play and their alertness in capitalizing on the breaks.

It was evident that bigger schools would soon be after Gagliardi. It is to Bill Osborne, '48, who starred in three sports at St. John's and later was head coach in basketball and baseball and assistant coach in football from 1953 to 1959, that St. John's owes the good fortune of snaring Gagliardi before some big-name school had snapped him up. As a high school coach in Montana, Osborne knew of the performance of the Gagliardi teams, and urged Fr. Arno Gustin, O.S.B., SJU president, to snap him up while he was still a free agent.

John was not eager to leave Carroll. He had excellent working relations with the priests and others on the college staff. His assistant coach was Fr. Raymond Hunthausen, who later became president of the college, then bishop of Helena, and who is now archbishop of Seattle, where he still watches for reports of St. John's as well as Carroll College games. The faculty representative in athletics during John's years at Carroll, Fr. Bernard Topel, became the bishop of Spokane, now retired, whose saintliness and simplicity of life was a legend in the Northwest. So it was evident that John was working with high calibre people. He also loved the climate and the people of the West.

One thing impressed him about St. John's, however, and that was Bill Osborne's high regard for his alma mater. John felt that there must be a genuine basis for such loyalty.

When he visited the school for interviews, he found that he would have a larger theatre of operations and personnel to work with who would be as cooperative as was the staff at Carroll College. One of these was Fr. Adelard Thuente, O.S.B., '37, now deceased, a halfback of the early 1930's and an enthusiastic supporter of intercollegiate sports. He was also professor of biology and prefect (faculty resident) of St. Mary's Hall, where John was to live during his unmarried years. Fr. Adelard was also faculty representative of St. John's to the MIAC in 1958-62 and served as friend, critic, marriage counselor, and entertainer of Gagliardi during those years of the middle 1950's.

John particularly valued his advice as marriage counselor. He was going with a lovely student nurse by the name of Peggy Doherty, but like all members of closely knit Italian families, John wanted the advice and approval of his family for such a major step as marriage. [This was particularly crucial since Italian families tend to consider a marriage to a non-Italian as a mixed marriage.] However, Fr. Adelard fulfilled the role of parental advisor. He had many evenings with John and Peggy and had associations with them on other occasions, and readily saw how ideally Peggy would complement John's personality. His advice was: "Sign her, before she jumps to another league!"

John signed her in 1956 and Fr. Adelard acted as ecclesiastical witness to the contract.

— 1953 —

And now to get back to football: after coming to St. John's in the fall of 1953, accompanied by a brilliant coaching record in Colorado and Montana, John was clearly on the spot. However, the Benedictine Fathers, who as he has often pointed out, always expect the impossible, didn't go so far as to expect him to beat Gustavus, the perennial champion at that time, and win the title in his first year—especially in view of the beating St. John's received from the Gusties in 1952. But that is just what he did. For some unexplained reason, the Johnnies lost the first game to St. Cloud State and the fifth game to Duluth, but won all the rest, including a stunning 26-13 victory over South Dakota State, a much larger school, and North Central Conference champion of that year. It was necessary to beat Gustavus because we had lost a conference game to Duluth, but St. John's took the Gusties by the respectable score of 21-7, which meant that *they tied us* for the championship. St. John's record for that year was 6-1-0 in the MIAC and 6-2-0 overall. They won all other conference games by comfortable margins, with the exception of the 7-6 squeaker over Concordia.

Veterans of the strong 1952 team put on weight and gained experience in adapting to the Gagliardi style of football. Many stand-outs from the 1952 team were on deck in the fall of 1953—Casey Vilandre (former Prep star), Jeb Vachuska, Bill Braun, Bob Aufenthie, Chuck Froehle (a four-year Prep star and son of Chuck, Sr., '27, who died of a heart attack while watching his son Rich, '65, perform at Gustavus in 1962), Jim Sexton (father of Terry Sexton, '78, end on the championship teams of the 1970's), Dick Coy, iron man at tackle, John Schwob, *et al.* A new name that was to resound throughout the conference in the next few years was that of Jim Lehman, halfback, a wraith-like ball-carrier in the tradition of Jim Roche who alternated

with Casey Vilandre in pounding the opposing line or scooting around it.

Four men made all-conference: Casey Vilandre, halfback, who gained a total of 604 net yards for the season in 136 tries; Dick Coy, tackle; Chuck Froehle, guard; and Bill Braun, end.

John had lived up to his reputation.

— 1954 —

With most of the championship team back in 1954, there were expectations of back-to-back championships. But the revenge-seeking Gusties and traditional rival St. Thomas shattered that dream (28-6 and 7-6 respectively). The latter game was a heart-breaker. The Tommies got a first period touchdown and made it stick for a 7-6 lead, despite the total of 75 net yards to which the Johnnies restricted them. In the final game against Augustana, of Sioux Falls, Lehman put on one of the greatest scoring displays in SJU history, putting 33 points on the board. His total for the year was a record-setting 89 points from 13 touchdowns and 11 points after touchdowns. The final score of the Augustana game was 39-7. Other big ground-gainers were the following: Don Catton, halfback, and Dick Miller, fullback. Dick Coy, Jim Sexton, and Chuck Froehle—all stalwarts in the line—made all-conference. The final standing was 5-2 in the MIAC, good enough for a third place tie with St. Thomas, and a 6-2 record overall.

— 1955 —

The year 1955 opened with three victories as Jim Lehman, Dick Miller, and Don Catton took turns at crossing the goal line through holes opened by the rugged line; but again St. Thomas and Gustavus stood in the way of an undefeated season. In compensation for this, St. John's romped over Eau Claire 33-6, and took Augustana by the more modest score of 6-0, to finish with a 4-2 record and a tie with Macalester and Concordia for second place in the conference. Overall the Johnnie record was 7-2.

During the season Lehman had a rushing average of 8.1 yards per carry, 117.6 yards per game, and a total of 16 touchdowns and 13 points after touchdowns, to lead all the Johnnies in scoring.

Lehman ended his career with the St. John's record number of touchdowns (30 in three seasons, 1953-55), the most in one season (16 in 1955), and the most in one game (5 in 1954 against Augustana). He was accordingly named the MIAC's most valuable player for 1955. The record number of touchdowns in a career has since been broken

by Dave Arnold, end (32 from 1969-72), and the most in one season by Tim Schmitz (17 in 1976).

— 1956 —

The 1956 team was beset with injuries, with all but two starters, Chuck Froehle and Ray Olson, sidelined at some time or other. The Jays ended up with a conference record of 2-4-1 (3-4-1 overall) to rank in sixth place, their lowest standing since the resumption of a full schedule in 1946. St. Thomas took the title and Concordia was second.

New names appearing in the line-up along with Chuck Froehle, Don Dvorak, Dick Matchinsky, Dave Boyle, *et al.*, were Len Kos, end; Roger Ludwig (later wrestling coach and assistant football coach), tackle; Sev Youso, fullback; Felix Mannella, guard; Joe Crotty, halfback; and Bernie Archbold, quarterback. A familiar name which had dropped out of the line-up after 1952 was that of Tom "Whizzer" White, while its owner put in a three-year stint in the armed services. The speedy halfback now returned to lead the Jays in scoring and to take third place behind Joe Crotty and Ron Deutz in rushing.

Chuck Froehle, guard, made all-conference for the fourth time and was chosen on the second Little All-American team. Don Dvorak, tackle, made the second MIAC all-conference team.

— 1957 —

Only two starters from 1956 reported with the 43 candidates in August, 1957. Twenty of the candidates were freshmen. Names which had appeared on the roster in 1956 and became regulars in 1957 were Len Kos, Chuck Twomey, and Tom O'Reilly, ends; Joe Louis and Roger Ludwig, tackles; Felix Mannella, Bill Anderson, and Sev Youso, guards; John Ficenec and Bill Chalmers, centers; Bernie Archbold, Jerry Kollodge, and Bob Ilg, quarterbacks; Joe Crotty, Mick Mullen, Duane Deutz, and Myron Wiest (son of Myron, Sr., '31, halfback, now deceased) halfbacks; and Tom Irving and Ron Deutz, fullbacks.

The Jays were unscored upon on their home field and rolled up big scores against St. Cloud State and Hamline but lost three out of four games away from home. One source of consolation was the 13-0 victory over troublesome Gustavus, in a game in which Ron Deutz scored on a 75-yard punt return. He and Crotty repeated that feat in a 23-0 defeat of Augsburg the following Saturday, but the Johnnies lost to Concordia and Macalester, which on top of an earlier loss to St. Thomas resulted in a 4-3 finish and fourth place in the conference. The overall record was 5-3.

Len Kos, end, was chosen to the first all-conference team and Duane Deutz to the second team.